

RECOVERED FROM THE THIRTIES: THE POLITICS OF PERIODIZATION

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Corinna King Lee

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Corinna King Lee, Ph.D.

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This dissertation examines critical efforts to republish and reevaluate 1930s American writers. Following the women's, Civil Rights, New Left, gay and lesbian, and other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, institutions of higher education underwent major transformations. These movements opened up new fields of scholarly inquiry, leading to the formation of interdisciplinary programs such as Women's Studies and Black Studies. In the field of literary studies, scholars extended this political critique to existing institutions, pursuing courses of curricular reform and developing new avenues of research into the cultures, histories, and literatures of marginalized groups. Literary recovery, the material practice and critical discourse of returning neglected authors and texts to print, is central to this larger institutional enterprise. "Recovered from the Thirties: The Politics of Periodization" focuses on a period (the 1930s) and three authors in particular—Tillie Olsen, Michael Gold, and Zora Neale Hurston—that have been the object of academic literary recovery.

The 1930s period during which these writers were active witnessed the convergence of avant-garde aesthetic and mass cultural movements. From the radical proletarian movements of Olsen and Gold to the New Negro movement and folkloric projects of Hurston, these writers identified with, served as cultural authorities on, and represented (in their writings) marginal groups. While sharply different in their political positions—Gold was a lifelong Communist, Hurston a conservative Republican—these writers sought to culturally legitimate the experiences of proletarian subjects and other minorities. Falling out-of-print and excluded from dominant and mainstream literary histories, Gold, Olsen, and Hurston received renewed academic interest

beginning in the 1960s, becoming, in their own right, representative subjects in alternative literary traditions. A definitive concern for literary recovery is the assertion of literary history as both a discursive and material process. This study pays close attention to the critical agendas that motivate the recovery of these authors as well as the mediums in which their writings are reissued. The analysis of these authors, from the perspective of literary recovery, thus allows for a reconsideration of general questions of literary interpretation including those of authorial identity and historical context.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Corinna King Lee was born in 1981 in Manhattan, New York. She completed her primary and secondary school education in various suburban towns throughout Connecticut. She attended Boston College, where she received a B.A., *summa cum laude* with Highest Honors in English, in 2003. From 2003 to 2011, she studied English literature at Cornell University, receiving her M.A. in 2007 and her Ph.D. in 2011. She joins the faculty of Marquette University as an Assistant Professor of Modern American Literature in Fall 2011.

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INTRODUCTION

Few critical terms register the tension between modernity and tradition as vividly as recovery—the retrieval of “lost,” “forgotten,” and “neglected” historical elements into the critical present. In American literary and cultural history, recovery represents a decisive process in both positive constructions and critiques of national literary identity, featuring centrally in early Americanist studies such as Van Wyck Brooks’s “On Creating a Usable Past,” F.O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*, and Richard Chase’s *The American Novel and Its Tradition* as well as more recent revisionist projects such as Jane Tompkins’s *Sensational Designs* and the *Heath Anthology*. And yet, while recovery has played a key role in practices of revisionist literary history, its terms and practices have not been subject to critical scrutiny. Literary critics and historians recover works whose conditions of production, distribution, and reception are widely divergent; often, it appears that the only commonality among various recovered authors is their absence from the contemporary canon or literary marketplace. “Forgotten” may, for instance, designate the never-before-published diaries of a Chinese “coolie” or a once best-selling author like E.D.E.N. Southworth. That critics understand such disparate texts and authors through the shared term of “recovery” suggests its appeal in describing the literary historical act and for positing the relation of texts to their historical and cultural contexts.

For scholars in feminist and other minority (sexual and racial) studies, however, literary recovery is not limited to metaphorical significance, it also designates a material practice, specifically the research, frequently archival in nature, that recuperates out-of-print (or never

before in print) writings by marginalized subjects.¹ Undertaken primarily in the context of the academy, this sense of literary recovery has been central to programs of canon revision and disciplinary formation. Working in conjunction with revisionist, reconstructive, and corrective models of literary historical writing, it leads to the publication and republication—usually through academic and independent presses—of under-studied, minor, and forgotten authors. Accompanying this material practice of reprinting, meanwhile, are articles and book-length studies—often biographical or literary/cultural historical in their approach—that serve to introduce and contextualize these recovered writers for contemporary reception.²

Focusing on the 1930s, a decade that Edmund Wilson dubs “The American Earthquake,” this dissertation examines the metaphorical and material role literary recovery plays in the construction of 1930s literature. As a literary period the 1930s, as Bill Mullen and Sherry Linkon suggest in their introduction to *Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s Culture*, occupies a marginal position in American literary scholarship (2). There are, to be sure, canonical American authors who published extensively during the period: eight of William Faulkner’s novels, including the classics *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* were released between 1929 and 1939, and Zora Neale Hurston’s publishing career reached its peak during the Great Depression. These authors, however, are less frequently identified as “thirties authors” and more apt to be read (and classified) according to other fields of literary study: for Faulkner,

¹ Speaking about African American literary studies in particular, Xiomara Santamarina describes this desire to locate a tradition as a “genealogical impulse” to identify “certain genre and ideological continuities” (305).

² Academia is not the only context in which literary recovery can be pursued; this dissertation, is primarily concerned with literary recovery in its academic form. Thus the new or wider reception that literary recovery helps bring about comprises mainly scholars and university students as opposed to popular or commercial audiences. I will have occasion, however, to consider how academic critical projects are mediated by the popular and commercial reception of recovered authors. See my discussion below of Zora Neale Hurston’s revival by black literary feminists and her popular crossover as well as the pulp paperback reissue of Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money*.

modernism and regionalism, for Hurston, the Harlem Renaissance, black feminism, and folk culture. On the other hand, high profile “1930s authors” such as John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos, although in print, suffer from uneven critical attention and evaluation.³

In the past two decades, however, a group of scholars have foregrounded the 1930s as a literary period, as that is, a conceptually meaningful and interpretively useful historical term for organizing particular themes, subjects, and genres that preoccupy creative writers in the 1930s. Referring to studies by scholars such as Barbara Foley, Alan Wald, Cary Nelson, and Michael Denning, Mullen and Linkon attribute this renewed interest in the literary 1930s to the “canon revisions and pluralism of discourse in literary criticism since the 1960s” (2). These critics take pains to characterize this shift as promoting a “broadened inquiry” into the literary 1930s, geared at unseating two critical questions “that had assumed almost monolithic proportions” in the evaluation of literature from the period. They ventriloquize these two questions as 1) “Did the writing on the Left, called variously proletarian, social-realist, or revolutionary [...] ‘succeed’ as literature” and 2) “to what extent did its success or failure reflect the merits or failures of the American and Soviet communism that to one degree or another influenced its production?”

The 1990s generation of revisionist literary critics to which Mullen and Linkon belong attribute these questions to postwar intellectuals, many whom they identify as ascribing to tenets of Cold War liberalism.⁴ For revisionist critics trying to recover the politics and culture of the 1930s literary Left, postwar liberal intellectuals represent the main institutional foe—the old guard that has to be combated. Their numerous critical statements thus posit Cold War liberals’

³ Barry Maine discusses John Dos Passos’s critical reputation in his introduction to *John Dos Passos*. For an anthology of Steinbeck’s contemporary and postwar critical reception, see *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath Jr et. al.

⁴ Debates over the meaning of Cold War liberalism are live and well, but here, I take it to refer specifically to the movement amongst progressive intellectuals to broker an ideological compromise between the radical political programs of the 1920s and 1930s and post-war anti-Sovietism.

representations of Leftist culture as the dominant narrative—a deleterious and tendentious one at that—of the literary 1930s. One strident example comes from Foley who names the New York Intellectuals—a group that includes Alfred Kazin and Edmund Wilson—in particular for developing a “narrative about the role of the Communist Party (CP) in Depression-era cultural movements that shapes much analysis of U.S. literary radicalism to this day” (*Radical* 6). Linkon and Mullen cast the revisionist project as broadening inquiry into the literary 1930s, but pressing beyond these two questions, in practice, has meant a deeper elaboration of the relationship between the period and the literary Left. Far from minimizing or qualifying the role of the Left, revisionist scholarship such as Foley’s *Radical Representations*, Wald’s several books on the literary radicalism, and Denning’s *The Cultural Front* has been interested in constructing a richer and more complex account of the Left’s impact on 1930s literature and culture.

These revisionist studies of the 1990s now form an appreciable canon of US 1930s literary scholarship, serving to uphold the literary Left, literary radicalism, and proletarian literature as a key subject in studies of the period. A recent literary history that challenges this emphasis on Leftist culture is Peter Conn’s *The American 1930s*, which argues for a more capacious understanding of 1930s literature. Conn seeks to restore the period’s “ideological and imaginative complexity,” questioning the “widely shared scholarly assumption that the 1930s were largely characterized in cultural terms by Left aesthetics and politics” (6). From the perspective of this study, Conn’s stress on the period’s heterogeneous literary production is a salutary reframing, offering a helpful counter-perspective to the dominance of Left-based analyses of the 1930s literature. Tellingly though, even a holistic literary history such as *The American 1930s* articulates its intervention through the terms of revision and recovery: the very literary Left that critics such as Foley and Wald understand as marginal in American literary

studies represents for Conn the hegemonic norm that must be displaced in order to arrive at a more comprehensive picture of the 1930s.

In the four chapters that make up this study, I examine academic and non-academic efforts to recover—understood here in both its metaphorical and practical applications—1930s literary culture. In doing so, I hope to bring into a new constellation 1930s critics and authors, many whom hitherto have been divided or opposed according to political categories. While the present study is very much indebted to 1990s revisionist criticism, it avoids rehashing the critical and ideological debates between postwar liberal and revisionist critics. Authoritative and careful studies of that history can be found in *Radical Representations* as well as the cultural histories of Alan Wald, Neil Jumonville, Terry Cooney, among others.⁵ Instead, with this preliminary review of literary scholarship on the US 1930s, I have tried to bring into relief how the terms revision and recovery are coextensive with the discursive construction of this literary period and serve to organize revisionist literary historical projects, whose political and ideological interests might be deeply antithetical.

My first chapter identifies recovery as a dominant theme and metaphor in a selection of postwar literary historical and autobiographical writings. Works such as Alfred Kazin's Cold War era memoir *Starting Out in the Thirties*, Edmund Wilson's *The American Earthquake*, Richard Chase's *Melville: A Critical Study*, and Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* are examples of retrospective intellectual responses to the economic devastation and political upheaval of the 1930s. Comprising various representational strategies,

⁵ Some important histories of the New York Intellectualities include Terry A. Cooney's *Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, Neil Jumonville's *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*, Harvey Teres's *Renewing the Left: Politics, Imagination, and the New York Intellectuals*, and Alan Wald's *The New York Intellectuals*.

these works nonetheless share in common a construction of the 1930s as a period of national crisis from which American culture and history has to recover.

The following three chapters redirect the discussion, identifying a shift in the meaning and significance of recovery for writing about 1930s literary culture. Whereas the critics and intellectuals I discuss in chapter one can be broadly characterized as partaking in a project of helping US culture recover from the 1930s—in the economic or medical sense of regaining a prior state of health—the three authors I examine in the rest of the dissertation are examples of cultural figures that have been *recovered from the 1930s*. This reevaluation of 1930s literary culture has meant a new significance for the period; rather than represent a historical and cultural problem requiring resolution, the 1930s now supplies a text for cultural and new historical analysis. Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, Tillie Olsen, Michael Gold, and Zora Neale Hurston, who had fallen out-of-print during the Cold War period, have been the objects of various academic and commercial recoveries.

The renewed academic interest in these authors reflects the institutional and epistemological reconfiguration of literary studies since the 1960s. Departing from nationalist, myth-and-symbol, and formalist approaches to American literature, critics and scholars inspired by the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, extended the critique of US culture and politics to institutions of literary study. T.V. Reed provides a useful delineation of this history:

Young critics emerging in the light of the Civil Rights, Black Power, Chicano, Native American, women's, gay, and other movements of the 1960s and 1970s began to reexamine deeply the ways in which what passed as the canon of literary texts, and the styles of literary analysis, left out both their historical experiences, and their own ways of experiencing the social power of the written word. The

cultural radicalism and interdisciplinary work of American studies scholars had prepared the ground for much of this work, but the new interdisciplines of women's and ethnic studies that drove much of the new work were also critical of the limits of American studies in its search for representative texts to speak for the whole culture (99).

Developing new critical approaches and disciplinary reconfigurations of literary studies—or “interdisciplines” to use Reed’s term—requires objects of knowledge production. These objects, to be sure, can be constructed vis-à-vis the existing canon. Revisionist interpretations, for instance, might focus on how categories of race and gender structure literary meaning; claims about the construction of racial otherness or women’s absence in literary discourse can be based on the re-reading of canonical texts. An exemplary work in this vein is *Toni Morrison’s Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination*. Beside these re-readings and re-interpretations of the existing tradition, forming new objects of knowledge in literary studies can also mean establishing a corresponding corpus of literary works.⁶ Motivating the literary recoveries of these writers is the belief that the dominant American literary tradition has historically excluded marginal experiences.⁷ This latter aspect is the one most immediately relevant to the authors I discuss in this dissertation.

The literary recoveries of Gold, Olsen, and Hurston reflect both the development of disciplines such as ethnic studies and women’s studies as well as the influence of these new

⁶ Indeed, scholars working on the literary 1930s, practically speaking, follow a methodological model established by feminist critics and historians, combining archival research, critical reevaluation, and republication to construct new fields of knowledge and reception for recovered authors.

⁷ What counts as “marginal experience” currently extends beyond membership in a social minority group. Thus Mullen and Linkon can write about “the beginning of a ‘recovery’ [...] of the American literary 1930s” (2). In this instance, what is spoken of in terms of “recovery” is not the experience of a social group but an entire literary period. That is, the 1930s functions *like* a minority category for these critics. The literary works produced during this period, like the works produced by women, are understood as excluded from the canon.

disciplines or “interdisciplines” on the methods, aims, and texts of literary study.⁸ The reading practices applied to these authors Gold, Olsen, and Hurston, for instance, are interdisciplinary to the extent that they combine literary analysis with social scientific categories such as race, gender, and ethnicity.⁹ Beyond their interest as examples of academic literary recovery, they together chart a history and process of disciplinary transition. Briefly, I outline this transition below in terms of two aspects of literary recovery: these are 1) the formation and develop of an academic field and 2) the process of canon revision as a material and imaginary literary historical act.

These authors’ academic initiation—and by this phrase, I mean to refer to by shorthand the discursive conditions whereby they became objects of disciplinary knowledge—through disciplines such as women’s studies and ethnic studies has dictated a sociological and cultural approaches to their writings. The disciplinary and institutional objectives that initiated these authors into literary critical discourse categorically determine the kinds of reading practices critics apply to their writings, but they do, I am suggesting, represent if the residual, if not dominant terms of critical engagement. Speaking less abstractly, we might refer to patterns in Olsen’s, Hurston’s, and Gold’s critical reception, where their writings have been interpreted according to the terms of the field or movement responsible for their recovery. Olsen’s work thus has been central to critics interested in the intersection of class and feminist analysis; Gold’s writings and personality received new consideration by critics of Jewish American literature and

⁸ It has also affected what counts as literature and literary study.

⁹ How exactly social scientific discourse relates to literary discourse is a complex matter that has been the subject of lively debate and ongoing exploration. For my purposes here, I will only be addressing its implications for literary recovery discourse. As I suggest at the beginning of this introduction, literary recovery, hardly restricted to any single agenda, can encompass a wide range of goals. The main criteria or case for recovering a text need only be that it is materially out-of-print and/or discursively neglected. The examples of literary recovery I examine in this study, however, have proceeded largely in the service of social and historical categories: instead of literary categories such as genre or abstract categories such as “idealism,” race, gender, ethnicity, and class have served as the terms for authorizing recovery.

US Leftist culture; and Hurston occupies a primary symbolic position in the construction of an African American women's literary tradition. Olsen, Gold, and Hurston are of particular interest for a study of literary recovery because of the multiple minority positions they—in their person and in their work—are understood to both occupy and represent. Presiding over my examination of these authors will be the attempt to separate out the different senses of representation that overdetermine the interpretation and reception of their work.¹⁰ In the chapters discussing Olsen, Gold, and Hurston, I examine the disciplinary formations and critical programs of recovery that construct these writers as representatives of a literary period and social or cultural minority groups. This type of synecdochal representation, where the author or his text is understood to stand-in for a larger historical or social body, is different from aesthetic representation, those literary devices these authors use to depict or represent a historical setting or characters. In literary recoveries of these authors, these two senses of representation are frequently run together, leading to a failure to distinguish between the aesthetic strategies their writing uses to represent particular kinds of social or historical subjects and their work's representative status within a canon or discipline.¹¹

¹⁰ These writers' own aesthetic practices, which were formulated in the context of avant-garde movements that sought to galvanize art's political and social function, contribute to the confusion of different senses of representation. The 1920s and 1930s period during which these writers were active witnessed the convergence of aesthetic and mass cultural movements. The disruptive and dislocating effects of industrial, agricultural, and technological change comprise the economic base to these movements, which include state-funded WPA projects charged with documenting and "rediscover" the margins of American culture. From the radical proletarian movements of Olsen and Gold to the folklore projects of Hurston, these authors identified with, acted as intermediaries for, and represented aesthetically minority groups who were excluded from dominant culture. While sharply different in their political positions—Gold, for instance, was a lifelong Communist, Hurston, a conservative Republican—these authors sought to recover and legitimate the literary value of vernacular, proletarian, and agrarian cultural productions.

¹¹ John Guillory argues that canon revision assumes an analogy between the representation of a social group in the canon and the representation of a social group in political institutions. The canon, in this instance, is conceived as a "plenum" where different social groups vie for representation. In Guillory's words, the author returns in the critique of the canon not as "genius but as the representative of a social identity" (10). This explains why the problem of class as it has been addressed in canon revision

Current models of literary recovery uphold two inter-related assumptions about the recovered work's representative-ness. At the one level, the critic identifies the text as representing the experiences of a particular social identity. At another, the text is assumed to represent a particular historical period, or more precisely speaking, an identity is presumed *between* the text and its point of historical origination.

This identity between the recovered work, producer, and period is reinforced by the rhetoric of academic literary recovery, which draws language and metaphors from archeology and anthropology. The work of literary history is figured as mining and excavating the past for buried textual artifacts. Under the guise of mining the literary historical past and bringing the textual artifacts of forgotten authors and marginalized cultures to the light of day, writers and critics displace recovery's ideological and historical mediations.¹² Though they draw from archeological vocabulary, literary recoverers' usage of terms like excavation are chiefly figural, evoking an imaginary scene of cultural production, and have little affinity with actual methods employed in functional or interpretative archeology. Left un-theorized these terms may therefore carry undue ideological significance, suggesting or assuming forms of historical empiricism that are in contradiction with literary critical emphases on indeterminate meaning and polysemy.

discourse has primarily meant the literary recovery of writings *by* working-class authors as opposed to a broader application of the concept to all literary texts. Arguably, this specification of class—an analytical category applicable to all social relations and the relations of literary production—to the working-class demonstrates the particularizing effect of literary identity politics. In addition to the problem of the author-as-representative of social identity in the canon, this analogy also entails a set of more local critical problems that affect the ways we read recovered literary texts: chief among these, I would argue, is the way the text becomes primarily a vehicle *for* the author's social identity.

¹² The artifact has a long career in literary critical discourse, from the New Critics' autotelic artifact, where it describes the self-sufficient literary work, to the cultural artifact of New Historicism. In the case of literary recovery—the symbolic and material retrieval of “lost,” “forgotten,” and “neglected” texts—the artifact is a privileged trope for imagining the work of literary history, supplying, in effect, a seductive interpretative framework that secures the significance and value of the recovered work.

Against this tendency of treating recovered works as parts of homogeneous historical or cultural wholes, my research draws from specific examples of literary recovery, examining the material sites and practices of literary production and re-production. The material practice of literary recovery entails the reconstruction, re-presentation, republication, and recirculation of texts, yet the rhetoric of literary recovery—through tropes of the artifact—purveys, by and large, a view of literary texts as identical to the period of their historical “origination,” diminishing or effacing the ways the contemporary context of the recoverer and his/her editorial alterations and paratextual framings mediate textual interpretations and textual meaning.

The critical habit to discuss recovered works as artifacts—as that is objects modified by past human activity—has a number of implications for literary interpretation; chief among them being is the anthropological tendency to interpret the literary work as the product of a particular cultural group. Regarding the recovered work as an artifact suggests that it belongs to a static and enclosed past. Structured by a linear conception of time, this ideology sets up the recovered work as a privileged figure of temporal displacement: an object out-of-sync with the present. To the extent that the authenticity of the artifact inheres in its historical other-ness—its alterity to the critic’s contemporaneous moment—the work of recovery is relegated to what Aaron Kunin calls “secondary culture-making” (124.1: 92). As Kunin suggests, this form of secondary culture-making, strictly speaking, is involved less in the creation of the artifact and more so in the identification and maintenance of objects *already made*. It is this temporality of the “already made” that this dissertation aims to complicate.

The prevailing archeological rhetoric in revisionist literary history and canon discourse allows critics to present recovered works as artifacts whose value and significance is *already made*. Recovered works and authors, however, do not speak in their own name: whom and what

they represent depends on the critical frames that make them newly meaningful and relevant. At the same time, revisionist critics and literary historians are loath to speak for the recovered work. This critical situation places the recovery practitioner in a contradictory position with respect to the recovered author or work, whose meaning and value, on the one hand, is presented as self-evident, but, on the other, which he or she must help disclose. Addressing this problematic, “Recovered from the Thirties” examined the material forms, paratexts, institutional contexts that comprise the recovered work. In the process, I will show that publishers, editors, critics, and patrons supplement the meaning of recovered authors and texts.

Critical representations of authorial identity, framing narratives, paratexts, and editorial changes are just some examples of the formal and material mediation that undercut the recovered work as being *representative* of a single social identity or historical period. The recovered work in this project thus encompasses not just the product of a single cultural producer—the author—but an entire field of mediators and agents struggling to establish meaning. Informed by insights from textual and bibliographical studies, I stay attuned to the mutability of literary texts. Attention to the mutability of texts matters because it throws into question one of the driving impetuses for literary recovery work, that being the desire that the recuperated writings of minority authors (et. al) should have the effect of *representing* their respective social identities (or, as is suggested by the trend of recovering particular historical periods, that texts *from* the 1930s represent that decade). If, however, literary texts are not reducible to a single (version of a) text—which is to say the text as literary work is not self-identical, self-contained, and closed off—then it would follow that the object presumed to be represented (whether it is social identity or historical period) cannot be self-evident either.

The critical reception of Olsen, Gold, and Hurston compels us to rethink conventional concepts of authorship and periodization. This project develops a practical theory of literary recovery, detailing its formal, material, and historical instantiations in three recovered authors. Such a critical discourse places the recovery practitioner in a contradictory position with respect to the recovered author or work, whose meaning and value, on the one hand, is presented as self-evident, but, on the other, which he or she must help disclose. Recovered works such as Olsen's *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*, Gold's *Jews Without Money*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are historical and social co-productions that bear the labor of not just their authors but also other artistic, editorial, and critical mediators. Each chapter of my dissertation examines a key recovered work as both a formal *and* material object, addressing issues of aesthetic representation as well as matters of textual transmission, editorial intervention, and critical recovery.

Focusing on Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio*, a work started in the 1930s but not published until 1974, my second chapter examines the author's self-reflexive engagement with issues of literary recovery. In her paratexts to the book, Olsen takes pains to frame *Yonnondio* as an "unfinished" work. Analyzing the significance of this "unfinished" status, I argue that Olsen presents the book as an artifact "From the 1930s" in order to claim its historical authenticity. Olsen's auto-recovery leads her to figure the book's authorship as an "arduous partnership" between herself and a "long ago young writer" with whom she is not identical. I theorize this figure of "arduous partnership," arguing that Olsen's desire not to usurp the voice or speak on behalf of the "long ago young writer" can provide us with a model of literary recovery informed by Marxist and feminist critiques of labor and exploitation. The recovered work *Yonnondio* is presented as a collaborative project rather than the singular expression of a self-identical author.

My third chapter continues to pursue how literary recovery refigures existing ideas of authorship and authorial identity by examining the literary historical status and publication history of Michael Gold. Although a major cultural impresario in the 1930s proletarian literary movement, Gold's literary reputation and position in the canon largely relies on *Jews Without Money*, a semiautobiographical narrative set in New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the century. Bringing together republications of his writings, including different editions of *Jews Without Money* as well two anthological recoveries of his writings, I show that Gold's authorial identity is a function of the material forms and institutional contexts in which his work is distributed and published. From representative proletarian subject to minor Jewish author from slumming reporter to native informant, I demonstrate the different ideological and symbolic applications of his authorial name.

In my last chapter, I take up Zora Neale Hurston, whose literary recovery by black feminist writers and critics represents one of milestones in African American literary studies. Carla Kaplan, introducing *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, comments, "While it is common for literary reputations to rise and fall, not many American writers have experienced a sea change as radical as Hurston's move from obscurity to acclaim. Hurston's every unpublished word is now treasured-hunted and the discovery of even one short story generates news reports and a flurry of scholarly activity" (15). In contrast to Olsen and Gold, Hurston's literary recovery has produced the most commercial and academic press, in the double sense of publicity and publications. The catalogue Kaplan describes, comprising activities critical ("scholarly activity"), commercial, popular ("news reports"), and hobbyist ("treasure-hunted"), provides a useful summary of the multi-dimensional character of the Hurston industry. Her remarks also touch on Hurston's continued significance as a figure *for* recovery. Thirty years since the initial black

feminist recovery of Hurston, her academic and mainstream presence seems so secure that we are hard-pressed to make a case for her Hurston's marginality or "obscurity." This institutional security notwithstanding, Hurston's cultural and literary value continues to be understood within the terms of recovery. This dissertation thus concludes with a discussion of an author whose reception reveals the contradictory investments of literary recovery.

CHAPTER 1

PERIODIZING THE '30S

In the coverage of the ongoing global financial crisis, a trend has been sweeping across US mainstream and alternative media. After the crisis flashpoint of the Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy declaration, references to the 1930s—suddenly—were ubiquitous. Alarmists drummed up images of Depression-era breadlines: one *Wall Street Journal* headline, for instance, read “Worst Crisis Since ‘30s. With No End Yet in Sight” (Hilsenrath A1). Others opted for allusive bon mots (“Party Like It’s 1929” (Krugman) “Depression You Say? Check Those Safety Nets” (Duhigg) “The New Deal Didn’t Always Work Either” (Cowen) “Leave the New Deal in the History Books” (Levey) “Don’t Get Depressed, It’s Not 1929” (Gross) “Our Depression Obsession” (Samuelson)).¹³ On the human interest and popular historical angle, PBS, under its American Experience Series, began production on a collection of films about the 1930s, and *The New York Times* initiated a multimedia series “The New Hard Times” with regular installments on subjects who had lived through the Great Depression.

Not unique to the media, the trend crossed over to the academy as well: for their 2009 New Student Reading Project, Cornell University chose John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Like F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, which practically defines the mythology of the “roaring twenties,” Steinbeck’s Depression-era narrative about the Joads, a sharecropper family that migrates from Oklahoma to California, is a period-defining work: its representations of sharecropping, the “Okies,” migrant labor, and the “Dust Bowl” serve as some of the 1930s’

¹³ Such headlines lured readers with the power of the comparison, but the corresponding article contents usually dispelled the likelihood of a proportionate catastrophe.

most widely circulated and recognized symbols. Explaining the rationale for selecting *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Reading Project cites the “special relevance” of “the story of the Joad family” during a “time of economic recession.” The page for the Reading Project continues, “[Steinbeck’s] novel should encourage us (undergraduates and the Cornell community) to reflect on the causes and effects of widespread homelessness and unemployment, the nature of economic and social justice, and the consequences of taking the vibrancy of the natural world for granted.”

Since the end of World War II, virtually every severe economic downturn has drawn comparisons to the Great Depression. In downturn discourse, the 1930s Great Depression functions as a historical limit case: for experts and specialists, it is a paradigm or model by which to measure the severity of the recent recession, for the general public, it is a symbolic event that embodies and defines the very meaning of an economic crisis. Citing The University of Michigan’s Surveys of Consumers, Robert J. Shiller, a professor of economics and finance at Yale, identifies three precedents (or “depression scares,” which the Surveys define as “any time the consumer [confidence] score is below 6”) to this recent wave of Depression allusions; these are the periods from 1974 to 1975, from 1978 to 1982, and from 1990 to 1992.¹⁴ He adds that the Surveys, to confirm the “scare’s significance,” “count[ed] in news databases the number of articles containing the word pair ‘great depression,’” and notes that “[t]here were huge peaks in the count during these periods” (BU5).

For all its panicked rhetoric, “depression scares” and media coverage of economic crises partake of 1930s nostalgia. Themes of impoverishment, material deprivation, and scarcity—signs of degradation in the land of opportunity—ironically ennoble the American subject. The 1930s in

¹⁴ The Surveys, on a monthly basis, poll consumers’ feelings about the economic environment.

such instances conjures up photographs and narratives of farmers displaced by the Dust Bowl and dispossessed by technological developments. Texts such as James Agee and Walter Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Dorothea Lange's *The American Exodus* (1939) may critique and indict exploitative labor practices and unsustainable agricultural practices, but they also circulate as idealized images of agrarian anti-materialism. Such images, in short, dissimulate agricultural production as a vital force of modernity. In this sense, documentary images and fictional narratives that depict sharecroppers and migrant farmers as a disappearing or endangered class naturalize and reinforce an agrarian mythology, where the poor (and usually white) tenant farmer represent the authentic American subject.

If the 1930s have been significant as a historical reference point and metaphor during economic recessions and financial crises, the period has also been symbolically important in times of political crisis and hysteria. Along these lines, the “red scares” of the so-called McCarthy Era form the ideological partner to the various “depression scares” that grip the national imagination. In contrast to the agrarian and populist 1930s imagery that characterize “depression scares,” red scares invoke the 1930s as a historical *other*. For Cold War American ideology—which Alan Nadel has termed “containment culture”—the 1930s represent the nation’s patient zero or point of contamination by the “foreign” ideology of communism. Links between the 1930s and the Cold War surface also appear in legal and fictional contexts. Leslie Fiedler, writing on the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers spy case, points out that at the heart of the elaborate media and legal theatrics of the Hiss trials imprisonment was a “transaction [that] had taken place in 1937 and 1938” (3). Figures and institutions such as Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, who loom so large in the history of

American anti-communism, had significant precedents in the 1930s. McCarthy and his 1950s witch-hunts now seem the essence of red-baiting, but American anti-communism began well before McCarthy's direct involvement. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, now notorious for the Hollywood Blacklist, actually formed in May 1938 as a special investigating committee, with the Texas Congressman Martin Dies Jr. as its chair. Riding opposition to Roosevelt's New Deal, Dies and the HUAC rose to national prominence, targeting the theater and writers' projects under Federal One as a "hotbed of Communists" (Mangione 290, 5). The Dies Committee's red-baiting tactics, as Jerre Mangione argues, were "emulated a decade later by Senator Joseph McCarthy" (5).

Economic recessions and political hysterias are not the only times that prove discursively generative for the 1930s. Totalizing metaphors of the "Great Depression" "the New Deal" and the "red decade," which figure the period in sweeping economic and political terms, may furnish the principal themes, but, as numerous historians point out, the period was also the age of major technological and cultural developments. Some cultural historians have even gone so far as to argue that the 1930s witnessed the birth of modern mass culture. Along these lines, Warren Susman provocatively jokes, "while political historians generally see [the 1930s] as the age of Franklin D. Roosevelt, cultural historians are more likely to call it the age of Mickey Mouse" (197). As the heyday of the studio era, the 1930s saw the codification of the classical Hollywood style and the development of genres such as the gangster film. Many of the codes and aesthetic conventions in today's post-Hollywood post-classical cinema can be traced to 1930s films.¹⁵ During the 1960s, citations of 1930s cinematic *mise-en-scène*—from Art-Deco set designs to

¹⁵ In this respect, the 1930s seem to be especially important as a source text for nostalgia films. For a more extensive discussion of contemporary appropriation of 1930s style, see Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism and Consumer Society."

costume fashions—proved to be lucrative marketing strategies. A 1966 *Business Week* article, for instance, reports on “[m]anufacturers and designers” who were “cashing in on nostalgia for the styles of the Great Depression days” (128).

In contrast to downturn discourse, the 1930s nostalgia that Susman identifies in the 1960s was not precipitated by a recession. Quite the contrary, the mid-1960s were a period of unprecedented economic growth: the reporter for the *Business Week* piece even wonders out loud, “What makes the Depression era so fascinating to well-heeled citizens in the 66th month of a business expansion is a mystery” (132).¹⁶ Significantly, disrupting some of the iconic images of 1930s *as* “the Depression era,” the nostalgia was not for the Tramp’s rags or Okie overalls. Rather, as the article reports, businesses were developing upmarket luxury products with designs and styles drawn from Bauhaus and Art Deco. Among the examples discussed is a furniture manufacturer, Thayer Coggin Inc., who had produced a line (“New Dimension”) “based on Hollywood movie-set styles of the 30s” (128).

Meanwhile, in the 1960s literary sector, publishers like Avon, which specialized in popular genres from romance to science fiction, made bank reissuing 1930s texts. Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep* (1934) was an unqualified success for Avon, selling a million copies when the firm issued it in 1964 as a paperback edition. Other titles that enjoyed a renewed or newly found appreciation included Nelson Algren’s *Somebody in Boots*, the works of Nathanael West, Daniel Fuch’s trilogy, Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money*, and Horace McCoy’s *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*¹⁷

¹⁶ Without explicitly endorsing it, the reporter cites Caroline Bird’s theory that consumers, in a time of economic expansion, may actually “miss those times when there was a greater gulf between the rich poor,” and fewer affluent consumers to compete for the luxuries of life (132).

¹⁷ For original sales on some of these titles, see Susman 301n13.

I

From this opening review of discourses and representations of the 1930s, it should be evident that a diverse—and even contradictory—array of references and artifacts are mined from the decade. 1930s historical events, economic crises, and cultural productions together comprise a major chapter in the mythos of American exceptionalism. Depending on the historical, institutional, and discursive contexts, the 1930s serve a range of practical and ideological purposes, including, as we have seen, the marketing of consumer goods. This contest over the meaning of the 1930s has much to do with narratives of American history, and the assignment of particular meanings to national periods. Needless to say, no period—major or minor—in histories written on the national model escapes this ideological function of representing a certain stage of national development. The 1930s, in this regard, are not exceptional; any period—the twenties, the Gilded Age—contributes to defining the nation.

If the period *is* exceptional, however, it is because it has conventionally signified historical exception. In American literary and cultural historical discourse, the 1930s is a signal figure for concepts of national crisis and recovery. In *The Rediscovery of American Literature*, Richard Ruland, reviewing the history of American literary criticism, claims that during and after the years of the first war, “widespread interest in the social and political implications of literature raised once again questions which have persisted from the earliest years of the Republic? What is America? What, historically, has it been, what did it hope to become which road would lead to the brightest future?” (vii) Questions over national identity, Eric Foner suggests, become more strident during times of crisis when national “cohesiveness is under siege” (Conn 6).

As the economic nadir of the twentieth-century, the 1930s represent a crisis in U.S cultural history.¹⁸ Within the American context, the 1930s's historical meaning is inseparable from economic and political contradictions at the basis of national culture and ideology. The "bare poverty of the Great Depression," writes Julia Foulkes, puts the lie to "the rhetoric of American opportunity" (215). What I argue in the following chapter builds on what is by now a conventional cultural historical narrative: this is the story that the objective situation of the 1930s economic depression and the mainstreaming of radical political ideologies precipitated a crisis in national ideology.¹⁹

This chapter identifies in the postwar period one of the first substantial efforts by literary critics to recover 1930s literature and culture. Specifically, I examine literary historical discourses that share the premise that the 1930s and its cultural production pose a problem for national identity. Understanding the period's figurative significance for ideologies of American national identity requires an examination of historical conventions, and in particular, the system of signs and models through which the 1930s acquires its historical meaning. Postwar and Cold War representations of the 1930s are instrumental in transforming a chronological unit—the 1930s as a decade—into a culturally and ideologically meaningful period. Building on the work of Thomas Schaub and Barbara Foley, this chapter therefore examines the discursive

¹⁸ In his conceptual history of the term, Reinhart Koselleck defines crisis as a "critical transition period after—if not everything then much—will be different" (371). Historical crisis, as I use it here, has a double signification, referencing both an objective historical situation and a term of historical analysis and interpretation. Representations of the U.S. 1930s have largely applied the first sense of crisis—certainly the one most prevalent in colloquial usage—by identifying in the period's events symptoms of a pathological objective condition or illness caused by the capitalist system.

¹⁹ While closely connected to this historical hypothesis, my approach, here, is not strictly historical. To borrow a crucial distinction from Frederic Jameson, when dealing with "the area of culture [...] we are [...] confronted with a choice between a study of the nature of the "objective" structures of a given cultural text (the historicity of its forms and of its content, the historical moment of emergence of its linguistic possibilities, the situation-specific function of its aesthetics) and something rather different which would instead foreground the interpretative categories and codes through which we read and receive the text in question" (*Political* 9).

construction of the 1930s across examples from three genres of postwar historical writing, literary history, compilation, and memoir.

These genres, of course, represent only a part of the “1930s” as a discursive formation, meaning all the economic, cultural, and historical discourses that take the 1930s as an object. Following Jameson’s cue in his article “Periodizing the 60s,” this chapter does not attempt an “organic history which [seeks] ‘expressive] unification through analogies and homologies between distinct levels of social life” (179). Nor does it attempt to uncover some unifying logic that cuts across all the discrepant historical, economic, and cultural discourses of the 1930s. What my selective textual analysis of examples from these genres of historical writing offers, however, is a better understanding of the politics of periodization.

Literary historical accounts of the 1930s rely heavily on general historical conventions; the period is chronologically punctuated by the 1929 stock-market crash (“the Crash”) and the beginning of World War II. These two world-historical events, which neatly bookend the decade, function as the chronological signs for the period’s conventional dating. Of course, when pressed, neither event is fixed: the singular “Crash,” for instance, actually distributes over a series of significant dates—“Black Tuesday,” “Black Thursday (or “Black Friday in Europe because of the time difference)—and the beginning of World War II is only *conventionally* held to be the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.²⁰ Nonetheless, the Crash and the start of war function as the minimal chronological rule for measuring and spacing a historical unit that can then be assigned cultural value and endowed with historical meaning.

²⁰ Though the national framework could also be foregrounded, making the start of World War II (for the United States) follow the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the official entry of the United States into war.

More than just denuded chronological markers, these events bear ideological significance, insinuating themselves into the very historical and cultural meaning of the 1930s. Hence the “Crash” is succeeded by the trope of depression—not just *any* depression but the Great Depression. In common historical usage, the Great Depression is virtually synonymous with the 1930s, and though it shares billing with other monikers such as the “Dust Bowl,” the “Dirty Thirties” “the red decade,” it is without question the privileged designation for the period. The hyperbolic devices of capitalization, the definitive article, and the modifier “Great,” summarily convey the Great Depression’s significance as a singular and paradigmatic event. This exaggerating rhetoric, within the context of cultural history, makes the Great Depression a *proper* event, in the sense of a proper noun, which is to say, unique and distinguished from common depressions.

Although “depression” here primarily means the economic kind, the term also shades into other registers. Far from being a liability, this polysemy actually empowers depression with broad referential application. Unlike for instance the “2007 – present subprime mortgage crisis,” which functions on a much more literal level, the Great Depression has a psychological and mental valence, describing not just an economic crisis but also a zeitgeist—a national mood disorder. As a geophysical term, meanwhile, depression suggests a dip, sunken, or lowered surface, this topographical sign, in turn, connotes the precipitate Crash.

Such overlapping senses of psychological and geophysical depression are conventional in historical narratives about the 1930s, exemplified by phrases such as Monty Noam Penkower’s “diseased patient” (3) Rideout’s “seismographs of social shock” (133), and Edmund Wilson’s “American Earthquake.” These psychological and geophysical discourses of depression also mediate literary and cultural histories at a more generic and conceptual level.

If the 1930s have conventionally been periodized according to the category of economic depression, then the end of this period, strictly speaking, has been marked by economic recovery. Historians and economists will thus describe the upturn in economic activity as a “recovery,” and of World War II, which spurred employment and production in manufacturing, as helping the US economy “recover” from the Great Depression. Within the economic register, recovery primarily means a return to or resumption of some chronologically prior state of calculable activity: one of the standard measures being a nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). But like its terminological counterpart depression, recovery has undergone metaphorical expansion, gaining archeological, psychological, and eschatological meanings in writing about the 1930s. Extended beyond its economic application, recovery takes on archeological and psychological meanings in postwar historical writing by some of the foremost intellectual authorities on the decade, including Alfred Kazin and Edmund Wilson and critics such as Richard Chase and Walter Rideout.

II

In a 1957 review of Walter Rideout’s book *The Radical Novel in the United States*, the literary critic Richard Chase, writes, “if there is anything that seems deadlier in 1956 than [...] the fellow-traveling of 1930, it is the novels [this movement] produced” (65). These novels, he continues, have not been read “in recent years,” and it is “customary to consign them to oblivion on the grounds not only of their irrelevance but of their crudity and formlessness.” Chase’s review, titled “A Reclamation of Values,” reaches well beyond its generic function—little space is actually devoted to assessing the value or interest of Rideout’s study to a particular readership. The review is more concerned with the value of Rideout’s subject—“the novels produced [by the

social movements of the 1930s]”— than it is with the value of the book. And still more broadly, its real concern is with the value of the 1930s for American history.

What might at first glance seem a straightforward transaction between two social agents in the literary critical field—Chase as a reviewer for *Commentary* and Rideout as the author of *The Radical Novel*—is actually a complex arbitration over the meaning of the 1930s as a historical period. In what follows, I situate this review in the postwar American intellectual context, and identify the historiographical conventions in these writers representation of the literary 1930s. As a document, the scale of this review, in contrast to the numerous book-length postwar literary histories, is minor, but it condenses a number of the discursive trends and formations on the writing of 1930s literary history. Despite their widely divergent critical methodologies—Rideout attempts a historically objective study and Chase’s critical work, which I discuss in further detail below, reflects a romantic sensibility—both critics uphold the so-called “radical novel” as *the* definitive genre of the 1930s. Along with other post-war and Cold War literary and cultural historians, Rideout and Chase normalize the association of 1930s literary history with radical literature.

Frequently eclipsed by more decorous associates in their respective fields, Chase and Rideout participated in postwar intellectual culture, contributing academic studies with lasting implications for the study of 1930s literary history. Often sidelined by Daniel Aaron’s *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*, *The Radical Novel* is one of the first significant academic treatments—in contrast to the anticommunist polemic that had been the pitch of most preceding discussions—of 1930s radical literature. Chase, meanwhile, had connections to major postwar cultural institutions: his mentor at Columbia University was Lionel Trilling, a key figure of the New York Intellectuals, and he himself published several

influential books of literary criticism, including *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* (1949) and *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957).²¹

Written for *Commentary*, a leading publication for the postwar literary establishment, Chase's review reflects the prevailing sentiment of the New York Intellectuals towards 1930s radical literature, that being the belief that these texts from the 1930s were not only bereft of aesthetic value, but that they were—and this is the damning accusation—mere vehicles for communist propaganda and partisan sloganeering.²² Echoed over the span of more than two decades, this sentiment was expressed as early as 1939 by Philip Rahv who notoriously, in his piece "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy," describes radical literature as "the literature of a party disguised as a literature of a class" (4: 623).

Both of Chase's own studies, it bears noting, can be described as recovery projects in their own right: *The American Tradition and the Novel*, for instance, intervenes in the "usual depreciation of the romance" (x), and the Melville study seeks to recover a "new liberalism" from the nineteenth-century. Although not as influential as *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* helpfully illuminates the ideological underpinnings and political stakes of Chase's later work of literary theory as well as the literary historical significance of the 1930s.

In his introduction to *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, Chase avowedly enlists academic literary criticism in the service of liberal ideology, outlining, in the introduction, his intention "to contribute a book on Melville to a movement which may be described (once again) as the new liberalism—that newly invigorated secular thought at the dark center of the twentieth

²¹ Gerald Graff names *The American Novel and Its Tradition* one of the major works in the myth-and-symbol movement, "which from the end of the 1930s, has produced an outpouring of theorizing about the "American" element in American literature" (216).

²² Other important journals and periodicals for liberal intellectuals were *Partisan Review*, *Dissent*, *The New Republic*, and *The New Leader*.

century which, whatever our cultural wreckage and disappointment, now begins to ransom liberalism from the ruinous sellouts, failures, and defeats of the thirties” (vii). Chase thus identifies this monograph as engaged in a tripartite project of literary, historical, and political recovery; he charges his interpretation of Melville’s major and minor works with the ideological mission of revitalizing liberal thought after its disastrous course in the 1930s. As a recovery narrative, this passage is remarkable for its bizarre juxtaposition of figures of fragmentation, rupture, and restoration. Employing, on the one hand, the rhetoric of modernity and Enlightenment, Chase insists on a definitive break between “the new liberalism” and the contaminated liberalism of the 1930s, which in his conceit, represents the “dark center” (or Dark Ages) of the twentieth century. This break or marking of the “new,” however, decidedly requires recourse to a temporal past.

What is introduced initially as the “new liberalism” will in a subsequent sentence become the liberalism that has to be “ransomed” from the “ruinous sellouts [...] of the thirties.” Thus the announcement of a liberalism that is “new”—signaling modernity—turns out to be an even older liberalism that had only been held hostage by the 1930s. Structured according to this double movement of rupture and return, Chase’s nationalist project images American literature—and modern liberalism—as a selective tradition. Explicitly, Chase represents literary history not as the objective chronicling of the past—in the sense of amassing a complete record—but active historical interpretation, or in his words, “a continuous act of imaginative criticism” (vii). Following this framework, Chase can thus proceed to identify those texts—for him Melville’s *oeuvre*—that serve as the proper vehicles of the American character.

The task of the literary historian is to discriminate and recover the significant liberal past—for Chase, this consists of Melville’s *oeuvre* rather than 1930s “social realism”—from the

historical detritus, to salvage a vital tradition from the “cultural wreckage” of the 1930s. Chase achieves this equation of modernity with recovering a tradition through a figural reversal, affixing “progress” to “the old liberalism” (of 1930s), while investing the “new liberalism,” represented by Melville, with the act of “sloughing off a facile idea of progress” (viii). Rhetorically drawing on the semantic field of crisis, Chase’s “1930s” figures “cultural wreckage.” The significance of this figural structure for historical writing cannot be overemphasized. Literary studies such as *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, in turning the 1930s—or rather in naming it—as a sign *for* historical incoherence displaces and defers its meaning, which will only be produced or deciphered through a later historical interpretation.

Melville stays a key subject in Chase’s *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, a paradigmatic critical study of the myth-and-symbol school that codifies the influential generic distinction between romance and realism. Unlike the earlier Melville study, *The American Novel* makes scant reference to the critic’s historical context or recent national history. Although not produced with the same occasional intent, Chase’s romantic imagination represents a through-line. No mention is made to the 1930s, its literary production, or old liberalism, but the later study repeats a parallel themes of essential and extraneous history. In *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, Chase represents the writing of literary history—“the continuous act of imaginative criticism”—as a “sloughing off”: in this organic metaphor, the 1930s represents the dead tissue or dead weight no longer essential to the living vital tradition. The themes of stripping away or laying bare history repeat in *The American Tradition* in Chase’s definition of the romance. Ignoring the “spectacle of man in society,” which he associates with the (English) realist novel, Chase, by way of a quote from Melville, proposes that the American romance aims to “plunge directly to the ‘very axis of reality’” (xi). Free from a “surface rendering of real life”

the romance “formulate[s] moral truths of universal validity” (4, xi). Thus complicating the binary opposition of realism and romance, romance’s alignment with “universal validity” suggests that it is not so much anti-realist as it is after a different order of reality.

This generic (and ideological) distinction between the romance and the realist novel allegorizes Chase’s critical practice, and in particular, his understanding of the relationship between history and literature. His introduction to *The American Tradition* opens with the admission that “[this] book is an essay in definition and appreciation, and although it often takes a historical view, it is not a detailed literary history” (vii). Instead, his “main purpose,” he states, “is to propose a native (romantic) tradition of the novel” (viii). “[H]istorical” in “view” and yet “not a [...] literary history,” his critical project enacts the very romantic imagination he purports to find in Melville, Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, and the other subjects of his study. These authors “plunge” to the “axis of reality” in much the same manner, Chase plunges to the foundation of American literary history by identifying a “native tradition.” Actions such as “plunge” and “sloughing-off” are figures in these critical studies for literary historical writing. Such figures position history as the raw unsorted debris on which the “imaginative critic” “acts.” Albeit in different registers, both plunging and sloughing-off evoke relations of surface and depth, which condense interpretation with historical writing. In Chase’s application, he consistently favors and values depth over surface: depending on the subject, surfaces are associated with extraneous, inert, or dead matter (the progressive old liberalism) or foreign literary traditions (the English novel).

Published about eight years after *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, the Rideout review marks a significant change in Chase’s stance toward the 1930s. Where earlier he had written off the social realism of the 1930s had been written off as the nation’s “cultural wreckage,” Chase’s

review stops just short of sweeping these novels into the dustbin. Mustering up the spirit of a scrupulous antiquarian, he observes that while most of the novels are “bad,” “a few of them are worth reviving,” because they might actually be “good reading,” and more importantly, because they constitute “a part of our past” (65). Whereas in the Melville study, Chase undertakes the project of helping American literature recover from the 1930s—as in the sense of an acute illness or medical crisis—in the review, he sets the cultural historian the task of recovering—or to use his phrase “making sense”—of the 1930s.

At the conclusion of the review, Chase admits a “very strong” “impulse” to “devote oneself to the universal and the timeless” in the face of such “rapid” changes in “attitudes and eras” (71). This comment could be interpreted as an oblique reference to his project in *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, published the same year as the review, where he identifies the American romance as able to “formulate truths of universal validity” (xi). Significantly, this “very strong” impulse is not promoted to a higher moral ground. Rather, Chase suggests that devotion to the “universal and timeless” is actually an intellectual defense mechanism. Having implicated his own intellectual orientation in this universalizing impulse, Chase implicitly acknowledges its limits and opts to endorse Rideout’s project of recovering the 1930s. Across *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* and the Rideout review, then, the significance of the 1930s, as a period or historical sign, evolves from its sense as a crisis or depression—a condition or disorder from which to recover—to its sense as a “hard, lumpy, insistent realit[y]” from which the cultural historian must salvage meaning (71).

III

Rideout's *The Radical Novel* opens with a statement about the historically distantiating effects of World War II:

One of the effects of the modern war is to alienate us from the recent past.

The events of the prewar years are accomplished, of course, and do not themselves change, but our attitude toward them changes vastly. In our consciousness war drops like a trauma between "before" and "after," until it is sometimes hard to believe that "before" was a part of us at all (1).

Claiming a fundamental discontinuity between the respective "before" and "after" of the war, he turns the 1930s (the "before" of the "modern war") into an "alien" decade. Periodizing, here, is coextensive with alienating the 1930s, insofar as it involves actively construing the 1930s as a historical other to the present. Assuming the radical novel's historical otherness paradoxically allows it to be reclaimed as part of American literary history.

For Rideout, whose express purpose in *The Radical Novel* is to examine "a body of fiction" that was once "exaltedly praised in some quarters" but now in "most quarters is categorically condemned," this alteritist historicism serves a strategic purpose (vii). Calling his study an "objective" "examination"—"neither an attack nor a defense"—of this literature, Rideout's rhetorical neutrality betrays the volatile political climate of the 1950s. Framing his study as a "literary history" that aims only to conduct as "objective an examination as possible" (vii), he assures the reader that while his study treats political matters, it is not in the service of any political agenda: "If the general reader has picked up this volume in hopes of finding the sort of thing which should be entitled *The Novel on the Barricades*, or, conversely, *I Read Red Fiction*, he had better put it down at once" (vii).

Publishing *The Radical Novel* at a time when anti-communist sentiment and red-baiting were still prevalent trends in American culture, Rideout, merely by treating a leftist subject, was vulnerable to accusations of Communist sympathies. As Barbara Foley and other critics have observed, Cold War academicians and writers had to negotiate the “consensus culture” and “vital center”²³ politics that characterized the 1950s intellectual culture. These writers were, as such, under a great deal of pressure to avoid the kinds of explicitly political or ideological statements that left them open to public castigation.

Given this climate, an alteritist historical interpretation of the 1930s is one of the few rhetorical strategies available to scholars. By treating the 1930s as a historical other, Rideout assumes a kind of anthropological stance. Of course, the object of study, here, is not a different national or ethnic culture, but a chronologically prior set of events in US culture. While retaining the themes of foreign-ness characteristic of Cold War containment culture, Rideout neutralizes the threatening alterity of the Communist-influenced or “politically radical novel” by recasting its “difference” in historical terms. Addressing himself to those who dismiss the radical novel “as bizarre and improbable,” he proposes to domesticate the radical novel’s alien nature by “describ[ing] its relation to the society of its time” (3). Historical period, here, serves an analogous function to (an anthropological sense of) culture, where the literary historian establishes the meaning and significance of the radical novel by delineating its native historical habitat—the codes, customs, and conventions that comprise the 1930s as a historical system.

Rideout, however, is not content to only define the radical novel as a culturally and historically specific production, his objective—one he shares in common with Chase—is that his

²³ For accounts that examine the Cold War’s impact on political ideology and cultural production, see Thomas Schaub’s *American Fiction* and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. The term “vital center” is taken from the title of Arthur Schlesinger’s 1949 book which advocates liberal democracy as a bulwark against fascism and communism.

book by “defin[ing] the place of radical fiction within our literature [...] may also help us repossess a part of the past” (3). Producing the historical otherness of the 1930s paradoxically prepares it for assimilation and recovery. In phrases such as “our literature” and “help us” the subject of the enunciation (the “self”) identifies and speaks representatively for a collective national body and literary history. Through this recovery of the radical novel, Rideout might thus be seen as practicing or advocating in his literary historical writing an assimilationist form of containment, wherein the historical otherness of the 1930s is domesticated and reclaimed as properly American.

The Radical Novel, “A Reclamation of Values,” and *Melville: A Critical Study* illustrate a pattern in postwar and Cold War literary histories to address the 1930s as problem for historical interpretation. *Melville: A Critical Study* responds by superseding the 1930s—and its corrupted liberalism—with Melville, whose writings may shine the light toward a new liberalism. For Chase, 1930s utopian liberalism promoted a progressive view of national history, which in his dire account, had failed to come to fruition and had so thoroughly thrown national history off course as to leave it in ruins. Turning to Melville, whose literary production chronologically precedes the 1930s, he therefore pursues a romantic interpretation of American literary history over linear historical causality. Recovery, here, promises the possibility of loosening the lock or claim that the immediate past has on determining the course of the future.

Chase modifies this uncompromising appraisal of the 1930s in his review of *The Radical Novel* and comes largely to endorse Rideout’s study, which he identifies with a general recovery of the 1930s as a part of American history. Published about six years after the Melville study, Rideout’s book and Chase’s review address the 1930s in less urgent tones. Using the periodizing markers of the war, these pieces alienate the 1930s, consigning it to the past: its hegemonic hold

over American culture, having loosened, the period shifts from the determining force and subject of national history to an object that can be interpreted and understood by the historian.

IV

Although I have charted a shift in the historical construction of the 1930s from *Melville: A Critical Study* to *The Radical Novel* and “The Reclamation of Values,” these literary histories share an objective mode that may, at least in part, be determined by their authors’ professional trajectories: Chase (born 1914) and Rideout (born 1918) did not start their publishing careers until after World War II. In addition to assuming an objective historical distance from the 1930s, their style is objective and academic. Neither critic makes an experiential claim on the period. In what follows I examine the historical writings of Alfred Kazin and Edmund Wilson, which share with Chase’s and Rideout’s studies the rhetoric of crisis and catastrophe in representing the 1930s, but do so through frameworks of personal history and recovery.

Active professionally during the 1930s, Wilson and Kazin, had establish themselves as representative intellectuals of American liberal thought: Wilson, in addition to his prolific career as a reviewer, critic, and journalist, served an influential term as the literary editor at *The New Republic*.²⁴ Kazin, meanwhile, was affiliated with the New York Intellectuals, the group of writers and critics organized around journals such as *The Partisan Review*. In the postwar era, Kazin and Wilson each published books that document their historical experience in the 1930s. Like many liberal writers active in that period, Wilson and Kazin supported radical leftist movements and the national policies of the Soviet Union, and like so many of their peers and contemporaries, they reformulated their political identities and identifications during the postwar

²⁴ His career spanned the progressive era Wilson was also a key critic who helped document the expatriate literary culture of the “Lost Generation.

culture of anti-communism. These writers present themselves as historical witnesses to the 1930s. Drawing on conventions from cinematic documentary, they order their retrospective accounts chronologically, linking their autobiographical perspective to historical time.

In 1958, Edmund Wilson, widely regarded by his literary and critical peers and the general public as the foremost figure of twentieth-century American intellectual culture, published *The American Earthquake*, a collection of his “non-literary articles” written during the twenties and 1930s. Although Wilson avoids a tendentious account of the 1930s, his language is colored by embarrassment when he admits he “eagerly drew Marxist morals from the phenomena [he] went to explore.” Rather than recant these morals, however, he professes, “the more shallow or nagging of these I have been happy to lop away, but I have not, beyond this, made any attempt to correct my point of view of that time.” This apologetic statement continues, “for people born too late to have memories of the depression” it is “difficult” for them “to believe that it really occurred, that between 1929 and 1933 the whole structure of American society seemed actually to be going to pieces.”²⁵

With *The American Earthquake*, Wilson attempts to recreate this historical instant. A chronologically sequenced compilation of his journalistic reports, the book chronicles the twenties and 1930s, consisting of three sections—“I. The Follies 1923-1928,” “II. The Earthquake October 1930-October 1931,” and “III. Dawn of the New Deal 1932-1934”—followed by a postscript dated 1957. These section headings chart a developmental organization that plots the twenties as the stage of the nation’s irresponsible youth (“Follies”), the economic

²⁵ Rideout, for instance, explains this incredulity as an effect of war, which serves as a point of objective historical rupture: “in our consciousness war drops like a trauma between ‘before’ and ‘after,’ until it is sometimes hard to believe that before was a part of us at all.” This remark about the incredible history of the 1930s represents a variation on the common theme of discontinuity between pre and post-war American culture, which can be found in Cold War era historical writing. In Wilson’s terms, the problem of incredulity has a more subjective basis, involving a generational gulf in historical experience.

crisis (“Earthquake”), and Roosevelt’s program for national recovery. By and large, however, Wilson eschews interpretation and narrative retrospection, preferring his “chronicle to tell its own story.” This abstinence from historical interpretation is further suggested by the subtitle, “*A Documentary of the Twenties and 1930s*,” and his claim in the preface that most of the material in the book is “simple reporting.” Contrary to Chase’s and Rideout’s narrative reconstructions of the prewar period, Wilson’s historical recovery takes the form of re-coverage: the reprinting newspaper and periodical articles that had been produced in response to (then) current events.

Part of the interest of *The American Earthquake* as a type of historical writing inheres in its ambiguous status as a historical chronicle. On the one hand, the book’s sequential organization and topical content suggests the format of a “living chronicle”—the non-narrative recording of recent, ongoing, and current events as they occur. On the other, unlike the open form of the living chronicle the book’s record of events has a conclusive date (1934) and a 1958 postscript, making it a kind of “dead chronicle,” where the chronicler gathers events up until the date of his writing. Living chronicles and dead chronicles are helpful for identifying the book’s presentation of historical time, but their linear perspectives do not suffice to describe its complex temporal perspective. Wilson’s authorial identity is divided between the reporter of the individually titled reports and the compiler/editor who pieces together these disparate articles, originally written for a different purpose, into a chronicle. His reports function in two temporal registers. As journalistic presentation or “simple reporting,” they hew closely to current events, effecting apparent correspondence between reporting time and the event reported; as portions of a historical documentary, they are recovered into a historical series, or in Wilson’s words, “a fragmented panorama.”

V

“The thirties,” Kazin writes, “were the years of my apprenticeship, my basic formation.” Thomas Schaub, commenting on Kazin’s memoir and other postwar liberal writing, identifies a “recurrent story line” (5), where the liberal writer awakens or matures to a “skeptical perception of political reality and human nature” (7). For liberal writers, who describe this movement from innocence to experience, ignorance to knowledge, optimism to skepticism, utopianism to realism, this narrative of maturation allows them to negotiate a relation to their historical experience and come to terms with their political past. Rather than reject or disavow their former radical beliefs, they identify them with an early stage of their intellectual development.

Liberal writers thus plot their 1930s historical experience as the period of their intellectual adolescence. But this linear development from the 1930s into the postwar period displaces another developmental storyline, where the 1930s represent the catastrophic end of national history. The idea of recovery is central to this process of resignifying a ruined course into an immature phase. Covering a span from 1934, when he is still a student at the City College of New York to 1945, the end of World War II, *Starting in the 1930s* traces Kazin’s early career as a reviewer for *The New Republic* and the *Modern Quarterly* and portrays key 1930s cultural personalities such as John Chamberlain, of *Fortune* and *Life*, V.F. Calverton of the *Modern Quarterly*, and Malcolm Cowley of *The New Republic*. Published in 1962, *Starting Out in the Thirties* is Kazin’s second memoir; his first *A Walker in the City* (1951) focuses on his childhood in Brooklyn, and a third memoir *New York Jew* was published in 1970.

These memoirs comprise Kazin’s project of “personal history,” which he defines in his critical writings as “a form of [his] own influenced by the personal writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman” (“Self” 31). This subjective mode differs from the objective and

scholarly historical writing of Chase's and Rideout's study, and, certainly bears little formal resemblance to the major study of the period Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left*. Importantly, personal history, for Kazin, refers to a particular type of narrative retrospection that is not only autobiographical or private. "The real problem for 'personal history,'" he writes, "is how to render the excess of outer experience as personal but not private experience" (40). This investment in the idea of the historical self or individual has led Richard M. Cook, his biographer, to suggest that Kazin's autobiographical writings adhere to the conventions of the realist novel where the individual "register[s] the pressures of the outside world" and moves "from private experience into history, engaging the public world of people and events" (38). One limitation to Cook's formulation is that it suggests merely a change of scenery: the self as character steps from a private setting into a larger historical landscape. For Kazin, the self is not just a figure in history or a figure that moves into history; as the title phrase of his reflection on autobiography "Self as History" suggests, the self is a figure *for* history.

The narrative conveyed in a personal history, in other words, does not consist of private experiences cut off and alienated from history—in the sense of one's own history. Exactly the opposite in fact, personal history amounts to the writer's "life in history."²⁶ Citing Benjamin Franklin's, Henry Adams's, and Ernest Hemingway's autobiographical writings, Kazin identifies a national preoccupation with the "self": what is being "talked about is inevitably oneself as a creature of our time and place, the common era that is the subject of history" ("Self" 32). One of the problems of modernity, as he sees it, is the alienation of the subject from history.

"[S]omething new has entered into twentieth-century experience. We no longer identify ourselves *with* history" (38). There is an "omnipresent" autobiographical impulse in this age, but

²⁶ This phrase is cited in David J. Winslow's *Life-writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms* (49).

this is an autobiographical self that “knows history only as nemesis and liberation from oppression” (40).

Kazin thus understands his memoirs, with their insistence on historical setting and its formative effect on the self, as recovering the autobiographical tradition of Franklin, Adams, and Thoreau. Influenced by William James’s theory of the self, Kazin represents the self of personal history as the product of recovery—the reordering of existence. Whereas “the life of mere experience, and especially of history as the supposedly total experience we ridiculously claim to know, can seem an inexplicable series of unrelated moments” (“Self” 42), personal history, much like editing a film, allows the writer to selectively assemble, collect, and reorder historical fragments to produce a meaningful narrative. The personal history, following this formulation, is an assembly or coherent narrative organization of fragments, but it is also a fragment of “history as that supposedly total experience.”

Reviewing *Starting in the Thirties* for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Ted Solotaroff credits Kazin’s memoir for creating “a montage of the movement of the age as lived experience” (Cook 248). This montage metaphor suggests the memoir’s re-animating power, which recovers the mummified historical past bringing it back to life. Solotaroff’s metaphor also aptly captures the tension in *Starting Out in the Thirties* between narrative fragmentation and continuity. Like the newsreel that arranges fragments and documentary footage of historical events into a continuous moving film, Kazin’s narrative retrospection recovers memories and fragments of his historical experience into a period memoir. Organized calendrically, Kazin’s memoir comprises six chapters in chronological order; the narrative events of each chapter are identified with a particular year from the 1930s, indicated by the chapter heading.²⁷ This structure foregrounds

²⁷ With the exception of chapter five, which covers two years.

the systematic organization of historical time. Calendrical dating in the narrative functions primarily as a timekeeping device, registering the linear progression of time, linking chapters that otherwise bear little direct causal relation to one another. The chapters, despite their year headings, do not pretend to epic national or world historical coverage, and restrict their scope to vignettes and episodes that reflect the author's experiences and impressions. But the years that lend their names to the chapter headings ("Part One 1934," "Part Two 1935," "Part Three 1936") are indices of world historical-time.

Dated 1945, the epilogue to *Starting in the 1930s* was written at the suggestion of Peter Davison, Kazin's editor at Atlantic-Little, Brown and Company.²⁸ In the version that Kazin had submitted to Davison, the memoir ends with the chapter "Part Six 1940." The narrative gap between the two chapters—"1940" and "Epilogue 1945"—roughly corresponds to the chronology of World War II. Kazin's epilogue brings into focus, for me, the relation between self and history that preoccupies this memoir and, more generally, Kazin's project of personal history. Kazin's realist style belies this epilogue's nesting and framing of historical and narrative temporalities. At the level of the memoir's structure, the two newsreel screenings, set during the beginning and end of World War II respectively, correspond to the textual organization of the penultimate chapter of the memoir and the epilogue. The placement of these two screenings in an epilogue dated "1945" throws this symmetry askew, identifying only the latter scene with the year of the chapter heading. Further complicating the temporal structure of the epilogue is the memoir genre, which situates the voice of the reminiscing narrator outside the story-time. In effect, what we have are multiple levels of temporal embedding. Juxtaposed with this mise-en-

²⁸ According to Cook, It was also Davison's suggestion that Kazin date each of the sections "Part I 1934, Part II 1935, etc." (249).

abyeme of autobiographical time—or the subjective temporality of recovering the self—is the representation of world-historical time in the newsreel.

This moment of newsreel spectatorship in Kazin's memoir represents a cinematic extension—a different technological platform—of Benedict Anderson's discussion of print culture, and the newspaper's interpellation of an imagined world or national community.²⁹ Kazin's realization of a world-historical event—the end of the depression—is mediated by the text of the newsreel. Rather than participating or acting in the thick of history, Kazin presents himself as a spectator who identifies with history. Personal time has to, in a sense, catch up with and synchronize with world-historical time or the time of history. Kazin's narrative retrospection repeats and reverses the terms of spectatorship: this time, the narrator, rather than catching up with history, recovers *this* history—the 1930s, the depression, the beginning and end of war—as personal events.

V

Following World War II and running all the way through the Cold War period, American intellectuals and cultural critics—both academic and non-academic—used the language of crisis to portray the 1930s as a cultural apocalypse. Some of the figures I discuss, such as Kazin and Wilson, were active professionally in 1930s, and publicly identified with the radical leftist movements of the decade, while others such as Rideout and Chase did not begin their publishing careers until after the end of World War II. Despite the generational gap and diversity in genres, these writers share in common two main themes: 1) that the cultural, ideological, and economic

²⁹ See Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

events of the 1930s had yet to be reckoned with 2) that this reckoning or settling was crucial to restoring national health and proceeding into a national future.

CHAPTER 2

IT CAME “FROM THE THIRTIES”: TILLIE OLSEN’S *YONNONDIO*

Reader, it was not to have ended here, but it is nearly forty years since this book had to be set aside, never to come to completion.

These pages you have read are all that is deemed publishable of it. Only fragments, rough drafts, outlines, scraps remain—to tell what might have been, and never will be now.

Yonnondio! Yonnondio!—unlimn’d they disappear

The subtitle to Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnondio*, “*From the Thirties*,” a narrative following the Holbrooks, a peripatetic working-class family struggling to eke out a living in the pre-depression US Midwest, presents the book as a relic from an alien decade: the preposition “From” denotes its historical origin, or better yet, point of departure—“the Thirties.” Further emphasizing *Yonnondio* as a literary artifact, Olsen announces the novel’s unfinished state in two para-texts, “A Note About This Book” and a note to the “Reader” in the 1974 printing of *Yonnondio*. In “A Note,” she writes, “This book, conceived primarily as a novel of the 1930s, was begun in 1932 in Faribault, Minnesota, when the author was nineteen, and worked on intermittently into 1936 or perhaps 1937 in Omaha, Stockton, Venice (Calif.), Los Angeles and San Francisco. Unfinished, it yet bespeaks the consciousness and roots of that decade, if not its events” (v).

Even before opening the book, we already confront an interpretative problem: What does it mean to read and receive this text, first published in 1974 by Delacorte, as “From the Thirties”? Olsen’s original plan for the novel, according to interviews she gave in the 1970s, would have covered a span of fifteen years, taking the reader from the early 1920s through the mid-1930s, incorporating more narrative motifs of proletarian fiction, including characters’ participation in labor strikes and political conversions.³⁰ In particular, the story-arc of Mazie Holbrook, the oldest Holbrook child and primary focalizing agent for the narrative, would have culminated with her becoming a revolutionary writer who “could tell the experiences of her people” (Rosenfelt 390). The text as it exists today, however, consists of eight chapters chronicling the Holbrooks’ struggles in the early 1920s as they move from a small mining town in Wyoming, to a farm in North Dakota, and finally to the packinghouses of Omaha, Nebraska. Olsen writes in “Note”:

Thought long since lost or destroyed, some of its pages were found intermixed with other old papers last winter, during the process of searching for another manuscript. A later, more thorough search turned additional makings: old tattered pages, lines in yellowed notebooks, scraps. Other parts, evidently once in existence, seem irrevocably lost.

The sum effect of this language—the imagery of the passage of time (“old tattered pages”), the testimony to the text’s integrity (“no rewriting, no new writing”), and the insistence on the time of its production (“from the thirties”)—conspire to present *Yonnondio* as an archaeological object recovered from the ruins of the 1930s.

This representation of *Yonnondio* as a literary artifact—a work made in and by the 1930s—posits the act of literary recovery as an excavation, the uncovering or unearthing of a

³⁰ This blue-print is taken from Deborah Rosenfelt (371-406).

buried or lost object. Through the metaphor of the artifact, Olsen conceives of *Yonnondio* as more than a narrative about a particular period, she effectively presents her text as a document *from* the 1930s.³¹ But even as her language works to secure the text as an artifact—that is, its status as a material record and preservation of the past—a concomitant narrative about *Yonnondio*’s (re)-construction, which we can also find in “A Note,” draws it into the orbit of another time: its 1970s publication context. Because the narrative had to be assembled from several drafts and revisions of the manuscript, from which some sections were missing, Olsen is forced to concede, “In this sense—the choices and omissions, the combinings and reconstruction—the book ceased to be solely the work of the that long ago young writer and, in arduous partnership, became this older one’s as well.” Still, while she considers *Yonnondio* the product of an “arduous partnership,” Olsen nonetheless asserts that the writing consists only of “the old manuscripts—no rewriting, no new writing.” Even with this concession, then, she attributes to the older writer actions—“choices” “omissions” and “reconstruction”—that more aptly describe the work of an editor than co-author. The labor of the older writer, although acknowledged, is qualified as being of a different order from that of the long ago young writer’s. Identifying as the “older [writer],” Olsen avoids claiming full authority for the work.

The paratexts to *Yonnondio* raise the question of the work’s historical identity: is the work a document or artifact of the 1930s or the 1970s? For Olsen, this question is Historical identity, here, does not mean historical representation; *Yonnondio*’s narrative, after all, does not fictionally depict the 1930s. The work “bespeaks the consciousness and roots of that decade” and not importantly, “its events.” *Yonnondio*’s response to the question of whether it is proper to one

³¹ Olsen’s figural language and themes make *Yonnondio* very much of its “period.” The fascination with the artifact in this work reflects the intersecting discourses and practices of documentary, collecting, anthropology, ethnography, folk history that come to mind when we think of 1930s U.S. culture. As I intend to show in the following discussion, however, the text’s publication in the 1970s complicates such periodization.

historical period (the 1930s) or another (the 1970s), I suggest, is to imagine literary history and literary production as an “arduous partnership.” The recovered work, as conceived here, offers a figure for history that challenges norms of periodization and contextualization. Thus, despite its subtitle “From the Thirties,” *Yonnondio* is not strictly speaking of “the Thirties,” nor is it by default a product of the 1970s.

Focusing on Olsen’s para-texts—“A Note About This Book,” the epigraph, and postscript—I argue, in this chapter, that Olsen addresses the contradictory significance of recovery by setting up and then undoing the work’s identity as an artifact. In particular, *Yonnondio*’s paratexts demonstrates how artifactuality is contingent on the effacing the act of recovery. Even though the artifact is brought forth by an act of recovery, the logic of artifactuality prohibits the recognition of this act as partaking in the production of the artifact. Defined as the product of a particular time or place, the artifact cannot admit the constitutive role of the act of recovery. The figure of partnership or collaboration allows Olsen to resolve the political questions of representation and authority; her hesitance as a subject to speak for the younger writer. Olsen’s simultaneous insistence on *Yonnondio*’s authenticity and its becoming other, I will suggest, illuminates the competing desires of literary recovery work. The paratexts to *Yonnondio* offer a valuable resource for theorizing the political and historical problems that literary recovery raises.

I

Olsen represents an important figure of continuity for socialist-feminist literary scholars, who seek to link the political radicalism of the U.S. 1930s to the canon wars of the 1970s and 1980s. She has been both an initiator of literary recovery projects as well as a recovered author in

her own right. Active in the 1930s proletarian literature movement, which aimed dually to represent the working-class and equip the working class with the means of literary production, Her story “The Iron Throat,” a version of which serves as the first chapter to *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*, was initially published (under her maiden name Lerner) by the *Partisan Review* in 1934.³² In a review of little magazines for *The New Republic*, Robert Cantwell, a fellow proletarian writer, declared “The Iron Throat” the outstanding contribution to proletarian literature of the two-hundred odd stories under consideration (Nelson and Huse 5). In addition to her literary output, which beside fiction also includes verse and journalism, Olsen, who joined the Young Communist League in 1931, was also deeply involved in political activism: she attended the Party school for several weeks in Kansas City, distributed political leaflets, and organized farm workers in California (Coiner 146).

The particular ideological goals and political agendas that underwrote the recovery of *Yonnondio* in the 1970s were deeply implicated in the discourse of revisionist literary history. Olsen’s involvement in this discourse, and its various institutions, was extensive: in addition to the publication of *Yonnondio* and her earlier collection of short stories *Tell Me a Riddle*, whose title story won the 1961 O. Henry Award for Best Short Story, she also published *Silences*, a collection of her original essays, combined with the letters, diaries, and testimonies of other writers, that together explore the “relationship of circumstances—including class, color, sex; the climate into which one is born—to the creation of literature.” Olsen, herself, would help recover several of these “silenced” writers including Rebecca Harding Davis and Agnes Smedley, whom she brought to the attention of The Feminist Press. Her championing of these writers was

³² It was also anthologized in *Proletarian Literature in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1935); a collection of fiction, poetry, drama, and criticism edited by Joseph Freeman, Granville Hicks, Michael Gold, et. al., the anthology is hailed as a seminal text of the proletarian literary movement.

instrumental to their republication: Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* inaugurated The Feminist Press's reprint series, which also reissued Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*.

II

In the critical collection *Radical Revisions* (1996), the editors Sherry Lee Linkon and Bill Mullen name the "confluence" of the 1974 publication of *Yonnondio* by Delacorte Books³³ and Deborah Rosenfelt's article "From the Thirties: Tillie Olsen and the Radical Tradition" (1981) as "the beginning of a 'recovery'" of the 1930s (2). Of course, "appears" is the operative word here as such a claim deliberately ignores the publication of Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States* (1956), Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* (1961), and a number of other scholarly treatments of 1930s literary radicalism published well before either Olsen's or Rosenfelt's texts.³⁴

As Linkon and Mullen explain, however, the real distinction of Olsen's and Rosenfelt's work is not that they had been chronologically *first*, but that their work opened up new avenues of inquiry from the evaluative criteria that had dominated considerations of 1930s literature. Recovery then, for Linkon and Mullen, refers more to a "reframing" (2) or "revision" (5) rather than a simple excavation. Olsen's and Rosenfelt's texts by "reframing" the 1930s in terms of the "roles gender and sexuality played in the production of political and literary 'discourse' of the

³³ An imprint of Dell Publishing.

³⁴ See also Alan M. Wald's *Writing from the Left*, which offers a fuller gloss of earlier writings on literary radicalism; in his chapter "The Legacy of Daniel Aaron," he claims that Daniel Aaron's "inaugurated the field as we know it today" (14). More recently, the recovery of the literary 1930s has involved more extensive republication. In a 1990 bibliographic essay, Barbara Foley notes that the Feminist Press has "reprinted paperback editions of a number of 1930s women's novels including Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1976), Fielding Burke's (Olive Dildford Targan's) *Call Home the Heart* (1983), Tess Slesinger's *The Unpossessed* (1984), Josephine Herbst's *Rope of Gold* (1984), and Myra Page's *Daughter of the Hills* (1986)—and has issued Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz's *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940* (1987)" (Foley, "Women" 150-151).

1930s” made the 1930s speak anew. Following Cary Nelson’s proviso that “one never actually ‘recovers’ the thing itself” (8) the editors take pains to avoid a naive definition of recovery, describing their aim as one of reorienting the American literary 1930s in terms of a “variety of textual approaches” including “theories of feminism, popular culture, ethnicity, New Historicism, and various new formations of Marxism.” (2).³⁵ These textual approaches imbue, in the editors’ words, the 1930s with a “new discursive life” (5) and work toward contesting the “temporal boundaries implied by the 1930s” (5). By describing the effects of Olsen’s and Rosenfelt’s work as a “reframing,” Linkon and Mullen gesture at the productive and generative aspect of recovery discourses. In this sense, recovering the 1930s entails not the excavation of the 1930s, its texts and artifacts, in any original or former condition, but the discursive production of a new object of knowledge.³⁶

III

In light of the primary importance Linkon and Mullen assign Olsen in their account of the, it is worth comparing the model of recovery they construct with Olsen’s. Olsen’s “Note” hardly bears out the recovery model the editors of *Radical Revisions* champion. Unlike Linkon and Mellon who understand recovery as “revision,” Olsen promotes a model of careful and gentle handling. Recounting the rummage that “turned up” “old tattered pages, lines in yellowed

³⁵ Nelson, in *Repression and Recovery*, writes “Literary history can never have in view, can never hold in its intellectual grasp or even merely in its gaze, some level of sheer, unmediated textual facticity, let alone any stable system of signification. History and its artifacts are always reconstructed, mediated, and narrativized” (8). What Nelson stresses is that the meaning of the object (or “thing,” to use Nelson’s term) inheres in its dialectical relation to its context, which is always changing. The fantasy of a self-sufficient autonomous object, productive though it may be for a modernist aesthetic and discourse, does not furnish an adequate theoretical object for the aims of literary recovery.

³⁶ Though earlier discourses may address the “1930s,” we cannot assume that the “1930s of the theories of feminism, popular culture, ethnicity, New Historicism, and Marxism represents the same discursive object. My argument here is informed by Foucault’s concept of discursive formation. See Chapter 2 of Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

notebooks, scraps,” Olsen’s language insists on *Yonnondio*’s material qualities. The initial event, where Olsen comes across pages of her manuscript (“Thought long since lost or destroyed”) is presented as accidental: the pages were “found intermixed with other old papers” “during the process of searching for another manuscript.” This narrative of finding an object that one is not even looking for, happening by chance.

Using adjectives that indicate the passage of time, the pages she describes are so frail and time-worn that a careless handling threatens to destroy them once and for all. The frailty of these documents require, by implication, a careful handling. Indeed, the thematization of gentle and careful handling extends from the physical matter (the parchment) to the very writing recorded on the pages: Olsen makes sure to insist that her recovery consists of “no rewriting, no new writing.” In contrast to the gentle handling necessary to preserve the artifact, the kind of recovery Linkon and Mullen promote suggests a manipulative handling that would tamper with or unduly influence the document’s integrity.

This anxiety over manipulation or interference presupposes the artifact’s sensitivity to touch. That is, for the artifact to maintain its integrity, it ideally must not be touched or handled (manipulated) by any others. Insofar as what the beholder prizes most in the artifact is the imprint it bears of another time, culture, or people, any additional or secondary touching would overwrite this imprint, rendering it illegible. Yet at the same time, the very existence of artifact *as* artifact, of course, precludes the possibility of such absolute safeguarding. Even if we set aside, for the moment, our skepticism that artifacts can achieve some unmediated facticity, the artifact’s very condition of existence is still contingent on the initial act of recovery or excavation that produced it from the ruins.

For Olsen, the value of these pages inheres not only in their diegetic capacity (to tell of another other time), but also in their actuality as products of this other time. Seen in this light, the act of recovery, Olsen suggests, may have a destructive capacity as much as it does a productive one. That is, the particular predicament of recovery is whether the recovered artifact—a product of another time—can remain other to the time into which it has been recovered or whether it will necessarily be remade in the image of the present. Caught between these two possibilities, the recoverer occupies a difficult position: for while she may be the artifact’s procurer and custodian, her custodianship may also betray the artifact through a careless handling.

IV

These two competing senses of recovery delimit a historical problematic that Foucault has addressed in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in terms of the problematic search for origins.

From the vantage point of an absolute distance, free from the restraints of positive knowledge, the origin makes possible a field of knowledge whose function is to recover it, but always in a false recognition due to the excesses of its own speech.

The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things corresponded to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost (143).

That genealogy should be the term Foucault chooses to designate a historical praxis that “opposes itself to the search for origins” (140) is one of the perverse achievements in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” perverse, because the sense in which Foucault uses genealogy deviates from its conventional significations (140). This ironic use of genealogy aptly plays out Foucault’s larger argument: like the perversion of the term genealogy, the genealogical method,

far from tracing a direct line of descent, finds that at the “historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity” (142). The origin is not the site of truth but the site of dissimulation, where an error acquires the status of truth because it has “hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history” (144). Thus, while it may seem that Foucault perverts the meaning of genealogy, this perversion helps drive home the contingency at the origin of the word.

The theme of dissimulation resurfaces in a later passage where Foucault proposes that the “the origin makes possible a field of knowledge whose function it is to *recover it*, but always in a false recognition due to the excesses of its own speech” (my emphasis 143). The word “recover,” translated from the French “*recouvrer*” is key to understanding the dissimulation Foucault attributes to the search for origins. *Recouvrer*, the infinitive form of “*recouvrer*,” translates as “to recover” or “to regain,” close to the definition of “recover” to which we are most accustomed. But the French verb *recouvrir*, closely related to *recouvrer*, translates as “to cover” “to re-cover” or to “cover up again.” That both “*recouvrer*” and “*recouvrir*” could be translated as “to recover” helps accentuate the multiple valences of the word. While Foucault uses “*la recouvre*” (recover it), his argument about the work of recovery (wherein “the excesses of its own speech” result in a “false recognition”) is that it “*la recouvre*” (re-cover it). Every attempt to “recover” the origin produces a false recognition—not the “removal of every mask to disclose an original identity” (but another re-masking or re-covering).

In the one sense of recovery, we encounter what has been described as naive historicism: history understood as a parody of archeology: the notion that an objective true account of the past is available to us through its artifacts and documents. The second sense of recovery is evident in the work of Cary Nelson and the editors of *Radical Revisions*, who champion notions

of “reconstruction,” “mediation,” (Nelson 8) or “revision” (Linkon and Mullen 5). These redefinitions renounce any desire to recover the origin, and, on the face of it, seem to effectively weed out several dubious inclinations informing the first sense recovery: the tendency to overlook the mediating and narrativizing effects of the act of recovery, or the tendency to presume a linear concept of time.³⁷ For these scholars, the reconstructive approach has no illusions that it recovers history as “it really was”³⁸ or that that the object recovered was ever lost in the first place. For the reconstructive approach, the object of the recovery does not precede the act of recovery; it does not, that is, exist as an object.

Although these scholars who champion reconstructive approach seem to have heeded Foucault’s claim that recoveries yield only “false recognitions,” we may nonetheless wonder whether such a sense of recovery is predicated, if not on the attainability of originality, than the notion of referential relevance. While the editors may diplomatically claim not to “repudiate” “previous considerations of 1930s,” opting to chart out a “reconstructive approach” that would “revise and reaffirm” rather than repudiate older scholarship, there is nevertheless the implication or suggestion that these “previous considerations” were one-note, moribund, and in

³⁷ The significance of Nelson, Linkon, and Mullen’s work in this regard cannot be overstated. These scholars charted out a new direction for 1930s scholarship with their reconstructive approach. Unlike other studies of the 1930s, *Radical Revisions*, for instance, does not open with the charge, which has become perfunctory, that the 1930s had been repressed in discourse by various cultural and political agencies. Although the historical record leaves little room for doubt about the realities of repression (through both state-enforced cultural agencies such as the Committee for Cultural Freedom, or more indirect forms of social ostracism or cultural disenfranchisement). The frequency with which this narrative is repeated suggests it may play an important rhetorical function as well. Once we recognize that the charge of political repression may in fact serve to legitimize or justify the recovery project, its ostensible absence from Linkon and Mullen’s language is notable. Linkon and Mullen do not understand repression as the active intervention of certain anti-communist agencies in silencing discourse about the 1930s, or the object of recovery as some previously repressed object. That is, for an object to be recovered, it has to first be posited as lost.

³⁸ This phrase is most often associated with Leopold van Ranke.

need of serious resuscitation.³⁹ (5) Unless revision is simply being celebrated or championed for its own sake, Linkon and Mullen are, in other words, necessarily making a claim about the value of these new alternative considerations. Without repudiating earlier studies, they nonetheless imply that these studies need to be revised. Though the editors do not say as much, the suggestion is that questions about the aesthetic quality of 1930s literature had run their course and that the new perspectives of Olsen's and Rosenfelt's work represent a welcome change.⁴⁰

Arguably, the pressure to make a case for the relevance of the recovered object to the contemporary context works to undermine the novelty and difference the ideas of revision and reframing mean to convey. If the primary draw to recovering the 1930s is the recovery of "intellectual roots," then recovery work amounts to little more than the reiteration or reaffirmation of identity, rendering revision and the search for origins indistinguishable. In other words, establishing the relevance of the proposed object of recovery would require that the recovery worker postulate the logic of identity or continuity to ensure the knowability or relevance of the recovered object, insofar as it is another version of what we already know. On some level, the recovery worker already knows what she is going to find.

V

This tension between Olsen's historical understanding and the critical projects that champion also occurs in her relationship to the socialist feminist literary criticism. In 1981, Deborah Rosenfelt published "From the Thirties: Tillie Olsen and the Radical Tradition," in the

³⁹ Recovery, in this sense, carries with it the remedial connotation, that is, recovery as convalescence or healing.

⁴⁰ Indeed, the logic of recovery advocated by the editors seems to accede to the ideological basis of the canon wars. Particularly telling is the valorization of the "new" in this collection. The ascription of the "new" to these various discourses produces their temporal difference by positing the former methods as an enclosed unit. By situating these theories outside the enclosed unit of "previous considerations," they imbue these discourses (race, gender, sex) with a regenerative, revitalizing force.

journal *Feminist Studies*. To the extent that feminist literary scholarship understood and represented itself as a recovery of works by women and the subject of woman, Rosenfelt's article marked a shift toward, what we might call, "other" recoveries within feminist literary history. Critiquing the category of "woman" in whose name this work had been done, these "other" recoveries operated under the premise that the category of "woman" was itself heterogeneous: a subject position divided along the axes of class, race, region, nation, and sexuality.

While the publications of *Tell Me a Riddle* (1961), *Yonnondio* (1974), and *Silences* (1978) had established Olsen as an important literary figure, especially for feminists, critics credit Rosenfelt's article with "laying the groundwork for an unacknowledged socialist feminist tradition" within which to consider Olsen's work (Nelson and Huse 7).⁴¹

Like much of the literary scholarship at the height of second-wave feminism,⁴² Rosenfelt aims to find a usable past that speaks to contemporary political struggles.⁴³ For feminist literary historians and scholars working on the U.S. 1930s, Olsen's anemic literary output and *Yonnondio*'s unfinished state symbolized the predicament of the working-class woman writer.

Recovering *Yonnondio* was understood as part of a larger project of constructing a socialist feminist literary tradition. For such undertakings, tradition proves an indispensable but typically unexamined object. In literary historical narratives such as Rosenfelt's, the term tradition, perhaps because it is used so repetitiously, may hardly register at all. As John Guillory argues, scholars often have recourse to the concept of tradition in order to construct an

⁴¹ Wald notes that the reemergence of one-time Communist women writers such as Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur in the "feminist literary movement" represented a point of intersection between the Old and the early New Left (*Writing* 4).

⁴² Some key studies in this field include Ellen Moers's *Literary Women*, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*.

⁴³ The term "usable past" is taken from the title of Van Wyck Brooks's 1918 essay.

“imaginary scene” that effaces the material determinants—the various institutional locations of the university, the classroom, and pedagogical tools such as the syllabus—through which texts are actually collocated (33, 28). Imagined as a literary object or cultural artifact, whether it is style or set of literary practices, changing hands, literary tradition tropes the relation between different generations of writers in terms of heritability, that is, through the bonds of transmission. Rosenfelt, for instance, employs the language of heritability when she prompts critics to “examine the connections between the radical cultural traditions of the past and those our own era is creating, questioning that earlier *heritage* when necessary, but acknowledging also the extent to which we as contemporary feminists are its *heirs*” (my emphases 372). The critic, in this particular scenario, is explicitly cast as an “heir,” but she also serves as the presiding authority, the embodiment of the law, before whom this transmission from one generation of writers is legitimized.

Of course, when critics identify a literary tradition, they rarely elaborate the kind of scenario I have sketched above, but what I hope this dramatization clarifies and literalizes are the imaginary relationships literary traditions imply. These relationships, though only implied, represent part of the fiction of tradition. Although this imaginary scene is repressed, manifest only at the level of figurative slips (when she refers to heirs or a heritage), it nonetheless serves to cover over the relations of production. Identifying a literary tradition inevitably involves a sleight of hand that switches out the construction of tradition—the retroactive selection, arrangement, and collocation of texts—for the “real” object of tradition.

To be sure, Rosenfelt in fact avows her determining hand: the placement of Olsen’s work in the “context of a ‘socialist feminist’ literary tradition” reflects more her “view” that Olsen’s “life and art” represents an “important link between that earlier radical tradition and

contemporary feminist culture” (371) than Olsen’s own. In fact, Rosenfelt reveals, “Olsen herself pointed out” that placing her work in such a context gives “insufficient weight” to other aspects of her life and art. In spite of Rosenfelt’s taking ownership for this particular situating of Olsen’s work, Kay Hoyle Nelson and Nancy Huse continue to credit Rosenfelt not for her invention or strategic deployment of the “socialist feminist literary tradition” but for recovering this “unacknowledged [...] tradition,” suggesting in effect its existence independent of any critical intervention.⁴⁴ Writers as disparate as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Susan Glaspell, Meridel Le Sueur, Tess Slesinger, Josephine Herbst, Marge Piercy, Grace Paley, Alice Walker, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Katharine Anne Porter, Mary McCarthy, Dorothy Parker, Adrienne Rich, and Susan Griffin are bound together through their a common matrilineal literary inheritance.

The critic’s hand in linking writers is superseded by the imaginary scene of tradition: the action of handing down or transmitting from generation to generation. In the sense of literary tradition, however, the transmitted object is presumably “tradition” itself. Hence tradition both names the act and the object. As a term of literary history, tradition is a powerful means through which to imagine the identity and continuity between writers over time. If on the one hand, we may see Olsen’s own work as a literary historian as deeply implicated in the imaginary scene of tradition, the paratexts in *Yonnondio* also serve as a cautionary note to this work.

Instead of celebrating a scene of tradition, *Yonnondio* foregrounds the possibility of betrayal. Olsen critiques the grounding assumptions of literary tradition. First and foremost, her representation of the “young” and “older” writer ironizes the age positions. Instead of a an older generation of writers passing on a legacy to a younger generation—a lineage metaphorically

⁴⁴ There’s a number of ways this line of argument could play out: Said, for instance, distinguishes between “affiliation” and “filiation” in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Similarly, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar draw on Said’s work to articulate a “female affiliation complex” (*No Man’s Land* 168-171).

suggested in Rosenfelt's term "heirs"—Olsen reverses generational positions. In the reconstruction of *Yonnondio*, it is the older, not the younger, writer who is in the receiving position. Furthermore, instead of a legacy—an inheritance that can be passed on—the work in question is a fragment, not a finished property that can be transmit but a piece of an incomplete past labor.⁴⁵

VI

While Rosenfelt identifies "socialist feminist tradition" as her own definition, she also inadvertently disavows her critical mediation by displacing it onto historical process. By now, we are familiar with this situation where reconstructed traditions are misrecognized as excavated or uncovered objects. If tradition obtains through the transmission of a set of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, Olsen calls the tenability of this transmission into question by dramatizing her alienated relationship to her own text. But "own" is precisely the wrong word here. If anything, Olsen's relationship to *Yonnondio* might be better described as a reluctance to own it. That much is evident in the opening paragraph of "A Note About This Book," where the authorship is attributed to "the author." Olsen adamantly avoids the autobiographical "I" until the very last paragraph (notably preceded by a page break), where "I" thanks the "MacDowell Colony for the solitude and protection which enabled me to work on this during five months of 1972 and into 1973." Even in this last paragraph, the "I" only takes credit for the "five months" of "work" rather than claiming authorship for the novel.

What is striking in this prefatory note piece that opens the 1974 Delacorte edition of *Yonnondio* is how it disrupts one of the most basic units of identity: the self. It is not that the self

⁴⁵ Betrayal shares a root with "tradition." Both terms have as a sense "giving up" or "giving over."

has been jettisoned *tout court*—to the contrary, positing an estrangement or alienation between the young and older writer has the effect of securing these as two separate figures for the self. Though both figures are tropological substitutions for an authorial self, it is only the latter, marked by the deitic “this” and the possessive case “one’s,” that is identified with the proper name “Tillie Olsen.”

The particular problematic of the self worked through in “A Note” is not the absence of a self, but the inability to guarantee the self’s identity over time. We might understand the non-identity of younger and older writer as an instance where tradition fails, or a failure, as it were, to deliver the self to the self. This rendering of the self’s non-identity over time is not just a claim about identity but about history. Insofar as they respectively personify their periods, the non-identity between young and older writer also represents the non-identity of the 1930s and the 1970s. That the historical understanding articulated here is underwritten by the logic of periodization can hardly be overlooked. Using this logic to posit the incommensurability between the 1930s—the period when the text was first produced—and the 1970s—the period when the text is reconstructed and published—Olsen rejects the historical continuity that grounds tradition. In place of tradition’s imaginary scene, wherein the younger writer hands over the novel to the older writer, Olsen stages a scene of collaboration, presenting *Yonnondio* as the product of an “arduous partnership” between the “long ago young writer” and “this older one.” “This older one” presumably refers to the signature “TILLIE OLSEN” that closes the note. Without the continuity of identity, the estrangement between young and older writer has to be bridged through an “arduous partnership.”

But why should this partnership be represented as an arduous one? As though she wanted to insist at every turn that recovering *Yonnondio* was difficult and laborious work, Olsen

disabuses us of the notion that this collaboration was an effortless one. Even in representing recovery as a partnership, then, she continues to insist on the boundary between these two writers and the periods they personify. Indeed, the particular reluctance to claim *Yonnondio* as hers, or to name herself as the author in the “Note” indicates an acute anxiety over alienation, over dispossessing the “young writer from long ago” of her work. Of course, it is not without irony that the “young writer from ago” is a fictional product of Olsen’s self-alienation, her disowning of *Yonnondio*. Consistent with the poetics of artifactualization, self-alienation has the effect of keeping the “young writer from long ago” in the “long ago.” To not deliver the self to the self is to not betray, to not give up, the self. And here, we might do well to keep in mind that betrayal and tradition share the common meaning, indeed a common root, of “giving up” or “giving over.” For Olsen, to keep the “long ago” in the “long ago” forestalls it from running into the now. Whereas tradition posits that the past has led us right up to the now, the past, by Olsen’s account, retains unrealized possibilities. The “arduous partnership” between the “long ago young writer” and the older writer personifies the historical collaboration between the 1930s and the narrative present. Figuring a relation between the past and present that does not run in a straight line. By representing the relation between the 1930s and 1970s as a partnership, Olsen draws these two periods into contiguity.

By conceiving of *Yonnondio* as a work of “arduous partnership,” Olsen collapses temporal distance into spatial proximity, creating a bridge between these two personifications of time. Yet even as she bridges these times through the figure of “partnership,” her insistence on arduousness indicates the difficulty and contradictions of such a conceptualization. While on the face of it a partnership may suggest a model of mutuality, it is also the case that Olsen’s “arduous partnership” depends on the denial of coevalness to the “long ago young writer.” Or,

put otherwise, the evocation of temporal collaboration, personified by this partnership, presumes as a matter of course that the young writer belongs to a time that is not contemporaneous with the speaker's. In order to avoid the mode of a self-present authorial "I," Olsen represents her ("this older one's") relation to the "long ago young writer" as the relation between, in Johannes Fabian's language, the "producer of anthropological discourse" and "the referent of anthropology" (31).

Olsen's desire to preserve *Yonnondio*'s unrealized possibility takes the form of what Fabian has identified in anthropological discourse as allochronism—the denial of coevalness—to the other (31). According to Fabian, anthropological discourse, having formed under a "paradigm of evolutionism," "promote[s] a scheme in terms of which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope, a stream of Time—some upstream, some down stream" (16-17). On the face of it, Olsen's temporal relation to her object—the text—seems more the effect of the periodization enforced by a certain form of historicism than the instantiation of a kind of allochronism. In other words, a critic who studies Shakespeare and an anthropologist who studies a living society of aboriginal peoples both accede to forms of temporal distancing, but these forms are not, strictly speaking, identical. Yet, as the medievalist Carla Freccero has observed, the concept of "altericism," which developed from the anthropological critique of ethnocentrism, may be "accompanied by an older, more familiar claim that periods—those confections of nineteenth-century disciplinarization in the West—are to be respected in their time-and context-bound specificity" (487).

That the language of the artifact gives way to the language of partnership in "A Note About This Book," suggests that the former way of figuring recovery only goes so far. Were the "arduous partnership" only a relation between two discretized personifications of time, however,

it would hardly constitute a radical reconfiguration of recovery. Yet, in referring *Yonnondio* to as a *work*, Olsen offers an alternative to the predicament of allochronism. The particular impasse of recovery that “A Note” thematizes is whether an object can be recovered without betraying its origin, or whether the act of recovery necessarily overwrites the object.

Rather than cover it over, Olsen presents *Yonnondio* as a work of this asymmetrical relationship between the past and present. Whereas recovery qua excavation implies that the recovered text is a “found” object or as I have been referring to it, an artifact, recovery as partnership refigures the text as a work. As such, *Yonnondio* belongs neither to the personification of 1930s nor the 1970s. To produce *Yonnondio* as a work, Olsen betrays (gives up) the text’s status as an artifact: “The book,” Olsen writes, “ceased to be solely the work of that long ago young writer and, in arduous partnership, became this older one’s as well.”

How exactly has the work become the older one’s as well? Olsen offers the following account of the text’s reconstruction:

The first four chapters, in final or near-final form when fitted together, presented only minor problems. The succeeding pages were increasingly difficult to reclaim. There were usually two to fourteen versions to work from: 38 to 41 year old penciled-over scrawls and fragments to decipher and piece together. Judgment had to be exercised as to which version, revision or draft to choose or combine; decision made whether to include or omit certain first drafts and notes; and guessing as to where several scenes belonged. In this sense—the choices and omissions, the combinings and reconstruction—the book ceased to be solely the work of that long ago writer and, in arduous partnership, became this older one’s as well.

Such combinatory and reconstructive work threatens to undo *Yonnondio*'s artifactuality. For by this account, *Yonnondio* could hardly exist as an object without the older writer's mediation.

Unless authorship is restricted to the production of words, the older writer's painstaking textual selection, arrangement, and reconstruction counts as a form of authorship as well.⁴⁶ While Olsen represents the older writer as effecting an artifactual relation to the text—that is, understanding it as a work produced by someone other than herself—her structural positioning of the older writer as the text's editor and re-constructor renders this artifactual relation untenable. In setting up the novel as an artifact, Olsen underscores her ambivalence over the work of recovery. Can an object be recovered without annihilating the very properties—its imprint of another time—that compelled the recovery in the first place? Olsen's response to this question involves conceiving of *Yonnondio* not as an object, proper to the 1930s or the 1970s, but as a collaborative work: a partnership between these two times.

VII

⁴⁶ In many ways, Olsen's editorial disclaimer bears a structural similarity with what Robert B. Stepto has referred to as the "authenticating machinery" of slave narratives, whereby various personages—abolitionists and slaveholders alike—furnish prefaces, introductions, or letters to guarantee or vouch for the authenticity of the narrative (*Veil* 4). Frederick Douglass's autobiography includes two such authenticating documents: William Lloyd Garrison's "Preface" and Wendell Phillips's "Letter." Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, when it was first published in 1861, credited Lydia Maria Child on the title page but omitted the author's name. In addition to Child's "Introduction," *Incidents* also includes an appendix with statements by Amy Post, Linda Brent's (Jacobs's) Quaker friend and George Lowther, a free black man. These authentication devices play out longstanding anxieties about the reliability of testimony as a source of historical evidence. For historians and critics, one of the more vexing questions remains determining the authorship of the narratives. Doubts about authenticity, which most often manifest as skepticism over the literary facility of ex-slaves, dogged both the narratives that ex-slaves had dictated to white editors, and those that literate ex-slaves had written themselves. Whether or not Olsen had meant it to be a play on these authentication devices, "A Note About This Text," through its preoccupation with the manuscript's authenticity, similarly renders the relationship between the "the long ago young writer" and the older one, between the 1930s and the 1970s, between authorship and editing a problematic one. Besides serving as advertisements or sponsorships, these documents are predicated on a number of interrelated presuppositions: 1) the endorsed narrative is a form of testimony; 2) the testimony's value hinges on its truth; 3) the testimony is authentic—that is, the sole product of the witness.

Few scholars have devoted much attention to the implications of reading *Yonnondio* as an unfinished novel. When it is remarked upon, critics and reviewers have generally have interpreted *Yonnondio*'s incomplete status in terms of the themes of unrealized possibility. One reviewer, commenting on the 2004 reissue, notes for instance, "Overall, the text's unfinished state emphasizes Olsen's purpose because the narrative itself became a casualty of the forces she describes" (Wooley). Similarly, another critic speculates that Olsen's thematization of art's failure to provide an escape for the characters may be connected to the fact "that Olsen's text is itself unfinished, the conclusion to the children's story significantly absent" (Macpherson 267).

Of the body of scholarship on *Yonnondio*, Deborah Rosenfelt's article has given the most extensive consideration to the novel's unfinished state. Recounting *Yonnondio*'s publication history—from a chapter published in 1934 by the *Partisan Review*, an unrealized publishing arrangement with Random House, to its 1974 publication by Delacorte—Rosenfelt stresses the competing demands on Olsen's time that impeded the completion of the novel. In consultation with Olsen and Olsen's husband Jack, Rosenfelt examines the ways Olsen's political participation both "limited and nurtured her work as a woman and artist" (380). She writes, "in those turbulent years, Olsen lived her life fully as artist, as activist, as worker, and as woman/wife/mother," but, she goes on to observe more darkly, Olsen also suffered from these "conflicting demands, always having to give primacy to one part of her being at the expense of another" (380). By and large, the materialist feminist approach that Rosenfelt applies to *Yonnondio* accords with Olsen's project in *Silences* (1976): in this collection of essays, which treats the theme of silences in literary history, Olsen suggests that her "own silences" were determined by the exigencies of housework, childrearing, political activism, and economic

survival, which made conflicting demands on her time, leaving little to write (19).⁴⁷ For many readers, this meta-narrative of unrealized possibility no doubt constitutes part of *Yonnondio*'s appeal. Margaret Atwood, in a 1978 review of *Silences* for the *New York Times*, comments that "women writers" revere Olsen because they recognize "what a heroic feat it is to have held down a job, raised four children and still somehow managed to become and to remain a writer. The exactions of this multiple identity cost Tillie Olsen 20 years of her writing life" (250). That Olsen's autobiographical reflections expresses a similar attitude toward writing as a labor that gives the self to the self has only reinforced the authority of this account of *Yonnondio*'s unfinishedness.

Yet the language many of these writers employ to represent these non-writing labors—as "exactions" that "cost" or were "at the expense of" Olsen's writing—ideologically conceives of writing as a form of individuation set against a matrix of domestic work, motherhood, political work, and economic survival. Their outrage at the forms of menial and uncompensated labor that "cost," in Atwood's words, "Olsen 20 years of her writing life" presupposes an understanding of time as a limited resource of the self. The self, by this logic, is already constituted. Because each

⁴⁷ In addition, Rosenfelt also identifies Olsen's growing ambivalence toward the strictures of proletarian realism. She writes, "the original design for the novel would have incorporated most of the major themes of radical fiction at that time" (390). She claims that much as the leftist literary institutions of the '30's may have nurtured working-class writers, the "proletarian realism" promoted by the Left literary establishment also tended to stifle the creativity and freedom of writers. As Olsen continued to work on *Yonnondio*, it deviated further and further away from the templates of proletarian fiction. Among some of the dilemmas, Rosenfelt identifies the contradiction between the demand (largely informal) that texts should instill the hypothetical reader with a sense of political optimism and her Olsen's autobiographical experience, which contradicted such cause for optimism. In addition, it became harder to accommodate her experimentation with modernist techniques and interest in treating feminine and maternal themes within the narrative exigencies of the proletarian literature script. Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman, editors of the *New Masses*, actively exhorted proletarian writers to produce material. Mike Gold reflects on this in an unpublished interview with Michael Folsom. The charges of Leftism—that writers were coerced into espousing some party cant—are largely exaggerated. This is not to discount the fact that many writers may have felt the pressure to conform their narratives to certain conventions, but such choices were more often made to please the tastes of editors and public expectations. In that sense, the establishment of various leftist magazines and publishing houses may have endorsed certain styles and types of stories (Gold-Folsom Papers).

form of labor is understood as a discrete process, Olsen's particular predicament is that she has to perform multiple tasks, multiple forms of labor at once ("always having to give primacy to one part of her being at the expense of another"). But if every form of labor expends the self, even if Olsen were to devote her time to only one of these tasks, it would still be a form of expenditure. This particular contradiction is resolved by imagining writing as a unique form of individuation—as giving the self to the self.

Yonnondio's unfinishedness, by this account, comes to emblemize a feminist topos of unrealized possibility, a situation that in turn prompts an inquiry into the material conditions that prevented Olsen from finishing the novel. Among the shortcomings of this interpretation of *Yonnondio*'s unfinishedness is its insistence on ideal conditions for writing: that is, the notion of an independently wealthy or patronized writer free to devote all of her time to writing. My objection is not only that such conditions rarely obtain for any writer. Or, even that Olsen may have had other reasons, besides a lack of time, for not finishing *Yonnondio*. Rather, my point is to read *Yonnondio* as a casualty of the challenges that face working-class, radical, female writers, while a powerful indictment, is not to appreciate this unfinishedness as itself a formal feature of the novel.

VIII

In accounts of *Yonnondio*'s unfinishedness, Olsen and other commentators frequently allude to the "fragments, rough drafts, outlines, scraps" from which Olsen constructed the 1974 text. In a note that follows the effective conclusion of the story, Olsen addresses the "Reader," intimating "it was not to have ended here"—a point she also makes in "A Note About This Book." She elliptically notes, "Only fragments, rough drafts, outlines, scraps remain—to tell

what might have been, and never will be now.” Now collected at Stanford University’s Special Collections⁴⁸ and the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library.

These fragments prove valuable for Olsen scholars such as Rosenfelt, who wish to reinforce the text’s unfinishedness.⁴⁹ In particular, they furnish the unrealized blueprints or abandoned outlines from which critics can piece together what the finished novel might have looked like. The published text of *Yonnondio* ends on an evening in late July—Jim home from a day’s work in the sweltering packing houses and Mazie waking from a “sweated sleep” (130)—when Will brings home a “borrowed crystal set” and the family hears “for the first time the radio sound” (132). According to Rosenfelt, however, “What we have today is only the beginning of the novel that was to have been” (390). She offers the following synopsis of Olsen’s original outline:

Jim Holbrook was to have become involved in a strike in the packing houses, a strike that would draw out the inner strength and courage of his wife Anna, politicize the older children as well, and involve some of the women in the packing plant as strike leaders in this essential collective action. Embittered by the length of the strike and its lack of clear initial success, humiliated by his inability to support his family, Jim Holbrook was finally to have abandoned them. Anna was to die trying to give herself an abortion. Will and Mazie were to go West to the Imperial Valley in California, where they would themselves become organizers. Mazie was to grow up to become an artist, a writer who could tell the experiences of her people, her mother especially living in her memory (390).

⁴⁸ Stanford University’s Special Collections house the Tillie Olsen Papers, which includes her literary manuscripts, notebooks, journals, as well her working notes, drafts, and revised typescripts for all her published work.

⁴⁹ Additionally, these materials are of interest to those who, for whatever reason, may wish to verify that the recovery and reconstruction had not been an elaborate marketing strategy or fictional meta-narrative.

To use this outline, reconstructed from old notes and Olsen's recollections, as the standard by which to measure *Yonnondio*, however, overlooks its speculative function. Unless we were to accept it as an infallible window onto authorial intention, the outline does not represent the whole of which *Yonnondio* is "only the beginning."

Remarking on the value of these fragments, Linda Ray Pratt, in her introduction to the 2004 reissue of *Yonnondio*, notes, "the experience of the novel as a powerful piece of literature gains little from pursuing them. They are useful in showing us how the mind of the young Tillie Olsen conceptualized a much longer novel with a radical political intent, and they provide a sketch for the curious reader who may want to know what happened next in the 'lives' of the characters beyond the last page of the book" (vi). Pratt's comments offer a sober corrective to readers who may seek in these fragments the scheme of the novel that "was to have been."

Contrary to Pratt's suggestion, however, these fragments are not of secondary importance nor only of interest to the curious critic or sentimental reader. Bracketing these fragments off from the proper text, as Pratt tries to do, effectively posits *Yonnondio* as a finished text. Indeed, the ostensibly opposed practices of bracketing the fragments from the text or perusing them in search of a grand design share in common a desire to resolve the problem of *Yonnondio*'s unfinishedness by effectively finishing the text. The value of these fragments, in my view, lays less in the content, the various abandoned storylines and speculative outlines they may disclose than in the statement "Only fragments, rough drafts, outlines, scraps remain." By pointing to these fragments as *there*, this utterance, in turn, partakes in a further authentication of the text's unfinished status.

Comprising part of *Yonnondio*'s artifactual edifice, the status of these fragments has proven mutable, changing with each new edition and reissue of the text. In reviewing the

publication history of the novel, it becomes quite apparent that material changes to the text's layout affect its legibility as an unfinished work. The 1994 reprinting by Delacorte, which uses the proofs of the "January 1989 Delta edition," includes "three of the original fragments" that Olsen approved for inclusion (Editor's Note). These fragments are not included in the 2004 edition of *Yonnondio* issued by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Press, which uses the plates from the 1974 printing. In the 1974 (Delacorte) and 2004 (Nebraska) printings of the text, the "Note" is located in the backmatter of the book. By contrast, the 1989 edition moves the "Note," where Olsen declares the "unfinished" status of the text, to the front of the book. In addition, this edition also adds the date "1932-1936/1937" to the end of Chapter 8, and the date "February 1973" to the note to the "Reader." These editorial differences affect the meaning of the work: in addition to specifying the time of writing, the 1989 edition literally foregrounds "A Note."

Here, the matter of *Yonnondio*'s historical authenticity surfaces again: the sheer reproducibility of texts, the contingencies and errata of printing via the addition, rearrangement, or removal of material have the potential to compromise its status as an artifact. Each reproduction—new edition, reissue, reprinting—of the novel has the potential to minimize or diminish the text's unfinishedness. Closely linked to the text as a material object, unfinishedness confounds any easy distinction between the time of production and the time of recovery. For every recovery enacts another re-production of the text. By interpreting *Yonnondio* as a casualty—an incomplete or interrupted work—of Olsen's experience as a working-class mother on the Left, some critics have tried affixing the work's historical identity to the 1930s.

The variability across different editions of the novel contradicts *Yonnondio*'s status as a historical artifact. That is not to say, however, that the declaration of unfinishedness is a mere

rhetorical gesture independent of the proper work.⁵⁰ The dialectic between composition and reconstruction makes it difficult to discern the properties properly intrinsic or extrinsic to the work. *Yonnondio* thus has to be understood as a work of recovery. The incorporation of the two notes, which signal the moment of recovery, as part of the work implicates the act of recovery in the novel's production. To understand *Yonnondio* as a work of recovery requires that we regard the act of recovery as constitutive of rather than extrinsic to the text. Yet, this is not to constitute a closed circuit between the time of the "long ago young writer" and the "older one." Importantly, for Olsen, recovery does not entail finishing or completing the work but disclosing an unfinished work that belongs to another time.

Thus, in Olsen's statement to the reader, "It was not to have ended here," and in Rosenfelt's speculative outline of the "novel that was to have been," what is notable is the implied subjunctive mood of the language. *Were I to have to have finished the novel*, "It was not to have ended here," or *Were Olsen to have finished the novel*, "Jim Holbrook was to have become involved in a strike in the packing houses [...] Jim Holbrook was finally to have abandoned them. Anna was to die trying to give herself an abortion. Will and Mazie were to go West to the Imperial Valley in California [...] Mazie was to grow up to become an artist, a writer who could tell the experiences of her people, her mother especially living in her memory." Using the subjunctive narrative modality, Olsen articulates a past that might have been and a future that would have been. Evident here is the kind of counter-historical orientation that Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt have identified in the work of E.P. Thompson,

⁵⁰ It should be clear that unfinishedness, while related to the question of narrative closure, is not, strictly speaking, reducible to it. The attempt to treat the question of an unfinished work is more in the spirit of what Walter Benjamin, citing Hugo von Hofmannsthal, has described as the imperative to "Read what was never written" (405). To pursue the question of narrative closure, by contrast, is to consider how the written—that is, a particular text's rhetorical and thematic strategies—bears on the narrative's resolution. For more on narrative closure, see D.A. Miller's *Narrative and Its Discontents*.

Raymond Williams, and others, who treat “history’s dead ends” (55) and the “cul-de-sacs where unrealized possibilities were stranded” (60) to puncture the *grand récits* or grand narratives of history (52). One of the poignant ironies of this mode of historicism is that the utopian appeal of these counter-histories inheres precisely in their never being realized.

Thus, Olsen’s statement, the novel is “never to come to completion,” props up the novel’s lack of closural finality and avoids, even in the act of recovery, of reinserting the work into a teleological sequence.

IX

I end my analysis of *Yonnondio*’s literary recovery with the text that book-ends the novel. Walt Whitman’s poem “Yonnondio” furnishes not only the title but also the epigraph and postscript to Olsen’s novel. By making multiple changes to the poem, Olsen ironizes her own artifactual theme; for in this instance, she clearly manipulates Whitman’s poem to make it suit her own. In effect, the theme of artifactuality that permeates “A Note” is turned on its head: for Olsen’s cavalier changes to Whitman’s “Yonnondio” give the lie to the supposed reverence and careful handling the older writer demonstrated toward the old writing.

Most Olsen scholars have taken at face value Whitman’s explanation that “The sense of the word is lament for the aborigines. It is an Iroquois term; and has been used for a personal name.” Typically, they focus on Whitman’s claim that the word is Iroquois for “lament” and accordingly go on to read the title as Olsen’s elegy for the Holbrooks, the 1930s, and the incompleteness of the novel.⁵¹ But this decontextualization of the word “Yonnondio” from the specificity of Whitman’s poem risks treating it as one might treat a book titled *Bon Voyage*

⁵¹ Rosenfelt writes, “Unfortunately for all of us, she never finished the novel. Its title, taken from the title of a Whitman poem, is a Native American word meaning ‘lament for the lost’; it is an elegy, I think, not only for the Holbrooks, but also for Olsen’s words lost between the mid-1930s and late 1950s, for the incompleteness of the novel itself” (389-390).

written by a U.S. author: for the operation there only entails finding the approximate equivalent in English for the French term. The history of the term “Yonnondio,” however, undercuts such a literal translation.

William H.C. Hosmer, who published a long narrative poem in 1844 also titled “Yonnondio,” claims in a note to his text that the term was “a title originally given by the Five Nations to M. de Montmagny, but became a style of address in their treaties, by which succeeding Governor Generals of New France were designated” (Torres and Milun 626). Hosmer’s more detailed background for the term need not go towards discrediting Whitman’s translation of “Yonnondio.”⁵² Indeed, as the legal scholar Gerald Torres has observed, “It is easy to understand that Whitman took ‘Yonnondio’ to signify ‘Lament for the Aborigines’; if ‘Yonnondio’ was indeed the word the Iroquois used to address the state, then its mere mention ‘is itself a dirge’” (627). That “Yonnondio” is a figure *for lament* rather than the word of lament is further underscored by the fact that there is not *one* Iroquois language: a confederacy, the Iroquois consists of six nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora—each with their own language. In other words, “Yonnondio” may not, strictly speaking, be the word in Iroquois *for* lament; rather, it is Whitman’s abstraction for the historical events that the poem’s speaker finds lamentful. Whitman’s statement, “The sense of the word is lament for the aborigines,” can thus be interpreted at least two ways: as the “aborigines” word *for* lament or as the speaker’s “lament *for* the aborigines” (my emphasis).

Indeed, the poem is an exercise in thematizing this undecidability. In the first line, Whitman writes, “A SONG, a poem of itself- the word itself a dirge.” The referent “Yonnondio”

⁵² Donald D. Kummings notes that it had, in fact, been pointed out to Whitman, after the poem first appeared in *Critic*, that the word did not mean “lament” but was used by the Five Nations to address a white governor in Canada, but Whitman “continued to publish the poem with the same title and subtitle” (128).

does not appear in the body of the poem until two lines later. Within the logic of the poem, the speaker recognizes in the word “Yonnondio” the consummate aesthetic ideal. The word is equivalent to its referent: “a poem of itself.” While the word is unable to signify beyond itself, for the speaker of “Yonnondio,” it prompts visions and phantasms. After opening line five with “Yonnondio,” Whitman introduces the lyric “I” who sees “far in the west or north, a limitless ravine.” Earlier, in line three, the speaker relates, “To me such misty, strange tableaux the syllables calling up,” and lines five through seven, I see swarms of stalwart chieftains, medicine-men, and warriors/As flitting by like clouds of ghosts, they pass and are gone in the/twilight.” The lines that follow, offset by parentheses, seem to contradict the speaker’s earlier claim that the word is a “poem of itself”: “(Race of the woods, the landscapes free, and the falls!/No picture, poem, statement, passing them to the future:).” The line “No picture, poem, statement, passing them to the future” serves as an ironic commentary on Whitman’s own poem. Located in a lost past, the “Race of the woods” survives only as a “A muffled sonorous sound” “a wailing word” that is “borne/through the air for a moment.” The metaphorical confinement of the aborigines to the past culminates with the transcription of the “muffled sonorous sound” into poetic verse. Though “Yonnondio” (the word) is a “poem of itself,” it is a poem that proves fleeting. Clearly, though, the phrase “poem of itself” also refers to Whitman’s own text, which is after all, a poem of and about “Yonnondio.” An abstraction of American Indians, the “Race of the woods” bears little relation to the historical Iroquois, serving instead as a trope for the “lost” aboriginal culture the speaker elegizes. Of course, this troping of the American Indians as “lost” implicates the speaker in the very erasure or disappearance he presumably laments.⁵³ While the

⁵³ In perpetuating the vanishing race motif, Whitman figuratively erases the American Indians while at the same time mystifying the genocidal effects of state violence and resettlement that were actually decimating the population as the ineluctable course of progress.

speaker seems to mourn the loss of this “Race,” its absence from the speaker’s present also furnishes the poem’s conditions of possibility.

In adopting the Whitman’s “Yonnondio” as an epigraph for her novel, Olsen omits the first nine lines of the poem:

Lament for the aborigines...the word itself a dirge...

No picture, poem, statement, passing them to the
future:

Yonnondio! Yonnondio!—unlimned they disappear;

To-day gives place, and fades—the cities, farms,
factories fade;

A muffled sonorous sound, a wailing word is borne
through the air for a moment,

Then blank and gone and still, and utterly lost.

from Walt Whitman’s “Yonnondio”

(The epigraph as it appears in the 1974 Delacorte edition and 2004 Nebraska reprinting)⁵⁴

The first line of the epigraph consists of a compilation of phrases from Whitman’s poem, extracted from Whitman’s note and from the otherwise absent first line. These omissions and rearrangements direct the poem to the subject of Olsen’s novel: the working-class whites of the United States represented by the Holbrooks. But this contextual translation—which substitutes

⁵⁴ The 1989 edition alters the epigraph significantly. For your reference, I have included the whole text of the epigraph in the Annex to this chapter). Notably, it un-expurgates the line “Race of the woods, the landscapes free and the falls.” In addition, the phrases “a song” and “a poem of itself” are added: as such the first line of the 1989 epigraph reads “*Lament for the aborigines...a song, a poem of itself—the word itself a dirge...*” These additions arguably reintroduce the Iroquoian historical context to the epigraph. I have yet to do this, but I hope to contact either editors at Dell or Linda Ray Pratt, who provides the introduction to the Nebraska reissue of *Yonnondio* to inquire whether these changes to the epigraph were Olsen’s decisions.

the Holbrooks for the Iroquois—enacts yet another erasure of the historical Iroquois; note for instance that Whitman’s reference to the Iroquois has been omitted from the epigraph. The term “Yonnondio” is thus further unmoored from its earlier historical and linguistic context; the “aborigines” in Olsen’s epigraph signifies not the Iroquois specifically but a more general conception of “aborigines.” Ironically, the omission of the Iroquois context from Olsen’s epigraph fulfills one of the poem’s premonitions: “unlimn’d they disappear.” In other words, the expurgations of phrases such as “It is an Iroquois term,” lines like “(Race of the woods, the landscapes free and the falls!” and “I see swarms of stalwart chieftains, medicine-men, and warriors” work to *un-limn*, that is erase, the subject of the poem.

In Whitman’s “Yonnondio,” the subject of “lament for the aborigines” plays out as a series of thematic displacements between different aesthetic mediums. Whitman stresses the sonority of the word by describing it as a “song,” and emphasizes this aspect of the word in alliterative phrases such as “a muffled sonorous sound” and “wailing word.” The word’s sonority prompts a chain of metonymic displacements: “to me such misty, strange tableaux the syllables calling up.” And later, “No picture, poem, or statement, passing them to the future.” Thus in the one line, the articulated vocal elements of the word call up images, whereas the other line serves as an ironic reversal of the word’s fecund sonority, an irony that is redoubled in the phrase “unlimn’d they disappear.” The speaker imputes to the written text and visual mimesis the capacity for permanence, while associating sonority with transience.

It is not without irony, then, that the various epigraphic citations of the poem undercuts this aesthetic hierarchy set up by the speaker.⁵⁵ Olsen’s modification of Whitman’s poem

⁵⁵ As the critic Luke Gibbons argues, this prejudice toward orality has a long history in Western culture: “The locus classicus for this attack on oral culture was John Locke’s argument that whereas an original text (‘the attested copy of a record’) bears witness to truth, in tradition ‘*each remove weakens the force of the proof*’ and the more hands the tradition has successively passed through, the less evidence and

implicates not only oral tradition but all forms of representation as unreliable modes of transmission. Contrary to the view espoused by Whitman's speaker, all forms of artistic reproduction, by fact of their reproducibility, are corruptible. Indeed, what the fantasy of the artifact covers over is the ambivalence of "passing" "to the future." For each passing or transmission assumes the form of another betrayal. Olsen's manipulation of Whitman's text recapitulates the problematic of authorship she addresses in "A Note," as her "choices and omissions" "combinings and reconstruction" effectively betrays the source material, making the poem her own. Neither in Whitman's poem nor Olsen's novel do such betrayals register as loss. Indeed, Olsen's reconstruction of Whitman's poem like Whitman's mis-translation of "Yonnonidio" produce as much as they claim to lose, making loss their very theme.

strength does it receive from them.' In this schema, the *written* text enjoys the status of an originating presence, and is the standard against which the inferior claims to truth of speech and tradition may be judged" (101).

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IS AN AUTHOR WITHOUT HIS WORK: MICHAEL GOLD AND THE INSTABILITY OF AUTHORIAL IDENTITY

A founding member of the Leftist little magazine the *New Masses*, Greenwich Village intellectual, radical journalist, provocateur-for-hire, and stalwart Communist until the end of his life, Michael Gold (born Itzhok Granich)⁵⁶ enjoyed celebrity status in 1930s US literary culture. During the interwar years, Gold's name was well-nigh coextensive with the US proletarian literary movement, which in its most ambitious articulation, sought to instigate cultural revolution and re-distribute the means of literary production to the economically disenfranchised. As a notorious impresario and spokesperson of radical culture and politics, he toured the country as a speaker and penned introductions to books by up-and-coming Leftist writers of the time, including Langston Hughes. Ironically, amongst today's audiences, it is Gold who needs an introduction (Wald, *Exiles* 39). Despite cutting a wide swath on the mid-twentieth century cultural scene, Gold, currently hovers as a minor author at the margins of the American literary canon. Having remained a Communist long after it ceased to be fashionable, Gold has the dubious honor of going down in American literary history as being better known for his politics and his personality than his writings.

In terms of his literary output, Gold is perhaps best remembered today for his 1930 fictionalized autobiography *Jews Without Money*, which narrates the experiences of "Mikey Gold," a poor Jewish boy growing up in New York's Lower East Side of the 1890s. An excerpt

⁵⁶ Alternative spellings: Itshok or Yitzhak (Yiddish); also Anglicized as "Isaac." In pieces for *Masses*, *Liberator*, and other journals produced early in his career, Granich published under the first name "Irwin." During the Palmer Raids (1919-20), Granich adopted the pseudonym "Michael Gold," the original name belonging to a Jewish Civil War veteran he admired, who had fought on the side of the North.

from *Jews Without Money* appears in the Volume 2 of the *Heath Anthology*. Barry Gross, who introduces Gold for the *Heath*, suggests that Gold's position in the American literary canon largely hangs on his value as a Jewish American writer. For Gross, the conditions of this canonization are ironic since the bulk of Gold's writing dealt with subjects such as class struggle, communism, and proletarian literature (1599-1602). Thus the category of "ethnic writer" under which we may classify Gold's authorial identity now represents a very different reception context from the Leftist cultural formations and institutions in which he worked throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In the following chapter, I reconstruct some moments in Gold's literary historical status and publication history—specifically the different attempts to return the author to print—in order to analyze the terms that have underwritten postwar reconstructions of his authorial identity.

Since his death in 1967, Gold has been the subject of commercial and academic literary recovery efforts. While literary recovery orients this discussion, my approach is not archival; there will not be, as such, any hortatory about Gold's under-read or overlooked texts, though to be sure, his bibliography offers many such possibilities. Not intended to supersede foregoing procedures, my approach examines the operative terms and practices of literary recovery in order to ascertain their productive material and ideological capacities. In what follows, I will consider symbolic and material interventions (and definitions) of Gold's body of work in order to open up questions about authorial identity. Gold's minor billing in the *Heath* anthology suggests larger questions about the relation between a minor author and an *oeuvre*. What writings do and do not merit inclusion in an author's literary *oeuvre*? And how is the literary value and posterity of an author such as Gold, whose primary output was as an editor and spokesperson for a literary movement, affected by conventional understandings of an *oeuvre*? In its conventional usage, the

term *oeuvre* may designate an author's entire body of work. But what gets to count *as* work is another matter. In his well-known essay "What Is An Author?" Foucault famously tests the conceptual limits of the term *oeuvre* when he asks whether Friedrich Nietzsche's drafts, deleted passages, marginalia—and more facetiously his laundry lists and memoranda—should qualify as part of his body of work. The force of this *reductio ad absurdum* does not so much depend on the specific examples adduced—one could certainly imagine and has likely borne witness to evaluative regimes that *do* count such ephemera as part of an author's *oeuvre*. Instead, its provocative power inheres in its putting the lie to the notion of an *oeuvre* as such. Foucault, in other words, strikes at the very heart of the concept—the idea that an *oeuvre* comprises the entirety of an author's writings—by showing that the act of identifying an *oeuvre* is, by definition, to draw borders, set up limits, and make distinctions: Not just between the writings of *this* and *that* author but also between different kinds of writing by a single subject.

The *oeuvre*'s incorporative and exclusionary function may be more apparent when we recall that the French word *oeuvre*, which Donald Bouchard translates simply as "work," in its adopted English usage conveys something more like "[body of] work." Deciding which writings merit inclusion in an *oeuvre* is never an innocent process: what gets remaindered may be as ideologically 'neutral' as Gold's hotel memos but it may also be, as evinced by Kazin's introduction, an entire genre or professional discourse such as journalism.⁵⁷ It may be helpful to distinguish here between a literary *oeuvre*, claimed by an author's name, and what may be loosely described as the raw file or unbounded writing that is signed by his proper name.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Such determinations are particularly insidious when we take into account the correspondences between certain genres and particular social groups. If, for instance, journalism, memoirs, or sentimental fiction do not 'count,' this may very well mean that genres strategically employed by, economically available to, or culturally specific to certain social groups are excluded *sine-qua-non* from the category of *literature*.

⁵⁸ Note that I avoid the formulation "a single author's writing." If an "author" by definition is a function of an *oeuvre*, we cannot technically attribute writings that do not merit inclusion in the *oeuvre* to the

This chapter explores constructions of Gold's authorial identity through the discursive and textual locations that have tried to recover his authorial identity. In the first section, I will examine the implications of circumscribing his *oeuvre* to *Jews Without Money* alone. To complicate this reduction of Gold's *oeuvre* to one literary work, I discuss different editions in order to throw into stark relief the play of textual identity and difference across different versions of *Jews Without Money*. Similar to the way that Foucault defines the "author" as a function in discourse that resolves what are in fact a discontinuous series, a "title" such as *Jews Without Money*, instead of referring to a single self-identical work, performs the appropriative function of organizing multiple versions of a text into a single "work" or *oeuvre*. By reading across different versions of a single work, we thus engage various modalities of that "singular relationship that holds between an author and his text." If *Jews Without Money* refers not to a single self-identical work but is actually a discursive function that unifies or resolves a discrepant series of editions, then the authorial name "Michael Gold," even when critics try to restrict it to a single work, functions differently from version to version.

My comparison of the various editions of *Jews Without Money* stresses the significance of paratexts, those liminal productions that play a major role in justifying the text's value, guiding reader expectations, and offering an interpretation of the text.⁵⁹ Hardly unique to recovered literary works, peritexts such as prefaces, forewords, and introductions constitute significant zones of critical intervention. According to Gerard Genette, these productions function as "thresholds" or zones of "transaction" between the text and the "world's discourse

author in question. Both the phrases "raw file" and "unbounded corpus" admit the difficulty of designation here. The question persists, how do we group these writings without recourse to a corporeal metaphor?

⁵⁹ Genette distinguishes between two orders of paratexts: those that are appended to the physical body of the text (peritexts) and those that are outside of it (epitexts). See Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*.

about the text” (2). Broadly speaking, peritexts help establish an immediate and materially proximate context for the work. Because of their liminality, which is to say, their status as a part yet apart from the text, the career of any given peritext, in the course of a text’s publication history, is decidedly short-lived.⁶⁰ An introduction that may accompany one edition may be removed or replaced in a later one. Hence, while their function may be to secure perpetuity, this being the case especially with classic or recovered works, peritexts themselves are seen as expendable or non-essential. It is for this reason, however, that they constitute a crucial resource for studies of literary recovery.

When considering the publication history of a work that has gone through as many editions and reprintings as *Jews Without Money*, we see that peritextual content is in flux, shifting to accommodate and situate the text, and its author, in new ideological and economic context.⁶¹ I draw on three versions of *Jews Without Money*—the paperback reissue by Midwood in 1961, by Avon Books in 1965, and the 1996 Carrol and Graf edition that includes Kazin’s introduction—to consider the ways each of these versions represents Gold’s work through a complex of material and discursive mediations.⁶² The latter part of the chapter examines specific academic efforts to recover Gold. Through analyses of these recovery efforts, I show that Gold’s name performs a dual function in

⁶⁰ This liminality is also suggested by the translation of Genette’s term “seuil” into the English word “paratext.” Genette quotes J. Hillis Miller, “‘Para’ is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority [...] A thing in ‘para,’ moreover, is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself, the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside. It confuses them with one another” (1n2).

⁶¹ Arguably, were we to adhere dogmatically to Genette’s typology, some of these productions, the book-length studies for example, would better fulfill the criteria of the “world’s discourse about the text.” Nonetheless, I see them as performing a comparable function, engaged as they are in stabilizing the meaning of the text and ensuring a proper reading of it.

⁶² Carroll & Graf was an imprint of the Avalon Publishing Group. Perseus purchased Avalon in January 2007 and folded the Carrol and Graf imprint in May 2007.

literary discourse, serving primarily to designate (and symbolically represent) a literary movement, and only secondarily to lay claim to a body of work.

With the exception of the occasional honorific or exemplary analyses of *Jews Without Money*—many of which celebrate the work as a minor classic or as the signal text of a minor genre (proletarian literature)—the trend amongst academic critics has been to appreciate Gold as a literary personality and cultural impresario. Along these lines, Wald tellingly describes him as a “star” of the thirties US Literary Left) rather than as an author. (39) Although Gold produced a substantial amount of writing during his lifetime, only a fraction of it has lent itself to literary posterity. A tendency to circumscribe his *oeuvre* to a single title cuts across party lines: vocal champions and adamant critics alike share the view that *Jews Without Money* represents his peak, or, as some would argue, only literary achievement.

I

In a review for *The Nation* of the 1965 Avon paperback edition of Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money* (1930), Michael Folsom, the editor of *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (1974) and the foremost authority on Gold during the 1970s, describes the novel’s return to publication from its printing hiatus as a “perverse tribute”: despite its pride of place as the “first of the ‘proletarian’ works to reappear post-McCarthy,” Gold’s novel, he observes, surfaces “battle-scarred” (242).⁶³ What prompts Folsom’s indignation is a particular wound to the body of the

⁶³ Strictly speaking, *Jews Without Money*, given its relative popularity and longevity in print, is an odd case for a study of literary recovery. Between 1930, its initial year of publication, and 1950, *Jews Without Money* went through over twenty-five reprintings by Gold’s original publisher Horace Liveright, Inc. Selling 13,370 copies in 1930, *Jews Without Money* was regularly reprinted by Horace Liveright, Inc., later called Liveright Publishing Corporation when Victor Gold—no relation to Michael—acquired the firm in 1933.⁶³ For the following two decades, *Jews Without Money* remained a popular text: in addition to regular reprintings by Liveright Inc., it was also issued in 1946 by The Sun Dial Press and perennially

work: basing its reprint on a facsimile from a previous paperback reissue rather than a typed setting copy from Liveright Publishing Company (the book's original publisher), the Avon edition leaves out the last twelve lines of *Jews Without Money*.

These lines depict the narrator coming upon a soap-box speaker and narrates in rapid succession his conversion to the worker's Revolution:

A man on an East Side soap-box, one night, proclaimed that out of the despair, melancholy and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty.

I listened to him.

O workers' Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit.

O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live.

O great Beginning! (309)

After the first printing run (November 1965) that omitted Gold's conclusion, Avon released a statement to the press admitting this error, and all subsequent Avon runs of *Jews Without Money* include a correctional note on the copyright page, stating that "earlier omissions" have been "restore[d]" and "previous errors" "correct[ed]." ⁶⁴

For Folsom, however, the Avon edition's accidental omission really only adds insult to an injury *Jews Without Money* had evidently already suffered at the hands of Midwood Books, a firm that specialized in "the best in Dynamic, Virile Fiction" "Books that are Fast-paced, Bold, Lusty and packed with Excitement."⁶⁵ Catalogued as number "F96," the Midwood paperback

reissued by International Publishers. By 1950, however, reprintings had ceased, and the book would remain out-of-print until its paperback reissue until the late 1950s.

⁶⁴ See Lewis Nichols, "In and Out of Books," *New York Times* (Jan 23 1966): 241.

⁶⁵ I am quoting from the ordering form in the back matter of the 1961 Midwood edition.

edition of *Jews Without Money* is sandwiched between a lesbian pulp novel *The Gay Interlude* (F95) and *Desire Under the Sun* (F97), a fictional work about sex slavery.

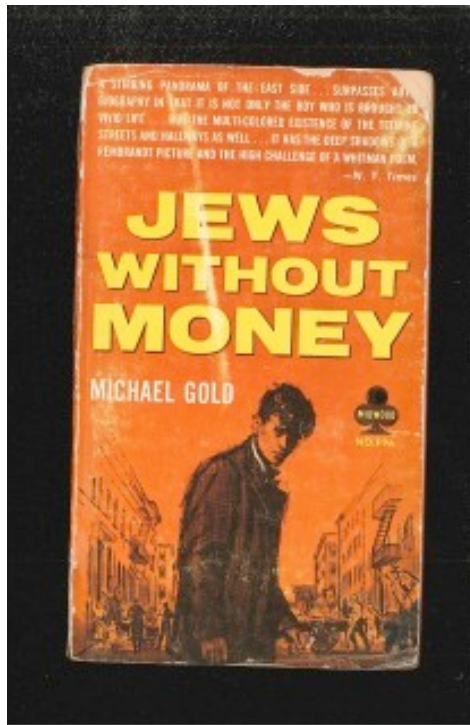


Figure 3.1 Cover of the 1961 Midwood paperback edition of *Jews Without Money*

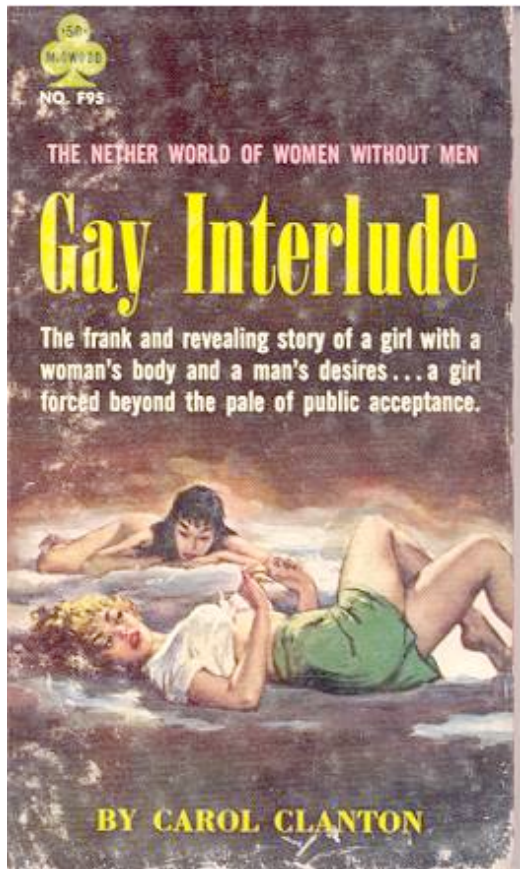


Figure 3.2 The cover of *Gay Interlude*, the title immediately preceding *Jews Without Money* in Midwood's catalogue, and an example of the types of lesbian pulp titles the firm typically published.

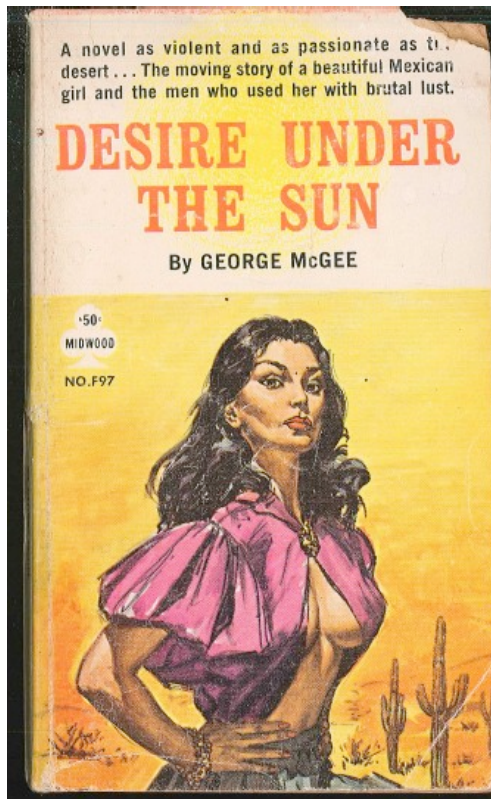


Figure 3.3 The cover of *Desire Under the Sun*, the title immediately succeeding *Jews Without Money* in Midwood's catalogue.

As Folsom recounts, Liveright Publishing Company, which owned the rights to *Jews Without Money*, arranged for Midwood, primarily noted today as a progenitor of “sleaze” or pulp fiction, to issue the title as a paperback without informing Gold of the firm’s reputation.

Rather than write off the Midwood edition as a crude commercial exploitation of *Jews Without Money*—which in one sense, it no doubt is—I read it as a particularly salient example of the instability of Gold’s authorial identity. Besides what he regards as the unsavory company (or strange bedfellows) *Jews Without Money* is forced to keep, Folsom finds the Midwood edition particularly offensive because it expurgates the ending which “makes logic and triumph out of the tortured young life Gold retells” is “in one sense the whole point of the book” (242). For

Folsom, this expurgation to the body of Gold's work materially and symbolically repeats the erasure of Gold's text from American literary history. In his review, he characterizes the book's printing hiatus in the following fashion: "It was not 'forgotten,' like Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, nor was it 'rediscovered' by Establishment literati" (242). Unsatisfied with either of these rhetorical poles of literary recovery, Folsom finally settles on another: *Jews Without Money*, he asserts, was "erased" (242). Registering the Leftist backlash against Cold War politics and policies, this trope of erasure attributes the gap in the book's reprinting history to political censorship.⁶⁶

For Folsom, Cold War repression is a convenient narrative against which to direct his literary recovery of Gold. To call Cold War repression a narrative is not to imply that it is a mere fiction nor is it to dispute the claim that anti-communist ideology hurt Gold's literary reputation and career; it is rather to stress the ways in which the Cold War comes to function as the governing trope of political repression and censorship in literary historical accounts. The narrative of Cold War repression, of textual erasure and cultural amnesia, paradoxically helps to reinforce and reaffirm a historicism set on producing a complete, exhaustive, and restored account of history. So long as this narrative of repression is assumed, the literary history of the 1930s performs the reparative work of remembering—with the end-goal of establishing a history fully present to itself. Terms such as "forgotten" "erased" "exhume" "excavate" "buried," which litter the rhetoric of literary recovery, trope the literary text as an artifact that need only be

⁶⁶ Terms such as "erased" "forgotten" and "rediscovered" reify the complex processes of textual production (institutional, economic, and ideological). That this recovery logic relies on the notion of cultural memory can be adduced from passive statements such as "It was erased," or "It was forgotten." The questions that few critics and historians, who rely on the discourse of literary recovery, countenance or address are "Forgotten by whom?" "Erased by whom?" The answer to both of these questions is presumably culture, but the very thought that culture "erases" or "forgets" would be nonsensical, unless we recognized the implicit personification that secures the trope of cultural memory.

brought back into the light of day. This artifactualizing language, so common in discourses of recovery, relapses into a naïve historicism, implying that there is an original version of the lost text, and by extension, a stable historical context that can be recovered.

In her discussion of proletarian fictional autobiography, Barbara Foley names the ending to *Jews Without Money* the “*locus classicus* of troublesome closure in the proletarian novel” (311). Her claim is borne out by the text’s critical reception. In the critical literature on *Jews Without Money*, the tendency to malign (or, at the very least, cite others maligning) this ending is nothing short of a ritual, one so widely observed that it is hard to imagine writing on this text without remarking on these lines in some capacity. The great scandal of these lines is that precisely at the point—the structural close—where a narrative is expected to neatly resolve its meaning, the text moves in the opposite direction. Or rather its effort to resolve introduces a conflict that may not have been apparent as a conflict *in* the preceding narrative. The narrator’s address to the “workers’ Revolution” and his declaration in the future tense, “you will destroy the East Side when you come,” in other words, prompts a double-take by underscoring (or introducing) a “conflict” that was not hitherto apparent. Hence, the anticipated resolution—and it is important to note that the apostrophic address indicates that it (the resolution/revolution) has not yet “come”—retroactively implicates the subjects of the preceding narrative—the tenement, the Jewish ghetto, urban poverty as problems.

This indictment of the ghetto as a problem that requires a solution strikes a very different note from the sentimental overture that opens the narrative, where the narrator states, “I can never forget the East Side street where I lived as boy” (13). There, the ghetto is established primarily as a “narrative setting” and site of narrative pleasure. It is indeed the “East Side” as the site of narrative pleasure on which Midwood Books quite explicitly intends to capitalize. Under

the modest claim “ONE OF THE GREAT NOVELS OF ALL TIME,” the blurb on the back cover of the Midwood edition of *Jews Without Money* reads

“THIS IS HOW IT WAS...THIS WAS THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF NEW YORK WHEN IT WAS THE GHETTO OF THE WESTERN WORLD...AND MICHAEL GOLD WAS THERE. IN BOLD, VIVID STYLE HE FILLS THE PAGES WITH THE SMELLS AND SOUNDS OF LIVING PEOPLE....HERE ARE THE WHORES, THE PIMPS, THE GANGSTERS, THE THIEVES, THE OPPRESSED, THE FLIES, SICK CATS AND BEDBUGS...HERE IS A WORLD YOU NEVER MADE!!!”

Lurid and sensationalist, these lines market the book as a vehicle for literary class tourism and historical tourism, promising readers thrills and titillation. A series of spatial deictic expressions— “This is how it was...This was the Lower East Side [...] Here are the whores, the pimps [...] Here is a world you never made”—insist on the proximity of the blurb’s speaker and the reader to the Lower East Side, which is to say, the speaker and the reader inhabit a spatial plane where the former can simply point at the East Side. But clearly the pronoun “This” also refers to the text in the reader’s hands. The ambiguity of “This” only serves to reinforce the collapse between the text (the sign) and its referent (the East Side) as the expression “This is how it was...This was the Lower East Side” combine spatial and temporal deictics to promise to transport the reader not just to an alien place but also an alien time.

II

In his afterword to the 1965 Avon paperback reissue of *Jews Without Money*, Michael Harrington, a sociologist whose work impacted Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society reforms,

begins his comments by referring to Gold's novel as a work of proletarian literature. Tellingly, however, proletarian literature as an explanatory category is eventually displaced by a metonymy of overdetermined terms such as "political," "propaganda," "ideological," and "partisan" (227). This slippage in characterization—from the proletarian to the political more generally conceived—is common to discussions of Gold's text suggesting, at the very least, a critical vagueness over the meaning of proletarian literature.

This silence over how the term proletarian literature mediates our reading of *Jews Without Money* suggests less its impertinence to the work than it does a degree of what Louis Althusser has termed "ideological obviousness," an assumption, in other words, of its empirical basis ("Ideology" 85). By referring to *Jews Without Money* as a "work of 'proletarian literature,'" without seeing the need to explain, defend, or justify this point, Harrington treats this detail as if it were mere fact—as obvious and self-explanatory as the novel's status as a work of fiction—as to be beneath commentary. Ironically, it is precisely this assumption of obviousness that imputes to "proletarian literature" a theoretical coherence and unity that overlooks the term's complex historical determinations.

As a generic or formal category, proletarian literature has little bearing on the ways Harrington and other critics read the Gold's novel. To the extent that commentators speak of *Jews Without Money* as a "proletarian" work, this description refers less to an interpretation of the book than it does to Gold's identity as a working-class author. Thus, despite the generic labels—"classic of urban social protest" (*Saturday Review*) or "work of 'proletarian literature'" (Harrington 227)—that highlight the political valence of *Jews Without Money*—these descriptors signify at only the most superficial level, proving to be more indexical than substantive. In account after account, readers are more fixated on the autobiographical sources of the text and

the veracity of details—such as the gender of his siblings or his father’s occupation—than with its status as a novel of purpose or work of proletarian literature. When proletarianism is addressed, discussions center largely on the conclusion of the text. And even there, readings tend to revert to autobiographical questions such as whether the soapbox speaker is based on I.W.W. spokeswoman Elizabeth Gurley Flynn or the anarchist Emma Goldman.⁶⁷ Nominations of *Jews Without Money* as the first American or the first successful proletarian work of fiction notwithstanding, critics rarely address exactly why or how the novel qualifies as proletarian literature; such nominations tend to ascertain literary capital for the work by claiming its primacy within proletarian literature without addressing the basis and constitution of this category.

III

Alfred Kazin, in his introduction to the 1996 edition by Carroll and Graf, an imprint of Avalon publishing group, provocatively states, “Much could be said about Gold as a ‘primitive’ who never wrote anything of value except this flaming book—his own story—and whose perpetual sense of outrage went flat in servility to the Communist Party line when he contributed indistinguishable columns under the head ‘Change the World!’ to *The Daily Worker* and *The People’s World*” (3).⁶⁸ Given his barely veiled hostility toward Gold, one might think that Kazin was writing at the height of the Cold War, and not 1996, a year when anti-Communist sentiments, if not altogether extinct, were at least significantly muted. Indeed, Kazin’s opinion of Gold’s literary merits had changed little from the one he proffered four decades earlier in *On Native Grounds* (1942), where he had written off Gold’s *Daily Worker* columns as “twaddle” (*Wald Writing* 32). With his abiding ambivalence toward Gold and his historical affiliation with

⁶⁷ Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time*, 48.

⁶⁸ Avalon was bought out Perseus Books Group in January 2007, and Perseus folded the Carrol and Graf imprint shortly after in May 2007.

the “New York Intellectuals,” whose members were wont to regard Gold and his colleagues at the *New Masses* as embodying the worst tendencies of “leftism,” the publishers’ decision to have Kazin introduce *Jews Without Money* is—to be sure—a curious one.⁶⁹

But when we consider the negative critical reception that dogged Gold during his life and posthumously, the uneven, hostile, and frequently condescending introduction proves all *too* appropriate. Anti-Communist cant may seem out of step with the times, yet its anachronism may constitute part of its appeal. The Cold War nostalgia of Kazin’s introduction, which relies on old animosities, stands in stark contrast to studies such as Barbara Foley’s *Radical Representations* and James D. Bloom’s *Left Letters: The Culture Wars of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman*. At turns polemical and palliative, these critics dispute the presiding political and critical norms that had consigned Gold and other Old Left writers to the literary historical annex.

Less a tribute than a grudging conciliation, Kazin’s introduction is most notable for the ways it perpetuates the spirit of critical indignation over the persona Michael Gold.⁷⁰ In addition to this ceremonial re-enactment of political acrimony, the choice of Kazin, whose writings frequently dealt with the Jewish immigrant experience, is suggestive for other reasons: Kazin’s name helps position *Jews Without Money* for a specialized audience of interested in Jewish literary and intellectual history, helping to legitimize its status as a work of ethnic fiction.

⁶⁹ Writes James F. Murphy, “the term *leftism* was employed [by the *New Masses*, *Partisan Review*, and the proletarian literary movement more generally] as an epithet characterizing certain attitudes and practices that were considered unacceptable. Among these was sectarianism with non-Communist writers, and the view that proletarian writers had nothing to learn from bourgeois writers from the past or present. In addition, leftism referred to the discard for aesthetic values, the limitation of literary criticism to sociological analysis, and the demand that proletarian literature be narrowly agitational in character, addressing events of the moment” (1).

⁷⁰ Contrast this to Kazin’s unqualified praise for Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep*. Originally published in the *New York Review of Books*, Kazin’s appreciation was reprinted as a preface to the 2005 Picador edition.

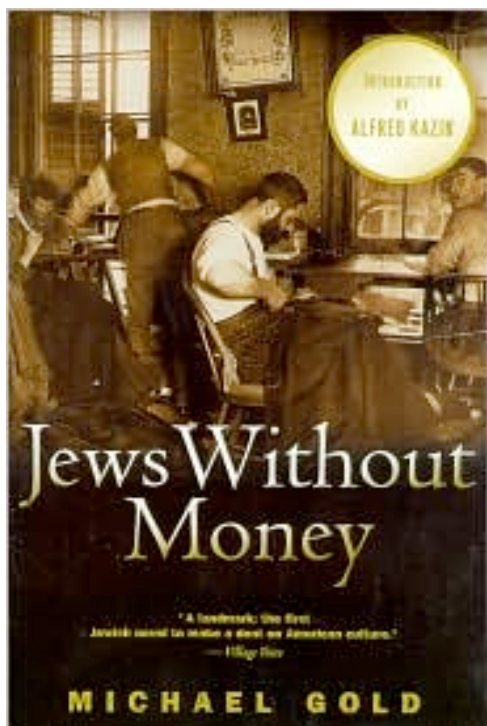


Figure 3.4 The cover of the Carroll & Graf paperback edition features Alfred Kazin's introduction with an inset.

Kazin's droll observation that *Jews Without Money* is the only work of "value" Gold ever produced suggests a calculus where its value is determined in inverse proportion to the rest of his output.⁷¹ According to this logic, to recognize Gold as an author of merit or really as an author at all requires that we prop up *Jews Without Money* at the expense of his other writings, which include, to name a sampling, his editorial and creative contributions to *The Masses*, *The Liberator*, *The New Masses*, *The Menorah Journal*, and *The American Mercury*, an essay collection *The Hollow Men*, the plays *Fiesta* and *Hoboken Blues*, a biography of John Brown, a children's book *Charlie Chaplin's Parade*, and two collections of short stories *100 Million* and *A*

⁷¹ Albeit in a more sympathetic register, Alan Wald also upholds this distinction between Gold's literary and non-literary output by suggesting a tragic arc to the author's career, where economic exigencies and political commitments squelched avant-garde aspirations (*Exiles* 39-70).

Damned Agitator.⁷² Easy as it may be to dismiss Kazin's claims as grounded in outmoded—and elitist—standards of literary evaluation, his distinction nonetheless begs Foucault's question "What in short, is the strange unit designated by the term, work [*oeuvre*]" (118)? For Kazin, Gold's "Change the World" columns clearly do not make the cut, but what of his other publications?

IV

During the 1980s and 1990s boom in US Literary Left scholarship, critics like Foley and Bloom, as well as Alan Wald and Michael Denning, bolstered by discourses of canon revision, reevaluated the critical norms that had marginalized Leftist writers such as Gold. Because of his role as an important authority and impresario in the proletarian literary movement, his name appeared frequently in narratives about the literary 1930s, but the general reassessment of the Left's cultural production had minimal impact on the material status of Gold's *oeuvre*. While Gold was represented in cultural and literary histories, his writings were not extensively reissued or republished.⁷³ The paucity of such re-publications cannot easily nor directly be linked to any one cause, though economics is surely one primary consideration.⁷⁴ And yet, this skewing of literary recovery toward genres such as literary and cultural history also bespeaks the particular kinds of literary critical meanings and ideological investments that are gathered under his name.

⁷² This is only a partial listing. For a more complete bibliography of Gold's writings, see John Pyros.

⁷³ I am loath to speculate too much without further research into why there has been little publication activity in Gold's literary estate. Though the absence of a champion cannot be ruled out as a possible factor. By champion, I have in mind those critic-patrons who have taken up the cause of a neglected author. Some better known examples of this include the following critic-author pairings: Alice Kessler-Harris and Anzia Yezierska, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston, Deborah Rosenfelt and Tillie Olsen, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Harriet Wilson, and Harold Ribalow and Henry Roth.

⁷⁴ For a fine discussion of relation between the publishing industry and the corporatized academy, and how marketing considerations drive the recovery process, see Karen L. Kilcup, "Anthologizing."

Without reducing their generic diversity, most scholarship on Gold shares in common a repressive hypothesis about the trajectory of his career. Michael Folsom, Barbara Foley, and James D. Bloom, for instance, all attribute his minor status today to the character assassinations he suffered at the hands of so-called ‘liberal’ postwar critics such as Alfred Kazin, Irving Howe, Philip Rahv, and Leslie Fiedler, who helped develop, in Foley’s words, “a narrative about the role of the Communist party (CP) in Depression-era cultural movements that shapes much analysis of US literary radicalism to this day” (6). This narrative tells of a CP cultural initiative that bent literary aesthetics to its ideological program, and doctrinaire party critics who promoted a crude literary barbarism. Advocates of proletarian literature, the common wisdom goes, favored pithy slogans over well-wrought lines, formulas over originality, politics over aesthetics. In this narrative, Gold emerges as a consummate partisan yes-man, who had few scruples over throwing dissidents under the bus if it meant serving the CP line.

As “a nationally known symbol of the fully ‘committed’ writer” (Wald 39), Gold nettled those critics like Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, and Philip Rahv. Memorable examples of this critical mudslinging can be found in seminal postwar literary histories. In his study *On Native Grounds*, Kazin characterizes literary Communists as falling in “abject surrender to naturalism” (371) and disparages Gold’s *Daily Worker* columns as “twaddle” (382). For their part, Irving Howe and Lewis A. Coser, in *The American Communist Party: A Critical History*, paint Gold as an “inveterate low-brow,” “endowed with a style of corrupt vividness and characterized by an astonishing incapacity for sustained thought.” Had Gold “not turned radical,” they opine, he would have made “a superb police reporter” (274).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ And yet, we should not overlook, as Gold’s defenders have been prone to do, that even the most withering assessments of his intellectual capacities or literary skill also betray a certain measure of admiration: to wit, Howe and Coser follow up their characterization of Gold with this ambivalent conciliation, “His one virtue, if such it can be called, was a fatal steadiness of commitment [...] He was

Although this invective often traveled the *ad hominem* route, these potshots at Gold's intelligence and character are not only sourced from personal vendettas. Though, to be sure, even during his heyday, Gold was a divisive figure with a knack for barbed missives of his own.⁷⁶ But his fall from prominence to literary persona non grata, according to revisionist literary histories, was at least in part a function of Cold War politics. Kazin and Howe may have had it out for Gold, but their recourse to *ad hominem* is precisely (argumentum) *ad hominem* because they intend not only to harm Gold the person, but the ideological positions he represented, chief among them being the idea that literature should serve a political function.⁷⁷

Incredible as it may seem now, given his contemporary obscurity and the hegemonic power revisionist critics attribute to liberal intellectuals, Howe and Kazin had reason to reckon Gold's cultural authority as a formidable symbolic and institutional force.⁷⁸ For one, Gold was,

one of the few who stuck it out" (275). Salutory sentences like these are few and far in between. We would be hard-pressed to contradict the prevailing claim that Gold's literary reputation suffered from violent defamation and critical devaluation in postwar literary and cultural histories. That said, the fact that patently hostile critics like Howe and Coser muster a grudging respect for Gold suggests that Cold War responses to Gold were actually more ambivalent than recent recovery efforts would have us believe.⁷⁶ One notorious example is his excoriating attack on Thornton Wilder in the pages of the *New Republic*. Reviewing Wilder's *Woman of Andros*, Gold was not above using homophobic language, describing the novel as "a daydream of homosexual figures in graceful gowns moving archaically among the lilies" ("Wilder" 197-202).

⁷⁷ Gold's position may be glossed as his subscribing to the theory of art as a political weapon.

⁷⁸ The historical irony here is that these critics, whom we now consider giants of American literary criticism, actually saw themselves as championing a minor position or counter-current to mainstream 1930s intellectual and artistic culture, which, as Warren Susman has argued, during "the time of the Hiss trial and McCarthy accusations" "appeared [...] to be dominated by ideological commitment to Stalinism" (151). It is no surprise, then, that the writers active during the 1930s that liberal critics most favor—John Dos Passos, James Farrell, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Henry Roth—are also those they believe had best escaped the clutches of this 1930s norm. In Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, and Farrell, for instance, Kazin sees "a new and original type," who in "a moribund world [...] seemed a phenomenon of energy—reckless, aggressive, inventive, the symbol of a world [...] that had learned the secret of production and would remain vigorous and new" (*Native* 370). Unlike the mass of young writers or literary Communists who had fallen in "object surrender to naturalism" (371), these writers, in his estimation, left an individual signature on their work: Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Farrell, in particular, were notable for towing the line between commitment and autonomy. The case of Henry Roth also rewards analysis in this light: in the 1960s, Kazin joined critics such as Irving Howe and Leslie Fieldler in claiming Henry Roth as the period's unsung talent. Howe, in his 1964 *New York Times*

in Wald's words, a symbol of the "committed writer." But even more than what he stood for, it was the power he wielded in the 1930s cultural field, where he struggled to establish proletarian writing *as* literature, that most aggravated established institutions of literary valuation and elicit hostile reactions from liberal critics.

Gold played an instrumental role in developing *The New Masses* into an unofficial CP cultural organ, which, along with other Leftist little magazines, anthologies, John Reed Clubs, speaking circuits, made up the proletarian literary field.⁷⁹ *The New Masses* and Gold were privileged agents in this field, mediating the symbolic recognition and positioning of proletarian literature (and its practitioners) as well as furnishing its (and their) primary mode of production, distribution, promotion, and reception.⁸⁰ Though the proletarian literary field where Gold enjoyed the most cultural authority entailed its own internal rules of positioning, its boundaries—because of its oppositional and counter-cultural inception—cannot be strictly demarcated from the dominant cultural field. Under the specific relations of production that obtained during the 1930s, the proletarian literary field, speaking as it did to the crisis mindset and labor disputes of

book review of *Call It Sleep*'s Avon paperback reissue, suggests that Roth's "Joycean" East Side narrative was not given due consideration upon its initial publication because it was "alien to the spirit of the times." He continues, "The politically radical critics then dominating the New York literary scene had enough taste to honor Roth for composing an impressive work, but they did not really know what to make of it. They could not know what to make of it. They could not bend the novel to their polemical purposes" (BR1). Fieldler similarly opines, "The absurd theorizing about 'proletarian fiction' almost guaranteed that when a really good book appeared, the critics would not be able to see it through the dust they were busy kicking up" (Geismar xvi).

⁷⁹ I am following Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the 'field' as a structured social space (*Field* 29-73).

⁸⁰ Michael Denning makes a related argument that the ontological question has tended to preoccupy discussions of the movement. Following his argument, to discuss proletarian literature in strictly generic terms, even when the conventions adduced extend beyond form to include categories such as author and audience, "fail[s]" because it treats proletarian literature as an "ahistorical" "ideal" type and ignores the fact that it was produced within a particular social formation. For a literary movement centrally preoccupied with class and exposing the ideologies that naturalize relations of economic domination, this ontological preoccupation proves especially problematic as it reifies proletarian literature into a thing (201-202).

the Great Depression, posed an increasing challenge to the literary institutional status quo.⁸¹

Struggles over the meaning and definition of proletarian literature in this subfield thus qualitatively implicated the broader cultural field. In other words, the challenge Gold represented was not just his struggle to define what could count as “proletarian” literature but what should qualify as literature, period.

Liberal character assassinations were thus attempts to remove Gold from a position of cultural authority. As the figurehead of the proletarian literary movement, he was already an easy mark for liberal critics in the 1930s “culture wars,” to borrow James D. Bloom’s formulation, but he drew still more fire with his unwavering commitment to the CP through the peak years of anticommunist sentiment. His remaining vocally and unapologetically Communist—his critics would say a hard-line Stalinist—long after fellow-traveling had gone out of fashion left him wide open to criticism. As his biographer, collaborator, and former literary executor Michael Folsom recounts, Gold, following the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the Moscow Trials, alienated most of his contemporaries and colleagues with his political fidelity to the Soviet Union, a decision that even his most dedicated friends and sympathizers would regard as foolish (Folsom 18).

According to this oft-recited narrative of Cold War intellectual culture, the end of World War II—with Soviet Union’s ascendancy as a global superpower and fissures in the US-Soviet alliance aggravated by the Pact and the Trials—saw a political re-centering amongst Left-inclined critics and artists, many of whom would recant their Communist identifications, memberships, or sympathies. These ideological realignments were often performative; acts of

⁸¹ Denning writes, “The year of the general strikes—1934—was also the year young poets and writers proclaimed themselves “proletarians” and “revolutionaries,” the year when dozens of experimental magazines publishing proletarian stories, poems, and manifestoes were suddenly recognized by mainstream publishers and the established reviews. The proletarian avant-garde had spread like prairie fire across the continent in the few years since the crash; for a brief moment, it dominated the American literary world” (200).

self-recrimination and finger-pointing found expression in an emergent genre of intellectual memoirs and reconstructive literary histories.⁸² These narratives serve a historiographical and autobiographical function: first by *writing* the 1930s into history, transforming it from a (chronological) decade into a cultural historical period, and second by distancing (politically and ideologically) their authors from the period's cultural follies. The subjectivation, or "coming-of-age," of the so-called liberal critic, at this particular historical conjuncture, thus entailed repudiating the positions that Gold represented and one of the period's most ideologically compromised cultural products: proletarian literature. For Gold, who derived his cultural authority almost entirely from this field, the failure of the proletarian literature to secure institutional longevity meant a rapid depreciation in cultural capital, leaving his reputation entirely at the mercy of an older system of cultural valuation.

To identify this continuity between liberal and revisionist handlings of Gold's output is not to cite the latter for being complicit in some repressive plot against Gold or to impugn them for bad faith. Instead, I mean to point out the intractability of certain ideologies and norms about authorship, which continue to inhere in a notion of the *oeuvre*. Most rehabilitations of Gold have had little bearing on his authorial status because they work primarily at the level of Gold-as-personality or Gold-as-cultural authority. Thanks to studies like *Exiles from a Future Time* and *The Cultural Front*, we have a richer record of Gold's activities in the proletarian literary movement, but these activities are not brought under the sign of authorship. Thus, while his name is virtually coextensive with the proletarian literary movement, it remains deprived of an *oeuvre* that might legitimize his authorial identity.

⁸² Examples include Edmund Wilson's *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties* (1952), Malcolm Cowley's *The Dream of Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1930s* (1980), Alfred Kazin's *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965), and Dwight MacDonald's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1957).

Significantly, Gold's symbolic absence of an *oeuvre* has a material correlative in the publication status of his bibliography. Michael Folsom duly notes this situation in his introduction to *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*, put out by International Publishers in 1974, "Aside from *Jews Without Money*, none of Gold's "voluminous work is available in print" (8).⁸³ While Folsom intimates plots of Cold War repression and censorship in his account, the causes behind the bulk of Gold's writings being out-of-print are far too complex to pin on any one group or agency. Even in the case of authors such as Gold, who endured negative press, the lack of a large catalogue of works in print cannot be attributed to informal or formal censorship alone.

To check this temptation to blame any single party, we must take into account the generic and reception contexts for Gold's published writings. We would have to note, for instance, that while his writings may have been "voluminous," the mass of it consisted of periodical contributions, which are subject to rapid depreciation, and, save for *Jews Without Money*, which was released by Horace Liveright Inc., in 1930, his literary publications were released in small runs by independent Leftist presses, while his stageplays had limited runs with Little Theatres or experimental theater groups (e.g. The Provincetown Players). Unless collected and reproduced in an anthology (like Folsom's) these writings are subject to different conditions of reprinting and reproducibility than those that might apply to a book under contract with a major commercial publisher. To seize on a turn of phrase, we might suggest vis-à-vis Folsom, that "voluminous writings" do not a volume or an author make.

In theory, the counter-normative definitions of literature, so vital to the project of canon revision, might support a more comprehensive revaluation of Gold's writings. But such a project requires more than a performative act. The hierarchy of value, in other words, cannot be

⁸³ With the exception of Folsom's anthology—which itself now is also out-of-print—this publication situation remains the same up to the present.

dissolved by rhetoric alone. To shape Gold's "voluminous writings" into an *oeuvre*—and even here, my language belies the complexity of this undertaking—requires a multi-leveled intervention. This is say nothing of the ideological implications of such a project. For instance, does the desire to produce an *oeuvre* for a minor author, given that it accepts the existing norms of valuation, cede too much ground to the status quo? For my purposes here, I am not interested in deleting the symbolic brackets around *Jews Without Money*. Little stands to be gained, theoretically or politically, through expedients such as symbolically lumping together, promoting, or demoting particular texts in his bibliography.

Rather, taking a cue from John Guillory, I employ a crucial distinction between an author's *oeuvre*, which exists as an imaginary totality, and concrete sites of textual incorporation.⁸⁴ These sites, by which I mean book titles, omnibuses, anthologies, Norton critical editions, comprise the concrete locations of an author's *oeuvre*. Of course, not all instances of textual incorporation are the results of literary recovery. But literary recovery represents one of the vital discursive practices that constitutes the author-function and processes of canon formation.

Adapting Guillory's claim that "every construction of a syllabus *institutes* once again the process of canon formation," I argue that every act of literary recovery institutes the process of giving body to the author. Like the "canon" in discourses of canon revision, the author's *oeuvre* is an imaginary totality that is cited but never fully disclosed or, to keep with my own terms, recovered. In what remains of this article, I concentrate on the anthology as a privileged form for literary recovery, and examine, in particular, how *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Vol. II* and *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* give textual body to and re-function Gold's name.

⁸⁴ Guillory distinguishes between a "syllabus" "the list of works one reads in a given class," and the "canon" which the syllabus "posits [...] as its imaginary totality" (30-31).

V

The anthology form, with its conventions of collection and compilation, is particularly well-suited for giving body to an author's name: many of the classificatory relations such as homogeneity, consistency, and affiliation that characterize the author-function are applicable to the anthology form, which similarly seeks to construct unities between discrepant discursive practices. Like authors' names or modalities of the author-function, however, individual anthologies can differ sharply in purpose, design, signification, and institutional location: the two I consider, short of their common polemical and interventionist bent, occupy opposite poles of the genre. Whereas the *Heath* represents a canon-defining or canon-revising anthology that incorporates Gold's name into a national literary canon, *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* better resembles single-author anthologies or omnibuses.

The Feminist Press-sponsored "Reconstructing American Literature" project, which yields a book volume of the same name, and *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* together represent a watershed moment in the academic canon debates of the 1980s and 1990s. With Paul Lauter serving as general editor, these studies were self-styled interventions that mobilized canon revision at the institutional level by generating reimagined pedagogical resources that comprised course design, syllabi, and anthologies. The first edition of the *Heath* includes an excerpt ("The Soul of a Landlord") from Gold's *Jews Without Money*. Classified under a sub-section ("Issues and Visions in Modern America") of the "Modern Period: 1910-1945," Gold shares billing with John Dos Passos, George Schuyler, Meridel Le Sueur, Clifford

Odets, and Lillian Hellman in this section organized around the topic of social problems.⁸⁵

Gold's inclusion in the *Heath* anthology, which reviewers have touted as a signal achievement of canon expansion, was a boon to his literary posterity, helping to assure his name a modicum of canonical security. But Barry Gross, who introduces Gold for the first edition of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2*, suggests that this canonical incorporation might be a pyrrhic victory:

Unlike many of the Marxists of his generation, Michael Gold never shifted gears, never changed with the times. Through the Forties, Fifties, and Sixties he remained remarkably—some would say foolishly, naively, stupidly—faithful to that twenty-one year old's epiphany: "O workers' Revolution!...You are the true Messiah!" So it is ironic that Gold's chance of surviving as a writer has come to depend much more on the religion and ethnicity that he abandoned than on his politics and ideology, much more on the Jewish identity he implicitly rejected at the end of *Jews Without Money* and which shaped the first twenty-one years of his life than on the Marxist identity he explicitly donned at the end of *Jews Without Money* and which shaped the last fifty years of his life.

(1601-1602)

Following existing critical conventions, Gross opposes Gold's "Jewish identity" to his "Marxist identity," and suggests that featuring *Jews Without Money* in the *Heath* skews his authorial identity toward his representative Jewishness rather than his political identifications. Since the canon wars, critics have addressed questions of anthological representation largely in identitarian and experiential terms, whether it is the advocacy for more inclusive representations of social and cultural identities, or acts of gatekeeping that enjoin criteria of excellence. But an anthology

⁸⁵ Tellingly, despite its topical organization, this roster consists of names that have been periodized as 1930s authors.

also represents the author in another register: namely, the editor decides which work (from the author's *oeuvre*) to include. Of course, for a canon-defining national anthology such as the *Heath*, principles of selection encompass more than just the author's *oeuvre*: each entry (e.g. "Susan Glaspell, 'Trifles,'"") is the sum of multiple selective functions of genre, period, subject ("drama, modern, gender politics") and differentially positioned with respect to all the other entries (to avoid, say, redundancy in favor of variety). This is to say nothing of editorial exigencies such as length restriction, which may favor short forms over lengthy excerpts. These variables notwithstanding, anything beyond a perfunctory decision obliges the editor to make a choice: for example, should F. Scott Fitzgerald's representation selection be an excerpt from *Babylon Revisited* or his short story "Winter Dreams"?

More often than not, the work chosen is the author's most prominent or characteristic piece. But here the particular predicament of the minor(ity)⁸⁶ author becomes salient. The tabular organization of the anthology—each author's name is paired with a corresponding title or set of titles—belies stark differences in the relative canonical statuses of the featured authors. In canon-defining national anthologies such as the *Heath*, organizational conventions—lists, tables, and headers—yield a uniform representation of authors. But lest we buy into this egalitarian surface, it is imperative to mind how the anthology form masks unevenly developed authorial identities. For a canonical author such as Fitzgerald, the work apposite to his name (his companion selection) functions metonymically by implying a larger authorial *oeuvre*, but the same cannot be said for Michael Gold, whose name recognition only obtains in *Jews Without Money*. We might

⁸⁶ With this orthographic play, I mean to spell out the semantic connection between "minor" and "minority," while respecting a crucial difference in their usage. Strictly speaking, "minor," in literary discourse, designates the position or status an author or literature has in the canon, whereas "minority" in literary critical discourse more properly describes an author's membership in a sociological subgroup. Needless to say, not all minor authors have minority identities, nor are all minority authors necessarily minor. In Gold's case, however, both concepts are relevant to understanding the terms of his anthological incorporation.

represent this equationally as F. Scott Fitzgerald = “Winter Dreams,” *Babylon Revisited*, *Tender Is the Night* [...] *The Great Gatsby* as opposed to Michael Gold = *Jews Without Money*.⁸⁷

Whereas a major literature or author comprises a body of recognized works, Gold’s claim to only one qualifies his authorial identity as “minor” in the sense David Lloyd has suggested: that is, as “having yet to mature to majority status” (3). Importantly, authorial identity, in this context, should not be confused with sociological or cultural identity. Instead, it refers to the identity relation between an author’s name and an *oeuvre*. Major and minor, in this sense, designate a name’s relative incorporative capacity, its ability to unify, organize, and assimilate writings into an *oeuvre*. Before going further, I would be remiss not to comment on the ironic construction “minor authorial identity.” If the terms major/minor coordinate a developmental model, for which a mature authorial identity is the resolution or end-stage, terms such as minor or immature, technically speaking, describe a developmental position. Once we speak of an immature or minor authorial identity, we are effectively fixing the relation between an author’s name and an incomplete *oeuvre*. The concept of arrested development provides a useful heuristic for understanding this contradictory identity-formation.

Within the terms of a developmental model, arrest registers the failure to reach an objective, and arrested development means a want of maturity. But what might be seen as deficient or lacking in one register is identity-formative in another, precisely because this arrest or stoppage punctuates the master developmental model by constituting or introducing a new end-point. While not innocent of quantitative considerations, a mature *oeuvre* represents more than the sum total of an author’s works. For a major authorial identity, the completion or end-point of an *oeuvre*—despite the concept’s basis in closure and completion—is a receding

⁸⁷ To be clear, what I am describing here is not a prohibitive rule—nothing, in theory, forbids a *Heath* editor from selecting, say, Gold’s play *Hoboken Blues*—but a practical norm that regulates the literary value of the minor(ity)-authored works.

horizon. Evidence of this unabated capacity for further incorporation abounds in the market around various configurations and additions to an author's "complete works"—typically issued in omnibus format or as a series of volumes—and in the academy, where fine-toothed editing and scholasticism conspire to produce ever more authoritative editions of previously issued major titles. In a commercial register, this major author-function has yielded a lucrative paratextual genre, where letters, lectures, diary entries, notes, and unfinished manuscripts are collected as part of the author's *oeuvre*, leading to paradoxically titled publications such as Vintage Press's *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*.

Applying the legal valence of the terms major/minor to the author-function, we can formulate two heuristics: first, Fitzgerald's name is not wholly dependent on *Babylon Revisited*, and second, it enjoys a relative autonomy or freedom from its proper function—that is, its designating or indicating the individual Fitzgerald. Developing a mature author's name involves a functional shift, wherein an existing proper name (Fitzgerald) takes on a new discursive function: from Fitzgerald naming a sociological individual to Fitzgerald naming an author, the unifying or originating subject of a body of work. By contrast, a minor or immature authorial identity suffers from an anemic author-function that depends on various props for recognition. In the context of literary recovery, this support comes in the form of allographic prefaces and introductions by critics, editors, or recognized authors who champion, recommend, or advocate a minor author's significance. On a more purely discursive level, this support consists of the proper name itself. That is to say, the proper name literally *props* up the author-function.

This dependency on the proper (name) function informs norms of evaluation and interpretative frameworks for minor(ity)-authored works. Both Kazin's and Gross's introductions, to use examples previously discussed, describe *Jews Without Money*'s literary

value in terms of cultural authenticity and identity: for Kazin, “[Gold’s] own story,” is the only work of “value” he ever produced, while for Gross, the book reflects Gold’s Jewish religion and ethnicity. When employed as a figure of reading and literary valuation, authenticity effects categorical leveling: extra-diegetic and diegetic levels such as author, narrator, and character collapse onto a single discursive plane. Seemingly benign or laudatory terms such as “authentic,” “personal,” “emotional,” “raw,” “genuine” register this collapse of discursive and narrative levels: in effect, Mikey Gold, the character-protagonist, is an extension of Michael Gold, the sociological individual, thus making *Jews Without Money* “[Gold’s] own story.”

Much as the criteria of authenticity may insist on the individual or the personal, phrases such as “his own story” admit a degree of irony. When used to describe a minority-authored work, the “personal” registers the work’s representative value, which is to say, the extent to which it expresses the experiences of a particular sociological group.⁸⁸ Hardly exclusive to Gold criticism, this language might be found in the valuation of ethnic and other minority-identified writers, even when the work in question is not autobiographical. As Jeff Karem observes in *The Romance of Authenticity*, “Almost every contemporary review of an ethnic writer expresses praise for an ‘authentic’ voice or vision and many scholars have made an explication of ‘authentic’ or ‘genuine’ cultural material a central task of their criticism” (1).

Critics such as Kobena Mercer have addressed this predicament of the minoritized or marginalized in terms of the “burden of representation,” meaning the expectation that “minority artists speak *for* the entire community from which they come” (214). Within such an economy of representation, the personal *is* the social for the minority author, and Gold’s “own story” *is* the story of Jewish Americans more generally. As Amy Hungerford has shown, these sociological

⁸⁸ This criterion is of a piece with a broader logic of substitution that structures projects of multicultural canon revision and literary recovery. By logic of substitution, I mean the reasoning whereby literary works and their authors are understood to represent certain social experiences and cultural groups.

trappings have the effect of diminishing or annulling the literary value of minority-authored works (210-211). Since the cultural turn in American literary studies, this evaluative opposition between aesthetic and sociological has come under pressure. While the Eliotic criterion of impersonality for literariness enjoys a certain cachet, minority writings, strictly speaking, are not disqualified from literary recognition. Instead, as Karem's study suggests, literary recognition for the minority-authored work might entail other practical logics such as cultural authenticity.

VI

To date, the most substantial effort to develop Gold's name and promote it to major status remains Folsom's *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*. Published in 1972 and thus predating the canon revision discourses that helped institutionalize Literary Left studies, the *Anthology* was released by International Publishers, a Leftist Press, as part of its "New World Paperbacks" series.⁸⁹ The *Anthology* distinguishes itself from other literary recoveries of Gold in that it broaches the matter of Gold's *oeuvre*; in gathering together selections from his published journalism, short stories, editorials, and poems, the *Anthology* aims to legitimate Gold's authorial identity. In his introduction, Folsom offers this summary of Gold's literary career: "The bitter wit and polemic high dudgeon of his literary criticism and journalism helped define the 'proletarian' sensibility. For his efforts, Gold earned the love of many, and also abiding notoriety. Some genteel critics and lofty scholars vigorously calumniate his memory. Others ignore him wholly, or reduce him to a grudging footnote—as befits what they consider a wart on the buttocks of American literature" (7). Folsom's comments here have more to recommend it

⁸⁹ Clearly intended as a kind of "Master Works" or "Classics" line of progressive and radical literature, the series, which includes works by Antonio Gramsci, Walter Lowenfels, John Reed, among other prominent radicals, exemplifies the appropriative strategies of oppositional politics.

than its cheeky imagery: Namely, the crossing of textual and bodily metaphors underscores the corporeality of “American literature”—of the American literary canon as a body of texts. In addition, his rhetorical choices for describing Gold’s inclusion in this textual body—the approximate tropes “footnote” and “wart”—both figure Gold’s relationship to the American literary canon as being in a supplemental, viral, or extraneous capacity.

Further still, we may also note how the referent for the proper name “Gold” changes over the course of this passage as the individual who “earned the love of many” is displaced by memorial/posthumous reputation (the noun phrase “his memory”) and transformed into the object of critical minimization (“reduced him to a grudging footnote”). While grammatically coreferent (which is to say, “Gold” “his memory” “him” all denote, on the surface, the same individual) these phrases actually re-mediate the referent as the name “Gold” denotes less and less the sociological individual and shifts toward an author-function.

This passage also illustrates the kinds of referential slippages that frequently play out in critical usage of minority authors’ names. The distinction between proper names and author’s names, which Foucault elucidates, is complicated by cases such as Gold’s where his being recognized as an “author” is contingent on the criteria of cultural authenticity and other personal or autobiographical effects. In these cases, the proper name, with its indicative function of pointing to the person outside the interior of discourse, is always poised to usurp the author-function, which to quote Foucault, “remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other” (122). Whereas most recoveries have, as I have shown, concentrated on Gold as a literary personality or have acceded to the view that *Jews Without Money* is his principal work, Folsom’s *Anthology* tackles head on the question of Gold’s *oeuvre* and his authorial identity. Folsom, in a note that anticipates my discussion of Gold’s status as literary personality, writes, “Although

Gold is frequently referred to and briefly discussed. in books about twentieth century American literature and politics, the most substantial published commentaries on his life and work to date are by the editor of this volume” (321). Listed under the recommended readings for works “About Mike Gold” are then two of Folsom’s pieces, one a review of *Jews Without Money*, the other, a biography of Gold’s early career.

A MIT English professor who met Gold in the 1960s, Folsom worked closely with Gold on the *Anthology* as well as his memoirs. Suffering from failing eyesight and diabetes later in life, Gold would die in 1967, leaving his memoirs unfinished and in Folsom’s trusteeship. Over the course of their collaboration, Folsom had tape-recorded Gold’s recollections, which were to have served as the basis for Gold’s biography. Had this biography project—to have-been-titled *Mike Gold: A Literary Life*—not proved abortive, it would have been the companion work to the *Anthology*, a plan underscored by the titles’ parallel syntactic structure. This recovery diptych, unlike most efforts at rehabilitating Gold’s literary authority, intervenes in the authorial and proper functions of Gold’s name. That these memoirs were never published sounds a poignant note, but, considering so much of the focus on Gold has been biographical anyway, the anthology’s publication, in my view, represents a more unique, and ultimately more impressive, intervention into Gold’s authorial status.

From its title, introduction, presentation, editorial framing, down to its contents, the *Anthology* represents a calculated re-mediation—in both the sense of remedy as well as re-transmission or re-presentation—of Gold’s name. Folsom demonstrates a canny awareness of the anthology as a signal form of institutional intervention. First, the decision to issue Gold’s writings in an omnibus or single-author anthology represents a strategic appropriation of this prestigious genre, typically reserved for authors who already enjoy major canonical recognition.

The language around these single-author anthologies, often classified as “readers” or “pocket” editions,” draw from pedagogical-developmental metaphors (readers are marketed, for instance, as an introduction, primer, or beginner to the author) as well as tropes of mobility (hence, Viking Press’s “Portable Library” imprint). In contrast to the “complete works” format, this anthology genre does not purport to reproduce the author’s (entire) *oeuvre*—though it is retained as the imaginary totality from which the anthology draws. Instead, this genre presents itself as a miniaturization of the author’s *oeuvre*. As a class of cultural commodity, the single-author anthology promises the reader-consumer a representative selection—analogue to, if I may indulge this comparison, a “tasting menu”—of a major author’s *oeuvre*. (“Same Shakespeare taste with only a fraction of the calories!”) But this scale metaphor comes under pressure when applied to a minor author, whose name does not claim a body of recognized works. Unlike the “essential” or “select” works of Shakespeare, in other words, *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* does not so much miniaturize as it fabricates an *oeuvre*.

The very title *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* evinces this effort to shape Gold’s textual miscellany into an *oeuvre* or body of work that can be claimed by his name. Its syntactical structure connects, via a colon, the proper noun “Mike Gold” to the noun phrase “A Literary Anthology.” The relation between the primary and secondary terms of this title is one of description, specification, and itemization. What we get with the title is the author-function in miniature: “Mike Gold” consists of “A Literary Anthology.” Also significant is that his first name is represented in the title as “Mike” instead of Michael. During the length of his publishing career, Gold signed and was credited under both names, but his preferred (first) nom de plume was the diminutive “Mike.” In a persuasive reading, Kazin has interpreted this pseudonym as a nominal one-two punch that partakes of the same syllabic economy that characterizes Gold’s

writing: Gold, Kazin writes, demonstrated “a remarkable gift for putting wholly visceral experiences into rhythmic series composed of short stabbing sentences” (4).⁹⁰ In addition to considerations of style and recognition, the pseudonym “Mike Gold,” which derives from a complex nominal genealogy, registers an act of self-fashioning in its own right.

Not to be overlooked is the modifier “Literary,” which would have been mirrored in the subtitle of the unpublished biography (“A Literary Life”). By qualifying the *Anthology* as “Literary,” Folsom attempts to consecrate—in Bourdieu’s usage, to recognize or legitimize the aesthetic value of a cultural product—Gold’s name. The word “literary” repeats throughout Folsom’s introduction, notably once to describe Gold’s career as a “literary life,” in an echo of the unpublished biography’s title, and again when he, commenting on the principle behind the anthology’s selection, states, “This is primarily a *literary* anthology, because Gold’s aspirations, gifts, and achievements were primarily literary, though arithmetically, perhaps, the bulk of his writing was political journalism. Gold put more art in his politics and more politics in his art than most, but still there is a distinction⁹¹ to be made” (19).

This particular distinction (between politics and art or the political and the aesthetic) provides, as I have discussed above with Barry Gross, the primary sort key for Gold’s writings. Lest we carry the analogy too far in the direction of science, however, editorial processing—in

⁹⁰ In “Fifty Cents a Night,” the first chapter of *Jews Without Money*, contains many examples of the “short stabbing sentences” that Kazin likens to a cinematic “shot.” In a sequence such as “It never slept. It roared like a sea. It exploded like fireworks,” short sentences are linked through the repetition of “It.” In a later sentence, Gold’s running prose style mediates his introduction of motley urban denizens: “Pimps, gamblers, and red-nosed bums; peanut politicians, pugilists in sweaters; tinhorn sports and tall longshoremen in overalls” (13). The use of staccato and alliteration suggests a writer with a keen sense of linguistic rhythm and phonic interplay. Despite these indications of craft, readers are wont to describe Gold’s style as guileless—an anti-style style—or equate Gold’s style with his personality, identity, or level of intelligence.

⁹¹ *Distinction*, of course, is the subject (and title) of Bourdieu’s 1979 study of the social dimensions of the judgment of taste. It is improbable that Folsom, writing in 1972, was aware of Bourdieu’s research, but this accidental confluence in terminology, at the least, suggests contiguous concerns.

the modes of filing, sorting, arranging, classifying, etc—tends to deal in contradictory value systems where the principles are more likely to be ideological than conceptual. In its symbolic economy, *Anthology* is divided between playing to the genre's strengths (its capacity to coordinate without homogenizing the constitutive selections) and repressing this fabricating capacity by presenting itself as a mere citation of an already existing *oeuvre*.

Indeed, the most express sign of this ambivalence is the omission of *Jews Without Money* from the anthology's contents. Folsom justifies this decision in terms of practical access—"the book," he writes, "is now [introduction is dated "May Day, 1971"] available in paperback (Avon)" (19), but its symbolic significance is consistent with what I have identified as the *Anthology*'s re-mediating goals. The *Heath* offers an instructive point of comparison in this matter of anthological representation. There, "Michael Gold" is positioned as the author of *Jews Without Money*, and essentially *only* that work. Within the parameters of the *Anthology*, by contrast, "Mike Gold" represents the originating subject of an extensive selection of short stories, essays, and editorials.

As a bid for promoting Gold to major status, this omission is a complex wager. On the one hand, the symbolic capital of the omnibus genre that Folsom has appropriated inheres in its citational status: the idea that it miniaturizes or samples the author's *oeuvre*. In omitting *Jews Without Money*—Gold's only recognized work—from its contents, the *Anthology* works at cross-purposes with the genre's *raison d'être*. On the other hand, Folsom's stress on institutional concerns such as the availability of and access to Gold's writings suggests that the *Anthology*'s function, in relation to the *oeuvre*, is primarily additive. Unfortunately, this reifying approach fails to distinguish between the "real object" and the "object of knowledge" by treating the

oeuvre as a concrete thing rather than a mediating concept.⁹² For all its contradictions, Folsom's *Anthology* exemplifies the complex negotiations between the anthology form and literary recovery. The anthology's capacity for assembling heterogeneous selections into a unified collection represents, depending on one's point-of-view, the genre's greatest advantages or disadvantages. As a vehicle for literary recovery, it can admit discrete value systems by gathering together anything from unrecognized pieces to a well-worn manifesto. For the unpublished or little-read piece, anthological inclusion is coextensive with cultural consecration—as it confers on the piece literary value—whereas for an already recognized work, its inclusion in the anthology serves an appreciative purpose. Indeed, the reifying language that frequents discourses of literary recovery is symptomatic of these divided labors and the competing economies of valuation that critics and editors must coordinate.

VII

Representing one of the principal discourses of multicultural canon revision, literary recovery informs central notions in American literary studies such as authorship, minority identities, and crucially the relation between the two. And yet, the archeological and anthropological rhetoric that conventionally frames identity-based literary recoveries—metaphors of excavation, unearthing, exhumation frequent the critical discourse—belie its complex mediations. The tendency, for instance, to approach or describe the recovered text as an artifact, while useful for highlighting literature's anthropological dimension, effectively posits an originary authorial identity and historical period from it is retrieved. But recovered texts and authors, as I have shown with my discussion of Gold, do not exist ready-made, fully-formed,

⁹²The distinction between the “real object” and the “object of knowledge” is articulated by Althusser (*Reading* 43).

awaiting only discovery by the literary critic, editor, or historian. Quite the contrary, literary recovery is a discourse that mediates, and, as I have argued, consecrates authorial identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

“TO REACH A WIDER AUDIENCE”: ZORA NEALE HURSTON’S CRITICAL AND POPULAR RECEPTION

Over Zora Neale Hurston’s gravesite in the “Garden of the Heavenly Rest,” a historically segregated cemetery in Fort Pierce, Florida, a granite marker stands bearing the inscription:

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

“A GENIUS OF THE SOUTH”

1901- - - 1960

NOVELIST, FOLKLORIST

ANTHROPOLOGIST

Placed there in 1973 by the author Alice Walker, the headstone and the narrative of its origination are famous symbols of Hurston’s literary recovery. In 1973, Walker, author of *The Color Purple* (1982), following a lead from an academic article, visited Hurston’s native Florida in search of her unmarked grave.⁹³ The trip also included visits to Eatonville, the all-black settlement that Hurston claimed for her birthplace. Walker’s narrates her impressions of Eatonville—the setting for many of Hurston’s fictional and folklore writings—and her meetings with its residents and excursion into the abandoned cemetery in the essay “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston” (1975). First published in the influential mainstream feminist magazine *Ms.*,⁹⁴ the

⁹³ Walker credits Robert Hemenway’s “efforts to define Zora’s legacy and exploration of his exploration of her life” as leading to her “attempt to locate and mark Zora’s grave” (“Cautionary” 87).

⁹⁴ Founded by Gloria Steinem and other feminist editors, activists, and writers, *Ms.* began as a special insert in the December 1971 issue of *New York* magazine; its first regular issue was published in July 1972. Historian Amy Erdman Farrell argues for *Ms.*’s historical importance as a “crossover mass media periodical.” Although Steinem originally intended *Ms.* as a newsletter, her collaborators on the project, Elizabeth Forsling Harris and Patricia Carbine, convinced her to develop *Ms.* as a magazine. Farrell provides a detailed discussion of *Ms.*’s history, and its efforts at reforming the medium and genre of the

essay is frequently cited by popular and scholarly commentators as reviving interest in Hurston's life and work.⁹⁵ Walker ends her essay expressing disbelief that a career as promising and decorated as Hurston's could nonetheless culminate with an anonymous grave in an untended overgrown cemetery. Walker's valuation of Hurston's achievements was not overstated. Hurston was a significant player in the Harlem Renaissance, forming, along with Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Arna Bontemps, the younger generation of black intellectuals and artists contributing to the development of "New Negro" culture.⁹⁶ In addition to being involved in one of the key African American cultural movements of the early twentieth century, Hurston moved within prestigious social and academic circles. She received funding from Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy white patron, and studied with the Franz Boas, a foundational figure in modern anthropology. Under Boas's guidance, she conducted fieldwork collecting Southern black folklore. Though her books *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1939) were considered unorthodox by the era's academic standards, they are now recognized as groundbreaking in the field of folklore studies. During the economically depressed 1930s, which precipitated the end of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston nonetheless was able to secure a book contract with J.P. Lippincott, a major publisher and one the United States's oldest houses.⁹⁷ With Lippincott, she

women's magazine. In contrast to the alternative independent media that traditionally served as distribution outlets for the feminist movement, *Ms.* was the first commercial magazine, according to Farrell, to "unambiguously claim a feminist perspective" (1, 26-27).

⁹⁵ See for instance, "The Official Zora Neale Hurston Website," authorized by the Zora Neale Hurston Estate. For academic references to Walker's role in Hurston's rediscovery, see Mason Jr. 18 and Awkward 5. Christine Daley, writing on Zora Neale Hurston's publication history, qualifies Walker's influence somewhat and uncovers a "revitalized interest in Hurston's work as early as five years before Walker's findings." I will discuss the difference between Walker's material and symbolic role in Hurston's recovery in greater detail later in this chapter. See below.

⁹⁶ Along with their elders Alain Locke, Charles Johnson, W.E.B. Dubois, and James Weldon Johnson, Hurston and her contemporaries participated in defining and producing a literature (and more broadly a culture) that might serve as the locus for a new concept of racial identity. Pieces by Hurston et. al can be found in the seminal anthology *New Negro* (1925) edited by Locke.

⁹⁷ After reading Hurston's short story "The Gilded Six-Bits" in 1933 in *Story* magazine, Bertram Lippincott, who was interested in her blending of fiction and folklore, contacted her asking if she had a

published a total of six books. Her commercial publications and other writings made her the most widely published African American female writers of her era.

By the beginning of the end of the 1950s, however, Hurston was living and working largely in obscurity. While she continued publishing as a freelancer, she was unable to support herself as a professional writer. After a stroke in 1959, she spent her last year as a resident in the St. Lucie County Welfare Home in Fort Pierce and passed away in 1960, leaving no financial arrangements for her funeral. Her friends were able to raise over \$400 for her burial, but not enough for the price of a headstone, leaving her grave unmarked until Walker's visit thirteen years later (McCarthy 250). Hurston's biographer Robert Hemenway suggests that her "final resting place" is "symbolic of the black writer's historical fate in America" (3). For Hemenway, her unmarked grave is more than a document of late-life penury or the evidence of a professional writer who fell on hard times. Her gravesite also figures, by his account, the "fate" of the "black writer."⁹⁸ By extension, if the unmarked grave symbolizes the African American writer's absence in American literary history, Walker's belated memorial figures the literary recovery that reclaims and identifies this forgotten writer. Beginning his Hurston biography with the image of Walker's belated memorial, Hemenway similarly uses it to figure his own project at (biographically) recovering Hurston's life.

novel. Hurston did not actually have a working manuscript at the time, but she nonetheless convinced Lippincott she was in the middle of composing a book (Hemenway 188).

⁹⁸ Crucially, Hemenway's symbolization only abstracts certain biographical details. His symbolization—which abstracts the author's penury but not her gender to figure the black writer—is actually incongruous with the primary reception of Hurston as a black female author in the 1970s. Hurston's "final resting place" represents the "historical fate" of the "black writer" *not* the female "black writer." I have chosen "erasure" instead of omission, as the latter may be a problematic term since it neglects the re-combinatory (at a different level) processes of symbolization. Omission in other words may suggest that the genre or linguistic level has remained the same: as in someone omitted a crucial detail from Hurston's biography. But I want to suggest that there is a kind of erasure that is specific to the process of symbolization.

More than thirty years have passed since the publication of *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* and Walker's pilgrimage to the Fort Pierce cemetery. If Hurston's untended gravesite in a "field of waist-high weeds" provided a powerful symbol for Walker and Hemenway of the "black writer's historical fate in America," the current condition of the grave site is a testament to Hurston's status as a celebrity writer, whose work and personality are saleable commodities to a number of overlapping markets. Since Walker's *Ms.* essay and the ensuing Hurston revival, the gravesite has been steadily transformed into a destination for literary tourism.



Figure 4.1 Now the fourth stop on the "Zora Neale Hurston Dust Tracks Heritage Trail," the gravesite has been reclaimed as a historic state, county, and municipal site.

In 2004, the St. Lucie County Library System received a grant from the Florida Humanities Council for a "Heritage Trail" that would "commemorate the life of author Zora Neale Hurston through the prism of her Fort Pierce years."⁹⁹ Jon Ward, the executive director for the St. Lucie County Cultural Affairs Council, describes the \$100,000 project as an "outdoor

⁹⁹ A similar trail was dedicated in Hurston's claimed hometown of Eatonville, FL (Geary "Trail"). According to the website for the exhibit, the Fort Pierce trail is the "second link of the chain for a state-wide trail to honor Zora Neale Hurston."

museum exhibit.”¹⁰⁰ Equip with three kiosks and eight trail markers, visitors to the exhibit can follow the trail through a series of sites connected to Hurston’s last years in Fort Pierce. In addition to the gravesite, visitors, for instance, can tour the library branch dedicated in Hurston’s name, the house where she lived rent-free before her stroke, the offices of the local newspaper for which she was a contributor, among other locations.

Heritage Marker # 4, the trail marker that adorns Hurston’s gravesite, is only the most telling sign of Hurston’s transformation from forgotten author to an American cultural celebrity. Three decades into the dramatic revival of her literary reputation, Hurston is a firmly established popular and academic figure well beyond the need for literary recovery. Her books sell nearly 500,000 copies annually, and her backlist continues to generate substantial revenue.

HarperPerennial, who recently just issued a “Deluxe Edition” of Hurston’s autobiography *Dust Tracks on the Road*, inked a deal early in 2010 with the Zora Neale Hurston Trust, securing exclusive rights to the author’s adult backlist (“Harper”). The Library of America’s Hurston volumes are amongst the house’s bestsellers. In the educational sector, Hurston has entered the teaching canon at the secondary, collegiate, and graduate levels.¹⁰¹ *Their Eyes Are Watching God* is taught in high school classrooms, a regularly recommended title on summer reading lists, and Hurston is a favorite cultural figure for various Black History Month events. Selections of her writings appear in major teaching anthologies such as *Norton*, *Heath*, and *Bedford St. Martin*. The Hurston industry has expanded beyond print and reached other media. A television movie of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* starring Halle Berry premiered in 2005; the film was co-

¹⁰⁰ The Heritage Trail is the product of municipal, county, and state cooperation. Participating agencies and institutions include the Florida Humanities Council, the St. Lucie County Library System, St. Lucie County Cultural Affairs Council, the Fort Pierce and St. Lucie County commissions and donations from nonprofit groups (Geary).

¹⁰¹ Indeed, Hurston crosses several literary canons. She is included in both national—and the revised multicultural American canon—feminist, modernist, and African American literary canons.

produced by Harpo Films, Oprah Winfrey's production company, and ABC.¹⁰² In 2008, PBS aired a documentary *Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun*, directed by Sam Pollard and produced by Kristy Andersen, as part of its American Masters Series.¹⁰³ *Jump at the Sun* is an expository documentary that mixes found footage shot by Hurston, dramatizations, archival photographs, and interviews with the "Who's Who" of Hurston scholars.

These recent developments in Hurston's celebritydom are hardly unprecedented. By the 1990s, Hurston's growing popularity alarmed black feminist academics Hazel Carby and Michele Wallace. Though divergent in their methodology and approaches, these critics shared a wary response to the runaway success of Hurston's literary recovery. Wallace's "Who Owns Zora: Critics Carve Up the Legend" and Carby's "Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk"—published amidst a cacophony of critical collections, MLA panels, anthologies, and studies devoted to Hurston—soberly question the ideological, political, and commercial interests served by what Wallace facetiously describes as "Zoramania."

Both critics narrate a crossover from Hurston's initial recovery by black feminists to the prestigious critical and lucrative commercial industry currently proliferating in her name.¹⁰⁴ Carby documents the extensive "institutional support"—academic and commercial—Hurston's work had received in order to enter the "American literary mainstream" (71). She continues,

¹⁰² The novel was adapted for the screen by noted African American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks; the film version premiered on ABC on March 6, 2005 (Heffernan).

¹⁰³ At a 2011 public screening of *Jump at the Sun*, the producer Kristy Andersen—who had been the point person for the film project—revealed during the audience Q&A that the documentary took 18 years to complete.

¹⁰⁴ At first blush, these concerns over Hurston's mainstream crossover seem to be of a piece with historical debates amongst African American intellectuals and critics over the co-optation of black cultural production by white mainstream audiences and patrons. Conceiving of authenticity as a property of works, these earlier debates enforced an opposition between authentic and inauthentic black cultural production. Neither Carby nor Wallace, however, are mainly concerned with the authenticity of Hurston's writing. Their concern over the mainstreaming of Hurston's work centers on the ideological motivations behind these popular and critical investments.

“[c]learly, a womanist- and feminist-inspired desire to recover the neglected cultural presence of Zora Neale Hurston initiated an interest in her work, but it is also clear that this original motivation has become transformed. Hurston is not only a secured presence in the academy; she is a veritable industry” (72). Wallace claims along similar lines, “Hurston’s cultural use has clearly passed beyond the control of black feminists/womanists” (175). For Carby, the current fascination with Hurston is symptomatic of a “lack of response” to the “contemporary crisis of black urban America” (73). Her essay identifies a parallel between Hurston’s nostalgia for black southern folk culture and contemporary critical nostalgia for Hurston. In both historical moments, the intellectual preoccupation with black cultural authenticity displaces “contemporary social crises” (76). Just as Hurston avoided confronting (in her writing) the Great Migration that had so dramatically restructured black cultural life, critics, Carby argues, black intellectuals were “privileging [...] Hurston in a moment of intense urban crisis” when “the number of black males in jail in the 1980s doubled” and “young black children face the prospect of little, inadequate, or no health care” (89). More explicitly concerned with maintaining the integrity of black feminist criticism, Wallace meanwhile suggests, “Even when the opportunity obviously exists to describe and define the black woman in her own terms, her own voice, white male and female and black male expertise may persist in silencing her by unwanted sexual/textual acts” (175). Black feminist writers and critics such as Alice Walker and Mary Helen Washington had recovered Hurston in order to address the absence of the black woman’s voice in American literary history. But Hurston had become, for Wallace, a mouthpiece for critical agendas—she names Harold Bloom as one example—potentially antithetical to the interests of black female critics and writers, and for Carby, was being used to produce “cultural meanings that this society wants to hear” (72).

Remarkably, the cautionary missives by Carby and Wallace aside, the Hurston backlash has been relatively mild and never gained momentum on a broad scale. Excepting a few concerned scholars, Hurston seems immune to the effects of overexposure, and the rhetoric of recovery continues to characterize popular and critical discourse about her work and person. As recently as 2008, Kristy Andersen, the Florida-based producer of *Jump at the Sun*, claims that part of the motivation for making the documentary was her desire to recover Hurston's regional identity: "I was trying to take her out of this description that I was constantly hearing of her as a Harlem Renaissance writer cause[sic] for me she embodied a Southern writer. She wrote about this sense of place in the South, this sense of home that is so common to the Southern writer" (Interview).

This continual recovery of Hurston serves as an instructive contrast to writers such as Herman Melville and William Faulkner, whose literary reputations similarly underwent major appreciation after critical reassessment. While these writers' dramatic reversals in literary fortune have not disappeared entirely from critical view—the 1920s Melville renaissance, for instance, has and continues to receive some critical attention—the value of their work and personalities has not been so insistently framed in terms of a recovery imperative. We might formulate as an axiom, "when recovery hits its mark, we remember the author but forget the recovery."¹⁰⁵ And yet, this rule clearly does not apply to Hurston. The institutional prestige or commercial success she enjoys notwithstanding, the language of recovery, long after it has ceased to fulfill the practical function of recovery, still regularly envelopes her work and person.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Such a disappearance is coextensive with what Guillory describes as the loss of "historical specificity" or "deracination" that comprises one of the central techniques of literary canonization. (34, 43)

¹⁰⁶ It would be an exaggeration, however, to say that this is true across the board. Reading some critics, we would be none the wiser that Hurston had fallen into literary anonymity for two decades before her recovery in the 1970s.

Since her revival by black feminists during the 1970s, Hurston has, in no uncertain terms, secured a position in the literary mainstream. But this position is partly contingent on her significance *as* a recovered author. Thus the renovations to Hurston's gravesite, rather than erase the evidence of Walker's belated 1973 memorial, deliberately showcase the earlier recovery. The headstone with its incorrect date of birth—Hurston was born in 1891 not 1901—remains at the gravesite, and the text on the marker addresses the origin of the headstone in its narrative summary of Walker's "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston." Hurston's literary recovery, far from being forgotten, represents a continual site of investment, and serves as a frame narrative that embellishes the hard-won triumph of a marginalized, lost, or forgotten perspective finding its way into the historical record and cultural mainstream.

But Hurston's recovery is not only mythologized, it is also repeated and re-enacted in new terms—a phenomenon exemplified in Andersen's regionally-identified recovery of Hurston: Hurston may have been recovered as a Harlem Renaissance writer, but what about her position as a Southern writer, so the logic goes. Her institutional prestige and commercial status would seem to undermine her credibility as a marginal author, but Hurston has demonstrated extraordinary staying power as a symbolic outsider. Her Southern heritage, ambiguous political commitments, gendered perspective and folk identification continue to provide audiences with rich material for a resistant idiosyncratic position, consistently at odds with the mainstream.

Carby and Wallace end their pieces signifying on the matrilineal metaphors Alice Walker and black feminist critics used to figure their relation to Hurston. Carby, who no longer sees the political utility in appealing to Hurston's work, opines, "perhaps, it is time that we should question the extent of our dependence upon the romantic imagination of Zora Neale Hurston to produce cultural meanings of ourselves as native daughters" (90). Wallace similarly declares, "It

probably won't do any of us any good to make that childless trickster Zora Hurston into a madonna figure, whose arms we can lie and be safe" (182). Whereas Carby and Wallace advise black feminist academics to emancipate themselves from Hurston's symbolic parentage, I return, in this chapter, to the scene of Hurston's initial recovery in the 1970s.

In a recent discussion of Hurston's connection to black feminist studies, Ann duCille argues for an "absolute necessity of separating [Hurston's] legacy from [her] legend." Literary history has emphasized the "legend of Zora," she suggests, and elevated it to a story of "biblical proportions: what was lost now is found." This lost-and-found narrative dominates most discussions of Hurston's recovery in the 1970s, and, in duCille's opinion, has the capacity to "obscure" the larger legacy of black women writers and "distort" Hurston's individual literary history. duCille's reflection is especially salutary for a critical history characterized by the push and pull of negative and positive reception. Heeding duCille's call to separate Hurston's legend from her legacy, the following two sections of this chapter reconstruct Hurston's recovery in the 1970s, examining the key events, players, and critical agendas.

I

If the "legend of Zora" casts Hurston as a heroic progenitor of the African American literary women's tradition, her most prized daughter is certainly Alice Walker. Michael Awkward credits Walker as "the single most instrumental figure in the recent [1990s] establishment of Hurston's literary reputation" (5). Walker's contributions to Hurston's recovery have been of both practical and symbolic significance. As indicated earlier in the chapter, the publication of her essay "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" in *Ms.* is regularly cited as *the* founding moment in Hurston's literary renaissance. In the lost-and-found narrative of literary

recovery, Walker is apt to appear as having single-handedly rescue Hurston from obscurity. Appealing as this narrative is to the romantic imagination, it also risks oversimplification, glossing over the specifics of her contributions and obscuring their historical context.

Walker's reputation as a Hurston authority is established largely on the strength of several essays she published during the 1970s. The most well-known of these essays "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (1975) first appeared in *Ms.*, a popular feminist magazine, although the piece is later reprinted under the title "Looking for Zora" in the Feminist Press anthology *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive* (1979). Walker also edits the collection, which is bookended by two of her pieces: in addition to "Looking for Zora," which serves as an afterword, Walker adds a dedication, "On Refusing to be Humbled by Second Place in a Contest You Did Not Design: A Tradition by Now." In addition to her prominent part producing the first major anthology devoted solely to Hurston's writing, Walker also contributes a foreword "A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View" to Robert Hemenway's *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, another foundational publication in the revival. Walker's essays and anthology form an important segment of Hurston's practical recovery, the work of republication and introduction instrumental to literary historical scholarship.

Besides helping bring Hurston back into print, Walker's influence is also palpable in the figurative language and creatively imagined history surrounding Hurston's literary recovery. Her discovery of Hurston's grave, as one scholar proposes, has become a "metonym [for the] recovery of an African-American women's literary and cultural tradition" (Mason Jr. 18). In this regard, her journey into an overgrown cemetery in search of Hurston's unmarked grave

symbolizes the literary historical work scholars and writers undertake to reconstruct a literary tradition.

This symbolic scene gains additional resonance for representations of the African American women's literary tradition because of the narrative meaning Walker imbues her account. "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" begins with her arriving in the town of Eatonville, which she identifies as Hurston's birthplace. The actual purpose of Walker's visit—gathering information about Hurston and identifying her gravesite—acquires literary meaning by hewing closely to the conventions of a quest narrative. Drawing on the genres such as detective fiction and mystery, the essay's plot revolves around Hurston's figurative disappearance from literary history.

Accompanied by her academic sleuth sidekick—the felicitously named Charlotte Hunt—Walker interviews the residents of Eatonville and Fort Pierce, in hopes of learning about Hurston. One motivation for the visit, we are led to infer, is the desire to reconstruct a portrait of Hurston that is drawn from the community and place she claimed as home. Introducing Charlotte to the reader, Walker writes, "We have written to each other for several weeks, swapping our latest finds (mostly hers) on Zora, and trying to make sense out of the mass of information obtained (often erroneous or simply confusing) from Zora herself—through stories and autobiography—and from people who wrote about her (94). By presenting this information about her and Charlotte's academic research of Hurston at the outset, Walker sets up a thematic foil to her story's main action of oral storytelling. This interplay between written and oral accounts figures throughout Walker's essay: Excerpts from published sources and transcribed quotes from various commentators intersperse the narrative action. Sometimes counterpointing, sometimes reinforcing the conversational themes, these textual quotations are a sampling of the "mass of

information” referenced earlier. With respect to the plot, they function as contents from the case file, evidence for the present investigation.

Here, however, Walker deconstructs her initial terms. The essay begins with the suggestion that the oral history by the residents of Eatonville and Fort Pierce will be a more personal and authentic source than this “erroneous” “mass of information,” but as the investigation proceeds, the mystery of Hurston only deepens. Early on in the narrative, Walker makes clear that Eatonville has forgotten Hurston. Her absence from Eatonville’s memory strikes a poignant note for it establishes that even the place Hurston claimed for her origin and source of creative inspiration no longer remembers her. One of the piece’s thematic ironies is that Walker, an outsider to Hurston’s birthplace, turns out to “know” and remember Zora more than any of the town’s residents. Walker, in this way, becomes a figure for or evidence of the wider audience that Hurston sought *for* Eatonville.

In Walker’s essay, Hurston’s erasure from Eatonville is established in both communal and institutional terms. In the first instance, there is the extinction or near extinction of any living memory of Hurston; Walker learns from the receptionist at the City Hall that there is only one resident, Mrs. Mosely, “still living who might remember” Hurston (298). Walker represents Mrs. Mosely, an Eatonville resident whom Hurston features in *Mules and Men*, as tight-lipped and withholding. When Walker arrives at the Mosely house, asking about Hurston, Mrs. Mosely responds, “Yes I knew Zora Neale but that was a long time ago, and I don’t want to talk about it” (299). What Mrs. Mosely impresses upon Walker over the course of the conversation is Hurston’s outsider status in Eatonville: “Zora Neale,” she relates, “left here to go to school and she never really came back to live. She’d come here for material for her books, but that was all” (300). We might infer from Mrs. Mosely’s caginess toward her inquisitors as well as from these

remarks a subtle reproach, indicative of her ambivalence toward Hurston's creative license with Eatonville.

By the end of their conversation, Walker alludes to seeing Mrs. Mosely's name in "one of Zora's books." Her response, "You did? I read some of her books a long time ago, but then people got to borrowing and borrowing and they borrowed them all away" (300), brings together several key points. Reinforcing Walker's theme that Hurston has been textually erased or forgotten in Eatonville, Mosely's reply indicates that Hurston's books are literally no longer in circulation: people "borrowed them all away." But her remarks are also characteristically evocative: the unavailability of the books is supposed to explain why she no longer reads Hurston's books and her sketchy memory of having come across her name. Furthermore, her explanation is for why these books were taken out of circulation is cryptic. In both referencing a public circulation, and suggesting that some lenders never returned the books, either kept in their own storage or destroyed. Given that this reply was prompted by Walker's reference to Mosely's name appearing *in* Hurston's books, we can infer that the other lenders might have borrowed the books to find and identify their literary counterparts. Borrowing and then not returning the book to library circulation suggests a thematics of privatization.

A related moment, where Walker again asks after the status of Hurston's books, occurs earlier in the essay when Walker asks the receptionist if the "schools [in Eatonville] teach Zora's books?" The receptionist responds to Walker's question, "No, they don't. I don't think most people know anything about Zora Neale Hurston, or know about any of the great things she did. She was a fine lady. I've read all of her books myself, but I don't think many other folks in Eatonville have." The receptionist, described as a "young" "dark brown-skin woman," and

distinguished by her extraordinary reading habits, functions, here, as a double for Walker: a reader who finds in Hurston a precursor.

The underground audience to which Walker and the receptionist belong stands in stark contrast to Hurston's lack of a public audience (her absence from Eatonville's curriculum and public library system). Walker's exchanges with Mrs. Mosely and the receptionist serve to establish Hurston's social and symbolic placement outside the Eatonville community. This theme is driven home in the essay by the location of Hurston's gravesite, which is not in Eatonville, but Fort Pierce, FL. When Walker presses Mrs. Mosely to explain Hurston's unmarked grave, the old woman responds, "The reason she doesn't have a stone is because she wasn't buried here. She was buried down in South Florida somewhere. I don't think anybody really knew where she was" (302). Walker's search for Hurston thus leads her out of Eatonville, who has largely forgotten her. Where Hurston is to be found, however, is in the emerging community of women readers, like her, Charlotte, and receptionist for whom Hurston's writings has become a shared text.¹⁰⁷

II

Central as Walker is to Hurston's literary recovery, making her its primary agent glosses over the larger historical and social developments that determine her role in the process. In the late 1960s and early 1970s when Walker was completing her graduate work, institutions of higher education were undergoing a massive reorganization galvanized by the oppositional and emancipatory social movements of the 1960s and 1970s among women, racial minorities, labor groups, and gays and lesbians. This reorganization affected all levels of academia from hiring

¹⁰⁷ Walker continues to explicitly pursue her project of reconstructing an African American women's literary tradition in her other nonfictional writings. "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," along with her other Hurston essays, are republished in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, a collection of "womanist prose" devoted to the discovery, cultivation, and celebration of black women's expressive creativity.

practices, curriculum development, to the formation of interdisciplinary programs of study such as Women's Studies and Black Studies.¹⁰⁸

Walker, in a "A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View," relates, "The first time I heard Zora's *name*, I was auditing a black literature class taught by the great poet Margaret Walker, at Jackson State College" (xi). Alice Walker minimizes the impact of this initial academic encounter: "[t]he reason why this fact later slipped my mind was that Zora's name and accomplishments came and went so fast" (xi). As Walker recalls, the class focused on the "giants"—all male—of black literature, and the "names" of female black writers like Hurston were "appended, like verbal footnotes, to the "illustrious all-male list that paralleled them." None of these female writers, whose books largely were out of print, Walker claims, were studied in the course (xii). Although Walker's initial—and as she represents it largely forgotten and repressed—encounter with Hurston in an academic context has "slipped" from her own as well as literary historical memory, its significance for later journey to Eatonville cannot be overlooked.

Linking Hurston's literary recovery to this institutional history, Daylanne K. English observes that the "initial re-emergence of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* coincides with the emerging presence of black women literature teachers in the late 1960s and early 1970s" (284).¹⁰⁹ Likewise, in her foreword to the 1990 Harper & Row edition of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Mary Helen Washington describes the growing presence of black women academics, "who were teaching in the newly formed Black Studies departments in the late sixties" (284). In literary

¹⁰⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty links these developments in higher education to the new social movements, observing "The origins of black, ethnic, and women's studies programs, unlike those of most academic disciplines, can be traced to oppositional social movements. In particular, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and other Third World liberation struggles fueled the demand of a knowledge and history 'of our own'" (197).

¹⁰⁹ For more on this institutional history, see Lauter, *Canons and Contexts*, George Lipsitz, and Mary Helen Washington, "Disturbing."

studies, these changes were reflected in the development of black feminist criticism, a set of approaches and analytic concerns that responded to the absence of black women's experience from the Anglo-American feminist work and to the masculinist nationalism of the Black Arts movement. Simon Lee-Price, who refers to black literary feminism as "[a]rguably the most significant revision of the African American literary tradition," describes the movement's main objective as the effort "to articulate the relationship between gendered and racial oppression and assert a positive and empowering identity for black women" (260). A major aspect of this movement involved the literary historical work of identifying and republishing writings by African American women.

Within this project of black feminist literary historiography, Hurston has assumed a primary significance. Henry Louis Gates Jr., speaking to this history, proposes that Hurston "is the first writer that our generation of black and feminist critics has brought back into the canon" (180). But the significance and impact of Hurston's literary recovery extends beyond the bibliographic. Hurston has not just been added *to* the archive or canon of African American women's literature; for the minority audience of black feminist critics and writers who initially recovered her work, Hurston's exemplary status comprises the constructions of her authorial identity, the theories drawn and applied to her writings, and the discursive positions that are assigned to her.

Narrating the history of African American theory and criticism after 1977, Theodore O. Mason Jr. suggests that during the 1970s and 1980s, black literary feminists "conceive[d] of Hurston as a far more suitable ancestor than [Richard] Wright" and "traced a clear line of descent

from [her] self-positioning of Zora Neale Hurston” (15).¹¹⁰ Her marginality in the African American literary canon was symbolic of the marginal status or absence of black women in black culture, and identification with this position would paradoxically authorize the terms of their critical speech.

By her death in 1960, Hurston’s books had all fallen out of major print publication, although her work circulated as an underground cult object with an audience that consisted primarily of an emerging class of black feminist writers and literary scholars. Alice Walker, Sherley Anne Williams, and Mary Helen Washington all narrate a similar encounter, setting their initial discovery of the author within classroom settings or small subcultural networks of exchange. Williams describes coming across Hurston in a graduate course in Afro-American literature, which was “still an exotic subject then” (20). Material access to many of the books, she notes, was restricted to “anthology selections (when available)” and “what samplings could be garnered in a Saturday spent in a rare-book collection or an evening in the reserve book reading rooms.” Copies of books such as Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* were scarce, circulating amongst instructors and students, who had to wait their “turn” to read the book.

Mary Helen Washington, more specifically sets this limited circulation within the emerging culture and movement of black literary feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, recalling colleagues reading *Their Eyes* in a women’s study group during the late 1960s. She points out, “By 1971, *Their Eyes* was an underground phenomenon, surfacing here and there, whenever there was a growing interest in African American studies—and a black woman

¹¹⁰ Mason Jr. draws a parallel between black feminists claiming of Hurston as an ancestor and the “consciously literary and theoretical readings of African-American literature” who had “found an appropriate forebear in the motivation for Ralph Ellison’s literary essays” (15). Mason Jr. also references projects such as *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*. In his contribution to the collection, Robert B. Stepto, who also edits the volume, calls for critical models that move beyond reductive ideological approaches to African American literature, which, by his estimation was still treated as “an agreeable entrée to black history, sociology, and politics” (*Reconstruction* 9).

literature teacher” (x). Washington’s account describes a gendered and racially-identified audience, made up of women “all across the country,” who, in reading and finding themselves “powerfully represented,” form a community around Hurston’s text (ix).

III

In his 1940 autobiography *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes, sketching the various personalities comprising the younger Harlem Renaissance set, gives the following sarcastic description of Zora Neale Hurston:

Only to reach a wider audience, need she ever write books—because she is a perfect book of entertainment in herself. In her youth she was always getting scholarships and things from wealthy white people, some of whom simply paid her just to sit around and represent the Negro race for them, she did it in such racy fashion. She was full of side-splitting anecdotes, humorous tales, and tragicomic stories, remembered out of her life in the South as a daughter of a traveling minister of God. She could make you laugh one minute and cry the next. To many of her white friends, no doubt, she was a perfect “darkie,” in the nice meaning they give the term—that is a naïve, childlike, sweet, humorous and highly colored Negro (239).

It would be difficult to miss the irony in Hughes’ representation of Hurston as a “perfect book of entertainment.” Hughes’s public dig at his one-time close friend followed their 1930 falling out

over the acrimonious –and ultimately abortive—collaboration on the play *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*.¹¹¹

Hughes's portrayal of Hurston characterizes, for many critics, her early reception. Scholars frequently reference this passage from *The Big Sea* as contributing to her image as a calculating opportunist who, playing the part of the “happy darky,” pandered to racial stereotypes about African Americans.”¹¹² After quoting Hughes, Barbara Johnson, in her influential piece “Thresholds of Difference,” observes for instance, “Hurston has often been read and judged on the basis of her personality alone” (173). Lisa Perdigao similarly suggests, “Hughes’s comment underlines Hurston’s celebrity status rather than treating her as a ‘serious’ writer” (129). It is, of course, this reduction of Hurston to an image, celebrity, and personality that Alice Walker and Mary Helen Washington set out to combat with the anthology *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*.

Both Walker, who edits the anthology, and Washington, who provides the critical introduction, regard the preoccupation with Hurston’s personality as preventing the serious assessment of the quality of her writing. Washington proposes along these lines, “To a large extent, the attention focused on Zora Hurston’s controversial personality and lifestyle has inhibited any objective critical analysis of her work. Few male critics have been able to resist sly innuendoes and outright attacks on Hurston’s personal life, even when the work in question was not affected by her disposition or her private affairs” (8). Rather than engage in debates over

¹¹¹ Hughes recounts the dispute in the penultimate chapter (“Literary Quarrel”) in *The Big Sea*. The 1991 HarperPerennial edition of *Mule Bone* includes an appendix “*Mule Bone* Controversy” which offers extensive documentation and background on the dispute. For a very illuminating scholarly discussion of the issues the collaboration raises for issues of literary authorship, see Rosenberg.

¹¹² Critics have similarly cited Wallace Thurman’s satirization of Hurston, Sweetie Mae Carr, in his 1932 *roman-a-clef* *Infants of the Spring*. At one point in the novel, Thurman has Sweetie Mae Carr declare, “being a Negro writer these days is a racket and I’m going to make the most of it while it lasts. Sure I cut the fool. But I enjoy it, too” (230).

Hurston's white patronage or the question of her sincerity, Walker and Washington reject the framework of personality as a "basis for evaluat[ing]" Hurston's work.¹¹³

For Washington and Walker, judging Hurston as a personality rather than as an author represents a holdover from racist and misogynist regimes of literary study that must be overcome. The preoccupation with personality only perpetuates the pattern of negating and excluding the significance and contributions of women's work to literary culture. Focus on the black woman writer's personality, in other words, effectively turns her *into* a mere personality. Deprived of artistic subjectivity, Hurston cannot speak for herself, becoming instead an object or image produced by male writers.¹¹⁴ Importantly, politicizing literature, for Walker and Washington, does not mean rejecting the language of aesthetic value or the literary theories closely associated with aesthetic judgment. Quite the contrary, they employ some version of New Critical and aestheticist critical idioms to counteract the dominance of biographical approaches. These formalist and romantic appeals indicate the multiple—and often contradictory—positions black feminist writers and intellectuals occupy when advancing political and counter-hegemonic programs of literary recovery.

Washington, for instance, sounds practically New Critical, calling for the formalist consideration of Hurston's work. Similarly objecting to the relevance of Hurston's personality, Walker claims she has "nothing of finality to say of Hurston the person" and champions an

¹¹³ The difficulty personality poses for critical analysis partly reflects its ambiguous meaning. In the foregoing examples from Walker and Washington, Hurston's personality alternately means "her person" "true character" "lifestyle" "personal life" "disposition" and "private affairs." The favored senses of personality, here, connect to selfhood, interiority, and character, the private individual. Personality as *persona*, that is as public, dramatic, or social mask, surfaces only secondarily, and usually in citation. Racial minstrelsy ("cutting the fool" "play[ing] the role of the swinging, happy darkie" or the "simple, childlike primitive") suffuses this latter sense of personality.

¹¹⁴ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that women in "patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to *mere* properties, to characters and images imprisoned in male texts because generated solely [...] by male expectations and designs" (*Madwoman* 12).

expressive (or romantic) appreciation of the author: “any artist’s true character,” she proposes, “is seen in the work she or he does, or it is not seen. In Hurston’s work, what she was is revealed” (2). Personality, as Washington and Walker convincingly argue, is a problematic basis for evaluating Hurston’s work. But, it bears pointing out, that of the three events that Washington identifies as “signal[ing] the end of the inadequate, sometimes venomous, and often highly inaccurate, assessment of Hurston’s life and work,” one is a biography and two are republications. None of these events, strictly speaking, “signal” the acts of “objective critical analysis” or “reappraisal and reevaluation” that Washington claims is inhibited by the “attention on Hurston’s controversial personality.”¹¹⁵ What anthologies such as *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing* accomplish, first and foremost, are not critical reevaluations but the publication, distribution, and circulation of the recovered author to a wider audience. But this economic aspect of literary recovery, and its significance to Hurston’s reception, is crucially under-examined, typically being relegated to a secondary or supplemental status.

In their prefatory comments to the anthology, Washington and Walker tend to combine the critical practice of reevaluation with the material fact of republication. Studying Hurston’s literary recovery, however, requires that we distinguish between these dialectical but not identical processes. Either we assume that republication accomplishes the *critical* work of reevaluation, or we must take into accounts its specific function in literary recovery. Unless we believe that the value of Hurston’s work speaks for itself, republication is not tantamount to reevaluation. Republication creates material conditions for reevaluation, by bringing the work back into print, preparing it for the marketplace, and presenting it before a new audience. If the republication of a work affects its value, the “value” in question is chiefly economic instead of

¹¹⁵ Ironically, the most clearly stated value claim, Walker, surfaces in the frontmatter to *ILM* reflects sentimental rather than objective involves At one point in her dedication, Walker “purpose of [the] anthology is to present enough of that work so that the reader can make up her his or her own mind” (2).

literary. Much as literary recovery aims to challenge existing norms of critical evaluation, it is also an economic process of re-publication. Re-entering circulation, the work is subject to revaluation, meaning its economic value may appreciate or depreciate, as much as it is to reevaluation. Indeed, these two measures of value—evaluation and valuation—do not form an easy alliance, and frequently work at cross-purposes with another. This problematic relationship between literary evaluation and economic valuation, between two different types of value, is especially salient for a writer like Hurston, whose work has at turns been dismissed by intellectuals as commercialized.

The original reception of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston's third book, might be interpreted in terms of this conflict between commercial and intellectual interests. Amongst the harshest criticisms lobbed at the book is that Hurston writes for the wrong audience. Richard Wright, in his frequently cited *New Masses* review notoriously claims, "the novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy" (23-25). Instead of writing for a minority black audience, Hurston "*voluntarily* continues" the "tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears." According to this view, the novel's content cannot be reviewed apart from the implied audience, which Wright determines is not "Negro" but "white." Other treatments of Hurston relationship to audiences have similarly racialized the terms of her reception.

Positing the 1920s and 1930s Harlem Renaissance as a single historical milieu, Hughes's account in *The Big Sea* imagines a continuum of cultural reception, where persons become like

objects (“perfect books”) entertaining small private audiences and printed books (as substitute persons-as-objects) entertain a wider public audience. His representation of Hurston as a “perfect book” figures the interracial social dynamics of the Harlem Renaissance—between “wealthy white people” and black artists; black writers and “white friends”—into the spectatorial relationship between a work and its audience. Hurston, the person, here circulates like and represents an “entertain[ing]” work. Keeping within the logic of Hughes’ metaphor, writing books for Hurston amounts to enlarging this circle. Her books function as substitute “perfect book[s]” that “entertain” a “wider audience” in her physical absence.

In point of fact, of course, the relationship Hughes presents between Hurston, the person who “sit[s] around and represent[s] the Negro race for [wealthy white people]” and the “books” she “write[s]” to “reach a wider audience” is not a difference of scale but a qualitative shift—one both economic and social—in modes of cultural circulation and reception. By reifying Hurston as a “perfect book” Hughes erases the difference between Hurston’s participation in the Harlem Renaissance as a cultural movement, comprising interpersonal (and frequently interracial) interactions, and Hurston’s publication in mass print culture. Finally, this reification of Hurston as a “book” also condenses two different mediums. The implied community of readers that Hurston the “perfect book” entertains is a narrow (as opposed to “wide”) audience. One pictures a coterie culture: the exchange of an original book within a private circuit of readers. But ultimately Hughes’s metaphor has less to say about exchange or circulation than it does about reception and audiences. What the trope of the “perfect book of entertainment,” presented in single quantity, ultimately serves to prop up is a theatrical imaginary or a community of auditors who inhabit the same space.

Hurston's position between—and as I hope to show her attempts at reconciling—folk and commercial culture makes her a particularly problematic figure for programs of critical evaluation that determine aesthetic and cultural value in opposition to a dominant commercial culture. Hughes's figuration of Hurston as a "perfect book of entertainment" is particularly suggestive for thinking this issue of commercial value: his dig at Hurston's "darkie" act involves turning her into a commodity—"a perfect book"—that is being consumed by a paying white audience. Thus "writi[ng] books" (or publications) in Hughes's figural economy amounts to reaching a mass audience. Rather than treat this passage from *The Big Sea* as a moment of negative literary evaluation—a stage in Hurston's reception history we recite only to overcome—I use Hughes's fictive reification to broach Hurston's relationship to different types of audiences.

Hughes's (and indeed other black contemporaries) preoccupation with Hurston's personality—and in particular the prospect of her broad commercial appeal, indicative in the rhetorical tendency to turn her person into an entertaining spectacle, invidious as it may be, bespeaks the anxiety of mass audiences. The conventional reduction of Hurston's audiences to a black/white binary, however, fails to account for the other oppositions such as high/low culture; limited/commercial circulation; minority/mass audience that also determine her reception. The institutional context for debates over proper black cultural expression extends beyond the black press and journals such as *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, encompassing the larger cultures of mainstream and commercial publishing. Like other black writers of the period, Hurston negotiated between conflicting demands of the cultural (and political) program of the New Negro

movement, consisting of a black intellectual audience, and the broader commercial mainstream.¹¹⁶

Both Hughes and Wright identify writing for white audiences *with* writing for the commercial mainstream. Their skepticism over Hurston's commercial appeal to white audiences reveals an antipathy to mass culture that, as Douglas Mao has proposed, is foundational to "the theories and practices that we have begun to think of as so many modernisms" (4). Economic and aesthetic assumptions overdetermine racial politics, making Hurston a problematic figure not just for New Negro cultural politics, but also for the very grounding premises of an art or culture that defines itself in opposition to the sphere of commerce. For Hurston, instead of seeing in commerce a debased culture, adopts an instrumental approach to commerce, understanding in it its capacity as popular media, as that is, a means of transmission. Commercial culture, in this way, is not a monolithic thing that can be opposed to art. Instead, commercial culture is itself imagined as a terrain of struggle, and Hurston understands her own collecting and representation of folk materials (from folktales to spirituals) as counteracting other dominant representations already being transmitted in commercial culture.

In a recent biographical volume, Lucy Ann Hurston suggests that her great aunt "lamented the opportunities for artistic that black people had lost over generations and set out to appease her ancestors by 'serving as their loudspeaker,' as she would say" (15). Hurston's reference to herself as a loudspeaker, a device that produces and transmits sound in response to an initial audio input, offers a useful figure for Hurston's authorial practice. For the type of authorship that this metaphor implicitly advances is writing *as* a technology for enhancing and increasing the range that sound can reach. Through this technological metaphor, Hurston sees her

¹¹⁶ For an excellent discussion of the New Negro Movement's complex negotiations with mainstream culture, see Hutchinson.

own collecting expeditions—and the work it produces—as a device for re-producing and transmitting cultural content to a wide audience.

In a series of personal correspondences and essays throughout the twenties and thirties, she elaborates a theory of authentic (or “genuine”) versus inauthentic folk forms. Her letters to her mentor Franz Boas, under whose advisement she made several folklore expeditions, indicate she had “little regard for the work of [white folklore collectors] whom she saw as presumptuous in their confidence that they fully understood black folk material” (Rampersad xviii). We can also find this view that folk culture is misunderstood when it circulates beyond or loses its source in the people in Hurston’s attitudes toward commercial blues records. Like other folklorists at the time, Hurston regarded “race records” as corruptions of traditional forms. What alarmed her about these records was not just their commercializing folk expression for a white audience, but also the ways they had insinuated the very source of folk culture. In summary reports on her first Florida expedition, she reveals to Boas her discovery that the phonograph had found its way into the turpentine, logging, phosphate, and other work camps of rural Florida (Levine 231).

Her concern over the dissemination of specious folk materials similarly suffuses her essay “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” published in Nancy Cunard’s *Negro* anthology.

Distinguishing between “real spirituals” and “neo-spirituals,” Hurston claims

There never has been a presentation of genuine Negro spirituals to any audience anywhere. What is being sung by the concert artists and glee clubs are the works of Negro composers or adaptors *based* on the spirituals. [...] These neo-spirituals are the outgrowth of glee clubs. Fisk University boasts perhaps the oldest and certainly the most famous of these. They have spread their interpretation over America and Europe (*Sanctified* 80).

Hurston's is no simple conception of authenticity. In fact, she reverses the terms of origin and difference. By Hurston's definition, real spirituals are not conceived as a permanent traditional form in any sense of the repetition of the same. Far from it, they are "unceasing variations around a theme" (79). Real spiritual songs, she continues, "do not remain long in their original form." Contrasted to the dynamism and "unceasing variations" of the real spirituals, which according to Hurston "dies under training," "neo-spirituals" represent attempts to standardize, regulate, and remove the "jagged harmony" (80). Hurston's theory of culture thus paradoxically imbues the traditional form with creativity and new-ness and the "neo-spiritual" with conventionality.

Worth noting, besides the generic distinction Hurston claims, is her implicit admonition that the public has mistaken "neo-spirituals" as "genuine" Negro spirituals. The cause for this public misunderstanding, furthermore, is attributed to concert artists and glee clubs that disseminate a popularized form of the spiritual across "America and Europe." What consternates Hurston, here, is not the development of the neo-spiritual but that it has reached a wide audience, who receives and misrecognizes it as the real spiritual. Such comments indicate, as Carby has suggested, that Hurston measured the folk cultural forms she was interested in representing against an "urban, mass culture" (75). And much of Hurston's writings in the twenties and thirties reflect her desire to represent genuine and authentic Negro folk forms for popular audiences. Hurston's take on folk culture is paradoxical: hers is not an antiquarian approach, which regards these "genuine" folk forms as in need of preservation or isolation. Folklore is typically posited as the site of cultural authenticity opposed to mass culture, but while Hurston might reject—or hold little regard—for the products of mass culture, she appropriates its commercial mass medium.

Where folkloric studies have often been seen, like cultural anthropology, as a symptomatically conservative response to social transformations, Hurston resists the disciplinary and ideological imperatives that would make folklore *only* into an anthropological or archeological object. In “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” also published in Cunard’s anthology, Hurston stridently claims black expression *for* modernity, writing “Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man” (“Characteristics” 836). Negro folklore, following Hurston’s cultural theory, does not need to be brought into modernity; it is already modern. The task that awaits the Negro intellectual or artist is to act as the “loudspeaker” for this already modern but under-recognized folk culture. Instead of sheltering tradition against the productive forces of modernity, she sets out to “broadcast” it to a mass audience. As she later told the president of Fisk University, at this time in her life she was ‘weighed down by this thought that practically nothing had been done in Negro folklore when the greatest cultural wealth of the continent was disappearing without the world ever realizing that it had ever been’ (Hemenway 109). Hurston, in other words, would have the “world” know about this cultural wealth.

Instead of making folk culture the maternal source or basis for a racial art, which maintains the hierarchical categories of high and low culture, Hurston constructed for herself an artistic and intellectual persona that served primarily as an auditor and secondly as a publicist. This persona figures in Hurston’s self-presentation, in the 1920s and 1930s, as “Eatonville’s esthetic representative to the Harlem Renaissance” (Hemenway 6) and also in the representational strategies of works such as *Mules and Men*, where she casts her authorial persona “Zora” as a narratee to the rotating cast of folk storytellers.

For Hurston, elevating Negro folk culture to a dominant position required promotion rather than aesthetic reevaluation. Hurston's commitment to folk culture has garnered significant critical interest, and has been the object of regular critical attention, including studies of the influence of anthropology on her writings, her anthropological positioning in texts such as *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*, her strategies for representing black oral culture, and the folk as theme in her writings. Describing folklore as the "passion" of Hurston's life, Hemenway writes, "she made incredible sacrifices to collect it, record it, and broadcast it to a wide audience" (Kaplan 4). Hazel Carby, taking a more critical view of this commitment, argues that Hurston's "creation of a discourse of the 'the folk' as a *rural* people in [her] work in the 1920s and 1930s displaces the migration of black people to cities (121). Within the terms of this reading, Hurston's is primarily a reactionary response to the effects of industrialization on the agricultural South and folkways of life. Carby's analysis of Hurston's folk discourse insists on its historical mediation by contemporary social crises such as the Great Migration, reaching the conclusion that Hurston ideologically resolves this crisis by creating a "folk who are outside of history" (122). But this ascription of a "romantic" "colonial" and "ethnographic" imagination, one that indulges a "nostalgic" view of the folk, to Hurston neglects her efforts to establish a vital connection between folk and popular culture.

While Hurston may construct sites of folk culture as, to use Carby's phrase, a "cultural 'other'" within "the racist order of North America," this construction leads Hurston, I would suggest, to an understanding of culture that is not summarily reducible to the colonial ideology that construes this other as a primitive past or lagging under-developed culture. Instead, Hurston's intervention into folk culture aims at countering what Stuart Hall has suggested as "the active destruction of particular ways of life" (227). To be sure, Hurston, in her folklore writings,

incidentally partakes of discourses of preservation, giving credence to critiques such as Carby, but there also happens a competing strain, where she refuses to cede or resign folkways to the past. In this sense, we may re-interpret one of the early dialogue exchanges in *Mules and Men*, when “Zora,” to the group gathered on Joe Clarke’s store porch, explains that she has come to “collect some old stories and tales” (13). To George Thomas’s incredulous remark, “Who you reckon want to read all the old-time tales about Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear? she declares, “Plenty of people, George. They are a lot more valuable than you might think. We want to set them down before it’s too late” (14). George follows this explanation with another question, “Too late for what?” to which Zora replies, “Before everybody forgets all of ‘em.” All the makings of the anthropological encounter are here: the confrontation between tradition (“old stories and tales”) and modernity (the outsider “we” come to “collect”); the dialectic of recording (“set them down”) and loss (“forgets all of ‘em”). Following Carby’s interpretation of Hurston’s folk discourse, the emphasis would have to be on the naïve object of anthropology and the anthropological will to capturing this culture on the brink of extinction.

This exchange raises many questions for Hurston’s folk writings, not the least of which is the question of writing (the status of writing) in folk discourse. Certainly, the dominant interpretation of the anthropological project drives toward folk writing as artifact or textual object; the stress, in this case, would be on writing as a record, the document produced from folk collecting. But Hurston’s “Zora” also indicates another meaning for writing, one that references a third party, thus triangulating the relationship between anthropologist and folk. When George asks Zora, “Who you reckon want to read all the old time tales...,” and she answers “Plenty of people,” the implied subject is a mass audience. These lines thus serve as a meta-commentary on Hurston’s folk project, encouraging us to see the writing of *Mules and Men* as publication, as

that is, a medium for reaching an audience. Recalling Hemenway's tripartite schema "collect, record, and broadcast," the last term "broadcast" is particularly suggestive here, for it speaks to an important aspect of Hurston's theory of her own literary practice. Broadcast, the idea of distributing content to a wide and disperse audience, resonates with Hurston's efforts to distribute and disseminate folk culture through the channels of commercial popular culture. Hurston's commercial endeavors brought her into repeated conflict with her fellow black writers and intellectuals.

To present her collections of folk material, Hurston explored a number of media, from the theatre to dance and academic scholarship. Her desire to promote and disseminate black folklore to a mass audience, however, met with significant economic obstacles. The commercial performance of Hurston's publications throughout her lifetime, however, indicates that her efforts to reach a wider audience were not realized in any straightforward fashion. During her lifetime and after her recovery by black feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hurston's commercial reception has posed a problem for a class of minority intellectuals, who make symbolic and cultural claims to her work. Depending on the historical moment, the constituents of this minority/mass audience have shifted. The prevailing audience question during her career was whether Hurston writes for a black audience, or whether she exploits black subjects for her own profit and for the entertainment of a mass (white) audience. During her posthumous career, the audience question is recast: black feminists constitute the initial minority audience, and their recovery work (republication), serves as the vehicle for Hurston's reaching a wider academic and popular audience. The ensuing success of this recovery, however, would lead some critics to question whether Hurston had been appropriated for ends that were at cross purposes with a black feminist literary project.

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