PART 1.5

Toward World Literature

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The Novelists' International

As the age of three worlds (1945–89) reached its midpoint, the novel looked dead, exhausted. In the capitalist first world, it was reduced to increasingly arid formalisms alongside an industry of formulaic genre fictions. In the communist second world, the official conventions of socialist realism were ritualized into a form of didactic popular literature. Into the freeze of this literary cold war erupted Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*] (1967), the first international best seller from Latin America and perhaps the most influential novel of the last third of the twentieth century. In its wake, a new sense of a world novel emerged, with *Cien años de soledad* as its avatar, the "third world" as its home, and a vaguely defined "magical realism" as its aesthetic rubric.[1]

Like "world music," the "world novel" is a category to be distrusted; if it genuinely points to the transformed geography of the novel, it is also a marketing device that flattens distinct regional and linguistic traditions into a single cosmopolitan "world beat," with magical realism serving as the aesthetic of globalization, often as empty and contrived a signifier as the modernism and socialist realism it supplanted. There is, however, a historical truth to the sense that there are links between writers as unlike as García Márquez, Naguib Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer, José Saramago, Paule Marshall, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, for the work of each has roots in the remarkable international literary movement that emerged in the middle decades of the twentieth century under the slogans of "proletarian literature," "neorealism," and "progressive," "engaged," or "committed" writing. The African-American novelist Richard Wright (1908–60) captured the sense of political and literary enfranchisement that marked this novelists' international in his autobiography:

> It was not the economics of Communism, nor the great power of trade unions, nor the excitement of underground politics that claimed me; my attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other

[1] Gregory Rabassa's English translation (1970) had immense influence in breaking up the formalisms that dominated the official modernism of the U.S. literary world; in the USSR, the 1970 *Foreign Literature* translation made it a model for writers trying to break with bureaucratic socialist realism. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 267.

> lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. . . . Out of the magazines I read came a passionate call for the experiences of the disinherited, and there were none of the lame lispings of the missionary in it. It did not say: "Be like us and we will like you, maybe." It said: "If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find that you are not alone." . . . Out of step with our times, it was but natural for us [writers] to respond to the Communist party, which said: "Your rebellion is right. Come with us and we will support your vision with militant action."
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> (Indeed, we felt that we were lucky. Why cower in towers of ivory and squeeze out private words when we had only to speak and millions listened? Our writing was translated into French, German, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese. . . . Who had ever, in all human history, offered to young writers an audience so vast? True, our royalties were small or less than small, but that did not matter.[2]

This international of writers was allied to, and often organized by, the international communist movement, and its failures and successes—"the horror and the glory" in Wright's phrase—echoed the checkered history of that movement: both the local communist parties, legal and underground, and the revolutionary regimes ruled by communist parties in the wake of 1917. Nevertheless, its history is by no means congruent with that of the official "socialist realisms" of the communist regimes. And though the novelists of this movement were deeply influenced by the experimental modernisms of the early decades of the century, they rarely fit into the canonical genealogies of Western modernism and postmodernism. Though the royalties were small, the writers were not all proletarians, and the audience was often more a promise than a reality, the movement did, by imagining an international of novelists, transform the history of the novel. It enfranchised a generation of writers, often of plebian backgrounds, around the world, and it was the first self-concious attempt to create a world literature. In looking at how the geography of the novel was transformed in the twentieth century, the history of this first "world literature" is central. From Maxim Gorky to Gabriel García Márquez, from Lu Xun to Praemoedya Ananta Toer, from Richard Wright to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, from Patrícia Galvão to Isabel Allende: the novelists' international spans the globe and the century.

To sketch the history of this novelists' international is a daunting task. First, literary histories usually focus on its dramatic and still controversial literary politics: the formation and splitting of writers' organizations and

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[2] Richard Wright, *Later Works: Black Boy (American Hunger), The Outsider* (New York: Library of America, 1991), 302, 303, 328.

unions; the brief ascendency of the idea of a "proletarian literature" and the shift to "socialist realism" at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress; the famous writers' congresses in Kharkov (1930), Moscow (1934), Paris (1935), New York (1936), Lucknow (1936), Madrid (1937), Tashkent (1958), Cairo (1962), and Havana (1968); the struggles over the writers' place in revolutionary regimes from Stalin's Soviet Union to Mao's China and Castro's Cuba. One can easily collect the manifestos in which writers, critics, militants, and bureaucrats tried to define the proletarian novel and the forms of a radical or revolutionary realism—critical, social, socialist—and announced their intention to produce a committed, engaged, partisan writing; but the novels actually written under these literary charters rarely matched the manifestos and often provoked further controversy.

Second, though the aesthetic ideologies of "proletarian literature," "socialist realism," or "engaged" writing are found around the globe in the twentieth century, most literary histories focus on a single national tradition, and there is little comparative work that would indicate whether the novels share common modes, forms, and styles. Mainstream literary criticism has generally taken one of two stances: either arguing that proletarian or social realist novels share a transnational formula that marks them as less-than-literary outsiders to the national literature, or claiming that the finest left-wing writers transcend the generic formula and are thus best understood within the particular linguistic and cultural tradition that makes up the national literature. Moreover, the two leading transnational aesthetic terms—realism and modernism—were so embedded in the cultural cold war that they became mere honorifics, with little actual meaning. In the communist world, favored writers were proclaimed realists; in the capitalist world, they were deemed modernists. The discoveries that apparent modernists were actually realists—think of the cases of Picasso or Brecht—and the reverse claim that classic social realists were actually modernists (as in contemporary reinterpretations of Lu Xun) have regularly been part of the ideological battle conducted through these terms.

Third, the novel itself has an uncertain relation to politics and social movements. Radical writers have usually chosen shorter and more public forms, writing plays, poems, journalism, and short stories. Novels take time; as Gerald Martin notes in his history of Latin American fiction, "a great historical novel usually requires at least thirty years' distance from its subject matter. Great realist works will always exist . . . [but] they will not appear during the era to which they refer."[3] The great novels of the revolutionary

[3] Gerald Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1989), 94.

movements that erupted around 1917 often did not appear until the 1950s and 1960s, when the political energies of the movements had receded. A history of this literary movement must thus move between two moments: the moment of the breakthrough books, the landmark "proletarian novels," short, often crude, but electrifying works often written by figures who did not go on to careers as novelists; and the moment of fruition when writers shaped by the radical literary movement produced major works, long after the manifestos and polemics had been forgotten.

Thus, if "proletarian literature"came to world attention in the brief moment in the late 1920s and early 1930s when young writers like Wright founded communist literary circles and magazines, and the fledgling Soviet regime attracted writers to literary congresses and published *Literature of the World Revolution* in several languages, its roots lay in the first alliances between writers and the socialist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its legacies reach to the magical realisms and postmodernisms of the age of three worlds.

The First Socialist Realism

The massive historical presence of the communist regimes and movements often screens out world socialism *before* the Bolshevik revolution. Though the phrase "socialist realism" is rightly linked to the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress that formally adopted it as the new aesthetic and thus as a central part of the consolidation of the Stalinist regime, the idea of a socialist realism was, as Régine Robin has argued, the culmination of decades of socialist debate over a new aesthetic.[4] Gorky's presence as the chair of the 1934 Writers' Congress was emblematic because he represented a generation of socialist realists who preceded the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, a generation who came of age at the turn of the century just as the powerful labor movements and socialist parties of the Second International were forming. They also preceded the experimental modernisms that exploded around the world in the 1910s; their slogans were "realism" and "naturalism." Some affiliated themselves with the emerging socialist and labor parties, and others were adopted by them. If Gorky (1868–1936) and the Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) were to become international communist icons (Gorky's *Mother* [1907] would be a central book in this tradition), this generation would also

[4] Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992).

include Europeans like H. G. Wells (1866–1946), George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), Anatole France (1844–1924), Romain Rolland (1866–1944), Martin Anderson Nexo (1869–1954), Pio Baroja and the authors of classic antiwar novels of World War I, Henri Barbusse (1873–1935), and Jaroslav Hasek (1883–1923); North Americans like Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), Upton Sinclair (1878–1968), and Jack London (1876–1916); and South Asians like Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Prem Chand (1880–1936). By the 1920s and 1930s, they were "the grand old men of socialist literature," the classic "fellow travelers."[5] Though several (including France, Dreiser, and Du Bois) were to join the communist party just before their deaths, it is worth emphasizing that the generation of Gorky marked the beginnings of an international socialist literary culture before 1917.

It was this generation that brought the novel to forefront of socialist literary culture. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the novel was not central to socialist cultural thought. Poetry and drama were the heart of socialist notions of *Bildung*, which stressed the appropriation and mastery of the classics by working people rather than the development of an independent radical or working-class art. Following the lead of Marx and Engels, socialist critics championed the classics of the epoch of an ascendent and revolutionary bourgeoisie—Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe—against the bourgeois culture of the time. The novel was generally seen as merely a form of entertainment, and socialists both criticized and tried to supplant the commercial dime novels and *Schundliteratur* that proliferated in working-class culture. The main exception to this disregard of fiction was provoked by the social novels of Zola and his naturalist followers. The Marxist debate over naturalism—now largely associated with the writings of Lukács in the 1930s—began among German socialists (including Franz Mehring) in the 1890s.[6]

By the turn of the century, the immense popularity of Zola's novels among working-class socialist militants and the emergence of the generation of Gorky brought the novel to the fore in socialist culture. The realists of the turn of the century were hailed as the heirs of Balzac and Tolstoy, and the first two decades of the twentieth century saw the hegemony of realism among socialists: this was the source of the notion of "critical realism" that Lukács would defend. Novels of turn-of-the-century industrial cities like

[5] Jürgen Rühle, *Literature and Revolution: A Critical History of the Writer and Communism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969).

[6] See H.-J. Schulz, *German Socialist Literature 1860–1914: Predicaments of Criticism* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1993).

Gorky's *Mat* (*Mother*, 1907) (set in the shipworks of Nizhni-Novgorod), Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) (set in Chicago's meat-packing plants), Nexo's *Pelle Erobreren* (*Pele the Conquerer*, four volumes, 1906–10, narrating the migration to working-class Copenhagen), and Baroja's *La lucha por la vida* (*The Struggle for Life*, three volumes, 1903–05, set in Madrid) became internationally famous.

In the early 1910s, the first calls for a "proletarian literature"—writing by workers—appeared among Russian social democrats in exile and Yiddish-speaking socialists in New York, and soon resonated with the younger "lefts"—syndicalists, maximalists, and bolsheviks—who emerged in the strike waves of the 1910s. This marked a radical break with the classicism of Second International socialist *Bildung*, which had maintained a suspicion of both proletarian cultural iconoclasm and agitational or "tendentious" literature. In their rejection of received aesthetic canons, the young advocates of proletarian writing shared much with their dadaist, cubist, and expressionist contemporaries.

Nevertheless, there were few attempts to organize left-wing writers before the First World War; the socialist subcultures of newspapers, clubs, and party schools rarely brought together young worker-writers, and the Second International did not organize international writers' congresses. If an incipient socialist realism had taken shape, a novelists' international lay in the future.

1917: Toward a Proletarian Novel

The turning point was the world upheaval of 1917–21. In the wake of the European slaughter, regimes and empires were challenged: there were revolutions in czarist Russia and Mexico; brief-lived socialist republics in Germany, Hungary, and Persia; uprisings against colonialism in Ireland, India, and China; and massive strike waves and factory occupations in Japan, Italy, Spain, Chile, Brazil, and the United States. The "imaginative proximity of social revolution" electrified a generation of young writers who came together in variety of revolutionary and proletarian writers groups.[7] Three initiatives were particularly influential. The first was the formation of the first international writers' association, *Clarté*, in 1919 by Henri Barbusse, which symbolically enrolled many of the established writers of the prewar years

[7] The phrase comes from Perry Anderson's account of the coordinates of the modernist conjucture in his "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review* 144 (March–April 1984): 104.

including Gorky, Sinclair, and Tagore, and which led to a series of international writers' congresses. The second was the emergence of a proletarian culture movement in revolutionary Russia, a loose federation of clubs, educational societies, and workers' theaters that held its first national conference in Petrograd just a week before the storming of the Winter Palace, and that soon became known by the epithet Proletkult. The Proletkult movement reached its peak in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, spawning workshops, journals, and rival groups, and its example resonated around the world. By the time of the 1930 Kharkov conference of revolutionary writers, there were active unions of proletarian writers not only in the Soviet Union, but in Japan, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Korea, China, and the United States.

The third initiative was the Baku conference of 1920, which marked the turn by the communist inheritors of European socialism to the anticolonial movements in Asia and Africa, generating the powerful alliance of communism and anticolonialism that was to shape the global decolonization struggles of the twentieth century. The importance of the anticolonial movements for European radical artists did not register immediately; at the Kharkov conference, the delegates from Egypt and Brazil argued that "European revolutionary and proletarian writers do not pay sufficient attention to the colonial question" and to "one of the most important branches of world proletarian literature—the development of revolutionary literature in colonial countries."[8] In many ways, the proletarian literature movement was to have a deeper impact on the national literatures of the colonized countries than it would in Western Europe.

In the wake of the upheavals of 1917–21, the slogans of revolutionary and proletarian literature were adopted by young avant-gardes around the world. The early Proletkult groups were usually organized around theaters or small magazines publishing poems, short stories, reportage, and workers' correspondence. However, by the late 1920s and early 1930s—just as the world plunged into economic depression—a group of landmark proletarian novels appeared, announcing a new form: among them were Feodor Gladkov's *Tsement* (*Cement*, 1925) in the Soviet Union; Mike Gold's *Jews without Money* (1929), Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929), and John Dos Passos's *The 42nd Parallel* (1930) in the United States; Kobayashi Takiji's *Kani Kosen* (*The Factory Ship*, 1929) and Tokunaga Sunao's *Taiyo no Nai Machi* (*The Street without Sun*, 1929) in Japan; Alfred Döblin's *Alexanderplatz*

[8] "Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers," *Literature of the World Revolution* (special number, 1931): 180, 176.

(1929) and Willi Bredel's *Maschinenfabrik N&K* (*Machine Factory N&K*, 1930) in Germany; the controversial story collections *Los que se van* (*Those That Leave*, 1930) by Ecuador's Quayaquil group of social realists; *Angarey* (*Embers*, 1932) edited by the radical Urdu writer Sajjad Zaheer; César Vallejo's *El tungsteno* (*Tungsten*, 1931) in Peru; Patrícia Galvão's *Parque industrial* (*Industrial Park*, 1933) and Jorge Amado's *Cacau* (*Cacao*, 1933) in Brazil; Lamine Senghor's *La violation d'un pays* (*The Violation of a Country*, 1927) in French West Africa; Paul Nizan's *Antoine Bloyé* (1933) in France; Ding Ling's *Yijiu sanling nian chun Shanghai* (*Shanghai, Spring 1930*, 1930) and Mao Dun's *Ziye* (*Midnight*, 1933) in China; Yi Kiyong's *Kohyang* (*Hometown*, 1934) in Korea; Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) in India; Jacques Roumain's *La montagne ensorcelée* (*The Bewitched Mountain*, 1931) in Haiti; and C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley* (1936) in Trinidad.

The polemics that tried to define the revolutionary or proletarian novel—did one define it by subject matter, by the writer's class origins, or by its implicit or explicit proletarian or revolutionary stance?—hardly illuminate this flowering of books that were widely translated and read and that served as an inspiration to other radical writers. Some of the novelists, like Gold, Bredel, and Tokunaga, grew up in working-class families and found their literary vocation in the radical labor movement; others, like James and Anand, were the "talented tenth" of colonized peoples; still others, like Dos Passos, Galvão, and Döblin, were children of bourgeois families and elite schools who had come to the left from the ranks of the the modernist avant-gardes: dadaism, German expressionism, French and Latin American surrealism, Brazilian *antropofagia.* Many had traveled widely: the plebian writers as soldiers, migrant workers, or seamen; the young colonials as students in the imperial capitals; the modernists as artist expatriates, tourists, and journalists.

Their books were experiments in form, attempts to reshape the novel. Several challenges immediately presented themselves: the attempt to represent working-class life in a genre that had developed as the quintessential narrator of bourgeois or middle-class manners, kin structures, and social circles; the attempt to represent a collective subject in a form built around the interior life of the individual; the attempt to create a public, agitational work in a form that, unlike drama, depended on private, often domestic consumption; and the attempt to create a vision of revolutionary social change in a form almost inherently committed to the solidity of society and history. The early novels are often awkward and un-novelistic. They had their roots in the reportage of worker correspondents, first-person testimonies of working life, and they adopted its plotless, loosely linked sketches of shop floors and tenement neighborhoods. As Gorky had put it at the beginning of

Mother: "it was clear that the life of working people was the same everywhere. And if this was true, what was there to talk about?"[9]

Thus, this emerging novelists' international and its proletarian novel is neither a sociological entity—all novels written by proletarians—nor a fully formed genre, but is a continuing dialectic between a self-conscious literary movement and the literary forms it developed. In the three decades between the victory of the Russian bolsheviks in 1917 and the victory of the Chinese communists in 1949, this proletarian literature spread around the world, as both a movement and a mode, a formation and a form. In the midst of the Cold War, literary historians tended to read this as a single story, whether in the Soviet literary historian Ivan Anisimov's triumphant sense (in 1966) that the "literary movement set in motion by the Russian Revolution" marked "a new epoch in world literature," or in the German literary historian Jürgen Rühle's tragic judgment (also of the 1960s) that the "alliance between left-wing art and left-wing politics" was a complete failure.[10] More recent scholarship has focused on the place of these movements in national literary traditions, and we now have many fine revaluations of specific national proletarian literatures. However, a survey of these literary histories suggests that there were several common trajectories, and allows us to sketch a preliminary set of hypotheses about the movements and the forms.

Movements

Not surprisingly, the presence of a proletarian literary movement in a country usually correlates with the presence of a communist movement, even though communist parties were often skeptical, even suspicious, of their literary allies. But proletarian literary movements seem to have had their greatest impact in countries that experienced major cultural upheavals in these decades, conflicts that challenged the legitimacy of dominant cultural forms. Moreover, there seems to be an inverse relation between the impact of the proletarian novel on a culture and the earlier importance of the novel in a culture. In countries with a long-established tradition of the novel—and that did not see overwhelming cultural crises (England, for example)—the proletarian novel left little mark. Thus, the most significant proletarian literary movements emerged in four types of situations: those in countries where communist regimes came to power; those in countries where fascist or authoritarian

[9] Maxim Gorky, *Mother*, trans. Margaret Wettlin (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 13.

[10] Anisimov quoted in Rühle, *Literature and Revolution*, 464; Rühle, *Literature and Revolution*, 3.

regimes came to power; those in the creole countries of the Americas; and those in colonized regions of Asia and Africa.

The trigger for the proletarian literary movement was the bolshevik revolution of 1917, and the history of the Russian movement casts a long shadow around the globe.[11] However, in a number of ways, the Russian proletarian literary movement was not typical but exceptional. The Russian writers of the proletarian moment had perhaps the most daunting literary forebears, the prerevolutionary reinvention of the novel by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, not to mention the pioneering working-class novels of Gorky. It is not clear that any of the writers of the proletarian generation suceeded in creating a space of their own. Second, in Russia, the literary movement developed largely after the revolution, in alliance (in varying degrees) with the new regime, rather than as an oppositional avant-garde. As a result, proletarian novels were more about reconstructing the nation and building socialism than about struggling against capitalism or colonialism: the production novel—the tale of "how the plan was fulfilled or the project was constructed"—not the strike novel dominated.[12] Third, the early and often experimental proletarian novels of the Soviet cultural renaissance of the 1920s—like Gladkov's *Cement*—became canonized by the Stalinist state as models for a didactic and formulaic "socialist realism." "Many forties classics," Katerina Clark notes, "read like reruns of either *Cement* or *How the Steel Was Tempered*."[13] In the communist states established after World War Two, works of the local proletarian literary movements were similarly canonized, and some of

[11] Four distinct moments emerge from the historiography: the original Proletkult, formed in the midst of the revolution by left-wing bolsheviks who had developed circles of worker writers in exile, and which became a state-funded haven for socialist intellectuals during the civil war, before evaporating in the wake of the Kronstadt uprising; the post–civil war Soviet cultural renaissance of 1921–28, which saw the emergence of several rival proletarian literary groups in Moscow and Leningrad, publishing journals (*Na Postu* [*On Guard*], *October*, *Kuznitza* [*Smithy*]) and the first celebrated proletarian novels, particularly Gladkov's *Cement*; the Stalinist "cultural revolution" of 1928–32, as Fitzpatrick calls it, a turbulent moment when the promotion of young workers into higher education and the arts created a new Soviet intelligentsia, and when one wing of the proletarian literature avant-garde, RAPP, was unleashed to conduct a literary class war against the older, established intelligentsia; and the end of the "cultural revolution" after 1932, when the advocates of proletarian literature were purged, traditional Russian culture was reasserted, and a middlebrow sense of "socialism realism" was officially sanctioned. See Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[12] Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 256.

[13] Ibid., 192.

the writers became bureaucrats of an official socialist realism in state-run Writers' Unions: one can see this in the careers of Mao Dun in China, of Johannes Brecher in East Germany, and of Han Sorya in North Korea.[14]

The experience of fascism marked a second trajectory. The earliest proletarian literary movements to appear outside the Soviet Union—those in Japan and Germany—came to world attention in the middle 1920s before being crushed by fascist and authoritarian regimes in the early 1930s.[15] The vibrant left-wing cultural worlds of Weimar Germany and Taisho Japan had developed out of dramatic alliances between modernist intellectuals and young working-class writers, spurring passionate debates over the shape of a revolutionary or proletarian novel (like the debates in *Die Linkskurve* sparked by Lukács over the novels of Bredel and Ottwalt), and producing

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[14] In China, the radical literary movement emerged out of two moments: the cultural renaissance associated with the student May 4 movement of 1919 and the turn to the Marxist left following the suppression of the Shanghai strikes of 1927. A number of left literary circles and journals appeared in the late 1920s, most notably the League of Left Writers, founded in Shanghai in 1930, and led by Lu Xun, a key figure of the New Culture movement of 1919. Its major figures, including Mao Tun (1896–1981) and Ding Ling (1904–86), became central literary figures in the early People's Republic after the victory of the communists in 1949. See Tang Tao, ed., *History of Modern Chinese Literature* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1993); Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000). The Korean proletarian literary movement began among Korean students studying in Japan in the early 1920s; the Korean Proletarian Art Federation (KAPF) was founded in 1925. See Brian Myers, *Han Sorya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in DPRK* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University East Asia Series, 1994); Kim Yoon-Shik, "Phases of Development of Proletarian Literature in Korea," *Korea Journal* 27.1 (January 1987): 31–36.

[15] In Japan, the strike wave of 1917–19 had led to the formation of the Japanese Socialist League in 1920, and an explosion of Marxist discussion and debate. The left-wing literary journal *Tanemaku hito* [*The Sower*] appeared in 1921, directly inspired by Barbusse's *Clarté*. Though it ceased publication during the crackdown on the left that followed the Tokyo earthquake in 1923, a successor journal, *Bungen sensen* [*Literary Arts Front*] appeared a year later, helping to organize the Japanese Proletarian Literary Arts League in 1925. The movement was crushed in the early 1930s, as writers were arrested and forced to issue a *tenko*, a disavowal of their politics. After the war, however, members of the proletarian writers' movement, like Nakano Shigeharu (1902–79), organized left-wing writers' groups that became a major force in Japanese literature. See Cecil H. Uyehara, "Proletarian Cultural Movement," in his *Left-Wing Social Movements in Japan: An Annotated Bibliography* (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle, 1959); G. T. Shea, *Leftwing Literature in Japan: A Brief History of the Proletarian Literary Movement* (Tokyo: Hosei University Press, 1964); Miriam Silverberg, *Changing Song: The Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990). In Germany, the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers (BPRS) with its journal *Die Linkskurve* emerged in Weimar Germany as an alliance between former expressionist poets and playwrights and working-class writers in the orbit of the communist party; forced into exile by the Nazi regime, many of these writers became the core of an international antifascist cultural front. See Rühle, *Literature and Revolution*.

classic proletarian novels, like Tokunaga Sunao's (1899–1958) *The Street without Sun*, which was translated into German in 1930 and into Spanish in 1931. Fascism extinguished this culture—Kobayashi Takiji (1903–33) became a martyr of the international proletarian literature movement when he was arrested and tortured to death in 1933—forcing it underground and into exile. For these movements, the resistance to fascism became a central literary topoi, displacing the factory and tenement novels of earlier years: one sees this in Anna Seghers's enormously popular novel of the antifascist underground, *Das Siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*, 1942), written and published in exile.

After the defeat of fascism, the experience of the resistance, as well as the story of collaboration, haunted the work of left-wing writers who revived the energies of the proletarian literary movement under the new slogans of "neorealism," and "committed" or "engaged" literature. In Italy, where the early rise of fascism had prevented a proletarian literary movement from emerging out of the factory occupations of 1919, a "neorealism" in fiction and film—closely connected to the cultural prestige of the postwar communist party—created new modes of representing working-class life, in such works as Vasco Pratolini's *Cronache de poveri amanti* (*A Tale of Poor Lovers*, 1947) and Cesare Pavese's *La luna e i falao* (*The Moon and the Bonfire*, 1950). Neorealism had a powerful impact throughout the Mediterranean, on the Iberian penisula, and in Latin America. Even though, when Iberian fascism gave way in the the early 1970s, the great left-wing writers of Spain and Portugal, Juan Goytisolo and José Saramago, seemed more in the tradition of Latin American magical realism, echoes of Mediterranean neorealism persisted: indeed Goytisolo's early novels of the 1950s were written in that tradition.[16]

The third trajectory of the proletarian literary movement was that of the creole nations of the Americas, where neither communism nor fascism came to power, but where communist movements of varying strengths found themselves facing nationalist, populist regimes ruling societies whose proletariats were colored by the ethnic and racial legacies of slavery, Indian conquest, and the recruitment of immigrant labor. American proletarian literary movements developed in the early 1930s, in the face of the Great Depression and political leaders like Roosevelt (United States), Cárdenas (Mexico), Vargas

[16] Margarida Lieblich Losa, "From Realist Novel to Working-Class Romance: An Introduction to the Study of the Brazilian, Italian, and Portuguese New Social Realist Novel, 1930–1955, in Light of New Critical Theory on Realism, Fiction and Reader-Response" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1989).

(Brazil), and Perón (Argentina), who attempted to incorporate insurgent labor movements into populist parties.[17] If left-wing writers of the Americas were at turns bitterly hostile and deeply sympathetic to these New Deals and Estavo Novos, they also inherited the messianic exceptionalism and cultural inferiority complex that characterized settler societies. Thus, they, like the celebrated Mexican muralists, helped to constitute a national imaginary of the "people" by importing European modernisms, reviving American folk traditions, and adopting the proletarian musics of the New World metropolises: jazz, samba, son, and tango.

The "proletarian" novels of the young American radicals often proved indistinguishable from the emergence of "regional" or "ethnic" fiction: "Negro writers," Richard Wright wrote in his classic "Blueprint for Negro Writers," "must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them but in order to change and transcend them."[18] The renaissance of African-American writing in the United States—from Claude McKay and Langston Hughes through Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison to Gwendolyn Brooks and Paule Marshall—grew out of a host of left-wing black writers' organizations and created links with radical black writers in

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[17] In the United States, the John Reed Clubs and magazines like the *New Masses* brought together young modernists like Dos Passos, Josephine Herbst, and John Steinbeck (whose epic tale of southwestern migrant farmworkers, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939, became internationally known) with a generation of plebian writers, children of a largely immigrant working class, including Pietro di Donato, Tillie Olsen, and Henry Roth. In the Andean republics, Ecuador's Guayaquil Group, including Enrique Gil Gilbert, Joaquin Gallegos Lara, and Demetrio Aguilera Malta, launched radical writing with the celebrated collection, *Los que se van*, and the historic 1922 general strike and massacre became the subject of Gallegos Lara's *Cruces sobre el agua* [*Crosses on the Water*] (1946). In Brazil, proletarian writing became associated with the "novel of the Northeast," including the works of Rachel de Queiroz (1910–), Graciliano Ramos (1892–1953), and Jorge Amado (1912–). All three were imprisoned at various points in the 1930s. De Queiroz had been a member of the communist party in 1931 but was expelled for Trotskyist sympathies; both Amado and Graciliano Ramos joined the communist party during the war years. If Amado was to become Brazil's most widely read novelist, Graciliano Ramos's brief and stark novel of refugees, *Vidas secas* [*Barren Lives*] (1938), stands as a landmark of Brazilian modernism. Like Brazil, Chile had a strong communist and Marxist tradition, based in the militant nitrate miners of the north and figured by the great poet Pablo Neruda; the election of Latin America's only Popular Front government in 1938 marked the emergence of a slightly younger "generation of 1938," which included the proletarian novelists Nicomedes Guzmán (1914–64) and Volodia Teitelboim (1916–), both of whom wrote novels of the nitrate mines. See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997); Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth*; Lon Pearson, *Nicomedes Guzmán: Proletarian Author in Chile's Literary Generation of 1938* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976).

[18] Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," *New Challenge* 2.2 (Fall 1937): 58.

the Caribbean: Hughes translated and rallied support for the imprisoned Haitian Jacques Roumain. In the Andean republics, proletarian writing fused with the tradition of *indigenista* novels in César Vallejo's widely read novel of Indian miners, *El tungsteno*, and Jorge Icaza's *Huasipungo* (*The Villagers*, 1934). In Brazil, Jorge Amado's cycle of six "novels of Bahia" ranged from cocoa plantations to the waterfront of Salvador and put black culture at the heart of Brazil. It included *Jubiabá* (1935), a popular tale of a black boxer who becomes the leader of a stevedores' strike.

The fourth kind of proletarian literary movement emerged in the Asian and African colonies of the European empires. Small left-wing, anticolonial writers' groups emerged among students in both imperial and colonial cities in the 1930s, as strikes and popular uprisings not only registered anticolonial ferment but became the subject of early novels like Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* (based on a 1935 Bombay textile strike) and Thein Pe Myint's *Thabeik-hmauk kyaung-tha* (*The Student Boycotter*, 1938), based on the 1936 Rangoon student strike. The imperial crisis created by the Second World War and the subsequent era of national liberation struggles—the age of three worlds—turned these small groups into major cultural movements. The All India Progressive Writers Association, conceived in London in the mid-1930s by the émigré writers Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand and founded at the 1936 Lucknow conference (addressed by Prem Chand [1880–1936], South Asia's equivalent of Gorky or Lu Xun, just before his death), became a powerful force in postindependence Indian culture; though Anand's novels in English received the most attention outside India, the left-wing literary movement influenced writers in many South Asian languages throughout the age of three worlds and was a major force for literatures in Bengali, Malayalam (particularly the figure of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai), and Urdu (including figures like Zaheer, Ismat Chugtai, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and the poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz). Similarly, Indonesia's LEKRA (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*, Institute for People's Culture), formed in 1950 and suppressed in 1965, was a key institution in developing a radical postindependence culture, figured in the work of Pramoedya Ananta Toer (who also translated Gorky's *Mother* into Indonesian in 1956).[19]

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[19] On India, see Priyamvada Gopal, "Midnight's Labors: Gender, Nation and Narratives of Social Transformation in Transitional India, 1932–1954" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2000); Sudhi Pradhan, ed., *Marxist Cultural Movement in India* (volume 1, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979; volume 2, Calcutta: Navana, 1982; volume 3, Calcutta: Pustak Bipani, 1985); and Carlo Coppola, ed., *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*, 2 vols. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Asian Studies Center, 1974). For Indonesia, see Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian Insititute of People's Culture 1950–1965*

After the Bandung conference of 1955, these literary movements of decolonization began to create a new novelists' international—"the links that bind us," in the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o—through a series of Afro-Asian writers' congresses and journals (particularly *Lotus*, published in Cairo beginning in 1967).[20] The novels by this generation of writers enfranchised by the proletarian literary movements often became the founding fictions of the new national literatures: for example, Pramoedya's *Perburuan* (*The Fugitive*, 1950), the tale of an underground fighter appearing as a beggar in his home

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(Monash University Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986); Keith Foulcher, "Literature, Cultural Politics, and the Indonesian Revolution," in D. M. Roskies, ed., *Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Series Number 91, 1993). Proletarian literary movements emerged throughout Southeast Asia, including the Marxist Thakin movement in Burma, the Angkatan Sasterawan 50 founded in Singapore, and the Philippine Writers League, organized in 1939: see Anna J. Allott, "Continuity and Change in the Burmese Literary Canon," in David Smyth, ed., *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literatures* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000); Robert H. Taylor, *Marxism and Resistance in Burma 1942–1945* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1984); Tham Seong Chee, ed., *Essays on Literature and Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore University Press, 1981); Manuel E. Arguilla et al., eds., *Literature under the Commonwealth* (Manila: Philippine Writers' League, 1940); Milagros Guerrero, "Proletarian Consciousness in Philippine Literature, 1930–1970," in Wang Gungwu, M. Guerrero, and D. Marr, eds., *Society and the Writer: Essays on Literature in Modern Asia* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1981); E. San Juan, *Towards a People's Literature: Essays in the Dialectics of Praxis and Contradiction in Philippine Writing* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1984). In the British Caribbean, the impulse dates from the circle around C.L.R. James and *The Beacon* in the early 1930s but reaches a flowering in the figures of the early 1950s: George Lamming, Roger Mais, and V. S. Reid, among others. In the French Caribbean, the major figures include the poet Aimé Césaire and the novelist Edouard Glissant. See Hazel V. Carby, "Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature? C.L.R. James and the Politics of the Trinidadian Renaissance," in her *Cultures in Babylon* (London: Verso, 1999); and Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980). In Africa, Peter Abrahams was the pioneering figure among writers in English, and Ousmane Sembène among writers in French. See Chidi Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature* (London: Zed Books, 1989); George M. Gugelberger, ed., *Marxism and African Literature* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1985); and Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990). In West Asia and North Africa, there were major left-wing literary movements in Turkish literature, whose key figures include the poet Nazim Hikmet and the novelist Yashar Kemal, and in Arabic, where the socialist ideas of Salamah Musa had a powerful impact on a generation of young social realists in the 1940s, including Naguib Mahfouz. See Yashar Kemal, *On His Life and Art* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999); M. M. Badawi, ed., *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Edward Said, "After Mahfouz," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[20] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Links That Bind Us," was an address to the 1973 Afro-Asian Writers' conference, reprinted in his *Writers in Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1981). See also Akram Aminov, "Afro-Asian Writers' Movement in its 15th Year," *Freedomways* 12.3 (1972).

village in the final hours of the struggle against Japanese occupation, adopts the outline of the traditional Javanese shadow-puppet play to narrate an allegory of resistance and collaboration.

The culmination of the proletarian literary movements in the decolonizing world might thus be seen in the grand trilogies and tetralogies of the age of three worlds: Miguel Angel Asturias's Banana trilogy, which encompasses the entire world of United Fruit, culminating in a banana workers' strike (Asturias won both of the competing prizes of the Cold War, the Nobel and the Lenin); Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo trilogy, a generational saga that narrates Egyptian society and politics from 1917 to 1944 through a single family, eventually divided between rival brothers, the communist Ahmad and the Muslim Brother Abd al-Munim; and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet, composed in prison, an epic of Indonesian nationalism in the early twentieth century, told through the life of Minke, a fictional portrait of the nationalist journalist, Tirto Adi Suryo.[21]

Forms

Given this diversity of proletarian literary movements, are there any common modes, forms, or genres? At first, it seems unlikely, given the multitude of linguistic, literary, religious, political, ethnic, and national traditions from which the "proletarian" or "progressive" writers came. On the other hand, unlike many novelists around the world, these writers held an explicitly internationalist aesthetic ideology; they sought links across continents and actively translated each other. The novelists' international certainly imagined the possibility of common forms and modes, and attempted to develop them. Nevertheless, here my conclusions are tentative, based on a mere sampling of the novels, mostly in translation, and on a survey of the critical studies of proletarian literature traditions.

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[21] Miguel Angel Asturias's *Viento fuerte* (1949), *El papa verde* (1954), *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960); Naguib Mahfouz's *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (1956), *Qasr al-Shawq* (1957), *al-Sukkariyya* (1957); Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Anak semua bangsa* (1980), *Bumi manusia* (1981), *Jejak langkah* (1985), *Rumah kaca* (1988). Similar multivolume novels that are written in this period by inheritors of the left-wing writers' movements include the Anatolian village trilogy of Turkish novelist Yashar Kemal—*Ortadirek* (1960), *Yer Demir Gök Bakir* (1963), *Ölmez otu* (1968)—and the Rosario saga of Filipino writer F. Sionel José—*The Pretenders* (1962), *Tree* (1978), *My Brother, My Executioner* (1979), *Mass* (1982), *Po-on* (1984).

It is fair to say that if the masterplot of Soviet socialist realism—the production novel with its heroic militants—informed the officially sanctioned literatures of the communist states, it had little presence in the genealogies of proletarian or engaged fiction elsewhere. Indeed, novels of militants and organizers were relatively rare, and those written were not particularly successful. Could one synthesize the realism of the novel with an engaged, agitational stance? The classical Marxist tradition, represented in these years by Lukács, was skeptical, and argued for realism at the expense of agitation. Gorky had pulled it off in *Mother*, making revolutionary organizers central characters; but perhaps it only worked if working-class or anticolonial struggles reshaped a society's history, if the organizers and militants became, in Lukács's sense, typical. It was more common for militants and organizers to be secondary characters, providing guidance like the donor in folktales.

Rather, two kinds of works quickly emerged: novels of, to use the capitalized personifications of Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete*, Job and Tenement.[22] Representing the factory and its collective laborer was not only a central formal and political challenge, but it offered a microcosm, a knowable community that might found a new realism. "There are no heroes in this work—no leading characters or persons such as you would find in works dealing with the lives of individuals," Kobayashi Takiji wrote about his *Kani Kosen*, a landmark of Japanese proletarian literature, banned in Japan and translated around the world. "The collective hero is a group of laborers. . . . I have rejected all attempts at depicting character or delving into psychology."[23] The narrative is a sequence of incidents in the daily life of the factory ship, culminating in a strike.

The strike narrative becomes, not surprisingly, a core element in these works, representing the interruption in daily life—a festival of the oppressed—that creates a story. Certain actual historical strikes—the 1927 Shanghai strikes and the 1929 Gastonia (U.S.) textile strike, for example—became the subject for a cluster of novels. If the strike is often defeated, it is because it stands as a figure for a promised revolution. In the early, simpler novels, the strike serves as the climax, often meriting only a few pages; by Ousmane Sembène's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* [*God's Bits of Wood*] (1960),

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[22] It is striking that the two novels by Willi Bredel that were the subject of Lukács's famous critique were a factory novel and a tenement novel. See Georg Lukács, "The Novels of Willi Bredel," in Lukács, *Essays on Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

[23] Kobayashi Takiji, *The Factory Ship, and The Absentee Landlord*, trans. Frank Motofuji (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), xvii–xviii.

the strike (a fictional account of the 1947–48 railway strike in French West Africa) becomes the subject of the entire novel, its own form of daily life and struggle, a totality that encompasses not a single workplace but an entire land connected by the railway.

The other formal option was to represent the tenement, the crowded and chaotic collective households of urban workers that spilled out into the streets of proletarian quarter. "When I think," Michael Gold wrote, "it is the tenement thinking."[24] A few of the radical writers—following the celebrated examples of Dos Passos and Döblin—attempted to write what might be called the novel of the metropolis by juxtaposing the workers' districts to the city of the bourgeoisie. In Mao Dun's sprawling portrait of Shanghai, *Midnight*, an omniscient narrator tries to weave together the family sagas of silk factory owners and workers; in Patrícia Galvão's brief and staccato montage of São Paulo street life, an omniscient editor splices together maps, statistics, conversations, and speeches under chapter headings like "In a Sector of the Class Struggle," "Where Surplus Value Is Spent," and "Where They Talk about Rosa Luxemburg."

But the novel of the metropolis was far outnumbered by the novel of the ghetto, the tale of working-class districts isolated from the "city," that is to say, the commercial districts whose department stores, skyscrapers, and theaters served as emblems of modernity. Early twentieth-century socialist and communist subcultures were usually found in class-isolated mining and textile towns, and the class-segregated urban waterfronts and metalworking districts, and this became the characteristic landscape of the proletarian novel: Johannesburg's Malay Camp in Peter Abrahams's narrative of a South African miner, *Mine Boy*; the immigrant patchwork of New York's Lower East Side in the novels of Michael Gold and Henry Roth; or a single street like Florence's Via del Corno—"fifty yards long and five wide"—in Vasco Pratolini's *A Tale of Poor Lovers*. Often, the protagonist of these novels was not an adult worker, but a child growing up in the streets and tenements. Equally common were accounts of the intellectual outsider watching and learning from the life of the "barrack-yards," as in C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley*.

Both of these modes were forms of subaltern modernism, as writers abandoned established family plots and the individual bildungsroman to create an experimental collective novel based on documentary and reportage (both

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[24] Michael Folsom, ed., *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 64–65.

terms were coined in this period). This impulse continued throughout the age of three worlds, manifesting itself in the aesthetic of neorealism—in fiction and film—at midcentury, and then in the testimonial literature of the 1960s and 1970s.[25] However, these often powerful documentary portraits of factory and tenement were, like many modernist fictions, curiously ahistorical, and rarely produced the temporal and spatial sweep of grand historical fiction or generational epics. A larger historical sensibility first emerged among the proletarian writers with the resistance narratives of antifascist and anticolonial wars, but it fully developed in the novels that grew out of the recognition that the new proletarians of the century were not simply factory workers and tenement dwellers, but were migrants from the countryside.

The worldwide migration from country to city was one of the central historical events of the age of three worlds: as Eric Hobsbawm writes, "the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this century . . . is the death of the peasantry. . . . With the exception of Britain, peasants and farmers remained a massive part of the occupied population even in industrialized countries until well into the twentieth century." In 1940, Hobsbawm notes, there were only two countries—England and Belgium—where farmers were less than 20 percent of the population; in Latin America, peasants were a majority at the end of World War Two. But by the 1980s, farmers constituted less than 10 percent of the population in almost all the countries of Western Europe, and peasants were a minority throughout most of Latin America. "In Japan . . . , farmers were reduced from 52.4 percent of the people in 1947 to 9 percent in 1985."[26] Like the Leninist communisms of the twentieth century that inspired them, the proletarian literary movements were hybrid concoctions, at once peasant and proletarian, completely entangled in this worldwide migration. Many of the novelists were themselves products of the migration, peasant children who moved to cities for work or education, or the city-bred children of peasant migrants.

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[25] It is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is worth noting the profound impact this literary movement had on world film, from postwar Italian neorealism and the noir films of the Hollywood left to the various new cinema movements of the third world. The new Indian cinema of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen was closely connected to the Marxist cultural movement; the Brazilian *cinema novo* followed the radical novelists in filming the Northeast, with Nelson Pereira dos Santos filming Graciliano Ramos's novel, *Vidas secas*; and Ousmane Sembène moved from the novel to become one of Africa's leading directors.

[26] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*: *A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 289–91.

Thus, in the decades after the initial factory novels of the proletarian avant-garde, the social and cultural uprooting that accompanied the migration from rural villages to the vast proletarian metropoles became the key historical experience behind the works of the novelists' international. At times it took the form of a quasi-autobiographical tale of a young man, as in the trans-Pacific migration of the Filipino proletarian novelist Carlos Bulosan, recounted in his *America Is in the Heart* (1944), or the migration of the student nationalist Minke from a Javanese village to the port city of Surabaya and the capital city of Batavia that structures Toer's *Buru Quartet*. At other times, it becomes the quasi-epic saga of a migrant family: John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) narrates the exodus of a southwestern Dust Bowl family to California's "factories in the fields," and Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954) follows an Appalachian hill family to the war plants of Detroit. The migration was present even if it was not directly represented: it was the subtext to the contemporary murder mysteries that structure Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*.

The contemporary experience of migration is one reason why many of the earliest proletarian novels were actually novels of the peasantry, like Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (*Masters of the Dew*, 1944) or the Brazilian novels of the "Northeast." "The urban masses are, on the whole, only rarely the central focus of Latin American narrative," one literary historian notes, and even the radical self-consciously "proletarian" writers often represented those who, metaphorically, stood between the peasantry and the urban working classes: rural proletarians like miners, plantation workers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers. Mining novels, sugar novels, banana novels (including Asturias's classic Banana trilogy) became entire genres in the middle decades of the twentieth century.[27]

When the radical writers turned to historical fiction, they also returned to the countryside, writing narratives of the epoch Marx had called "primitive accumulation." In his classic *Terras do sem fim* (*The Violent Land*, 1942), Jorge Amado turned away from the proletarian naturalism of his early novels to fashion a historical romance of the founding of the cacao plantations, a "land fertilized with human blood": "It was the last great struggle in connection with conquest of the land, and the most ferocious of them all. For this reason it has remained a living reality down the years, the stories concerning it passing from mouth to mouth. . . . At the fairs in the towns and

[27] Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, 376n.11. See also Joe Lockard, " 'Sugar Realism' in Caribbean Fiction," *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 2.1 (Fall 1994): 80–103.

the cities blind musicians sing of these gun-frays which once upon a time drenched with blood the black land of cacao."[28]

Out of the clash of peasant and proletarian worlds came the most powerful new form to emerge from the proletarian literary movements, magical or marvelous realism. Though magical realism is often considered as a successor and antagonist to social realism, its roots lay in the left-wing writers' movements. The idea and practice of magical realism was developed by two left-wing novelists from the Carribean and Central America, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier (1904–80) and the Guatamalan Miguel Angel Asturias (1899–1974), both of whom had been briefly imprisoned as young radicals in their native countries and both of whom were influenced by the communist surrealists during periods of exile in Paris. Carpentier's notion of *"lo real maravilloso"* was an explicit attempt to capture the temporal dislocations, the juxtapostion of different modes of life, mythic and the modern, that had resulted from a history of conquest, enslavement, and colonization. "What is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?" he asked in the 1949 preface to *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*) where he coined the phrase; the novel that followed was a tale of the Haitian revolution, a central turning point in that history, and a narrative that the proletarian writers often retold.[29]

The magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias is perhaps best seen as a second stage of the proletarian avant-garde: if the first moment in the wake of the upheavals of 1917–19 was dominated by a paradoxically ahistorical modernism that tried to document the lived experience of radically new factory and tenement (Chaplin's *Modern Times*), the magical realism of 1949 is the return of the repressed history—lived and witnessed by the exiles and migrants—and the consequent insistence on the specific reality of the colonized world at the moment of liberation in India, Indonesia, and China, a moment that finds its historical precursor not in the French Revolution (as the bolshevicks did) but in the Haitian revolution.

If this is true, then one can see why the notion of magical realism resonates far beyond the Caribbean islands and coasts where it began. The term comes to represent a larger shift in the aesthetic of the novelists' international from the powerful censoring of desire in the early novels—for the

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[28] Jorge Amado, *The Violent Land*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 333, 249–50.

[29] Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 88.

works of the epoch of worldwide depression are novels of lack, of hunger (the utopian novel is rare, and Louis Aragon's earlier move from surrealist desire to the socialist realism of his aptly named cycle *Le monde réel* is emblematic)—to an unleashing of desire and utopia, foreshadowing the liberation ideologies of the New Left (this is why it is common to see magical realism as the antithesis of an earlier social realism). One can see the shift in individual writers: in Brazil, Amado remains loyal to the communist left while creating a fictional equivalent of carnival, beginning with *Gabriela, carvo e canela* (*Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon*, 1958); in Egypt, Naguib Mahfouz turned from the urban realism and generational saga of his Cairo trilogy to a series of allegorical tales on the betrayal of the 1952 revolution, beginning with *Awlad haratina* (*The Children of Our Quarter*, 1959). It is also evident in the work of the left-wing writers of the postfascist Iberian penisula, Juan Goytisolo and José Saramago, in the turn to surrealism and magical realism in the post-1965 Indonesian novel of figures like Iwan Simatupang, and in the work of the contemporary English-language inheritor of the Marxist traditions of India's Kerala, Arundhati Roy.

Magical realism finds its most celebrated avatar in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. The 1967 novel, part of the celebrated Boom in Latin American fiction, came to stand for the moment of third-world hopefulness in the wake of decolonization, the 1955 Bandung conference, and the 1959 Cuban revolution, peaking at the Havana cultural congress of 1968, a moment that died with the coups in Brazil (1964), Indonesia (1965), and Chile (1973). The literary analogue of the 1960s "dependency theory" of Latin American Marxists, *Cien años de soledad* is a tale of primitive accumulation and desire, of the origins of the capitalist world system with its wonders and its monsters; the house of the Buendías is neither factory nor tenement. Nevertheless, it could be said to contain the classic proletarian novel, for at its heart lies a strike story. The climax of the novel—"the events that would deal Macondo its fatal blow"—is directly based on the 1928 strike by Colombian banana workers against United Fruit, and the subsequent massacre of the workers by government troops. The curious nature of García Márquez's strike sequence suggests that *Cien años de soledad* is both the culmination and overturning of the half-century of the proletarian literary movements.[30]

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[30] Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 315. I am indebted to the discussions in Gene H. Bell-Villada, "Banana Strike and Military Massacre: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and What Happened in 1928," in his *Gabriel García Márquez's* One Hundred Years of Solitude: *A Casebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Franco Moretti, "Epilogue: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," in his *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (London: Verso, 1996).

In 1928, the strike might have inspired one of the original proletarian novels; for García Márquez, a generation later (he was born the year of the strike), it is a history suppressed by the "official version . . . : there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families." The strike stands not as a figure for future revolution, but for social amnesia, as it is swept away in the torrential five-year rains that bring ruin to Macondo: "Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing had ever happened, and nothing ever will happen." Indeed, the strike has a contradictory place in the novel, at once central and marginal, memorialized in a single brief chapter, a climax that is forgotten by nearly every character. There is no preparation for the strike, and the massacre seems to take its place among the myriad magical events that constitute Macondo's reality. Unlike Asturias in his Banana trilogy, García Márquez makes no effort to represent either United Fruit or the banana workers; the only link between the strike and the novel's larger narrative is that one of the more "colorless" and anonymous Buendías—José Arcadio Segundo—becomes a leader of the strikers and the sole survivor of the massacre, keeping its memory alive.[31]

Thus, *Cien años de soledad* stands as both a sign of the crisis in the literary desire to represent workers that had animated a generation of plebian writers, and an attempt to bear witness to that desire. On the one hand, not only does García Márquez not represent the banana workers; he testifies to the "hermeneutical delirium" in which "by a decision of the court it was established and set down in solemn decrees that the workers did not exist." On the other hand, García Márquez, like the child witness to the massacre, continues to recount the tale "to the disbelief of all."[32] Nearly a century after the first calls for an international "proletarian literature" and "socialist realism," that desire seems not only defeated, but nonexistent, unimaginable. Yet like the strike story in *Cien años de soledad,* the aspirations and aesthetics of the novelists' international remain the forgotten, repressed history behind the contemporary globalization of the novel.

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[31] García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 333, 320.

[32] Ibid., 324, 327.