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Recollecting Work: Labour and Class in Contemporary North American Historical Fiction

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Résumé

Ma thèse examine quatre romans de l`époque post-1960 qui s'appuient sur le genre de la littérature prolétarienne du début du vingtième siècle. Se basant sur les recherches récentes sur la littérature de la classe ouvrière, je propose que Pynchon, Doctorow, Ondaatje et Sweatman mettent en lumière les thèmes souvent négligés de cette classe tout en restant esthétiquement progressiste et pertinents. Afin d'explorer les aspects politiques et formels de ces romans, j'utilise la « midfiction », le concept d'Allen Wilde. Ce concept vise les textes qui utilisent les techniques postmodernes et qui acceptent la primauté de la surface, mais qui néanmoins essaient d'être référentiels et d'établir des vérités. Le premier chapitre de ma thèse propose que les romans prolétariens contemporains que j'ai choisis utilisent des stratégies narratives généralement associées avec le postmodernisme, telles que la métafiction, l'ironie et une voix narrative « incohérente », afin de contester l'autorité des discours dominants, notamment les histoires officielles qui ont tendance à minimiser l'importance des mouvements ouvriers. Le deuxième chapitre examine comment les romanciers utilisent des stratégies mimétiques afin de réaliser un facteur de crédibilité qui permet de lier les récits aux des réalités historiques concrètes. Me référant à mon argument du premier chapitre, j'explique que ces romanciers utilisent la référentialité et les voix narratives « peu fiables » et « incohérentes », afin de politiser à nouveau la lutte des classes de la fin du dix-neuvième et des premières décennies du vingtième siècles et de remettre en cause un sens strict de l'histoire empirique. Se basant sur les théories évolutionnistes de la sympathie, le troisième chapitre propose que les représentations des personnages de la classe dirigeante riche illustrent que les structures sociales de l'époque suscitent un sentiment de droit et un manque de sympathie chez les élites qui les font adopter une attitude quasi-coloniale vis-à-vis de la classe ouvrière. Le quatrième chapitre aborde la façon dont les romans en considération négocient les relations entre les classes sociales, la subjectivité et l'espace. Cette section analyse comment, d'un côté, la représentation de l'espace montre que le pouvoir se manifeste au bénéfice de la classe dirigeante, et de l'autre, comment cet espace est récupéré par les ouvriers

radicaux et militants afin d'avancer leurs intérêts. Le cinquième chapitre explore comment les romans néo-prolétariens subvertissent ironiquement les tropes du genre prolétarien précédent, ce qui exprimerait l'ambivalence politique et le cynisme généralisé de la fin du vingtième siècle.

Mots-clés : Métafiction historiographique, prolétarisme, réalisme, postmodernisme, espace, lutte des classes, « midfiction », littérature contemporaine

Abstract

My dissertation project examines post-1960s novels that draw on the genre of proletarian fiction of the early twentieth century. Building upon current research focused on working-class literature, as well as pertinent literary theory, I argue that Pynchon, Doctorow, Ondaatje, and Sweatman bring to light often neglected working-class themes while remaining aesthetically progressive and relevant. In order to explore these novels in their political and formal aspects I employ Allen Wilde's concept midfiction. This concept refers to texts that use postmodern techniques and accept the primacy of surface, but nonetheless try to be referential and establish truths. The first chapter of my dissertation argues that the contemporary proletarian novels that I have selected employ narrative strategies commonly associated with postmodernism, such as metafiction, irony, and an "incoherent" narrative voice, to challenge the authority of dominant discourses, including the official histories that tend to downplay labour movements. The second chapter examines how the novelists employ mimetic strategies in tandem with more experimental techniques in order to achieve a believability factor that helps to connect the narratives to concrete historical realities. Referring to my argument in chapter one, I explain that the novelists ultimately use these two modes, referentiality and "unreliable", "incoherent" narrative voices, in order to both re-politicize the class struggle of the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century as well as to undermine a strict sense of empirical history. The third chapter draws on evolutionist theories of sympathy to argue that the depictions of wealthy ruling class characters illustrate that social structures at the time fostered a sense of entitlement and lack of sympathy in the elites that caused them to adopt a colonial-like attitude towards the working class. The fourth chapter addresses how the novels under consideration mediate the relationships between social classes, subjectivity and space. This section analyses how, on the one hand, representations of space show how power is manifested to benefit the ruling class, and on the other hand, how space was co-opted by radicals and militant workers in order to further their interests. The fifth chapter explores how the neo-proletarian novels ironically subvert tropes from the

earlier proletarian genre which, I argue, expresses the political ambivalence and cynicism of the late twentieth century.

Keywords : Historiographic metafiction, proletarianism, realism, postmodernism, space, class struggle, midfiction, contemporary fiction

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that contemporary fiction writers have reacted against the traditional "dead white man" view of history by developing literary strategies meant to deconstruct it. Many of these have come from feminist, postcolonial, and anti-racist perspectives intent on questioning and rearranging assumptions about gender, race, sexuality, and colonial legacies. My dissertation focuses on a small corpus of North American contemporary historical novels that have a similar objective; however, the central concern of these novels is to explore "classed" subjectivity. Their approach to subjectivity is expressed on both the individual level of specific characters, and in a broader sense, through examining class relations and the forces that stimulate class antagonisms. One of the contemporary theoretical schools my project engages with analyzes the intersection of class and literature: namely scholars of working-class studies and Marxian and post-Marxian literary theorists. One of the key debates among the latter has to do with the fragmentation of social relations and the questioning of the social construction of the present. Frederic Jameson has famously argued that the logic of late capitalism has led to a fragmentation of social relations which has made such relations difficult to "cognitively map". Jameson's work on the challenges of cognitively mapping contemporary culture and politics stimulated my curiosity which eventually found a suitable subject in postmodernist novels that draw upon proletarian themes and employ realism to construct their fictional worlds.

As Barbara Foley has pointed out, most scholars that deal with class include it in conjunction with other predominant categories, such as race and gender. In other words, "Marxism has to be careful not to seem to have hegemonic designs" (Foley *Radical* 214). E. L. Doctorow's work is one example of fiction that combines a

postmodern scepticism towards meta-narratives while also embodying Marxian concerns. In other words, Doctorow's Marxian concerns are not hegemonic in a political sense. In his essay "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Frederic Jameson lauds E. L. Doctorow's historical novels for their reformulation of leftist literary concerns. Indeed, Jameson calls Doctorow the "epic poet of the disappearance of the American radical past" (24). No one with left sympathies, Jameson asserts, can read Doctorow's "splendid novels without a poignant distress that is an authentic way of confronting our own current political dilemmas in the present" (25). The distress Jameson refers to resonates with Jacques Derrida's interpretation of what in *Spectres of Marx* he calls "the crime of the other" (21). Speaking of how events/phenomena from the past can haunt the present Derrida argues that the crime of the other functions as a kind of "misdeed whose event and reality, whose truth can never present themselves in flesh and blood, but can only allow themselves to be presumed, reconstructed, fantasized" (*Spectres of Marx* 21). Derrida's reading of the spectre names the cultural phenomenon of unresolved historical injustice, such as the oppressive conditions foisted onto significant sectors of working-class members of North American society. The historical fiction I study in this project attempts to rectify this unresolved or repressed historical memory, through historical representations of class antagonisms. Given that the representation of the latter could involve a multitude of possible injustices that have transpired and never quite been rectified, it can productively be embodied in the postmodernist use of paratactic historicity. As Amy J. Elias contends, this form of paratactic history resembles déjà vu in how it functions as

"the uncanny haunting of the present by the past" (*Sublime* 135)[1]. Parataxis in narrative, which Elias defines as employing juxtaposition, linear disjunction, and deperspectivized space, has deeply embedded "political implications that precisely identify the postmodern agenda of destabilization" (*Sublime* 123). The novels I look at in this study employ these tactics to destabilize official ways of narrating history while revisiting working-class themes. Moreover, using this framework for the subject of working-class studies seems especially relevant if one considers the complex social forces involved in labour versus capital struggles. Considering the possibilities of representing class struggle one would of necessity need to ponder the complex of networks constituting such a phenomenon. One could argue that an attempt at a complete historical representation of all of the individuals and social forces involved in a class struggle would be impossible and therefore involve a lack, or unknowable elements. Thus, cultural representations of class struggle inherently resonate with the concept of the postmodern historical sublime. Elias defines this as a post-traumatic consciousness that redefines "positivist or stadialist history . . . a desired horizon that can never be reached but only approached in attempts to understand human origins and the meaning of lived existence" (xviii). In my project I study how these inclinations are present in contemporary historical fiction that takes the historical figure of classed subjectivity and class struggle as a central subject.

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[1] Elias develops this idea in relation to what she calls metahistorical romance. For the post-traumatic metahistorical imagination history is desire, "the desire for the unceasingly deferred, sublime space of history. …This desire for the secular-sacred sublime in the absence of the gods—for certainty, hope, and awe-inspiring illumination—leads to metahistorical representations of the past, narratives that end up being at least as much about what history *is* as about the characters and plots that appear in those narratives" (*Sublime* 187-188).

Doctorow's *Loon Lake*, one of the novels I focus on in this dissertation, is an example of a text that combines postmodernist strategies with proletarian fictional concerns. Doctorow's work in general often adopts a heteroglossic approach in order to, as John G. Parks argues, create narratives that "disrupt or dismantle the prevailing 'regimes of truth', including their repressive effects" (*Polyphony* 455). A heteroglossic approach helps Doctorow achieve his ultimate political objective which, according to Parks, is to "prevent the power of the regime from monopolizing the compositions of truth, from establishing a monological control over culture" (*Polyphony* 455). Searches for texts similar to *Loon Lake* brought to my attention a small group of novels which share Doctorow's intention of re-conceptualizing the proletarian genre into a contemporary aesthetic framework, while retaining class struggle as a central subject. These were by authors who, in some cases, manifested consistent sympathies for leftism—Thomas Pynchon and Margaret Sweatman—while the other, Michael Ondaatje, was heavily influenced by modernist aesthetics and not known for political commitments, at least not in his early career (Jewinski 51). For example, his memoir *Running in the Family* was criticized for not taking into account Sri Lanka's broader social issues[2]. In an interview Ondaatje observes: "the thing about writing is that you want to represent or make characters who are believable, who are fully rounded, and that stops you from making them just politically good or politically vicious" (Ondaatje, "Michael Ondaatje" 198). For Ondaatje, it is more interesting to make characters that are "as believable and complex and intricate as possible than in making an argument in

[2] As Jewinski explains: "Canadian journalists and reviewers of South Asian origin took exception to Ondaatje's emphasis on his wealthy family's extreme eccentricity. Ondaatje was charged with ignoring

a novel" (Ondaatje, "Michael Ondaatje" 198). In spite of this, some critics consider some of the novels from his mid to later career to manifest political perspectives, namely *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*. Ondaatje's politics seem to grow out of his interest in examining marginalized areas of history, what he calls "the unspoken and unwritten stories—the 'un-historical' stories" (Ondaatje, "Michael Ondaatje" 198). This interest comes through in *In the Skin of a Lion*, as Jewinski explains: "while writing the final draft of *In the Skin of a Lion* [Ondaatje] was fuelled by a quiet determination to be more conscious of sociological factors than he had ever before" (Jewinski 124).

The novels I look at in this project are set during the early decades of the twentieth century and manifest a sense of class tension. Although these texts are nonlinear and fragmentary they embed historical events and figures within their dialogic structures. Some of these allusions are to real historical phenomena, while others are fabricated and seem real (this involves exploring the tension between fact and fiction, as I will explore more in chapter one). Thus, the novels fulfil one of the key elements of historical fiction. According to Avrom Fleishman, there is an unspoken assumption that for a novel to be considered historical it must include a number of "'historical' events, particularly those in the public sphere (war, politics, economic change, etc.), mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of the characters" (3). They link this embracing of the historical with narrative strategies that seem to manifest a post-structuralist-influenced view of the radical contingency of

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the pressing social and political issues of his native country. Some attacked him in print, accusing him of being politically naïve" (119).

language, that is, the notion that both identity and reality are texts, combined with distrust for systems of any kind (Jacobs 127)[3]. As such, these novels are aligned with the revisionist history movement, that is, the impulse toward social history. Moreover, the class-oriented novels' structural features conform to a new kind of objectivity that is called for in a post-culture-war intellectual climate, one that is less strictly empiricist, less demanding of a dominant, singular view of a particular historical event or figure and more dialogical. This form of historical approach resonates with insights expressed by Joyce Oldham Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret C. Jacob. In their book *Telling the Truth About History* these critics argue that viewing historical eras as manifesting multiple accurate versions does not necessarily "turn accuracy into a fugitive from a more confident age; it only points to the expanded necessity of men and women to read the many messages packed into a past event and to follow their trajectories as that event's consequences concatenate through time" (262).

Loon Lake like most of Doctorow's fiction is historical. Doctorow believes that America lacks historical substance, which he thinks gives American writers the opportunity to be creative in interpretation, reinterpretation, and invention (Harter and Thompson 81). *Loon Lake* is also a self-conscious, postmodernist narrative. Doctorow achieves this sense of self-consciousness by at times creating a sense of uncertainty about the information that the narrator attempts to convey. For example, at one point the narrator claims "Now I'll tell what I don't remember" (44). Doctorow also achieves

[3] The beginnings of a conscious postmodern agenda in American literature can be traced back to the 1960s when writers such as Derrida, Cixous, Barthes, and Kristeva became available in English (Jacobs 127). Moreover, Jacobs claims that American postmodernists have drawn upon "poststructuralist theories of language and identity both as the basis for their technical experiments and as a frequent topic of discussion in their works" (127).

a sense of narrative self-consciousness by employing multiple narrative voices or modes, such as conventional first and third person narrative points of view, computer generated texts, poems, resumes, and stream of consciousness passages. The central tension of *Loon Lake* revolves around the uneasy relationship between Joe Paterson, a scrappy young man of working-class origins and F. W. Bennett, a wealthy car baron and the owner of Loon Lake, a luxurious and secluded estate set in the Adirondacks. Disenchanted with his religious working-class family Joe strikes out on his own while still an adolescent. He rambles through various jobs and while wandering aimlessly in a forest is captivated by a train car passing by wherein he views Bennett, some of his cronies, and the beautiful Clara Lukacs. Joe follows the train tracks and eventually ends up at Bennett's luxurious retreat, Loon Lake. Here Joe encounters Warren Penfield and Clara Lukacs who share Joe's working-class origins. Penfield is a struggling poet and borderline alcoholic. He forges a close friendship with Lucinda, F. W.'s wife. An aviatrix, Lucinda is reticent and distant from Bennett and finds a close companion in the sensitive Warren. Joe, Warren, and Clara live peacefully at Loon Lake in a kind of pseudo-prelapsarian existence, surrounded by nature and seemingly not having to work or meet any professional obligations. Ultimately, they find life under Bennett's patronage too constrictive and so with the help of Warren, Joe and Clara decide to leave clandestinely, making off with one of Bennett's cars and a financial boost from Warren. They get stuck in the Midwest, and due to financial distress Joe is obliged to take a job at a local car manufacturing plant which happens to be owned by Bennett. Circumstances force Joe back to Loon Lake eventually, where

he learns that Lucinda and Warren have perished in a plane crash. The novel ends with Joe consoling Bennett and, it is implied, becoming the heir to his fortune.

The novel has two moments that clearly connect to historical events, one real and one fabricated, that resonate with the theme of class struggle. One is told through the point of view of Warren Penfield through a short stream-of-consciousness section. In this part of the novel he is living in Seattle while it is experiencing the general strike of 1919. The other episode appears fairly early in the novel and is a fabrication of a common working-class historical reality. It depicts a tragic mining accident. This episode introduces the Penfield family, who are miners, and F. W. Bennett, who at this point in the novel is working as a vice-president for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. I discuss this episode in chapter two with an analysis of how realist modalities are used to engage the historical real. These episodes tie into the larger theme of the novel which is to question the myth of the American dream and assess the politics of capitalism and socialism.

Like all of the novels that I focus on in the project *Fox* makes class struggle a chief concern. Taking Winnipeg's general strike of 1919 as the central conflict, Sweatman captures a keystone moment in Western Canadian history. The strike comes following the first World War and at a time when class feeling, which prior to the war was weak, was becoming increasingly prominent. At this point in history, social classes were organizing, and "society dissolving, as the farmers' organizations became more radical and labour organized and listened to more radical voices" (Morton 361). *Fox* unfolds in an array of short, fragmented sections with a wandering point of view that shifts from character to character and to headlines, titles, and passages from

various kinds of texts. In do doing, Sweatman is able to display the thoughts and feelings of a cross section of Winnipeg's society during the strike. Here, Sweatman employs an aesthetic strategy common in contemporary literature. She retells the story of one of Winnipeg's most controversial historical events in a way that, as Daniel Fischlin explains, "transforms the traditional linear historical narrative of the strike into a multivalent fictive experience of the voices that traditional historical tellings have forgotten or obscured" (57). In his assessment of *Fox*, Fischlin agrees that while *Fox* avoids the "historiographical imperative of affirmation" (62), it nevertheless holds on to "the materials of what constitutes a possible history" and transforms these materials into "the multivalent voices that speak through the novel" (62). This approach leaves the reader in a position to "make or remake a history of his or her own from both within and without the materials Sweatman has gathered" (62).

The novel revolves around two cousins, Eleanor and Mary, who come from the upper class. When the reader first encounters Eleanor she appears uncomfortable in her advantaged peer group and surroundings. As Fischlin claims, early on in the novel Eleanor shows a potential for complexity which seems to lie "dormant beneath the surface of her capacity to be at once 'expectant, distrustful, [and] persistent'" (59). This potential for complexity manifests itself in a broad-mindedness that enables her to empathize with the strikers, who some of her peers view through a distorted otherness (Drinkwater and Trotter for example, who I discuss in chapter three). Her sympathy for the workers and their cause comes about, in part, through her relationship with a friend of her father's, MacDougal. MacDougal comes from a formerly well-off Scottish family. While in Winnipeg, MacDougal connects with others who share his passion for

the social gospel. In this regard, Sweatman draws on the historical record by depicting historical figures associated with this movement. Through her interactions with MacDougal, and her observations of the pro-working class rallies and speeches, Eleanor develops sympathy for the strikers while her feelings toward her own class, which at the beginning of the novel are ambivalent and distanced, grow contemptuous.

Mary does not share these feelings. Rather, she feels affronted by the strike and the ideas behind it. This attitude is illustrated when Mary is brought to a public rally by her cousin Walter (who, like Eleanor, sympathizes with labour). A bare-chested man begins a presentation in a pose of confinement. He is bound by ropes and wears only a loin cloth, yet smiles confidently. Mary is initially impressed and amused as he flexes his muscles, shouts, and breaks loose from the ropes (presumably acting out working-class rebellion). But when the man recounts his experience as a soldier in World War One and equates trench warfare with the working class's plight (65), Mary is annoyed and storms off. This is related to Sweatman's depiction of some of the upper class characters as out-of-touch with the material reality of Winnipeg at the time of the general strike. Sweatman's focus on the romance between Eleanor and MacDougal, on the other hand, gestures towards the possibility of social transformation through the development of ethics. This is shown through how both Eleanor and MacDougal diverge from what is expected of them. For instance, MacDougal gives up his higher status position as a minister to become a bookshop owner and social activist; and Eleanor distances herself from her peer group and helps the strikers by working in a kitchen. Sweatman seems to suggest that a willingness to transform and to follow one's

social conscience can mitigate oppressive circumstances that can lead to intense social conflicts such as the Winnipeg general strike.

Against the Day is probably the most fragmented and dialogical of the texts. Spanning over one thousand pages, featuring a vast array of characters and settings *Against the Day's* voluminous content seems to mimic the sense of information overkill that affects contemporary life[4]. The infrastructure of the narrative centers around two mostly conflicting networks of characters, namely the Traverse and Vibe families. These two character clusters can be read as symbolic of the opposing political positions that to a large extent structure the novel, that is, leftwing radicalism (the Traverses) and social and economic conservatism (the Vibes). The Traverse clan is headed by Mayva and Webb Traverse, who is an active unionist, and an anarchist at heart. He is rumoured to be the Keiselgubr Kid, a notorious saboteur known for blowing up railway tracks. The Traverses have four children, three sons and a daughter. The Vibe clan is led by Scarsdale Vibe, a melodramatically villainous arch-capitalist. Vibe has several sons, but none of them seem to live up to his expectations. Thus, Vibe takes an interest in Kit, one of the Traverse sons, and attempts to woo him with a scholarship. Kit's acceptance of Vibe's offer sparks a tension between the two clans that results in Vibe contracting assassins to kill Webb. This commences a revenge plot that underpins much of the narrative. Other notable characters are

[4] This is related to how *Against the Day* draws upon many genres. For example, Amy J. Elias asserts that the central genres manifested in *Against the Day* are the hero quest, the picaresque, and the "postmodern pilgrimage" plot (*Plots* 29), while Brian McHale observes that most of the popular entertainment narratives of the early twentieth century are encompassed in the novel. McHale speculates that perhaps Pynchon's wager is that "multiplied and juxtaposed, an era's genres might jointly yield a complete and faithful—if also complex and elusive—representation of the historical whole. The map of the era's genre system can also serve as a cognitive mapping of the era itself (in Jameson's sense)" (25).

preacher Gatlin, who mingles radical socialist ideas and exhortations to radical action with Christian sermonizing, and Lew Basnight, a detective active in both Chicago and Denver at the turn of the century. Basnight is particularly important in my arguments as through his consciousness Pynchon expresses observations of labour strife. This comes through especially in the sections set in Denver that portray labour battles that Sidney Lens claims represented "the extreme in labor-capital confrontation" (112).

In the Skin of a Lion is set in the period 1918-1938 mainly in Toronto, and involves the lives of working-class people, both Anglo-Canadians and immigrants. Published in 1987, *In the Skin of a Lion* is Ondaatje's second novel and is seen as a transitional work. Ondaatje had published a significant amount of distinguished poetry and literary criticism since the early 1970s. With *In the Skin of a Lion* Ondaatje moves away from the personalized focus of his early work in order to embrace a collective outlook. He does this by representing characters from different social classes, ethnic groups, and genders which allows him to move "out from the self and into a wider sphere" (Ondaatje, Hutcheon, 199). In keeping with his desire to expand out from the self and into a broader realm, Ondaatje avoided writing about his own South Asian, or more specifically Sri Lankan diasporic community, as he feared this might be interpreted as "a personal saga" (Ondaatje, Hutcheon, 199), and preferred to "step away from a private story and into a public one, a social one" (Ondaatje, Hutcheon, 199). Although the novel contains a rather large cast of characters, the story revolves around a few main characters. At the center of the story is Patrick Lewis, a working class farm-boy who comes to Toronto. Patrick meets Clara, an actress who is connected to Ambrose Small, the entertainment baron who goes missing (here

Ondaatje is drawing on a real historical figure). Through Clara Patrick also meets Alice Gull. A one time nun, Alice becomes involved in the working-class movement and becomes vibrantly radicalized. Other characters include Nicolas Temelcoff, an immigrant to Canada who initially enters the working class. He builds a reputation as a daredevil construction worker who can accomplish amazingly acrobatic feats, and eventually achieves business success as a baker. His trajectory resonates with the Horatio Alger myth. Caravaggio is another major character. He is described as a "tarrer of roads, a house-builder, a painter, a thief—yet he was invisible to all around him" (199). This sense of invisibility or lack of agency manifests in a "fury and a sadness of only being described by someone else. (199). This resonates with a theme the novel is preoccupied with, namely generating a dialogic narrative that opens space for voices that haven't been adequately registered in the historical record. This point is manifested in Ondaatje's fictionalization of Roland Harris, the Toronto commissioner for public works from 1912 – 1945. He was responsible for the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct and the Toronto waterworks, which feature significantly in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Although Harris is treated sympathetically by Ondaatje, his ignorance of the injuries and deaths of the workers involved with the city's major construction projects resonates with a kind of epistemological violence that underpins the class tension explored in the novel.

One of the key problems that my study grapples with is how the novels in question both implement postmodernist approaches while also employing realist modalities in their representations of historical content and classed subjectivity. The postmodern can be defined, according to Steven Connor, as a body of theory that has

no "edges, hierarchies, or centre", but nevertheless is always framed by the theory that "in its authoritative disavowal of authority, prevents it everywhere, in a pervading inclusiveness, or 'preclusion'" (19). This theoretical proclivity manifests in the novels in question by how they deploy dialogic structures and metafictional devices; however, their employment of realism brushes against the grain of the more extreme postmodern tendencies, which would disavow the reverence these class-oriented novels have for realism. Yet, in another sense, the postmodern vision of narration should be seen as beneficial to writers interested in recovering the past due to dissatisfaction with how histories have been written, or with certain omissions and distortions. Thus, the postmodern concept of historicity can help illuminate, for example, the historical role of women. As Katherine Cooper and Emma Short point out, the undecidability of the postmodern text "leaves room for the female figure to be reasserted" in contemporary historical fiction[5]. A similar reformulation of a previously occluded cultural figure is born out in the class-oriented novels I focus on in this study, namely the image of the working class and the cultural dynamic that underlies class antagonisms.

The manner in which these novels embrace both a realist historical approach to the subject of class identity and class struggle and innovative post-modernist techniques, echoes Linda Hutcheon's definition of historical metafiction, which she

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[5] This is important for, as Cooper and Short argue, critics of historical fiction from the era of Walter Scott up until the recent past by and large tended to value more traditional forms of historical subjects, such as politics and war, which are associated with men. These critics were also dismissive of what they thought of as the escapism of the popular type, "which veered toward romance, fantasy, or deviated in any way from professed historical accuracy. As such, there was a marked preference for narratives featuring male agency and female passivity, and in many of these texts men were lauded as great explorers, heroes and adventurers, while female figures, real or imagined, were marginalized, and featured solely as romantic interests" (2)

describes as being a kind of intensely self-reflective art which is also rooted in historical, social, and political realities (*Canadian* 13). The novels I analyze in this project also appear to manifest what Alan Wilde calls midfiction. This term refers to kinds of fiction that reject both the "oppositional extremes of realism on the one hand and a world-denying reflexivity on the other, and that invites us instead to perceive the moral, as well as the epistemological, perplexities of inhabiting and coming to terms with a world that is itself ontologically contingent and problematic" (Wilde, *Middle Grounds* 4). The concept of midfiction is central to my project as it has helped me to think through how the neo-proletarian novels manage to revitalize a genre that is often seen to be outmoded while embracing contemporary thought on aesthetics and politics. Thus, Wilde's model, which acknowledges the constitutive powers of consciousness and denies the possibility of objective knowledge of the world, helps to illuminate the self-reflexive aspects of the novels I study (Maltby *Review of Middle Grounds* 457). In other words, I argue that the neo-proletarian novels successfully mediate between referential/historical and self-reflexive approaches. They do this in order to explore class subjectivity in a manner that engages three main categories: the historical, that is, significant public or collective events such as strikes, social activism, and rallies, as well as historical figures; lived experience, the representation of characters with psychological substance and reflections on how socio-economic status impacts one's identity; and ideological, which involves how the novels self-consciously interrogate the novel form, its implications for conveying meaning and how they attempt to reopen

space for writing from a class or collective-oriented perspective. The latter aspect, it is worth noting, is something missing from Wilde's program in *Middle Grounds*[6].

Although throughout the twentieth century there has been a significant amount of scholarship focused on class in North American literature, it nevertheless appears to be a fraught and somewhat marginalized field of research. When I began this project in 2007 the consensus in the field seemed to be that the subject of literature's relationship to class has been overlooked in recent decades. It has often been argued that within contemporary debates, the postmodernist stress on "difference" and "textuality", which, on the one hand has enabled marginalized and oppressed groups to achieve a heightened sense of agency, has on the other hand not allowed significant space for critical dialogue around the topic of class stratification, or the links between labour and subjectivity. In his notable text *The Trouble with Diversity*, for example, Walter Benn Michaels argues that the current emphasis on diversity (at least at the time the book was written in 2006) tends to downplay a focus on economic inequalities. We love race and identity, Michaels claims, "because we don't love class" (6). In other words, according to Michaels, we would rather "get rid of racism than get rid of poverty" and we would much rather "celebrate cultural diversity than seek to establish economic equality" (12). Echoing this sentiment Eric Schocket laments that class is often grouped with race and gender and like these categories considered to be an attribute of the individual, that is, as "something that shapes people into subjects but that is shorn of the dialectic ability to move them past their individualism into a collective response"

[6] As Maltby argues, the political and ideological implications of the problem Wilde's midfiction concept engages are not considered (Maltby, *Review* 457).

(255)[7]. William Dow, in a similar vein, suggests that theory and criticism have generally been under-employed in expanding our knowledge of literary representations of class (4). One reason he gives for this is that "class studies [are] incompatible with the academy's wishful claim for universalism" (4). Although I think that identity politics serve a valuable purpose, I tend to agree with Michaels, Schocket, and Dow when they claim that an *overemphasis* on identity politics can work towards obscuring the issue of economic equality.

Although proletarian literature has not traditionally drawn a significant amount of scholarly attention, since the late 1980s there has been a growing interest in the field[8]. However, little of this research has explicitly or substantively explored how contemporary historical approaches have treated class in the early twentieth century. There is a fairly large amount of research on the particular authors whom I consider in this study. Pynchon, Doctorow, and Ondaatje have all enjoyed long and successful literary careers, including much attention from literary critics. As the youngest of this group, and the only woman, Margaret Sweatman has not as of yet attracted the same extensive critical and popular attention but has nevertheless earned a respectable reputation. Having only one woman of four major authors in a research project is, I concede, less desirable than a more gender balanced corpus. I have tried to compensate for this by paying particular attention to how feminist concerns intersect with the

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[7] Schocket claims that this new perspective on class emerges from the 1960s belief that the personal is political. By "privileging the personal as the only domain of politics within texts" Schocket argues, "we have perpetuated a legacy born of this conservative reaction to communism and its social pretensions" (255).

[8] Key texts in the field would be Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (1993), Laura Hapke's *Labour's Text: The Worker in American Fiction* (2001), and Eric Schocket's *Vanishing Moments: Class and American Literature* (2006).

themes of the novels and the critical discussions about them[9]. The relatively small amount of critical works on these novels (with the exception of *In the Skin of a Lion*, and now *Against the Day*, which has only recently been attracting critical attention) makes reference to leftist politics, proletarian fiction, and Marxist theory; however, these subjects are not treated substantively. Moreover, the criticism that has been done on the novels I am concerned with does not view them in relation to other contemporary historical novels that draw upon the proletarian genre. Neither has any study grouped these novels together and engaged with them as a potential trend or subgenre. Given the research on these particular novels and bearing in mind the importance of historical fiction in contemporary literary debates, and given that these novels were published in an era (1979 – 2006) when a neoliberal political culture dominated and an anti-union sentiment more or less pervaded the mass media, a research project focused on four contemporary novels that recall the class struggle of the early twentieth century seems justified[10].

I have kept the corpus of primary literary texts relatively small because I want to focus on texts that are contemporary historical novels that make class struggle a central theme and employ both realism and self-reflexive modes of representation. That all of the novels selected incorporate these aspects to my mind opened the door to interpretations of these texts as not only reconstructions of a marginalized chapter of

[9] I do this by exploring: critiques of masculinist tropes in proletarian fiction and the role women played in the proletarian movement (both in chapter 5); feminist interpretations of evolutionist theory (chapter 4); and Doreen Massey's intervention in the male-dominated discourse of Marxian space theory (Chapter 3).

North American history but also as reflections on the links between ideology and literary forms and genres. I saw this project, therefore, as an opportunity to analyze these novels in relation to certain strains of Marxian theory, as well as prevalent contemporary criticism, such as spatial theory, otherness (with a focus on class relations), and postmodernist narrative theory[11].

The first chapter of my dissertation argues that contemporary proletarian novels employ narrative strategies commonly associated with postmodernism to challenge the authority of dominant discourses, such as the official histories that tend to downplay labour movements. The second chapter examines how the novelists employ mimetic strategies in tandem with more experimental techniques in order to achieve a believability factor that helps to connect the narratives to concrete historical realities. Referring back to my argument in chapter one, I explain that the novelists ultimately use these two modes, referentiality and "unreliable", "incoherent" narrative voices, in order to both re-politicize the class struggle of the early decades of the twentieth century as well as to undermine a strict sense of empirical history, expressing instead a postmodern scepticism towards the master narrative of official history. The third chapter addresses how the novels under consideration mediate the relationships between social classes, subjectivity and space. This section analyses how, on the one

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[10] William Puette argues that the mass media portrayals of a variety of images corresponding to labour or the working class have been unrepresentative and exceedingly negative (31). For more on the relation between labour and the media see Puette's *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labour* and Christopher R. Martin's *Framed! Labour and the Corporate Media*.

[11] Given my somewhat strict focus on midfiction I have necessarily left out several contemporary historical novels that might be considered peripherally related to my topic. Heather Robertson's trilogy: *Willie: A Romance*, *Lilly: A Rhapsody in Red*, and *Igor: A Novel of Intrigue* as well as Wayne Johnson's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* both treat historical subjects and touch on class issues. However, they do not employ a midfictional engagement with both realism and postmodernist experimental devices. Thus, I have omitted these worthy texts.

hand, the representation of various spaces shows how power is manifested in such a way as to benefit the ruling class, and on the other hand, how spaces were co-opted by working-class leaders and employed to further their interests. This, I argue, may be understood as a heterotopic space amenable to re-imaging ways of social ordering. In the fourth chapter I investigate the connections between labour practices, class stratification and intersubjectivity. Drawing on evolutionist theories of sympathy this chapter argues that the depiction of the wealthy ruling class characters illustrates how social structures at the time fostered in the elites a sense of entitlement and lack of sympathy that caused them to adopt a colonial-like attitude towards the working class. The fifth chapter explores how the neo-proletarian novels ironically subvert tropes from the earlier proletarian genre. This, I argue, expresses the political malaise and cynicism of the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1: DECONSTRUCTING HISTORIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE CERTAINTY AND PRESENTING "CLASSED" SUBJECTIVITY

It is generally accepted that contemporary fiction is preoccupied with the past. However, the way that it is represented in literary works often differs from the manner in which official history has conveyed it. This is partly due to the fact that contemporary writers are often motivated by a desire to explore experiential historicities that focus on groups other than elites and that encompass various kinds of oppressed conditions. In the neo-proletarian novels I will look at in this chapter it is the often repressed history of class struggle that takes center stage. One of the key critical terms describing the explosion of historicity in contemporary fiction, Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" describes a kind of writing that is comprised of self-reflexivity while also being based in "historical, social, and political realities" (*Canadian* 13). This fiction marks a continuation of the keenness for literary invention that flourished in the modernist period with an increased awareness and sense of anxiety about an array of political issues: racism, the threat of nuclear war, patriarchal domination and so on. The anxiety that an awareness of oppressed conditions brings about stimulates an impulse for revisionist history which is part of a turning away from an established public history that tends to perpetuate nationalist myths[12].

In contrast to earlier historical writers, contemporary historical fiction writers are more likely, as Herb Wyile points out, to "disturb the customary illusion of holding up a mirror to history" (*Speculative* 4). Moreover, they tend to invent devices and strategies that militate against the perpetuation of clear, authoritative "pictures" of the past. Thus, contemporary writers are inclined to present history as "fragmented, self-

[12] Some examples of this myth-perpetuating is seen in nineteenth-century writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Leo Tolstoy, and Canadian works such as Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty*, and in

conscious, and discursively and generically heterogeneous, reflecting a wariness of the terms of—even the possibility of—historical representation" (Wyile, *Speculative* 4). Viewing traditional or official historical discourse with scepticism is connected to a discomforting realization, namely, that perhaps, as Oldham Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob suggest, the history of Western civilization could be viewed as political propaganda for the ruling establishment (200). Moreover, this rebellion against historical representation involves a belief, Oldham Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob contend, that historical discourse can no longer offer legitimate national narratives and as such it is preferable to think in terms of *histories* that are "always partial, always political, always propagandistic, indeed, mystical" (200). This is related to the scepticism towards metanarratives that is a mainstay of postmodern thinking. This scepticism towards official historical discourse manifests in a shift towards historiographical metafictions, therefore, as Wyile explains, this meant a shift away from the desire to present a "picture" of the past to a "preoccupation with the discursive and representational conventions of such a presentation" (Wyile, *Speculative* 141). This focus on discursive and representational conventions has caused some theorists to view historical discourse as a kind of myth. Marc Colanvincenzo, for example, explores this topic in *Trading Magic for Fact, Fact for Magic: Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction*. Drawing on Roland Barthes's theories concerning the interconnections between narrative and myth Colanvincenzo asserts that historical discourse has a tendency to mythologize itself by masking its "historical

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twentieth-century novels like Raddall's *His Majesty's Yankees* and Costain's *High Towers* (Wyile, *Speculative* 6).

contingency and constructedness", thus giving itself a justification that appears "natural and eternal" (4). Taking Barthes's theory one step further, Colavincenzo sets up a framework wherein historical discourse itself corresponds with language systems, Saussure's "langue". As he explains, as a signifier we have language about a given historical event; "the signified is the concept of this particular historical event; and the sign is historical discourse itself' (Colavincenzo 4). If historical discourse functions on this higher level of sign system, then it is, Colavincenzo claims, vulnerable to cooptation by myth which "goes to work on historical discourse" and impoverishes it, evacuating it of its meaning (4). Consequently, historical discourse becomes simply form. This new form then becomes attached to the myth of historical discourse, that is, to a new kind of historical discourse that is objective and pertains only to "what really happened" (Colavincenzo 5). This corresponds with the concept of historical fact as directly accessible, which leads to a conclusion that both Colavincenzo and Barthes draw: that historical discourse presents itself as a natural given, which allows the constructing agent generating the discourse to be concealed. In other words, the actual producer of the historical discourse manages to absent her or himself from the communicative act (Colavincenzo 5, Barthes, *Rustle* 131). This absenting happens where there is

> a systematic absence of any sign referring to the sender of the historical message: history seems to *tell itself*. This accident has had a considerable career, since it corresponds in fact to so-called objective historical discourse (in which the historian never intervenes). As a matter of fact, in this case, the speaker annuls his emotive person, but substitutes for it another person, the 'objective' person: the subject

> subsists in his plenitude, but as an objective subject. (Barthes, *Rustle* 132)

In short, historical discourse wants to create the illusion that "textuality and mediation do not exist" (Colavincenzo 64). Again, the alleged need or desire for objectivity incentivizes the creators of historical discourse to draw attention away from themselves. Colavincenzo calls this the "objectivity trick", a kind of sleight of hand by which the historical author seems to both remove her or himself from the responsibility for the construction of discursive formations while gaining objectivity and impartiality in the bargain. This discursive condition is viewed as problematic by many postmodernists, and they therefore seek devices and strategies to militate against this allegedly incorrect mode of discourse. This standpoint resonates with Hutcheon's core concept that historiographic metafiction involves both self-reflexive, experimental strategies as well as a commitment to dealing with social and political realities. The neo-proletarian novels that I analyse in this chapter manifest these qualities in a way that, I would underline, also manifest Wilde's midfiction concept, that is, they are texts that use postmodern techniques that admit the primacy of surface, but nonetheless try "to be referential and establish truths" (Tokarczyk 11). For the purposes of this chapter I will focus on how they use innovative and metafictional narrative approaches in order to militate against conventional history's tendency to claim objectivity and authoritativeness, while occluding its own subjectivity. I will explore how the neo-proletarian novels counter the "objectivity trick" of conventional historical discourse by adopting various approaches and tactics—such as undecidability, shifting points of view, large cast collective narratives, the rendering of a parodic counterfactual/factual

binary, and the manifestation of a post-structuralist influenced representation of the relationship between the self and writing—in order to explore the possibilities of fictional narrative outside the confines of conventional narrative form while also, more particularly, questioning and destabilizing ways of narrating historical information. This disruption of historical narrative is related to the manner in which the neo-proletarian novels display political ambivalence in spite of their sympathies for leftist culture and values.

Given the postmodern scepticism of historical discourse, some postmodern-influenced fiction writers have employed devices that aim to point up the more unstable nature of subjectivity behind any writing. This involves narrative expressions that purposely try to break the illusion of objectivity and authoritativeness while attempting to foreground subjectivity. This involves illustrating how texts are mediated by the author, cultural assumptions and various intertextual influences. This intention is described by Linda Hutcheon as postmodern history's deliberate strategy to contaminate history and its pretensions to objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation by fusing it with "didactic and situational discursive elements" (*A Poetics* 92). In a similar fashion, Colavincenzo claims that postmodern writing undermines historical discourse by presenting the reader with radical subjectivity and partiality (55). In *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction*, Amy J. Elias claims that in order to disrupt and defamiliarize linear historical construction, postmodern writers apply the grammatical function of parataxis as a literary strategy. Parataxis is used in this way to juxtapose plot segments and also past and present within narratives (Elias, *Sublime* 125). Elias points to how parataxis and

intentional fragmentariness work together to create a narrative space wherein "[e]lements of historical narrative including events, characters, typical period language and costume and ideology are precipitated out of their seamless historical narrative and, paradoxically, gain identity as fragments of history" (*Sublime* 129). I will show in the following pages how in specific neo-proletarian novels the constructedness of history is made transparent.

I also want to suggest that the neoproletarian novels' instinct to draw attention to the constructedness of historical discourse goes a way towards challenging what some critics term "presentism". Neil Lazarus defines presentism as the tendency "to construe the past as the history of the present" (33). The problem with presentism is its inclination to project, as Lazarus maintains, that what has happened "is the only thing that could have happened, that this thing that has happened has, in a sense, always been about to happen" (33), rather than taking into consideration the more philosophical perspective that "something that happens had to have *been able* to happen", that it "had to have a possibility, or else it could not have become a reality" (Lazarus 33). In other words the phenomenon of presentism does not adequately attend to the conditions that shape events. Presentism's narrow view of the generation of the present is analogous with a phenomenon identified by Hayden White. Dominant groups, White suggests, often adhere to conceptions of history "in which only individual events and their relations to their immediate contexts can be known or in which, at best, the

arrangement of the facts into loose typifications is permitted" (21)[13]. White's conception of the type of historical thinking prevalent in dominant western culture recalls Lukács's analysis of historical thinking. In *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Lukács points to a mode of narrative which presents history as having a "natural" quality, wherein the subjects represented "have already acquired the stability of natural self-understood forms of social life" (47). The manifestation of this self-understanding can be said to precede, and therefore to efface, the impetus to decipher this kind of subject's "historical character" (47). Insofar as the bourgeoisie must "consciously ignore insights which become increasingly urgent" they must often "suppress their own moral instincts in order to be able to support with a good conscience an economic system that serves only their own interests" (Lukács, *History* 66). As a result, a particular kind of thinking emerges which, according to Lukács, must "abolish the process of history and regard the institutions of the present as eternal laws" (48). Perhaps this is why, as Hayden White points out, by the end of the nineteenth century many scholars began to raise serious doubts about "history's status as either a rigorous science or a genuine art" (2). Furthermore, White suggests that Enlightenment historical discourse can be interpreted as a "specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated" (2). The problematic aspects of historical discourse that Lukács, White, and Lazarus point out resonate with the postmodern proclivity to re-

[13] Similarly, Heike Härting, in her entry on subjectivity in the *Globalization and Autonomy Glossary*, claims that because colonialism relied, in part, on exploitative and white supremacist practices, Western countries tend to forget the ways in which "exploitation and racism constitute the historical present of the Western subject" (5), and, therefore, this "historical amnesia" (5) results in a kind of consciousness that "imagines globalization as a new – historyless – and transcultural phenomenon" (5).

mythologize historical content. Given that the problematic or distorted kind of historiography that these scholars address has at its core a protection of elitism or a kind of class domination means that contemporary reformulations of historical discourses that pay particular attention to class issues are potentially able to address this postmodern dissatisfaction with conventional historical discourse in very meaningful ways. As Fischlin claims, the creative and destabilizing powers of literature, particularly in the "revision of histories and historiographies in which 'empathy' with the victor is the norm", remains critical even if only to bring the critic "face to face with the possibilities, limits, responsibilities, and failures of his or her object of study" (56). In other words, the neo-proletarian novels I address in this thesis are particularly well suited to combat the unsavoury aspect of domineering historical discourse while illustrating how innovative literary techniques can be used to counteract the omniscient tendencies of meta-narratives.

Critics have noted that in *Loon Lake* Doctorow offers an unreliable narrative which conveys a sense of undecidability. This, I suggest, helps his narrative undercut the pretence of historical objectivity, while exemplifying how texts are mediated[14]. He achieves this effect through the use of multiple points of view which are not always clearly attributed to a particular character or narrative persona[15]. The undecidability that results from this strategy is symbolic of Doctorow's scepticism towards narrative

[14] This speaks to Doctorow's inclination to use self-conscious narrative voices that call attention to themselves, an approach that is often labelled postmodern or experimental. Doctorow uses this strategy in most of his major works (Cooper, *Cutting Both Ways* 111).
[15] This is common for Doctorow. As Michelle Tokarczyk asserts, "[r]ather than having an omniscient narrator report on situations, Doctorow's novels often feature narrators who agonize about their ability to comprehend and render events, but who nonetheless 'bear witness'" (5).

as an authoritative discourse[16]. Moreover, the undecidable aspect of Doctorow's work coincides with Hutcheon's theory of historical metafiction[17]. Indeed, the instability that Hutcheon claims is part of the nature of the postmodern historiographic novel has also been addressed in interpretations of Doctorow's work. Christopher D. Morris, for example, asserts that Doctorow's fiction parallels the paradigm espoused by thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, all of whom refuse to "presuppose that texts necessarily represent a signified, extratextual presence" (4, 13)[18]. In so far as Doctorow employs this concept to develop a literary style that, among other things, constantly and subtly undermines our tendency to understand reality with a kind of totalizing certainty, he also uses this style, more specifically, to contest traditional notions of the American Dream. As Morris claims, almost every one of Doctorow's novels portrays some duplicity at the heart of American life (13). I will argue that Doctorow's resistance to the conventional myth of the American dream is coterminous with his desire to challenge conventional methods of conveying history, i.e. the tendency towards objectivity and authoritativeness already discussed.

The undecidable dimension of *Loon Lake* may be attributed to Doctorow's use of various narrative points of view and ways of portraying character. Although the

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[16] It is important to note that initial reviews saw this aspect of the novel as a flaw. As Carol C. Harter and James R. Thompson summarize, Doctorow's narrative techniques "have led some critics to rail against what is for them a preciousness, a self-conscious literariness, that ultimately has neither artistic nor thematic function or merit" (79).

[17] Although Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction addresses Canadian fiction, her assessment of this kind of fiction, I believe, relates to work outside Canada's borders and certainly for much contemporary American writing, including Doctorow's work from the 70s and 80s.

[18] This paradigm is manifested in these writers' ambition to "undertake the activity of writing without the prospect that a representable, paraphrasable idea, set of ideas, or 'theme' . . . will be its result" (Morris 13).

novel presents the perspectives of four main characters—Joe, Warren, Clara, and Bennett—unlike a typical realist text, the sections depicting these perspectives shift grammatical points of view, and the narrative on the whole omits plot points in a way that makes it impossible to tell if they are "deliberate or accidental" (Morris 16). Stylistically, *Loon Lake* deploys a multi-vocal, fragmented, and nonlinear structure that presents a sense of self-consciousness. Comparing Joe with the protagonist of Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, Morris claims that they both write of themselves "in the first and third person" (117), and like Daniel's narrative, Joe's is "sometimes elliptical and frequently violates chronology" (117). To be more specific, the fact that Joe has access to Warren's papers and journals means that he is in a good position to narrate the episodes involving Warren's experiences and interleave them with an account of his own life (Morris 117). This interpretation seems to have credence given that, as Harter and Thompson articulate, only Joe has the "literal or imaginative access to all the players and to the many tangible materials that will inform the entire narrative" (79). Exploring the possibility that Joe may be a kind of omnipotent force, Morris goes so far as to suggest that Joe as narrator has stored on his computer information regarding the experiences of Warren, Clara, Bennett, and others, and that these files surface from time to time to interrupt the narrative (117). The interruptions that occur could perhaps be explained, as Morris suggests, as a "kind of collage technique on Joe's part, the inclusion of documents without comment" (117). If Joe is the mastermind behind all of the various points of view and kinds of information deployed in the novel, Doctorow is at pains to keep this fact ambiguous. This infuses

Loon Lake with an unreliable and undecidable quality which, it is crucial to point out, tends to undermine a sense of narrative objectivity and certainty.

One aspect of Doctorow's unreliable narrative strategy is the inclusion of several poems. Although one of the main characters, Warren Penfield, is a poet, none of the poems is clearly attributed to him nor to any other character. Although it's true that the first line of the third poem reads: "[a]nnotated text *Loon Lake* by Warren Penfield" (53), what follows is not an annotation but rather a twelve page poetic sequence. The second page of the sequence contains the subtitle "Loon Lake", which, given that it echoes the title of the novel, further adds to the confusion and ambiguity. Mixed in with the twelve page poetic sequence are five short sections pertaining to each of the main characters, which the narrator refers to as annotations. These are written in terse prose reminiscent of computer printouts, bureaucratic files or short biographies. They describe things like education, employment, business dealings, positions held, recreational activities, and so forth. Implanting these reflections in the annotations allows Doctorow the narrative space to meditate on modern American capitalistic culture without explicitly imposing a particular doctrine. For instance, roughly in the middle of the novel a substantial annotation on Bennett appears. It first presents the negative aspects of Bennett, indicating, for example, that his twenty-five years of engagement with labour relations lack "compassion / or flexible policy understanding" and that he has devoted himself "entirely to selfish accumulation of wealth" (158). The annotation also alleges that Bennett "patronizes unsavory elements of society for his / business gain", is "sexually exploitative", and that he is supposedly "unmoved by the violent death / of another human attributable to his calculated

negligence" (158). Following this rather scathing portrayal, however, the same narrative voice enumerates Bennett's substantial philanthropic achievements, such as endowments to a miners' black lung research facility, the gymnasium of a school, a Mexican silver workers' church, and a college library. This list also includes "numerous ongoing / benefactions of worthy charities and researches plus innumerable / acts of charity to individuals never publicized" (159). Juxtaposed with these two reflections on Bennett is a one page reflection on capitalism itself. This section appears to want to present a relatively balanced assessment. For instance, it claims that it must acknowledge "the immense / power of capitalism to generate living standards food housing / education the amenities to a degree unprecedented in human / civilization (sic)" (160). However, in almost the same breath the narrative acknowledges that capitalism also creates a long list of unsavoury ramifications, such as the intermittent suppression of freedom of speech, corruption of public officials, the spoiling of the natural environment, and so on (160). I will discuss Doctorow's ironic intentions with this passage in more depth in chapter five. What I want to underline here is how by interspersing his novel with poems and annotations, Doctorow creates within a narrative context a plausible opportunity to broadly comment on the U.S. political economy. Given that these annotations reside within a broader narrative that uses a realistic mode to characterize Bennett, the annotations illustrate how in his overall depiction of Bennett Doctorow creates an effect that relies on a dialectical relation between realism and a textual innovation, the "bureaucratic" annotation style. Thus, by melding together these two modes Doctorow develops a midfictional aesthetic that profitably gives expression to his sympathy for leftwing politics while developing an

innovative narrative technique that helps pull the narrative away from conventional, objective-seeming historiography.

To conclude, Doctorow's mixing of literary and discursive forms such as the novel, autobiography, poetry, and bureaucratic documentation defamiliarizes the reader in a way that, as Parks argues, makes him share in the "sense of doubt and uncertainty regarding the narrator's sense of self" (Parks, *E. L. Doctorow* 87). Moreover, Doctorow's multi-genre, heteroglossic approach is used, as I have argued, to undermine the conventional objectivity and mythic quality of historiographical discourse, and this also functions to destabilize cultural monologism. Parks claims that Doctorow's ambition to thwart cultural monologism is due to the fact that it is "authoritarian and absolutist and denies the existence and validity of the 'other' of 'difference'" (*Polyphony* 455). Taking Parks' analysis one step further I would dare to fill the gap and say that the marginalized "other" in this case is the historical worker, and perhaps more specifically the potentiality of meaningful historical representations of class struggle. This dynamic conglomeration of various narrative modes deployed by Doctorow establishes the postmodern aspect of the midfiction dialectic which enables the novel to go against the grain of narrative as singular or authoritative.

Similarly, Michael Ondaatje in *In the Skin of a Lion* uses a dialogic approach to project an unstable, non-authoritarian historical narrative[19]. This use of dialogism is foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel in an epigraph that states: "[n]ever again will a single story be told as though it were the only one" (1). This statement,

[19] Marinkova argues, for example, that Ondaatje denounces the "optical nature of mainstream historical and literary discourses which obliterates the opacity and multiplicity of being" (19).

according to Karen Overbye, indicates that the "story of the hero will be the story of many" (3) and that "[h]eroism and storytelling . . . will inform the representation of bodies in the text" (3). Early on in the novel a narrative voice indicates that "[t]his is a story a young girl gathers in a car during the early hours of the morning" (1). Using the verb "gathers" here illustrates that the girl is an active participant in the story-generation process. This metafictional statement then signals a larger strategy Ondaatje employs wherein, as Robert David Stacey suggests, he imagines both history and community as "dependent on the 'gift' of conversation" (456). Ondaatje's stress on the conversational aspect of narrative, or mutuality, is represented again in the first scene when the driver, Patrick, we are told, could say something like "In that field is a castle" and it would be possible for his companion, Hana, "to believe him" (1). This simple exchange illustrates the sense of mutuality involved in narration and echoes oral traditions of story-telling and as such reminds us that narrative requires at least two parties and a certain degree of good faith on both sides for a story to come into being.

This brief introduction, in its explicit dramatization of the process of narration, adumbrates the more complex metafictional elements that become a significant part of the novel. As Stacey suggests, this sense of the novel being a gathering of stories could be described as a "collection or anthology of nearly discrete parts" (450). Ondaatje's emphasis on multiple narrative processes, Stacey argues, is akin to a multi-voiced dialogue. As such, Stacey asserts that the manner in which *In the Skin of a Lion* imagines both history and community is "as a kind of fabric into which the subject is

'sewn'" (456)[20]. This idea of the interconnection between history, community, and narrative is exemplified in the characterization of the story-teller Daniel Stoyanoff. An immigrant from Macedonia, Stoyanoff finds work in Canada as a labourer. While working for a slaughter house he loses an arm. With the compensation money he receives he returns to Macedonia, buys a farm and marries. In his post-Canadian life Stoyanoff acquires a reputation for telling stories about his Canadian experience which inspires Temelcoff, one of the central characters, to immigrate to Canada. The stories that Stoyanoff conveys portray North America as a "rich and dangerous" (44) place where one arrived as a "sojourner and came back wealthy" (44). Like the characters who appear in the epigraph and introduction, Stoyanoff is a story-teller and a kind of cultural bridge who transmits an influential mix of first-hand accounts with exaggerated or imagined tales to the rural Macedonian community he is a part of in his later life. He is also, it's important to underline, a part of Ondaatje's metafictional strategy which divides the agency of the narrative and resists conveying a univocal and authoritative narrative voice.

Another aspect of the metafictional strategy Ondaatje uses in *In the Skin of a Lion* are intertextual references. In an essay on *In The Skin of a Lion* Katherine Acheson describes the novel as a richly intertextual work that invokes a wide range of

[20] Ondaatje renders this kind of communication in a manner that destabilizes conventional narration. As Douglas Barbour points out: "The narration seems to work at a strictly realistic level, yet somewhere among the allusions, the metaphoric destabilization, and the floating referentiality of some phrases, it slips slightly off balance, toward an indeterminancy that renders all historical records at least partially suspect" (186). As such, Barbour understands *In the Skin of a Lion* as a way to "supplement the official version" of history, and in so doing it holds "all writing up to scepticism" (186).

authors (107)[21]. Acheson suggests that by including the notable Canadian poet Anne Wilkinson in his novel as a minor character Ondaatje establishes a connection to her work and to the legacy of her family. Wilkinson was born into the Osler family, an elite Canadian family that helped shape modern Toronto. This allusion, Acheson claims, "deepens and enriches the inter-connections between cultural history and capital which is such a significant theme of the novel (113)[22]. Moreover, this intertext also reinforces the dialogic theme of the novel. For instance, after Caravaggio tells Anne his story of escape she "sits across from him laughing", not fully believing his story, and suspecting it might be a "fairy tale" (201). The interaction between Caravaggio and Anne suggests the collaborative nature of narrative, that is, how it consists of processes which involve authors, readers, and interpretors (as well as many intertextual connections), thus reinforcing the motif first developed in the epigraph. On another level, Anne's casual disbelief in the story recalls the poststucturalist notion that linguistic communication practices manifest a certain degree of instability and are thus incapable of articulating truth-claims authoritatively. The allusion to Wilkinson's poetry, Acheson claims, evokes a sense of history that is more concerned with "unofficial histories" (116) than with elites, such as the Oslers. This impulse towards "bottom up", or social history, as exemplified by Wilkinson's subtle presence in *In the Skin of a Lion* is one of the many elements that reflexively draw attention to the

[21] Some of these allusions rest more on the surface, and are accessible to a generally knowledgeable reader; while other allusions, Acheson avers, are more obscure. The reference to Wilkinson is one of the more challenging allusions.

[22] Ondaatje's decision to include Wilkinson is interesting in that although she comes from an elite family she also had an abiding sympathy for leftist politics and culture. Although Wilkinson viewed some of her early poems as too political and destroyed them she remained a socialist sympathizer for most of her life (see Irvine 26 – 27).

processes of reading and interpreting, while also suggesting an alternative kind of historicity.

Another example of how Ondaatje employs multiple narrative voices, in order to "disperse" narrative agency and decentre the singularity of historical narrative, is forcefully illustrated in the scene depicting the theatrical performance in which Patrick meets Alice. The performance is set in a section of the water works in front of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual crowd (Ondaatje 115). Given that it was illegal to hold public meetings in languages other than English at the time, the performers take advantage of the noisy machines to aurally camouflage their assembly (Ondaatje 115). In addition, Ondaatje takes pains to suggest that the play manifests a plurality of cultures. For example, the actors' costumes are "a blend of several nations" (116), and the hero of the show wears "a Finnish shirt and Serbian pants" (117), suggesting that the show symbolizes the ethnic diversity of Toronto's working class. Moreover, the relationship between the large cast of forty puppets and the central character/hero seems to parallel the relationship within the novel between the large cast of characters and Patrick, the central character through whose consciousness the novel is in large part filtered. A crucial aspect of this dynamic arises from the tension between creating a "democratic" polyphonic discursive space, where many diverse characters inhere equal amounts of agency, and a more traditional form of narrative that revolves around a few protagonists[23]. This tension is manifested in *In the Skin of a Lion* by virtue of the array of characters that provide "colourful and often eccentric details" (Gamlin 72).

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[23] This echoes the proletarian novel, specifically what Barbara Foley calls the social and collective novels (See *Radical representations*).

Audience members must enter into active negotiations of meaning with these characters, Gamlin suggests, in order to "form their impression of focal events" (72). Moreover, as "authorial hierarchies are dismantled" (72), Gamlin argues, conventionally privileged positions are distributed to minor actors, and the "participants become equals" (72). As such, "[n]o single 'hero' or 'heroine' commands the audience's attention", but rather "each character offers a unique perspective on a number of shared events and thus invites a revision of history" (Gamlin 72). Although Gamlin's interpretation of the egalitarian agentic distribution in the novel makes sense, not all critics agree. Frank Davey, for example, claims that Patrick's presence is stronger than other characters'. As he explains: "*In the Skin of a Lion's* most prominent character is not Small or Harris, but Lewis, with whom the book begins and ends, and who, through a highly problematic frame, is made to appear to focalize and partly narrate its action" (*Post-National* 142). Thus, according to Davey, Patrick is a prominent and centralizing figure who, through his access to English, has a privileged position in the novel. This same sort of dynamic involving a central figure and a large group of characters also exists within the puppet show, with its central figure—the "one life-sized puppet [who] was the central character in the story" (Ondaatje, *Lion* 116)—and the other minor characters. Although this character represents a problematic existence—"[b]ehind the curled moustache it was perturbed and nervous—ambitious, scared, at times greedy" (116)—and is described as "alien and naïve and gregarious, upset[ting] everything" (116), he is nonetheless the central character and moreover "the hero" who "linked them all" (116). Thus, the hero of the puppet show and the cast of characters that surround him both mirror and repeat the structure of the novel which

has Patrick as the central figure and a cast of other characters surrounding him[24]. This repetition is, according to Beddoes, one of the "most striking devices of the novel" (207). It is also an "aspect of the book's self-reflexivity" in that "its events reflect each other" (Beddoes 207). To summarize, the manner in which the puppet show mirrors the novel's structure, and the inherent tension in the novel between monologic and dialogic narrative tendencies, represent a kind of self-reflexivity that destabilizes conventional notions about narrative historiography.

Explicit authorial comments about the nature of history, and the adoption of a historical tone, are used by Ondaatje to provide ironic juxtaposition between official history and his own brand of postmodern history. Making a comparison between *In The Skin of a Lion* and Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Linda Hutcheon notes how both novels adopt an ironic stance towards historical and media discourse, for example, Hutcheon notes how in the following passage juxtaposition of news items is used to create an ironic resonance critical of the press: "Everyone tried to play the Hammond Organ. 'Red Squads' intercepted mail, teargassed political meetings. By now over 10, 000 foreign-born workers had been deported out of the country. Everyone sang 'Just One of Those Things'" (*The Canadian* 102). The ironic juxtaposition deployed by Ondaatje here suggests that dominant discourses in the press and conventional historiography employ apposition to imply equivalences between elements of differing levels of seriousness. In other words, observations on musical fads appear to be given equal weight to stories about the repression of dissent, while logically they would seem out of proportion. The humourously ironic tone that results from their mockery is related to

[24] Although the character here is portrayed as male, it is actually played by a woman, Alice Gull.

self-reflexivity and repetition. Deployed by Ondaatje, it imparts a self-conscious way of thinking about text and history that runs counter to strictly conventional or linear modes of historical discourse. This helps Ondaatje avoid a presentist view of the Canadian past and is part of his larger strategy to use dialogism and metafiction to produce a realism-dependent yet fragmented text that recaptures some of the historical residue of labour and class struggle in a highly aesthetic narrative form that is not dogmatic about its historical claims.

Similar to *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Loon Lake*, Pynchon's *Against the Day* uses dense layering and a dialogic form to destabilize linear historical narrative. The narrative manages to follow the lives of dozens of characters, and is geographically set in many countries, cities and towns. Richard Hardack argues that Pynchon uses repetition in narrative tone to help stage the ontological repetition of characters and events, and employs a kind of narrative that "absorbs, duplicates and disperses characters' voices in order to decentre notions of self-contained subjectivity and linear time" (2). Hence, the voluminous content of the novel, combined with its multiple-voiced perspectives and non-linear time frames, evokes a sense of chaotic movement and dispersal. The theme of movement and dispersal is developed through the use of quest plots. His use of quest plots manifests his desire to complicate conventional notions of narrative, as Cowart points out: "Pynchon's devotion to the quest plot exemplifies as nothing else his desire to repudiate, undermine, or transcend the modern wasteland" (*Thomas* 100)[25]. Indeed, for Cowart, the quest stands as the "single

[25] Literary quests, according to Cowart, tend "naturally to reflect the great and traditional questions about the human condition; whatever the religious certainties of the cultures that produce quest literature, it tends to express man's existential anxiety" (100).

indispensable ingredient in Pynchon's books" (*Thomas* 127). In earlier quest literature, Cowart suggests, the quest's success was a real possibility; that is, the grail quests of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table were "undertaken with some certainty of the existence and value of that which was sought" (Cowart, *Thomas* 127). Speaking of Pynchon's pre-1980 work, Cowart asserts that his postmodern quests, by contrast, "take place in a secular age that has lost the community of values that gave meaning to the quest and its literary treatment in the past" (*Thomas* 127-28). As such, Pynchon's questing characters "must search for a grail that is artificial, arbitrary, and perhaps wholly without relevance to the more terrible Waste Land to be redeemed in the modern age" (*Thomas* 128). In order to create a fiction that can encompass this pessimistic vision of modern reality, Pynchon's "myth derives much of its potency from a judicious lack of clarity in its presentation" (Cowart, *Thomas* 128). In other words, an important aspect of Pynchon's strategy in using old genres like the quest plot lies in forcing his readers to encounter his literary worlds which are full of "labyrinthine plots" and "deliberate obscurantism" in the "half-light of a studied ambiguity" (Cowart, *Thomas* 128).

Pynchon's desire to project a judiciously unclear narrative world is blended with his penchant for scrutinizing social orders, which he does with an eye toward areas of experience and meaning that are not immediately perceptible[26]. For example, Pynchon often creates characters who, as Molly Hite asserts, look for "the hidden structures of their experience that will reveal how events are connected, how

[26] As Molly Hite argues, Pynchon's narratives are "about order: about its presence or absence; about order as object of desire, dread, fantasy, or hallucination: about what order means, how it is apprehended, and what it entails" (4).

everything adds up, what it all means" (4). This, in tandem with Pynchon's penchant for ambiguity and obscurantism, gives his work a complexity that Robert E. Kohn argues "resists totalization" and is difficult to interpret (199). Kohn asserts that this Pynchonian "difficulty" is echoed in *Against the Day* when, in attempting to gauge people's responses to the Trystero mystery, Driblette claims that it is possible for one to invest one's energy investigating the matter and still "you could waste your life that way and never touch the truth" (Pynchon, *Against*, 80, qtd in Kohn, *Pynchon's Transition*, 199). The sense of futility this passage evokes is echoed in Pynchon's treatment of entropy as a plot device[27]. Although many other writers have used entropy for thematic and plotting purposes Pynchon, in Cowart's view, differs in that he is less interested in the running down of the world or the universe than in the running down of the civilization into which he was born. He has therefore tended to use entropy to thematize the progressive deterioration of the West (Cowart *Thomas Pynchon*, 2)[28]. Given that *Against the Day* is focused on "issues of time and space, and its narrative time overlaps with the emergence of Einstein's theories of relativity" (Duyfhuizen, par. 2), we might conclude that the themes of quest, travel, and dispersal are bound up with a certain kind of modernist, spatialized nonlinear temporality. The point here is that *Against the Day's* broad scope, nonlinear structure, revising of quest narratives, anti-

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[27] David Cowart describes the concept of entropy as "a corollary to the second law of thermodynamics" (*Thomas Pynchon* 2), which states that "systems that produce work by the transfer of thermal energy cannot function at perfect efficiency; thus the perpetual motion machine does not exist for the simple reason that all engines run down. Entropy is the measure of inefficiency in such systems: the less efficient the engine, the higher the entropy" (*Thomas* 2). Cowart further suggests that the "literary mind would probably take little notice of such matters were it not for the fact that the world and the universe of which it is a part are themselves 'systems' subject to entropy" (*Thomas* 2).

[28] Literary works that treat the subject of entropy include: H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Isaac Asimov's "The Last Question" (1956), George Alec Effinger's *What Entropy Means to Me* (1972), and Gustave Flaubert's uncompleted novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (Cowart, 2).

totalization stance, and entropic plot are part of a Pynchonian vision which, as Hite points out, "cannot be taken 'straight'" (4) and cannot be read successfully through the lens of "established conventions" (4). Thus, all of these elements in *Against the Day* illustrate Pynchon's desire to project an alternative mode of narrating history.

Pynchon`s desire to discuss and critique temporality and conventional notions of history is demonstrated through his characters' dialogues and monologues. Several of the less central characters meet at the theatre. In attendance are Khausch, a security chief, Professor Werfner, Nigel, and Lew Basnight the detective. They discuss world affairs, and the conversation drifts into a discussion of Jack the Ripper. In a comment reflecting on the case, and the list of suspects which was "long enough to populate a small city" (681), Werfner suggests that each of the theories put forth by all of the amateur detectives and speculators must somehow be correct, that is, until "the *next* fanatic steps forward to make his or her case" (682). Regarding all of the different theories related to the Ripper case, Werfner muses: "[h]undreds, by now thousands, of narratives, all equally valid—what can this mean?" (682). As the Ripper conversation continues, Nigel suggests that hundreds of equally valid narratives surrounding the Ripper issue may be chalked up to "multiple worlds" (682). This thought is taken up by Professor Renfrew, who ventures that Jack the Ripper may have operated in a kind of "momentary antechamber in space-time" (682). Furthermore, he reflects that the Ripper may have multiple presences and if this is the case "one might imagine a giant *railway-depot*, with thousands of gates disposed radially in all dimensions, leading to tracks of departure to all manner of alternative histories" (682). These comments on the plethora of competing Ripper theories symbolizes, I would argue, Pynchon's

contestation of narrative's ability to impart a singular truth. This idea seems to represent the manner in which Pynchon navigates what some critics call the new ontologies of modernity. If the latter signifies the notion that there is a vast multiplicity of simultaneously co-existing states of being which could be radically different qualitatively due to factors such as nationality, gender, race, sexual-orientation, socio-economic class, temperament, etc., within modern nation states and urban environments, then Pynchon's portrayal of the Ripper discussion takes this concept one step further by manifesting the notion that there may also be multiple historicities associated with specific historical figures. Pynchon's use of the term "alternative" here is telling, as it differentiates the possibility of multiple histories from the idea of a central or official version of history. In addition, Pynchon's acknowledgment of the possibility of multiple historical realities is linked to the structure of *Against the Day* with its vast array of characters and settings. This seems a furtherance of his strategy in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which, Maltby argues, is "designed to fracture the positivist logic which orders meaning into uniform, standardized
patterns . . . a logic, that is, which represses diversity of meaning" (146).

In his attempt to go against the grain of positivist logic and to advance work that presents a diversity of meanings, Pynchon develops a take on history that is complex and invites various readings. Kohn, for instance, argues that Pynchon erects a historical doubleness that can be misleading. Referring to William Logan's review, Kohn asserts that the "over-arching rule in *Against the Day* . . . is that 'Pynchon writes neither counterfactual history nor historical fiction'" (Logan 227, qtd in Kohn, *Pynchon Takes* 156). What he does is implant obscure historical anecdotes into the

novel that seem as though they may be fanciful historical fiction, but are in fact historically verifiable. For example, Pynchon's portrayal of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand's appearance at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago is an example that may seem counterfactual, Robert Kohn claims, because it appears in a paragraph that "suspiciously ends with the archduke perceiving his visit as a 'warm invitation to rewrite history'" (Kohn *Pynchon Takes* 156-57). Additional moments of seemingly questionable historical data in *Against the Day* include a hurricane in Galveston that kills six thousand people, the "description of which is cryptically followed by a reference to 'the frightful bomb', and finally, the 'rising dust-cloud' that the Campanile in Venice 'collapsed into' in 1902 is witnessed along with 'two skycraft slid[ing] away at angles'" (Kohn, *Pynchon Takes* 157). Kohn suggests that these historical anecdotes appear artificial, that is, as "almost-subliminal red herrings" (157), because they seem like artificial surrogates for the chaotic assassination that started World War I, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and the devastating collapse of the World Trade Centre Towers on 9/11 (157). Given that so many of the historical events in *Against the Day* portend crises that actually happened, readers are likely to be surprised, Kohn suggests, to learn that "the Archduke *did* attend the Exposition in 1893, that a hurricane *did* kill thousands of Galvestonians in 1900, and that the Campanile *did* collapse in 1902" (157). This echoes a type of contemporary narrative that Naomi Jacobs terms recombinant fiction. She claims this form of fiction mingles various styles and genres in order to underscore the hypothetical or tentative nature of its work, which helps the author "subvert the validity of his own text" (134)[29]. Pynchon

[29] Although Jacobs' insight is useful here for my interpretation of the counterfactual aspect of *Against*

manifests this tactic through a ludic treatment of obscure historical elements that seem fictional but are indeed historical. Hence, Pynchon teases readerly expectations in a way that conveys the sense that historical fact is not necessarily a phenomenon that is easily documented in one stable form of discourse.

Additionally, Pynchon furthers his questioning of official history by embedding in his text a series of authorial comments which amount to what we might call "micro histories". These seem to impart, at least to my mind, a sense of both the diversity of realities that should be remembered in historical records and paradoxically the sense that recording everything is impossible. Pynchon's use of "micro histories" precedes *Against the Day*. In fact, they can be found throughout his work, an example of which is "[t]he Courier's Tragedy" which appears in *The Crying of Lot 49*[30]. Pynchon's detailed description of "The Courier's Tragedy", essentially a play within a play, takes up a significant amount of the novel. Employing a convoluted plot, it parodies the Jacobean revenge play. According to Cowart, "[t]he plot is palpably absurd, yet not recognizably different from plots typical of the dramatic subgenre being spoofed, for Pynchon has in fact cannibalized all the most famous revenge plays to make *The Couriers Tragedy* more convincing as their epitome" (103). Like his sly positing of historical information that seems counterfactual, Pynchon's parody of the revenge tragedy is precise and well thought out (Cowart 104). This spoof of a historical literary

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the Day, Jacobs' focus on historical contemporary fiction that more or less eschews realism in favour of recombinant, or highly self-reflexive forms of historical fiction was not suited to my focus on midfiction. Thus, my engagement with Jacobs' fascinating research is minimal.

subgenre is part of Pynchon's long-standing tendency to poke and prod at literary historical conventions. In *Against the Day* this sense of alternative history is illustrated through the presentation of various obscure histories. An example of this occurs when the narrator discusses wealthy families in Venice in the thirteenth century. These families, the narrator explains,

> had been disqualified from ever sitting on the Great Council—and hence made ineligible for the Dogedom of Venice—by then –sitting Doge Pietro Gradenigo, in his infamous decree known as the *Serrata del Maggior Consiglio*. But not even Napoleon's abolition of the office of Doge five hundred years later had any effect on the claim to what, by now, generations of Sfinciuni, in a curious inertia of resentment, had come to regard as theirs by right. Meanwhile they devoted themselves to trade with the East. In the wake of the Polo's return to Venice, the Sfinciuno joined with the other upstart adventures, likewise relegated by Gradenigo's lockout, whose money was newer than that of the Case Vecchie but quite sufficient to finance a first expedition, and headed east to make their fortune. (247-48)

What I would point out here is the length and vividness with which Pynchon imparts this account of a rather obscure point of history and how this links to his penchant for deliberate obscurantism. Similar instances of this sort of obscure historical account occur at other points of the novel. An example is during one of the Colorado sections when Frank Traverse and Wren Provenance, an anthropologist, discuss a mysterious ancient people. This enigmatic tribe is thought to be associated with the Aztecs, whom

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[30] This episode is thought by some critics to be part of his tendency to "'work up' areas of knowledge to use in his fiction" (Cowart, *Thomas* 102). Nonetheless, "The Courier's Tragedy" probably represents, in Cowart's view, "both working up and an iceberg's tip of long-standing literary erudition" (Cowart, *Thomas* 102), since "[n]ot only does Pynchon know intimately the genre he parodies, he knows as well its scholarly problems, vocabulary, and methodology" (Cowart, *Thomas* 102).

Wren had researched. As Frank and Wren discuss this matter they speculate on whether or not these people were cannibals. Concerning the expert opinion on the matter, Wren states that even Harvard professors don't know (278). Wren had worked on this research project in Mexico for a year and according to her the mysterious people probably only lasted a short time in the specific locale she was studying but after that she claims that "nobody knows" (278). With this conversation Pynchon seems to suggest that there are "hidden" areas of human experience in the past that we have not been able to access, and which not even respected scholars are able to shed light on. Yet another example of an obscure historical sketch occurs when the Chums of Chance, riding in their air balloon, come across a mountain peak somewhere in the borderland between Europe and Asia. The characters speculate that the mountain was first thought to be Mount Kalish in Tibet. Darby suggests that this was the holiest spot for Hindus, but then adds that "I'm not sure if this one on the map is it. This one can also be seen at considerable distance, but not all the time" (437). Darby's statement here suggests the instability of epistemological systems like cartography. Moreover, like the other examples of obscure points of history which Pynchon includes in his novel, it suggests that the epistemology of historical narrative has limitations and cannot always be certain or authoritative.

In a similar vein, the manner in which Pynchon's characters discuss history suggests how certain perspectives are distorted. Pynchon hints at this idea in various ways, for example, when the spies Danilo and Cyprian meet. Regarding Cyprian, Danilo notes that he has a defective sense of history, which he rationalizes as "common among field operatives, given their need to be immersed in the moment" (828).

Therefore, Danilo concludes that "it was history—Time's pathology—that he must first address" (828). Danilo's comment conveys the idea that a lifestyle that is substantially present-oriented may lead to a skewed sense of history, that is, to an over-reliance on the present moment, without adequate regard for the past or future. Explicit comment on history, either by the narrator or by characters, is a common motif in *Against the Day*. One other example of this occurs when the narrative briefly outlines a battle between Serbians and Turks (at Kumanovo). The Turks are driven out and as they leave en masse, Pynchon describes the scene as set against a "landscape turned increasingly chaotic and murderous" and filled with "streams of refugees" (964). Regarding this forced exodus, Pynchon editorializes that it could be construed as a "fearful escape of the kind that in collective dreams, in legends, would be misremembered and reimagined into pilgrimage or crusade" and which might eventually transform from a "dark terror" into a "bright hope . . . the bright hope becoming a popular, perhaps someday national, delusion" (964). With this example of the manner in which a battle between Serbians and Turks gets remembered in a distorted way, Pynchon reflects on the nature of collective memory, reminding us that history is always vulnerable to being revised and framed in various ways to serve various interests. He asserts a similar idea in another episode of the novel, following Lew the detective, one of the characters associated with Colorado and with the Old West cowboy mythology. Reflecting on the type of Western badmen (desperadoes, gun fighters, and bank robbers) he had known in his younger days and how they have changed over the years, Lew observes that they have abandoned their wild and rugged ways for commercial pursuits. As he claims, these men were now "getting rich off of

real-estate deals only slightly more legit than the train robberies they used to depend on for revenue" (1041). Some of them were working for the film industry "as script consultants for the shadow-factories relentlessly turning those wild ancient days into harmless packages of flickering entertainment" (1041). This suggests that the past can be transformed and in a sense diluted, in this case through the entertainment industry. Moreover, the transformation of the Wild West subjectivity illustrates the manner in which the processes of commoditization can colonize the historical "real" and convert it into a more consumable product. All and all, *Against the Day* illustrates that the historical "real" can be distorted so as to avoid those elements of history that would delegitimize the values and identity of the dominant social group. On another level, Pynchon's engagement with arcane fragments of historicity exhibit his ambition to explore the outer possibilities of narrative, history, and knowledge and also serve to disrupt the concept of narrative as an authoritative bearer of knowledge.

Similar to Pynchon, Ondaatje, and Doctorow, Margaret Sweatman uses a dialogic form of narrative in *Fox* in order to destabilize commonly held conceptions of historiography. In an interview with Herb Wyile, Sweatman explains that Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism influenced her approach to writing *Fox*. For example, Sweatman indicates that Bakhtin's model of the "matrix as a marketplace of discourse and discord" (Wyile, *Speaking* 167) resonated with her desire to write about the Winnipeg general strike. Given that writing about the Winnipeg general strike would involve representing a variety of social forces, class interests, and ethnicities, Sweatman decided to reject linear or Aristotlean types of plot. Thus, she found that Bahktin's model freed her from what she calls "the terror of plot" and instead enabled

her to represent "an intersection of voices" (Wyile, *Speaking* 167). Moreover, Bakhtin's model helped Sweatman develop a style that was "impressionistic and oral" which included "different voicings . . . from various characters" (Wyile 173). This allowed her to "go right into those characters and inhabit them and then let them speak" (Wyile 173). Thus, Sweatman's adoption of Bakhtin's theory helped her to avoid Aristotlian linearity and plot structure in favour of a polyphonic text which encompasses a multiplicity of voices.

One key element of Sweatman's dialogic strategy is to have two opposing perspectives or ideologies co-existing within a single narrative segment or short chapter. This, I argue, helps to bring the mediated quality of the work to the foreground while diminishing the illusion of objectivity. An example of this tactic occurs in a scene which depicts a party Eleanor has thrown for her friends. This scene reveals the beginnings of Eleanor's dissatisfaction with her class's values and her inchoate class consciousness. We are given a clear sense of Eleanor's unease with some of her friends and their attitudes. For example, before joining the party Eleanor contemplates her social network and wishes she were sick so that she could avoid the party. She thinks of her friends as "glib" and in her agitated state of mind feels as though she'd "like to poison the whole bunch" (1). Eleanor's disgust with her peer group is paralleled in the tone of the third person narrative which treats the characters at the party, all young Anglos from Winnipeg's upper class, in a sarcastic manner that casts doubt on their sincerity and integrity. For example, the "the toboggan party-people" are described as toppling "about like puppies . . . yelping" to their "health" (2), which suggests a frivolous approach to life that could be thought of as questionable given the class

tensions at the time. Drinkwater is described as “beautifully knit” (2), which hints that he may be somewhat vain and fabricated. When Eleanor enters the party he is “telling a funny story”, which the narrator qualifies by stating “at least everyone’s laughing” (2), suggesting that there may be something disingenuous about him. Additionally, Mary is described as having a voice “clear and slippery” (2), and accurate “peripheral vision” (2), suggesting a mistrustful or slightly paranoid disposition. Melissa is likewise ruthlessly scrutinized. She is described as singing in a voice “pure and chill” (3), and the silence that proceeds her performance gives her the feeling that “she’s won them better” (3), suggesting a certain callous competitiveness on her part. Sweatman contrasts the subtly negative portrayal of the young elites, as somewhat self-involved and insincere, with a portrayal of servants, expressing the latter’s collective and inchoate revolutionary consciousness. She accomplishes this through momentary shifts of narrative voice that seem to express the workers’ consciousness. For example, during a scene depicting a party in Eleanor’s back yard, the narrator states that her father’s “Men have erected a gallows, no not a gallows at all but an ice slide for the toboggans” (3). On the one hand, the statement might be a commentary on the ruling class’s authority and a foreshadowing of the Citizen Committee of One Thousand’s determination to put down the strike. On the other hand, the statement “the Men have erected a gallows” might be considered a slip in the diegetic fabric which expresses the consciousness of the working-class servants. In this interpretation the statement expresses what we might think of as the repressed or unconscious desire of a subjugated class to rebel against the dominant class. Moreover, Sweatman’s decision to capitalize “Men”, which happens twice within the paragraph, suggests an attempt by

Sweatman to infuse the servant characters with agency and dignity. Given that nouns are only capitalized if they are a specific place or real historical figures, Sweatman's move could be interpreted not only as a co-optation of grammatical rules in order to give the specific servant characters agency but also to stress the notion of collectivities.

A similar textual event happens later on in a section depicting a socialist meeting in which historical figures, such as William Ivens and Fred Dixon, present public speeches at a church. In the midst of the socialist rhetoric espoused at the meeting — such as Dixon's declaration that "[j]ustice demands that money and mud shall not be more highly regarded than human life" (33) and Ivens's exhortation to "[r]oot out the capitalists and let the toilers take over the industries" (33) — Sweatman abruptly interjects the following sentence: "But the police know all about it: a band of Bolshevist spellbinders, a dangerous crowd of illiterate foreigners" (33). This sentence is not introduced or contextualized, and is directly followed by a return to the socialist rhetoric. The interjection seems to come from a perspective that is diametrically opposed to the ideology of the socialist meeting which dominates the section. Another similar example of this forcing of two opposing ideologies together comes in a section that weaves quotations from the Communist Manifesto into a segment that also adopts the voice of one of the members of the citizens committee. The latter is celebrating the Governor General's amendment of the immigration act which allows the authorities to deport non-Canadian born radicals. The quotations from the *Communist Manifesto* are broken up into poetic lines and italicized (Sweatman 170 – 71). Like the other examples I have outlined, this section represents a dominant perspective and at some point opens up space for another opposing perspective to emerge. If we read these

breaks in light of the post-structuralist theory that language always contains unstable binaries, then we can situate Sweatman's tactic here as not only manifesting the binary between opposed social classes but also as a self-conscious or metafictional reflection on the post-structuralist view of narrative. As such, these sudden breaks in the narrative which represent ideological binaries, on the one hand give voice to the paradoxical manner in which contrasting ideologies can co-exist within a modern industrial city like Winnipeg at the end of the First World War, and on the other hand, present a unique way of re-constituting how history can be represented within narrative.

Just as the other authors under consideration in my dissertation have utilized metafictional devices in order to destabilize the conventional sense of narrative, Sweatman too embraces these techniques, specifically through focusing on Eleanor's and MacDougal's ambivalent relationship to writing and reading, which, in a sense, parallels contemporary post-structuralist theories of language. The Barthian notion of writing as an unstable confluence of an array of social and historical references is self-consciously exemplified by Sweatman in her novel and may be interpreted as part of her overall strategy to create a dialogical text which lends voice to a variety of characters, while subverting the traditional historical novel[31]. Sweatman develops this strategy by showing how one's relationship to reading and writing may be complex, vexing even. For instance, MacDougal owns a bookstore and is an avid reader; however, Sweatman conveys his thoughts in a way that problematizes his relationship to books. Although he looks at his books "in amazement" and worships "their shapes [and], memorizes their titles and authors", he also considers them to be "full of false

promise" (45), suggesting MacDougal may be sceptical towards or disillusioned with published discourse. Moreover, although it is implied that MacDougal is an avid reader, once he "gets the gist, his interest flags, the books lie open, dusty in the dry wind" (45). Additionally, his office contains "books half-finished, abandoned" (47). Given MacDougal's position as an intellectual socialist leader, and the owner of a bookstore, it seems troubling that his relationship to books seems ambivalent and vexed.

Like MacDougal, Eleanor has a somewhat ambivalent and troubled relationship with books and her own writing. For example, soon after she moves into her own apartment she begins reading in earnest, and although she has access to "many impressive books" she "doesn't understand them" (91). When Eleanor reads she "skates over the letters, passing through quickly, lines forming and dissolving and gathering into patterns and she is losing and she is gaining, she's at the number zero, she's not at home" (91). This description expresses a sense of uncanny dislocation from the potential meanings of the texts she reads, suggesting the ephemeral quality of textual meaning. Hence, Eleanor's and MacDougal's manner of reading resonates with the post-structuralist perspective which views signifiers and signifieds as always existing in a constantly shifting relationship which destabilizes fixed meanings. If we accept this paradigm then it follows that it is impossible for the subject to be fully present in relation to writing. Commenting on this inherent problem with sign systems, Terry Eagleton asserts:

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[31] My summary of Barthes' concept of discourse is based on his article "The Death of the Author".

> it is an illusion for me to believe that I can ever be fully present to you in what I say or what I write, because to use signs at all entails that my meaning is always somehow dispersed, divided and never quite at one with itself. Not only my meaning, indeed, but *me*; since language is something I am made of, rather than merely a convenient tool I use, the whole idea that I am a stable, unified entity must also be a fiction. (*Literary* 112)

In other words, the process of communicating by way of writing and reading never allows one person to be fully present to another. Thus, insofar as Eleanor's and MacDougal's vexed relationships to the reading process manifest a kind post-structuralist linguistic instability, they also expose the mediated nature of writing.

To summarize, Doctorow, Ondaatje, Pynchon, and Sweatman all adopt various approaches and tactics—undecidability, shifting points of view, large cast collective narratives, the rendering of a parodic counterfactual/factual binary, and the manifestation of a post-structuralist influenced representation of the relationship between the self and writing—in order to explore the possibilities of fictional narrative outside the confines of conventional narrative form while also, more particularly, questioning and destabilizing ways of narrating historical information. Given these tactics, the novels can be read as palimpsests. That is, the manner in which they impart multiple voiced or dialogic narratives resounds with an intention to also impart multiple historical truths, a kind of tracing over traces which "by virtue of the materials used, allows for multiple realities to co-exist in the same vision" (Fischlin 63)[32]. This palimpsestic dimension is, as my chapter suggests, a significant aspect of all of the

[32] Here, I am quoting Fischlin's insight regarding Sweatman's *Fox*, but I also propose that it resonates with *Against the Day*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, and *Loon Lake*.

novels in my study; however it also co-exits with a robust realist dimension, which the following chapter will explore. The manner in which the novelists negotiate these two approaches enables their texts to make the politics of class more visible than might have otherwise been possible if they had held strictly to either a postmodernist or a realist aesthetic.

CHAPTER 2: SELF-REFLEXIVE REALISM AND REPRESENTATIONS OF CLASS STRUGGLE

In chapter one I argued that the class-oriented novels of Pynchon, Ondaatje, Doctorow, and Sweatman exhibit a certain postmodern scepticism towards historiography that manifests a marked discomfort with the kind of authority and weight that historiographical discourse had been accorded in the pre-1970s era. Since the 1970s much critical and artistic work has focused on subverting the authoritativeness of historiography while drawing attention to its ideological dimensions[33]. As such, much energy has been expended to illustrate that historiographical narrative is more unreliable than previously thought. Given the sizable amount of contemporary works that deconstruct historical discourse—texts that rely heavily on the presumed *unreliability* of "official histories"—it becomes unclear, as Katherine Cooper and Emma Short point out, whether these deconstructive texts should "be read as acts of enhancement, of challenge—or even of replacement" (14). With regards to the contemporary class novels under study in this project I would say that they both challenge *and* enhance, albeit in a limited and fragmentary way, the metanarrative of official history that they engage with. They do this through the midfictional dialectic. Having already explored the experimental side of the dialectic this chapter examines how the neo-proletarian novels may be read as enhancing history. More specifically, I will look at how the novelists use the realist dimension of midfiction in order to draw on specific moments from the historical record, as well as fabricated ones, and use them to dramatize the complex inter-connections between individuals and groups that

[33] Regarding the proliferation of revisionist historical fiction and historical fiction about previously neglected or marginalized histories, Herb Wyile claims that these works stress that "what is historically significant has been narrowly defined and ideologically overdetermined, and that there's much more to Canadian history than meets the European male eye. This revisionist approach is more than evident in contemporary Canadian historical novels" (*Speculative* 6).

make up the phenomenon of class struggle. Building on Lukac's notion of reification, I will first explore how a realist aesthetic can counter the critical tendency to downplay the cognitive or sympathy-building aspect of literature, a function that is crucial for any author concerned with class issues. I next explore research on realism that suggests it inheres a significant self-reflexive component and I reflect on how understanding realism in this manner can be augmented in today's critical milieu by recent scholarship on "practical realism". The latter refers to reflexive realist modalities that are aware of the relationships between investigative discourse-constructors and their objects of study, as well as their potential audiences. Ultimately, I will argue that a kind of reflexive realism embedded in a midfictional aesthetic allows access to the inner thoughts of characters and to their complex relationships, and as such illustrates "classed" subjectivities and the antagonisms that can arise from a class divided society.

By cognition I am referring to the ability of a text to impart some profound understanding of the life-world of a given social milieu or character type, that is, to create an understanding or sympathy within the reader for another person through literary modes. According to Frederic Jameson this cognitive potential of literature is a crucial aspect of realism. Realism's ability to instil cognition is, Jameson argues, bound up with the "ideal of realism" which presupposes a form of

> aesthetic experience which yet lays claim to a binding relationship to the real itself, that is to say, to those realms of knowledge and praxis which had traditionally been differentiated from the realm of the aesthetic, with its disinterested judgements and its constitution as sheer appearance. (*Aesthetics and Politics* 198)

As I will discuss more fully later, this idea of realism as manifesting "the real itself" is amenable to discussions of class issues, especially literary treatments of working-class and poverty-stricken elements of society. However, the idea that literature can convey a sense of cognition is one that has not always been readily accepted. Echoing a common perception in literary circles since the mid-twentieth century Scholes avers that "[b]oth the Formalist and New Critical schools of criticism tend to deny literary texts any cognitive quality" (110). For the model of communication used by schools of criticism that Scholes critiques in *Towards a Semiotics of Literature*, literary systems are effectively denied "any context beyond their own verbal system or other texts that share that system" (110). Scholes' intention is to break with this anti-cognition tradition (110) and to argue instead that "much of literary competence is based upon our ability to connect the worlds of fiction and experience" (117). The kind of experiential literary competence Scholes describes here resonates with Levine's idea that realist description can amuse and enlarge "our sympathies and knowledge" (*Realistic Imagination* 14). Moreover, Scholes argues that readers can access much of the content of fiction through analogues which they find in their own experience. As he explains:

> Many fictions, of course, insist that their context is not fictional at all, that they speak directly to us of the things around us. Others insist that their context is of imagination all compact, that in their fictional worlds is no contamination from our own. Both, of course, are wrong. Our world, our life, the knowledge we have of what our senses have allowed us to perceive, is with us always, and we know analogues in our own experience for the fairest damsels, the cruellest ogres, and the bravest heroes of all fairyland. Much of literary competence is based upon our ability to connect the worlds of fiction

> and experience. And much of our literature quite rightly insists upon that very connection. (117)

Scholes' point has implications for any writer who sets out to convey a political message or contest normative values. To what degree this is so may be appreciated by comparing Scholes' axiom with some theories that deny cognition in literature.

As Scholes has pointed out, it was especially the New Critical School that marginalized reading practices sympathetic to the cognitive qualities of literature[34]. This position is asserted in the essay "The Intentional Fallacy" by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, which argues that the intentions and background, or personality, of an author, including all of the texts she or he may have assimilated, are not pertinent to critical assessments of literature. With this principle Wimsatt and Beardsley set out to eliminate as much unprovable speculative interpretation as possible while promoting a rigorous focus on the structures of literary works and textual details. I have a certain amount of sympathy with this methodology, but when scrutinized, the principles upheld in this New Critical text strike me as inadequate to contemporary understandings of literature, especially as they relate to representations of class subjectivities. Wimsatt and Beardsley assert that the only way to decipher an author's intention regarding a given text is solely through a thorough analysis of said text. If the author is successful then "the poem itself shows what he was trying to do", and if the author fails then "the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go

[34] New Criticism can be considered a movement "beginning after World War I with the critical work of modern poets and critics, especially T. S. Eliot, Richards, and somewhat later Ransom, culminating some 30 years later in the work of explicitly academic critics, such as Wellek, Wimsatt, and Brooks" (Searle 692).

outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem" (1375). Going outside of the poem, however, is counter to New Critical methodology, for this opens the door to potentially less rigorous analysis and reduces the focus on the text itself. Wimsatt's and Beardsley's logic is understandable; however, as others have argued, it problematically reduces the possibility of introducing any broader social or political considerations that may be pertinent to understanding the text and its relation to its cultural-historical context. From Beardsley's and Wimsatt's perspective, dwelling on what the author may have intended is much less valuable than considering the text as "public property". As they explain:

> The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology or morals. (1376)

Moreover, Beardsley and Wimsatt prefer not to "make the poet (outside the poem) an authority" (1376). Hence, Beardsley and Wimsatt wish to separate the poem from the intentions of the author, or, in other words, they wish to seal off the poem from any influence the author, or anyone investigating the author and his/her context, may have on the work after it has been published. This separating process is not very thoroughly theorized by Beardsley and Wimsatt, and seems too arbitrary by today's scholarly

standards[35]. For the purposes of my argument I want to consider the process of separation that Beardsley and Wimsatt advocate in the context of the Marxian term reification. To paraphrase a well-known concept, this refers to the tendency for modern science to lose sight of the social totality, and especially the material base which is the cause of the phenomenon objectified and studied. In other words, science finds that "the world lying beyond its confines, and in particular the material base which is its task to understand . . . lies, methodically and in principle, *beyond its grasp*" (Lukács, *History* 104). The obstruction to the totality of knowledge makes it impossible to comprehend the present time. In other words, the present becomes "impenetrable" and "inapprehensible as a historical moment" (Beaumont 38). If we examine Wimsatt and Beardsley's text carefully it is evident that their interpretative approach bears a resemblance to the phenomenon of reification. For example, concerning the nature of poetry Wimsatt and Beardsley claim that there

> is a gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem, but can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem. For all the objects of our manifold experience, especially for the intellectual objects, for every unity, there is an action of the mind which cuts off roots, melts away context—or indeed we should never have objects or ideas or anything to talk about. (1382)

[35] George Dickie and W. Kent William, for example, suggest that in both "The Intentional Fallacy" and the dictionary entry that Wimsatt and Beardsley published on the intentional fallacy, "they claim the meaning of the poem is to be discovered through the study of the 'semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionairies'" and moreover that "the distinction that is presupposed here and the claim about how the meaning of a work is determined is asserted and not argued for…the anti-intentionalist position is stated but not defended" (234).

Although Beardsley and Wimsatt are discussing the nature of the creative poetic act, they also seem to be formulating, roughly, a process of separation which is similar to Lukács's concept of reification. More specifically, their assumption that the creative process involves a melting away of context (of the experience that poetry draws upon) parallels the manner in which the present is separated from a historical continuum in the Marxian concept of reification. It is important to point out how this informs their method of interpreting literature, and how it seems to eschew any serious consideration of reflexivity about what its implications for a variety of interpreting practices and concerns may be[36].

Although many politically minded writers and critics have contested the New Critical and formalist perspectives due to their downplaying of social-historical considerations, this doesn't necessarily mean that politically minded writers and critics have reverted to social realism. Rather, much literary theory, especially criticism of the late twentieth century, has challenged the effectiveness and political validity of realism. Penny Boumelha in "Penny Boumelha on Realism and Fiction" reviews some of the major critiques of the realist text, from a feminist standpoint as well as others. According to Boumelha, feminism's necessary aim is the "unmaking and remaking of knowledges, the refusal of singular perspective in the name of a situated view" (319). It

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[36] The tendency for New Critical, formalist, and structuralist methods to stress aesthetic and psychological aspects of a literary work and downplay historical or social considerations is taken up by Zamora in *The Usable Past:The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*. She underlines how this tendency has fed into the myth of America, which she defines as a "confrontation of the American individual, the pure American self divorced from specific social circumstances, with the promise offered by the idea of America" (18). This ideal, she argues, holds out the promises that in history-less America an individual will be able "to achieve complete self-definition" (18). Moreover, this myth also constructs a belief system that says "that individuals come before society, that they exist in some meaningful sense prior to, apart from, societies in which they happen to find themselves" (Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood, The New Feminist Criticism", 1985: pp 71. qtd. in Zamora 18)

follows, therefore, that a feminist standpoint would take issue with the realist text, especially the nineteenth century realist novel, which has generally been the target of most of the criticism levelled at realistic fiction. Boumelha claims that realist literature of this period has been gathered under the term "classic realism", which, as she says, has "gained considerable currency" and has proven "particularly influential in discussions of nineteenth-century texts" (320). For proponents of this theory, Boumelha claims, "the idea of 'classic realism' is a critical tool with which to expose the bourgeois and humanistic epistemological bases of the 'great tradition' on which the most widely practised understandings of written narrative have long been predicated" (320). Rather than addressing in a descriptive way the formal characteristics of realist texts, Boumelha claims that the 'classic realism' argument "has aimed to show the political content built into their narrative tactics" (320). Hence, this position argues that one of the main tactics of the classic realist text is "a form of closure" which is not only formal but also "ideological" (320). This tactic continually produces the reader and addresses him or her "as a unified individual human subject, through such means as the convergence at a single and uniform ideological position a set of hierarchized discourses of which one is always a controlling 'truth-voice'" (320).

Leo Bersani advances a similar critique of realism; however, his psychoanalytic perspective is mainly concerned with how fiction (mostly with nineteenth-century fiction) represents human psychology and whether or not its depictions present subjectivity accurately. His reservation about realist fiction is that it tends to posit a

sense of personality that is overly coherent and intelligible. For instance, Bersani claims that

> The richly detailed textures of characterization in realistic fiction seldom subvert the coherent wholeness of personality—or if they do, criticism has to deal with what we call an 'interesting' aesthetic failure. Psychological complexity is tolerated as long as it doesn't threaten an ideology of the self as a fundamentally intelligible structure unaffected by a history of fragmented, discontinuous desires. (242-43)

Part of what is at stake for Bersani is that realist literature, what he calls "[t]he literary myth of a rigidly ordered self" (243), is shown to have the "coherent, hierarchal wholeness suitable to a social system of sharply distinct ranks" (243). Therefore, it projects an image of human psychology that he construes as conservative in that it contributes "to a pervasive cultural ideology of the self which serves the established order" (243). This conservative dimension of realist literature corresponds with classical psychology and together these forces, Bersani argues, "vindicate authoritarian rule partly by [their] dismal view of a human nature in dire need of discipline" (243). Bersani also argues that from a structural point of view, realism (influenced by classic psychology) "vindicates authoritarianism by its images of a self whose very irrationality is part of its coherence—a coherence which lends itself ideally to psychological and social classifications (and control)" (243). As such, Bersani argues that the depiction of human psychology in realism is conveyed as overly stable, which makes nineteenth-century realist characters conservative. Bersani cites the nineteenth-century realist authors' "reluctance to take certain psychological risks with character"

as a reason for "these novelists' moral and social pessimism" (245). Moreover, "it is not just the nature of nineteenth-century society which defeats the realistic hero", but his defeat is "also the result of his imprisonment within a psychology which his creator has adopted from the society being contested, a psychology of the coherently structured and significantly expressive self" (245). For instance, one of the major reasons for this imprisonment is the propensity of realism to suppress desire, which Bersani claims is "a threat to the form of realistic fiction" (250). Given that desire has the power to "subvert social order" (250), Bersani argues that the nineteenth-century novel with its tendency to repress desire "is haunted by the possibility of these subversive moments, and it suppresses them with a brutality both shocking and eminently logical" (250). Bersani elaborates this point in relation to Balzac, stating, "the fear of desire in Balzac can be discussed as a fear of psychological fragmentation" (254). In Bersani's view, Balzac's fear of fragmentation is what leads him to a kind of essentialist psychology which allows Balzac to "present characters in terms of a fixed, intelligible, and organizing passion" (254). Bersani posits desire then as a force that stimulates Balzac's writing but that is immediately repressed: "the rigid structure of a Balzac narrative is both menaced and energized by desires which may destroy characters, but which the narrative manages to contain at least formally" (254). Bersani's critique essentially argues that realism tries to weave disparate psychological elements into a narrative structure and in so doing suppresses the full manifestations of desire. Bersani's theory sheds light on the motivation for the innovations of modernist and postmodernist narrative forms, which seek to avoid constructing narratives that present a picture of human psychology that may be too coherent and intelligible. If we

accept Bersani's and Boumelha's argument that fragmentariness, incoherence, and lack of closure are necessary to create fiction that is representative of modern conceptions of psychology and subjectivity, the question remains whether or not these tactics rule out realism or allow for a collaboration with it.

Thus, focusing on the reflexive aspect of realism may be amenable to interpretations of literature that might see certain kinds of realistic modalities as being compatible with more experimental and fragmentary forms. Understanding this will enable the articulation of a contemporary realism that inheres a kind of reflexivity that frees the class-narrative authors to treat their subject matter in a self-conscious manner. As a starting point for examining scholarly opinion on realism in the contemporary era a useful working definition can be found in Mary Francis Slattery's article "What is Literary Realism?". In this article Slattery claims that realism gives an illusion of correspondence with reality, but she points out, this is "in its limited aspects" (55). In other words, realism's representation is not of some "unlimited, ultimate reality" but rather, it represents the "fragmented, flawed world of quotidian experience" (55). Thinking of realism in terms of *illusion* suggests that the realist writer never really attempts a one-to-one correspondence with reality. Thus, it can reasonably be articulated that realism always functions with an awareness of itself as generating a certain degree of illusion, and this includes at least a small amount of self-reflexivity. George Lewis Levine makes a similar point. He argues that for Victorian realists there was no such thing as a "simple faith between word and thing" (*The Realistic Imagination* 12). Likewise, these writers viewed language's communicative capabilities as encompassing more than the concrete reality depicted, and as such they

tried to "embrace the reality that stretched beyond the reach of language" (Levine 12). Slattery also claims that realism is constituted by "[n]ot only the qualitative limitations of the mundane and unheroic or of the homespun," but it is also embodied in a "singleness of focus upon the small or the unnoticeable" (55). Given realistic writers' proclivity for the nonheroic and simple, as well as their impulse to probe beyond the material worlds they depict, it is not surprising that working-class writers and sympathizers have adopted realistic modes. As Levine notes, realism's emergence in the nineteenth century marked a kind of democratizing of literary experience. That is, realism gave value to "the ordinary" which hitherto had been "ascribed almost exclusively to the experience of a select few" (6). Moreover, what is often attributed to postmodernism—the collapsing of the distinction between "low" and "high" forms of art—was manifested in nineteenth century realism[37]. Slattery articulates realism as a dialectical relation between how we perceive perfection and imperfection, as the following quote explains:

> We all feel at home with reality. In the course of a day, although one sees, perhaps, a sunrise so awesome and all-pervading that it seems unreal, one then has breakfast, reads the morning paper, wears the same old tweed suit, starts the motor in the car, goes to work in the familiar stream of traffic, walks through the swinging door, suddenly sees a girl who is so beautiful that it seems she could not be real, gets on the same old elevator, sits down at the same oppressive desk. Two kinds of reality are mentioned here: perfection absolute, too much to believe, and imperfection. Realism in literature makes choice in reference, to imperfection. And its occurrences are valued, experienced as aesthetic. (55)

[37] Levine claims that in spite of this "traces of 'low mimetic' tradition remain visible" (6) both in

Although Slattery's model seems to focus on just the element of imperfection in social reality that would be grist for the writer`s mill, not everyone agrees. Other critics conceptualize realism as manifesting not only the mundane but also the sublime. Frank R. Ankersmit, for example, frames realism in terms of being "the real" and therefore claims that it tends to present itself in "its sublime manifestation" (65). Ankersmit's sense of the sublime stresses an overwhelming feeling of terribleness (65). In Ankersmit's view, there is never anything enjoyable or comforting about the sublime, because it "always confronts us with a reality that does not fit our categories for appropriating the world" (65). The sublime and reality will, therefore, always be experienced by us as "alien, threatening, and beyond our grasp" (65). Hence, Ankersmit claims that when realist novelists since the nineteenth century took a keen interest in the sordid and pathological

> this was not because they had a morbid fascination with the less redeeming aspects of human existence, nor was it due, finally, to a pessimistic view of human life. Nor did this interest in the base and sordid aspects of human existence stem solely from the novelists' desire to introduce a mixture of styles; above all, they were motivated by a desire to show how life displays itself through the prism of the sublime. (65)

This formulation has something in common with what Slattery emphasizes when she asks: "[w]hy do we not find beautiful things delightful in poor attempts at literature, when we find them so in reality?" (56). Slattery answers this question by claiming that representation's response is "not a response to a reality referred to but to reference itself and not to reference per se but to the effectual aptness of its occurrence in artistic

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nineteenth and twentieth century incarnations of realism.

form" (56). Slattery then seems to be suggesting that aside from depicting material realities, realism also manifests a self-reflexive quality. To summarize, Ankersmit and Slattery view realism as containing a sense of the sublime which inheres subtle self-reflexivity.

Although in his considerations of realism Ankersmit does not focus explicitly on working-class issues, he acknowledges that realism's tendency to embrace the lowly, sordid, and downtrodden has been salutary for democracy. For example, Ankersmit claims that realist texts, with their depictions of the simple and rough existences of their "Brutal protagonists", effectively enabled middle-class cognition of individuals from the lower-class, and therefore the realist novel can be thought to have contributed enormously "to the psychologization of twentieth-century man and to his readiness to embrace a democratic political order based on the assumption that all people are equal" (66). Reasoning that if "[t]he same dark psychological forces operate in all of us, whether we are descendents of illustrious, centuries old lineages or the progeny of simple, working-class families", then "[h]istorically, the nineteenth-century realist novel has been a leading moral educator of mankind in the West, and for this it deserves praise" (66)[38]. In light of the vast amount of criticism published in the past thirty to forty years from feminist, post-modernist, and post-structuralist standpoints that has been critical of realism, Ankersmit`s conclusion seems perhaps unduly optimistic and oddly unproblematic (his article was published in 1999). However, his

[38] This point about realism's ability to bolster democracy has significance for writers aligned with socialist values. Orthodox Marxism views democracy as vital for the working class in its struggle against the capitalists for its liberation (Lenin, *The State and Revolution* 89). However, for other kinds of leftism, such as syndicalism and anarchism, democracy would be moot as these schools of thought view the state as unchangeable and oppressive (Hunter 251-52).

emphasis on the democratic and egalitarian potential of realist narrative is important to bear in mind when considering class-oriented fiction with regards to its intentions and how it has been received. The postmodern neo-proletarian novels I will discuss later in this chapter, for example, contain an aesthetic effused with democratic and egalitarian values and this is embodied in how they impute equal weight to characters from both the lower and upper classes.

Nancy Armstrong's analysis of Victorian realism and the modernist rejection of it provides further support to the notion that realism contains a subtle self-reflexivity. Like Slatterly and Ankersmit, Armstrong suggests that realism should not be considered as representing reality in a mirror, one-to-one fashion. Armstrong claims that nineteenth century realist novelists were influenced by visual arts and a sense of pictorialism. For example, critics of Victorian literature often acknowledge that the nineteenth century novel's use of "painterly technique, perspective, detail, spectacle" served to create, expand, and update the worldview of Victorian readers (Armstrong 37)[39]. This relationship between literature and visual arts expanded into photography as well and a reciprocal relation between the two mediums developed whereby fiction "called photographic images into being as it repeatedly referred to them, and photography provid[ed] image after image to authenticate those same literary techniques" (39). Furthermore, Armstrong's understanding of literary realism underscores the element of mediation involved in mimetic representation, which involves recording "the interaction between the individual and his or her social-

[39] The influence that visual arts had on nineteenth century realism was, as Nancy Armstrong explains, "the culmination of a tradition that was part and parcel of the modernization process itself" (37).

historical milieu without significantly modifying either one" (40). Realism's faithfulness to the social-historical milieu is lauded by Marxists such as Lukács, as it enables a kind of literature alert to the historical, or materialist, make-up of class society[40]. However, realism is nevertheless a mediation and, as such, the process of mediation must also be grasped[41]. Therefore, as Armstrong suggests, the intensity of certain moments in fiction are a function of mediation, that is, "the obtrusive and pervasive substitution of visual forms of objectification for things and people themselves" (40). This process of substitution was a key factor in the modernist rejection of realism. This rejection is encapsulated in Virginia Woolf's complaint that realism "not only turned subjects into objects, but also abandoned those objects and took their images as adequate semiotic substitutions" (Armstrong 49). However, Armstrong also believes that since Woolf's time it has become "too easy to primitivize the Victorians simply because of what appears to be an inordinate concern with objects, or what is thought to be their fetishism" (49). Hence, Armstrong's stance bears a resemblance to Wilde's midfiction concept which is to say that, like Wilde, Armstrong does not reject realism outright but rather acknowledges the merits of realist fiction while understanding that the complex processes of mediation involved with representation must also be addressed.

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[40] Summarizing Lukacs' view of effective narrative, that is, the "cathartic immersion and surrender of the reader to the fictional momentum", Lunn claims that the writer must be able to "create a fully believable 'illusion' of life, to make this created 'world' emerge as the reflection of life in its total motion" (119).

[41] Ermarth argues, for example, that the premise of realism is to foster a "language of mediation that maintains tension between inside and outside, between surface and depth, between public and private" (*Realism and Consensus* 47).

The reflexive quality of realism corresponds with how some key critics think about social class and its literary representation. Most critics agree that understanding realist class-narratives as simple mimetic documentation is inadequate, especially in light of post-structuralist and post-modernist literary theory. Peter Hitchcock, for example, suggests that the intentional theory of representation, as espoused by Wimsatt and Beardsley, remains pertinent to working-class fiction. This is because, as Hitchcock points out, realist class-narratives do not own their "meanings, and however much consciousness informs working-class intent . . . the result is not an unmediated representation of the verifiably social nature of its Being" (22). Additionally, theories of representation and representation's profusions, Hitchcock asserts, are likely to thwart "those who project a unified or undifferentiated working-class subjectivity" (22). However, this is not necessarily undesirable in Hitchcock's view, if we keep in mind that "Marx's conception of class is based on its mutability" (22). Moreover, Hitchcock maintains that a mutable kind of class representation would not "disable working-class representation dependent on mimesis since presumably change will also be "'reflected'" at some point" (22). The main problem Hitchcock sees with regards to the representation of class has to do, paradoxically, with materialism's concern with the constructedness of class and of its meanings. In particular, when class is conceptualized as a given socioeconomic category, this givenness, he argues, "begins to dissolve in the complex modes of symbolic practice that give to its formation identifiable meaning" (22). Here we can see that Hitchcock's analysis accords with a post-structuralist-informed understanding of discourse, in that it is constituted of an unstable nature and is unable to embody stable meanings over time. Pynchon,

Ondaatje, Sweatman, and Doctorow manage to write meaningfully about social class in a non-monolithic manner by fusing realism with more experimental tactics. Moreover, it's worth noting here how this midfictional approach seems amenable to tackling the subject of class, especially in a post-structuralist dominated literary climate.

As a starting point for a discussion of realism in the neo-proletarian novels it will be useful to bear in mind the fact that although contemporary novelists make use of various devices to question the place of historiography and historical consciousness in a postmodern era, they also, as Herb Wyile argues, "exploit realist conventions to cultivate an acquaintance with that historical arena in the first place" (*Speculative* 253)[42]. Moreover, I think it will be beneficial to think of the way in which postmodern class-narratives employ realism in light of some repurposed theories of the relevance and appropriateness of historiographic realism today. Oldham Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob offer a prescription for the use of realism that could harmonize with the postmodernist perspective. Oldham Appleby et al. view the postmodernist approach to history as intentionally self-subverting for the purpose of attacking "the certainties and absolutes that provided the foundation for positivism and for the human sciences that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century" (210)[43]. They also summarize postmodernism as decentring the subject, which is done in order to question it's

[42] Although Wyile discusses Canadian novelists in particular, I would argue that the same idea can be applied to American contemporary writers such as Pynchon and Doctorow.

[43] They trace this proclivity to Nietzsche and Heidegger who, they assert, attacked historicism, proposing that history does not unfold in a linear manner nor reveal truth but rather "moved through an arbitrary set of crises, disjunctions, and disruptions" and thus, according to this logic "Nothing necessarily followed from what came before, so causation should be pitched out along with human agency and social structuring" (211).

"primacy as a location for making judgments and seeking truth" (212)[44]. In reaction to postmodernism's deconstructive stance towards historiography Oldham Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob propose a revised critical method for assessing and utilizing realism which they term practical realism. One of the key elements of practical realism is the presumption that meanings of words don't exist solely in the mind nor do they "lock on to objects of the external world and fix reality for all time" (247). Rather, practical realism views the development of linguistic conventions as arising from "human beings possessed of imagination and understanding" who "use language to respond to things outside of their minds" (247). Given this understanding of linguistic conventions Oldham Appleby et al. propose a model of language that acknowledges the necessity of fluidity in linguistic constructions. This modified mode of realism is insistent on connecting words to things through language in an attempt to assert "knowability experienced by human agents able to use language" (251), which permits "historians to aim language at things outside themselves" (251). Another key element of this historiographic methodology includes a revised version of objectivity, one which is, as Oldham Appleby et al. claim, less ambitious than previous articulations and which reduces "the plaster of grand expectations so that we can see once more the beams and joints of modest inquiries about what actually happened and what it meant to those who experienced it" (254). Influenced by contemporary attitudes regarding subjectivity and linguistics, the new practitioners of realism Oldham Appleby at al. call for "now must think more deeply about the nature of the relationship between a curious,

[44] Commenting on the more extreme elements in postmodernism these authors claim that the latter deny "that story or narrative is one of the major ways in which human intelligence ascribes meaning to life.

imaginative, culturally shaped investigator and the passive objects under investigation" (260). As I have argued in the first chapter of this thesis the neo-proletarian novels go to great lengths to adopt metafictional and experimental tactics to challenge the authoritativeness of "official histories" in part to mitigate objectivity while reflecting self-consciousness about mediation. They also maintain an interest in realistically presenting history; however, they do so in a manner that exhibits fluidity and fragmentariness and as such manifest an impulse to avoid seeming authoritative on the subject. Hence, their approach to historical content is episodic and dialogic, yet they nevertheless deploy these forms to embody class and to show class antagonism.

The fragmented way in which history is presented in the neo-proletarian novels manifests the kind of objectivity and practical realism that Oldham Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob propose. As I will explain, the neo-proletarian novels embrace historical content, but they tend to pickup on particular events, such as the Winnipeg and Seattle General strikes, the Colorado labour battles, the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct, and the Chicago World's Fair, and embed them in narratives that are significantly fragmentary rather than panoramic and sweeping. Thus, they seem to embody the spirit of modest investigation that Oldham Appleby promotes and affirm an approach to history that does not attempt to be authoritative and all-encompassing about the past. Fused with this approach is the employment of realist modalities which are used in conventional ways to express class struggle, and together these approaches embody a

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For them, the entire historiographical tradition simply fosters 'a consciousness that is never able to arrive at criticism" (233).

midfictional aesthetic which enables the narratives to politicize class while remaining current in terms of narrative theory.

Doctorow's *Loon Lake* offers some prime examples of this use of reflexive and fragmentary realism. Much like Dos Passos's *U.S.A. Trilogy*, *Loon Lake* features the "juxtaposition of incidents from the lives of seemingly unrelated characters" (Tokarcyzk 117). This has the effect, Tokarcyzk argues, of prompting readers to "ponder the collective experience of the working-class rather than the individual personalities of bourgeois characters" (Tokarcyzk 117). Doctorow achieves this through his depiction of characters from both the lower and upper classes. Specifically, I will argue that a class struggle dynamic is expressed in *Loon Lake* through events revolving around a mining accident and the general strike in Seattle. A short section of the novel describes the aftermath of an accident that happens in Ludlow, Colorado, which is where one of the main characters, Warren Penfield, grew up and lived with his parents. The entry to a nearby mine collapses and as the scene begins we are presented with a rescue crew digging away the debris. Some of the miners have been killed in the accident and are being removed. The description of the dead bodies is rendered with vivid figurative language. For example, the corpses are described as being "so impregnated by coal dust they looked like ancient archaeological finds of considerable significance" (33). An explosion has caused the gruesome dismemberment of a number of unfortunate miners; some of the corpses had "been blown to pieces and were assembled on the cold ground by thoughtful colleagues who matched the torn halves of pants legs or recognized what head went with what trunk" (33). Warren Penfield, here a young boy, watches as the body parts are assembled and

takes note of "the darkening stains around the bodies as blood blacker than coalwater" (33). Penfield is so affected by what he experiences that he sneaks into the railroad car which has been set up by company officers to deal with the families of deceased and injured miners. Angered by the callously efficient manner in which the company deals with the grieving family members, Penfield makes his way to the man in charge and proceeds to spit in his face. He is swiftly ejected from the car and falls onto the gravelled ground. As he hits the ground his knee "was embedded with bits of stone as the miners had been peppered with coal fragments, so he understood that feeling" (34). Later on the sensitive Penfield would sit "with his eyes closed in the night and his hands over his ears" holding his breath "as long as he could" (34) in order to feel what the miners must have felt like buried in the tunnel. Penfield's act of empathy suggests he has a sense of working-class solidarity, and moreover, his strong empathy for the suffering families and anger towards the company symbolizes an affective state common to oppressed workers who have to endure workplace accidents and the class antagonism that springs from such difficult scenarios.

The issue of class antagonism is further illustrated in the way the company deals with the mining disaster. This is reflected in the railroad car that is set up to enable company officers and clerks to deal with the rescue and to process the family members of victims. It is described as a "self-sufficient unit with bedrooms kitchen small library and a row of partners' desks" (34). Doctorow adds that the car is a property like the mine and like the miners of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, seemingly wanting to underline the corporate nature of this operation. Wearing "gartered shirt sleeves" (34) the company officers sit at desks "making settlements

pushing waivers across their desks proffering pens matching the tally sheets to the employment records and in general dealing so efficiently with the disaster that the mine would be back in action within the week" (34). In spite of the efficiency and order the company imposes on the situation raw human emotions break through and disrupt the calm flow of the process, in the form of an "occasional embittered woman who would come in screaming and tearing her hair and cursing them in her own language" (34). These disruptions were dealt with swiftly by security. As the narrator states, the officers would alert a guard and "the troublesome woman would be removed" (34). The callously efficient manner in which the company deals with the mining disaster symbolizes the kind of repression capitalist hegemony can impose on members of the working class. This idea is amplified by the fact that the company officer in charge of dealing with the aftermath of the disaster is a young F.W. Bennett who at this point in the novel is working for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company as Vice-President for Engineering. Given that Bennett becomes a major character in the story, and a representation of the wealthy elite class, illustrates how the depiction of the mining accident and its aftermath embodies class antagonism.

Loon Lake deals with a similar instance of class struggle in its depiction of the 1919 Seattle general strike, as experienced by Warren Penfield. Although the chapter contains much detailed imagery, a hallmark of realist texts, it also, at times, shifts into a modernistic style. For example, a three page passage (222-25) consists of a long sentence which utilizes no subordinating conjunctions, reminiscent of the style of Gertrude Stein or William Faulkner. However, rather than represent a single character's point of view, the passage expresses a collective action.

> Everyone is out the printers and milk-wagons drivers butchers and laundry workers hotel porters store clerks and seamstresses newsboys and electricians and bakers and cooks steam fitters and barbers all under the management of the central labor council and it is a very well organized show Warren stands in the streets some trucks are running with signs under the authority of the strike committee and the milk gets to the babies and lights stay on in the hospitals and the linen is picked up and the food cold storage continues to hum and the water from the waterworks and the garbage trucks exempt by the strike committee continue to pick up the wet garbage but not the ashes. (Doctorow 222)

I would point out that when Doctorow is enumerating the different kinds of workers there are no commas, suggesting a feeling of camaraderie among the strikers. The long sentence also depicts a sense of mutual aid which stresses the solidarity of the workers. This sequence, although meant to be a representation of Warren's consciousness, conveying something of his naive idealism, is also tempered with an anti-leftist perspective vis-à-vis his landlady, a minor character in the novel who only appears in this brief chapter. Through Warren and the landlady Doctorow conveys a sense of the competing ideologies driving the class struggle at the heart of the strike. For example, Warren espouses leftist ideological ideas when he claims that if "you take away man's fear" it is "surprising how decent they could be" (224), adding that if "you don't make them climb over each other for their sustenance" and "give them their dignity and the right to run their lives you release the genius of the race in the forms of art and love and Christian brotherhood" (224). In contrast to Warren's idealistic rhetoric the landlady says "the Bolsheviks are . . . a plague like the flu . . . they ought to be taken out and shot" (224). Additionally, in response to Warren's rhapsodizing on the

possibilities of a socialist future, she states: “Oh Mr. Penfield you’re a good and gentle man but I’m afraid you don’t know the ways of the world” (224). Although the chapter represents the Seattle strike and considers it in detail it does not seem to favour one side or the other, but rather seems to maintain a politically ambivalent position. However, the very fact that Doctorow chooses to make the Seattle general strike a key moment in his novel illustrates his desire to revive a usable part of the past in order to focus on class struggle. Additionally, the fact that he develops this chapter using both mimetic and experimental devices illustrates Doctorow’s midfiction aesthetic.

In a similar way Pynchon’s *Against the Day* uses realism to explore class struggle through Lew Basnight’s observations of Denver and Chicago. Lew’s observations of the latter appear in a section of the novel that is set around the time when, led by a group of anarcho-syndicalists, the eight-hour day movement in Chicago had a significant amount of support and momentum. During this period life in Chicago was marred by many skirmishes between workers and police. One of the notably infamous events of this period was the Haymarket bombing. On May 1, 1886 during a confrontation between 180 police officers and a workers’ meeting someone threw a bomb into the ranks of the policemen (no one was ever found guilty for this act). About the incident Sydney Lens writes: “[o]ne policeman was killed on the spot, seven died later, sixty-seven were wounded. In the maddening confusion that followed, police fired wildly and clubbed everyone in sight. A number of citizens were killed—how many is not known—and two hundred were injured” (63). The incident created an atmosphere of repression against suspected anarchists and labour leaders in general that as a result seriously impeded the momentum of the eight-hour day movement. The

section of *Against the Day* I analyze in the following paragraph is set in Chicago a few years after the Haymarket bomb. Lew Basnight here is working as a detective tracking radical elements for corporate interests. At this point in the story he appears to be harbouring misgivings about his chosen profession. For instance, while engaged in anarchist-hunting in Chicago Lew begins to consider the possibility that some of the anarchists and radicals may have been framed. He notes, for example, that the bombs in question could have been "set by anybody, including those who would benefit if 'Anarchists' . . . could be blamed for it" (175). In addition, while monitoring sections of Chicago for anarchist activity he observes that the communities that breed radical elements are desperately miserable and live in conditions comparable to the cruelty of "the old Negro slavery" (175). These feelings of disgust create in Lew sympathy for the oppressed worker that makes him fantasize about perpetrating violence against the well-to-do and the police. As the narrator explains, periodically he fantasizes about picking up "some surrogate bomb, a chunk of ice or, better, a frozen pile of horse-droppings, to sling at the next silk hat that he saw serenely borne along in the street, the next mounted policeman beating on an unprotected striker" (175-76). Through Lew's consciousness, Pynchon expresses a view of the oppressed conditions of industrial workers in the US in the early twentieth century. Besides the areas of Chicago that Lew monitors, Pynchon suggests that one

> could find this same structure of industrial Hells wrapped in public silence everyplace. There was always some Forty-seventh Street, always some legion of invisible on one side of the account book, set opposite a handful on the other who were getting very, if not incalculably, rich at their expense. (176)

While doing similar work in Denver Lew observes intense labour tension which further magnifies *Against the Day's* dramatization of class struggle. As he settles in, Lew becomes more and more aware of the intentions of the ruling class. For instance, Basnight observes how plutocratic networks send "legions of gnomes underground" to perform dangerous jobs, and he reflects on the fact that "the Powers" probably don't sympathize with the hardships and danger the miners endure as they "always had more dwarves waiting, even eagerly, to be sent below" (176). As he becomes more intimate with the struggle between capital and labour Lew feels a nebulous confusion that he thinks of as a "contest for his soul" (176). Furthermore, as Lew investigates the labour trouble he realizes that both sides are organized, and that the skirmishes are not independent or accidental. Rather, he realizes that what he is witnessing is a "war between two full-scale armies, each with its chain of command and long-term strategic aims" (177). Thus, through a realist modality, specifically the experiences and consciousness of Lew Basnight, Pynchon conveys a vivid impression of not only the hardships that working classes endured and which led to radicalization, but also a sense of an underlying conflict that pitted two economic social classes against one another.

Class struggle is also symbolized through the interactions between two of the main character clusters, namely the Traverse and Vibe families. As I observe in the introduction these two character clusters can be read as symbolic of the political positions that to a large extent structure the novel, that is, left-wing radicalism (the Traverses) and social and economic conservatism (the Vibes). As Web Traverse is introduced to readers we learn that he has a reputation as an active and subversive radical, due to his long-term union membership and his acts of industrial sabotage. As

such, he is known to the company detectives and becomes someone Scarsdale Vibe himself takes note of. Orders are sent down through the ranks of Vibe's company to monitor and intimidate Traverse. Deuce Kindred and his sidekick Sloat Fresno, are contracted to accomplish this objective. Deuce has developed a strategy of haunting places where workers frequent and initiating acquaintanceships with them. Through this method he becomes acquainted with Web. They meet often for a while in a boarding-house and Deuce manages to win his trust. This leads to an ugly episode wherein Kindred and Fresno capture Web, brutalize and eventually kill him. Web's three sons conduct their own investigation of the murder and through word-of-mouth learn that Deuce and Sloat are responsible for the death of their father. Deuce and Sloat avoid detection at first and slip away, avoiding the wrath of the Traverse family. However, in a chance meeting in a cantina Frank Traverse encounters Sloat Fresno and a spontaneous gun-fight erupts, leaving Sloat dead on the floor. Although the dynamic between the Traverse family and Deuce and Sloat is not typically how we envision class struggle, given the symbolic values Pynchon attributes to the Traverse and Vibe families, this classic revenge trope takes on added significance, resonating with the class struggle of the early twentieth century.

Another even more intense way that Pynchon conveys class struggle through personalized depictions of characters in a realist modality is through the words and thoughts of Scarsdale Vibe. While speaking with his right hand man, Foley Walker, Vibe describes radicals like Web Traverse as "abscesses in the suppurating body of our Republic" (332), who should be ruthlessly removed. Moreover, Vibe confesses to a well-nigh homicidal disdain for radicals; that is, he expresses a wish to "kill off every

damned socialist and so on leftward, without any more mercy than [he'd] show a microbe" (332). In the same conversation Vibe bemoans missing out on the Civil War and thinks that the labour wars his commercial interests are engaged in with their workers is his civil war. His aggressive and jingoistic attitude towards the working class is subtended by his tendency to *other* them. For example, he attributes labels to elements of the working class, calling them communards. Moreover, the fact that the ranks of the organized working class are made up of diverse ethnicities who speak a variety of languages is interpreted as a threat by Vibe. Their linguistic and ethnic diversity along with the fact that they choose to empower themselves through unification is seen as a potential danger for Vibe, which is expressed in his statement: "[t]hese communards speak a garble of foreign tongues, their armies are the damnable labor syndicates, their artillery is dynamite, they assassinate our great men and bomb our cities, and their aim is to despoil us of our hard-won goods" (333). What is crucial here is to see how Vibe's anxiety and anger are based on a fear of losing not only the status, resources, and wealth that he associates with his class, but also a deeply felt sense of identity. For instance, Vibe claims that the working-class radicals want to "divide and sub-divide among their hordes our lands and our houses, to pull us down, our lives all we love" (333). The word hordes here can be read as dehumanizing the working class through homogenizing them and stripping them of individuality and complexity, which makes them seem Other in Vibe's mind. This fear and othering is driven home when Vibe asserts that the "future belongs to the Asiastic masses, the pan-Slavic brutes, even, God help us, the black seething spawn of Africa interminable. We cannot hold. Before these tides we must go under" (333). Given his denigrating view of

non-white races and his fear of intercultural interaction, the only possible response to this problem, in Vibe's addled mind, is to "start killing" all of the "undesirable" others "in significant numbers, for nothing else has worked" (333). This rather disturbing portrayal of Vibe's inner thoughts about the ethnically diverse working classes illustrates a dimension of class struggle viewed from an intimate portrait of a representation (extreme perhaps) of the economic elite.

Similar kinds of very personalized and carefully rendered situations that represent class struggle exist in *In the Skin of a Lion*. One good example of this is the death of Patrick Lewis's father and the impact it has on Patrick's decision to take political action. As a professional dynamiter Hazen Lewis has a somewhat hazardous occupation. Eventually he loses his life while on the job setting charges in a feldspar mine. Patrick seems to lay the blame, at least partially, on the company, as he believes that they "tried to go too deep" and as a result "the section above him collapsed" (74). There wasn't an explosion, but rather the "shelf just slid down with him into the cave and drowned him" and he was "buried in feldspar" (74). The fact that Patrick feels anger and resentment towards the company for the death of his father shows through later on in the story when he confronts Harris. Preceding this confrontation we witness Patrick infiltrating the waterworks with the help of Caravaggio, who pilots a boat and drops him off near an intake hole. Patrick swims through the waterworks, and, in order to arrive at his destination, he dynamites a metal screen. His use of dynamite here echoes his father's occupation and suggests Patrick's plot to rig up the waterworks with explosives is an act of revenge. Patrick's attack on the waterworks can also be interpreted as being motivated by the influence of the radicalized Alice Gull, who he

has a romantic relationship with, and his growing class consciousness, developed from his own working experience. Patrick's class consciousness is also embodied in the dialogue between him and Harris. When Patrick first confronts Harris the latter is affronted, and asks him what he is trying to do. Patrick brazenly retorts that he is "not trying this" (235). Patrick then introduces himself, indicates that he has the waterworks wired with explosives, and, following a pregnant pause, murmurs "feldspar" (235). This suggests that the pain of his father's death returns to him at the moment he is about to exact his revenge. I explore the interaction between Patrick and Harris further in chapter three, but the point here is that Ondaatje's use of realism enables a portrait of Patrick that illustrates how he develops as a person and comes to political awareness. This portrait also resonates with class struggle and shows that his attacks are motivated by a mix of the class consciousness he absorbs through Alice's passion and ideas, as well as his own personal injuries, losing his father and working in oppressive conditions at the tannery.

Through depictions of various kinds of labour *In the Skin of a Lion* is able to gesture towards sources of class antagonism in a manner that is not heavy-handed but more suggestive. One example of this is Temelcoff and the hazardous work he routinely performs. This type of work demands that he descend under the bridge and hang from ropes in order to check on the integrity of "driven rivets, sheering valves, and the drying of the concrete under bearing plate and padstones" (34). Although Temelcoff voluntarily takes on many of the difficult jobs, and seems to thrive on the danger involved—when recounting all of his scars and injuries he seems to have a tone of pride in his voice—however, his predecessor was not as fortunate as him. After a

harrowing description of Temelcoff surviving a near-fatal accident while working under the bridge the narrator informs us that his predecessor was killed, ripped in two, by a similar accident (41). Although Temelcoff does not emerge as a very class conscious or political figure in the novel, the dangerous work he performs and the fact that his predecessor died on the job illustrates the kind of dangerous employment situation that can lead to class antagonisms. The labour conditions of the tannery where Patrick works for a spell are described in similarly harrowing details. Embedded in this section is a commentary on the negative health effects the work has on the tannery workers. For example, not only does the tannery exude "the most evil smell in history" (130), but the concoction of dyes and animal hides causes fatal diseases, such as consumption (131). The harsh conditions of the job were such that no one could "last in that job more than six months and only the desperate took it" (131). In other sections of the company, such as the killing floors where cattle were put down, there "was never enough ventilation, and the coarse salt, like the acids in the dyeing section, left the men invisibly with tuberculosis and arthritis and rheumatism" (131). The narrative editorializing here signifies Ondaatje's desire to activate cognition of social issues and the injustices that certain labourers endured. After describing the harsh and unhealthy conditions of the tannery the narrative voice depicts a brief and impressionistic scene of a party and then the chapter ends with a portrayal of how foreign workers were barred from holding public meetings in languages other than English (132-33). It also illustrates how this rule was used as a justification to make arrests and break up labour rallies. Employing narrative parataxis, that is, making the descriptions of the tanneries continuous with a brief scene depicting the skirmishes between politicized workers and

police, gestures towards a dialectical tension between social classes, or in other words, manifests class struggle.

In addition to the predicted deaths of the tannery workers and the fatal accidents suffered by Patrick's father and Temelcoff's predecessor, there is a general sense that many other working-class people have met untimely deaths due to their labour conditions and class position. This is suggested in a segment describing the official opening of the Bloor Street Viaduct. The night before the official opening workers had converged at the bridge, brushed aside the guard and occupied the bridge. They then proceeded to hold their own vigil "with their own flickering lights—their candles for the bridge dead" (27). The workers mourning here also illustrates how the dangerous labour conditions of the bridge workers can lead to not only injury and fatality but also deep disgruntlement that can in turn arouse class antagonisms.

Fox is perhaps the most formally fragmented of the neo-proletarian novels, and as such Sweatman's use of realism enables a dispersed representation of class antagonism. We can examine this in how she represents each side of the class struggle at the heart of the Winnipeg general strike. The conservative, pro-capitalist side of the conflict is presented through a variety of characters, scenes and vignettes. An example of how Sweatman uses a realist mode to impart a sense of class antagonism can be seen in the depiction of D. W. Drinkwater. At a party scene early on in the novel which involves a conversation between Drinkwater and Eleanor, Sweatman expresses the former's take on politics and economics. This is shown through his enthusiasm for building up a business career by using his upper-class position and his proximity to the wealthy establishment to increase investment in Winnipeg and modernize its economy.

His seemingly upstart attitude towards the wealthy establishment is in response to the fact that this economically important demographic has after the war become reticent about investment. As Drinkwater enthuses, "we can get back to the good old days it just takes some spunk and all the old money's just got scared that's what and they need a kick that's what they need" (5). The fact that Drinkwater is so focused on developing a business career in the tumultuous post WWI period, and in the face of the significant labour strife that gripped Winnipeg at the time, establishes Drinkwater as a representative of the pro-capitalist side of the conflict. Moreover, his attitude exhibits a lack of concern for the issues that the working class raised at the time, which is a factor in their pursuit of a general strike. One could assume, then, that the kind of pro-business attitude that Drinkwater symbolizes might also be a factor in the class struggle that emanates from the differing perspectives that clash in the novel.

The pro-capitalist side is also conveyed in a scene that describes skirmishes between a group of young Canadian men associated with conservative forces and a group of Austrians and Germans associated with workers and radicals. The speaker of this short vignette, Wellington Bateman, has just been to a meeting in honour of Karl Liebknecht which he claims was a terrible "desecration of the British flag" (18). The meeting is apparently dominated by Germans and Austrians as the narrative voice refers to the participants by turns as Germans, Huns, and socialists. He describes with relish how soldiers violently break up the meeting and chase the fleeing socialists back to their Austro-Hungarian Club and, once there, proceed to smash it up and then continue to attack "ten or twelve other buildings owned by Germans and Austrians" (19). Bateman's rather chilling account of street bullying by an anti-leftwing mob

expresses a conservative perspective regarding leftwing politics in general, and more particularly, illustrates how this ideology motivated some individuals to become violent and to develop an ethnically chauvinistic attitude.

Another variety of the anti-strike point of view can be found in the short vignette "Striker's Tuesday". This vignette focuses closely on an unnamed, and presumably newly deputized, police officer hired to patrol the streets during the strike. Readers are given a brief yet intimate view of this character, including a sense of his mood, which is tense yet pregnant with anticipation. For example, he seems to relish his superior position on horseback, as it gives him "a better perspective" (174). This character is part of a group of several hundred other mounted police. He asserts that this large squad emits "an awful sound on the streets" (174) suggesting he is aware of their capacity to intimidate the citizenry. He also seems to appreciate the power that his job and the weapons he wields instil in him. This is illustrated in the manner in which he describes these weapons: "the good feel of a wood bat, sawed-off neckyoke, spoke of a wagon-wheel, heavy enough . . . and my other hand on the club, swing it gently beside my leg" (174). Walking down the street and anticipating some kind of skirmish the young man thinks "[n]ows my chance, now's my chance to show somebody" (174), suggesting his enthusiasm for violence and also that he may be young and naïve, that is, not fully aware of the implications of his role and what is at stake in the conflict. Although this character only appears for one page, from this brief yet sharply-drawn portrait we can gather that he is feeling empowered by his authority and perhaps overly enthusiastic to use it. Moreover, his implicit support for the conservative side illustrates

the mind of a young man who enters into the class struggle, perhaps not fully aware of all of the factors that have shaped the general strike.

Sweatman's depiction of the selling and censorship of books also manifests the issue of class struggle. This conflict arises when a government censor enters MacDougal's bookstore. Given that MacDougal is a dedicated socialist his store is naturally stocked with socialist themed books, such as Max Adler's *Socialism and the Intelligentsia*. Ben Benstock, the government censor, is described as rotund, "suited up with good brown wool and a muskrat collar, well-paid, well-fed" (22), suggesting his is a comfortable life, which is somewhat conspicuous given the hardships many people were facing at the time. His visit is connected to his duties as a censor and he personally seems to be against socialism and the strike. He also seems to enjoy the opportunity to investigate the store and banter with its owner. After perusing the Adler book Benstock declares that carrying it amounts to sedition. MacDougal protests and claims that "red" ideas are spreading and there's a lot of interest in the literature, insinuating that the law Benstock invokes is outmoded. Benstock retorts that the government does not need to stop the masses' interest, but that they only need to stop information distributers, such as MacDougal (24). Benstock is aware that the labour trouble at the time is creating unrest and some people are looking for someone to blame. He adds that the government is aiming to deflect any blame away from itself towards the foreign element (24). In addition, he is contemptuous towards the masses, calling them "damned cattle", and he brags that he and his colleagues intend to "herd them as we wish" (24). Benstock's parting comment to MacDougal involves a less than subtle threat, as he says "[t]hings must be in harmony, in pleasing agreement with the

Dominion", adding that "the food tastes like shit in jail" (24). Benstock's attempt at intimidation succeeds to a certain degree, as after he leaves MacDougal locks up the shop for the day and leaves by the back door. The scene successfully reflects class antagonism in that it shows a clash between government support for the anti-strike side of the conflict, and the sort of domineering attitude that subtends such a perspective, and a pro-strike socialist leader who, among other activities, helps lead the movement by disseminating socialist literature. The antagonism that underlies the interaction between MacDougal and Benstock symbolizes the broader class antagonism and ideological disagreement that was gripping Winnipeg at the time.

To summarize, a review of critical perspectives on realism illustrates that interpretative methods have moved away from perspectives that deny the social and historical context of literary texts. Moreover, my research suggests that realist modalities offer more self-reflexivity than previously thought, and do not necessarily attempt to create mirror one-to-one, domineering representations of reality, but rather are aware of their capacity to discursively mediate their subjects. The neo-proletarian novels I examine in this chapter manifest this quality and blend it with dialogic narrative structures in a way that manifests the midfiction approach. That is, the realist modalities enable the authors to create identifiable "classed" characters, and the interactions between characters of different social classes, even though the plots may be intentionally convoluted or "incoherent". This midfictional blend of realism and dialogism helps the authors to avoid employing omnipotent narrative voices and rather imparts a more democratic sense of character and narrative voice. Moreover, this narrative approach enables the authors to illustrate how class struggle arises in modern

society. They do this through representations of strikes, industrial accidents, and intimate portraits of characters that embody the dynamic between labour and capital. My research on realism also shows how realist modalities can help enable cognitive or empathy-building forms of literary approaches. This empathy-building capacity is important to the neo-proletarian fiction I look at in this thesis in that it enables these works to not only revive the proletarian genre and a specific historical era, but also to accentuate the issue of class difference. The empathy-building aspect of proletarian fiction is a crucial element of the politics of this genre and therefore will be explored further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: WHITHER EMPATHY? INTERCLASS RAPPROCHEMENT AND OTHERNESS

In their film *The Corporation* Mark Achbar and Joel Bacon argue that modern multinational corporations are pathological. This conclusion is arrived at vis-à-vis an analysis of corporate behaviour throughout the twentieth century measured against the World Health Organization's Personality Test ICS-10 from its Manual of Health Disorders. According to the WHO personality test, in order for a person, or in this case an organization, to be diagnosed as psychopathic they must meet six criteria: 1) callous unconcern for the feelings of others; 2) incapacity to maintain enduring relationships; 3) reckless disregard for the safety of others; 4) deceitfulness: repeated lying and conning others for profit; 5) incapacity to admit guilt; and 6) failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviours. Citing a variety of examples of corporate misbehaviour the film claims that the modern multi-national corporation meets every one of the six criteria. Although the film's analysis is broad ranging and perhaps intentionally facetious, Achbar and Bacon have gathered enough evidence and presented it in such a way as to provoke thought about the personalities or subject positions that command corporations. This aspect of the film dovetails with my own interest in the relationship between subjectivity and class as it is mediated in literature. Point one of the WHO personality test, the callous unconcern for feelings of others, particularly resonates with the situations I would like to address in this chapter. I will discuss how this phenomenon relates to the relationship between the ruling class and the working class as it can be interpreted through the novels under study in this project. My argument explores how the immense financial, political, and cultural power that the upper class accrues through their business activities or their "advantaged" position creates an uneven power dynamic between business leaders and workers. Drawing on

recent psychological research on social class, socioeconomic status, and social cognition I will explore how the proclivity for lower-class individuals to be communally-focused and upper-class individuals to be self-focused shapes interclass relations in problematic ways. Important to this thesis is how Ondaatje, Pynchon, Sweatman and Doctorow utilize realist modes of representation to flesh out the "classed" subjectivities of their characters, while also exploring Freudian concepts (such as the double figure) on a thematic level. As such, the midfictional strategy is embodied in how the texts handle the complicated and at times vexing interclass relations depicted in the novels.

Recent social psychology research suggests that upper and lower class individuals define and experience the self in profoundly different ways. Lower class individuals tend to feel constrained in their pursuit of goals and interests by reduced economic resources and social rank. As such, "[d]iminished resources, uncertainty, and unpredictability are a central part of the social contexts of lower-class individuals" (Kraus et al., *Social* 549). Given this lower-class individuals are more likely than their upper-class counterparts to engage in caring for others and to be embedded in social networks that "depend on mutual aid" (Piff 2). By contrast, upper class individuals prioritize the self. Given that they are disposed to environments of "relatively abundant material resources and elevated rank in society, upper-class individuals are free to pursue the goals and interests they choose for themselves" (*Social* 549). Moreover, lower-class individuals are likely to develop communal and empathic self-concepts, whereas upper-class individuals are more likely to develop personally agentic concepts and to prioritize independence from others. Given these findings Kraus et al. venture

the hypothesis that upper-class individuals may feel more entitled and narcissistic than lower class members of society (*Social* 552).

These findings resonate with biographical work done on business leaders of the modern era, as well as their literary characterizations, such as can be found in the novels I study in this thesis. It is crucial to note how the employment of realist modes of representation enables the authors to zero in on the aspects from the past, what some critics term the "usable past", in order to convey their contemporary interpretations of class politics. Using realism then the authors base some of their characters, with varying degrees of precision, on real historical figures. For instance, Pynchon's Scarsdale Vibe, the banker and mine owner who Heinz Ickstadt suggests may be based on J. P. Morgan, and Doctorow's Harry Bennett, the auto manufacturer whose field of business, omnipresence, and intermingling with underworld figures, suggest an allusion to Henry Ford. *In the Skin of a Lion* also depicts two historical figures associated with Toronto in the early twentieth century, the prominent city councillor Roland Harris (dubbed Rowland by Ondaatje) and entertainment baron Ambrose Small. *Fox* depicts characters that represent prominent businessmen at the time of Winnepeg's general strike. Given that the wealthy elites of the American and Canadian business worlds of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are influential for the novels I am studying, it is worthwhile surveying some of the key historical figures of the Gilded Age in order to examine their relationships to their workers, as this may shed light on connections between recent research on the upper and lower class psychological make-up and literary representations of classed individuals. It is important to note that the key figures of the industrialization of America, the so-called

"robber barons", often engaged in generous philanthropic endeavours, and indeed, most of them saw themselves as performing an honourable public service to their respective nations. As we will see, however, although these figures gave away large amounts of money through philanthropic foundations and were associated with people who sympathized with the poor and the working class, the capitalists themselves remained aloof and unconnected from the workers.

For example, J. P. Morgan financially supported Dr. Markoe, an acquaintance, who devoted "his primary professional energies to the poor" (Strouse 299). As well, George Perkins, a business associate of Morgan's, was known for his "popular worker-benefit programs" (410). In addition, Morgan's daughter Anne became involved in social justice activities, including strikes, and befriended Ida Tarbell and other prominent muckraking journalists. However, even though people in Morgan's social network seemed to sympathize with and take action to alleviate the poor and oppressed, this wasn't the case for Morgan himself. Morgan's perspective concerning socioeconomic status seems to have been influenced by the Protestant work ethic, which was prominent at the turn of the century. While travelling in the Azores as a young man on a restorative retreat, Morgan paid little attention to the local population who did not enjoy the kind of prosperity he was used to. As Strouse explains, "If, as [Morgan] had been taught, industry and initiative promised prosperity, the poor had only themselves to blame." (43). When as an adult Morgan resided in a luxurious mansion in New York, his upper class neighbourhood was not far from much poorer ones. As Strouse explains, "not far from the elegant townhouses off Union Square were the tenements of the Lower East Side" (Strouse 74). In spite of his proximity to lower-

class life, however, Morgan did not "reflect on this disparity in the few letters from this period that survive," nor does Morgan comment on "the protests of the unemployed during his winter in New York" (74). Like the other tycoons I will discuss in this section Morgan generally remained aloof "from people who did not see the world as he did" (Strouse 677). In addition, Morgan rarely concerned himself with the political or social consequences of his actions, a tendency he shared with other business tycoons of his era (Strouse 155).

Unlike Morgan, who was born into an elite American family, Andrew Carnegie came from a humble Scottish background. His father was a weaver, and was, along with Carnegie's grandfather and other relatives, radically oriented and involved in Chartism[45]. Carnegie's class background stands as an ironic historical footnote that is somewhat difficult to comprehend, given his later oppressive relationship with his workers and the labour movement in general. In fact, Carnegie's attitude towards labour was inconsistent and exhibits a sense of entitlement. In "Problems with Labour", a section of his autobiography, Carnegie asserts that he always enjoyed meeting with his workmen and that "the better [he] knew the men the more [he] liked them" (243). In addition to this expression of respect and affection for his workers Carnegie shows a certain degree of compassion in this short article, when he reasons that

> Labor is usually helpless against capital. The employer, perhaps, decides to shut up the shops; he ceases to make profits for a short time.

[45] Chartism was a parliamentary reform movement of the mid-nineteenth century in the UK. Mainly a pro-labour (including agricultural) social movement the chartists called for "universal suffrage for men," as well as "equal electoral districts, voting by secret ballot, abolition of property qualifications for MPs, and annual general elections" ("Chartism").

> There is no change in his habits, food, clothing, pleasure—no agonizing fear of want. Contrast this with his workman whose lessening means of subsistence torment him. He has few comforts, scarcely the necessities for his wife and children in health, and for the sick little ones no proper treatment. It is not capital we need to guard, but helpless labor. (243)

Although Carnegie's sympathy for the working class here seems admirable, it betrays a certain condescension that is a recurring pattern in his statements about labour. For example, referring to labour as helpless tends to distract attention from understanding the labour/capital relation in terms of an uneven power dynamic which is always potentially exploitative of those who do not have the right kinds of skill sets and social capital. Carnegie's somewhat condescending and sentimental attitude is exemplified in the following statement: "[i]f I returned to business tomorrow, fear of labor troubles would not enter my mind, but tenderness for poor and sometimes misguided though well-meaning laborers would fill my heart and soften it; and thereby soften theirs" (Carnegie 243). Carnegie also has the tendency to view the workers as problematic or deficient in some way, while avoiding self-criticism. For instance, Carnegie claims that his workers "have their prejudices and "red flags," which have to be respected, for the main root of the trouble is ignorance, not hostility" (231-232). In negotiating with labour Carnegie's policy involved "patiently waiting, reasoning with them, and showing them that their demands were unfair" (Carnegie 221). Rarely does he concede unfairness on his part or by others in his class. Although Carnegie took some concrete steps to aid his workers, as Krass points out, the respect Carnegie "demanded for labourers would dissipate with time . . . once he became the capitalist, his workers

would be nothing but drones with an associated cost in the ledger books" (30)[46]. Carnegie's characteristic inconsistency regarding social issues can be seen in his position on abolition. On this topic Carnegie declared "I hope I shall never be found upholding palliating oppression in any shape or form" (Krass 48), yet, as Krass states, "once he was a capitalist, a capricious Andy would oppress his workers in a variety of forms" (48). These inconsistencies are typical of Carnegie, and as Swetnam suggests, Carnegie's writings tended to be inexact and prone to error (119); he often "forgot things or wrote of events the way he wished they had been" (121). To summarize, Carnegie's inability to empathize with his workers and to admit weakness or mistakes suggests that the high social rank he achieved through his business success created in him a sense of entitlement which limited his ability to engage in harmonious and fair relations with his working-class employees.

This sense of entitlement is also manifested in Carnegie's well known philanthropy. Carnegie's philanthropy was vast: it is estimated that at the time of his death his fortune was worth between "$500 million to $600 million" (Krass 538), most of which was given away to fund a variety of programs and endeavours[47]. Carnegie took the role of philanthropist seriously and always believed that "his philanthropic practices, like his business practices, were based upon rational, systematic principles" (Wall 805). However, Wall suggests that at times Carnegie showed "a quality of capriciousness which often made his philanthropic gestures—or lack of them—an

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[46] Aside from his well-known philanthropy, Carnegie paid the rent for his workmen to maintain their own cooperative store and his management also acted as a bank for the workers, allowing them 6% interest on deposits. See Carnegie's *Autobiography* pg. 241.

[47] This kind of philanthropy is peripherally echoed in the neo-proletarian novels. Namely, through the characterization of F. W. Bennett in *Loon Lake* and Scarsdale Vibe in *Against the Day*.

enigma to those soliciting him for aid" (805). Although Carnegie wanted his great wealth to benefit humankind and worked hard to find the best methods to accomplish this, like other wealthy patrons, he was against government intervention or the distribution of small amounts of money to many people (Wall 807). It should be noted that Carnegie's philanthropic phase did nothing to diminish his belief in individualism and free enterprise as core principles of a modern nation. This is evidenced in his statement concerning what he calls the "antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth" (Wall 807). This solution, according to Carnegie, is founded on individualism. He claims that only under the influence of individualism will it be possible to achieve

> an ideal State, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good, and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if distributed in small sums to the people themselves. (Carnegie, qtd. in Wall 807)

Here Carnegie's reasoning resonates with his usual high self-regard and lack of understanding of "average" or working and middle class Americans. At any rate, his philanthropy undoubtedly did tremendous good. Carnegie held education in high regard, and thought that university professors and teachers in general were undervalued[48]. Hence, of the seven priority areas Carnegie's philanthropy targeted,

[48] In his autobiography Carnegie claims of all professions teaching is probably the most unfairly paid, "though it should rank with the highest" (257).

education was of the highest importance (Wall 808)[49]. The responses to his contributions in relation to how he amassed his fortune are mixed and too numerous to address in this chapter. Regarding his workers, they had differing opinions as to his funding initiatives. For example, in regard to the pension fund Carnegie initiated for his steel workers, the men at the Homestead plant made the following statement: "The interest you have always shown in your workmen has won for you an appreciation which cannot be expressed by mere words. Of the many channels through which you have sought to do good, we believe that the 'Andrew Carnegie Fund' stands first" (Carnegie 247)[50]. However, regarding the libraries that Carnegie funded, his steelworkers commented: "[w]e'd rather they hadn't cut our wages and let us spend the money ourselves. What use has a man who works twelve hours a day for a library, anyway" (Kleinberg 299 qtd. in Krass 251). According to Krass, in Carnegie's mind, "philanthropy was, to a degree, a means for cleansing any doubts about how the money was made or class inequities, in spite of contrary claims made by the benevolent rich—including Carnegie himself" (247). Carnegie's approach to his employees and his philanthropy suggests a lack of understanding of their realities and a preoccupation with his own career and the operations of his company. In other words he exhibited a significant amount of solipsistic narcissism.

Like Carnegie, Henry Ford tended to hold an unsympathetic view towards the working class, especially unionization and radical politics. Early in his career,

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[49] The other areas, in order of importance, were: free libraries, the founding or extension of hospitals, parks, halls suitable for meetings or concerts, swimming baths, and churches (Wall 808). Carnegie would later revise these priorities, placing much less emphasis on hospitals and churches.
[50] This letter to Carnegie is dated 1903 and is signed by Harry F. Rose, John Bell, Jr., J. A. Horton, Walter A. Greig, and Harry Cusack (Carnegie 247).

however, Ford held relatively progressive views towards labour, i.e. the five dollar work day, a willingness to hire and support African Americans—which was quite remarkable for the era—and a genuine desire to "bring common people a comfortable, abundant life" (Watts 534). However, as his career progressed and as the US plunged into the Great Depression Ford developed a reactionary and rather harsh standpoint towards labour, especially unionization[51]. As Reynold Wik reflects, it seemed incongruous that Ford "could be so far ahead of his time in his economic thinking in 1914 and so far behind in 1929 and the early 1930s" (180). Although Ford survived the stock market crash of 1929, "his image lost its luster and he never again regained the esteem and loyalty of the common folks, who, for the most part, had bestowed so much admiration on him prior to this disaster" (Wik 180). Some of the statements Ford issued during the depression illustrate his misunderstanding of the conditions and plight of his workers, and the working class in general. Several of these betrayed his increasingly reactionary, simplistic "up-by-the bootstraps" attitude towards labour to the effect that conditions were not so bad and, in any case, served to toughen up Americans and inspire innovation. As Steven Watts claims, Ford reacted to the depression "with a series of platitudinous pronouncements that made him appear insulated from reality" (429). For instance, in 1930 Ford said: "'It's a good thing the recovery is prolonged . . . [o]therwise the people wouldn't profit from the illness'"

[51] Although Ford did enjoy public support in his early career his reputation was nevertheless marred as early as 1920 by his controversial publication, in his newspaper *The Dearborn Independent*, of a series of articles under the theme "The International Jew: The World's Problem". Widely condemned as anti-Semitic and baseless these articles reiterated ideas associated with the international Jewish conspiracy, which accused Jews of fomenting division amongst gentiles in order to gain control of world politics and finance (Wik 178). For more on Ford's anti-Semitism and his connection to Nazism see Max Wallace's

(Bak 191). Later that year he observed that "'these are really good times, but only if you know it' and that 'the average man won't really do a day's work unless he is caught and cannot get out of it'" (Bak 191). Concerning the hoboes that travelled on boxcars looking for work, Ford stated that "it's the best education in the world for those boys" and that in their tramping around they "get more experience in a few months than they would in years of school" (Watts 436). For millions of unemployed and hungry Americans, Watts concludes, such nostrums must have appeared surreal (Watts 436).

Throughout the Great Depression Ford still considered himself to be a fair-minded employer; however, as his increasingly discontented workers considered unionization Ford "responded with angry, unstinting opposition" (Watts 454-55) and "used every weapon at his disposal to fight against union inroads" (Watts 517). Furthermore, Ford's vision of the enlightened businessman and dedicated workers joined in a harmonious alliance of producers was a fantasy that did not reflect the reality of the Rouge under the domination of Harry Bennett's service department (Watts 460)[52]. Hence, Ford's folk-hero status and reputation as an advocate of social justice were "irreversibly damaged by his callous pronouncements" (Bak 191) and anti-union actions, "all of which underscored his belief that charity was debilitating and simple self-reliance was the key to recovery" (Bak 191). All in all, although Ford in his early years was considered relatively liberal in his views on employment, the challenges of the Great Depression foisted a new social reality on him that he wasn't

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American Axis: Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and the Rise of the Third Reich, and Neil Baldwin's *Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate*.

able to address with adequate respect and understanding. In other words, Ford's wealth and immense social standing seemed to create in him an inability to sympathize with his workers and the working class. The barrier between Ford, Morgan, and Carnegie and the working class is one I want to frame as a kind of othering. This othering I contend is subtended by the elevated social rank these powerful industrialists attained through activities in a society dominated by capitalistic hegemony. Moreover, the manner in which they combated their workers and seemed unable to empathize with the latter's concerns, suggests they inhered a certain degree of narcissism. Narcissism can technically be defined as "a multifaceted construct characterized by an inflated view of the self, a self-aggrandizing and dominant orientation towards others, increased grandiosity, and heightened feelings of uniqueness and individualism" (*Wealth* Piff 2). This increased tendency for the upper-class to be more narcissistic and entitled enables the relation of otherness between the upper and lower classes in that it may prevent sufficient empathy on the part of the upper-classes to understand the needs of their lower-class counterparts.

Lack of empathy can be analysed further by thinking in terms of sympathy and theories of its development. Debates about conceptions of sympathy and how it effects human sociality and identity have their roots in enlightenment, nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and especially Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud. One of the key questions in the debate on sympathy is whether one is inclined to feel sympathy mainly for individuals in an in-group, or if

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[52] Harry Bennett kept tight control over the workers of the Ford plants through espionage and intimidation that prevented unionization inroads throughout most of the 1920s and 1930s.

sympathy is a universal trait. Enlightenment figures were divided on the subject. Hume believed that sympathy is an empathy we feel for those like us. As Peart and Levy summarize, "[s]ympathy for Hume is akin to what we call empathy today: we enter in the passions of others, and we can do so because these people think and look like us (132-33). In addition, for Hume, human beings were made more moral "because they are motivated by the approbation that they receive from others with whom they sympathize" (Peart and Levy 133). Adam Smith, by contrast, believed humankind becomes a moral agent by achieving the approval that comes from "recognizing we are all equally deserving of sympathy" (Peart and Levy 137). Darwin was somewhere between these two positions. Although Darwin concedes that he cannot pinpoint the origins of the instinct for love and sympathy, he nevertheless speculates that although humans have "few special instincts, having lost any which [their] early progenitors may have possessed, this is no reason why [they] should not have retained from an extremely remote period some degree of instinctive love and sympathy for [their] fellows" (310). Therefore, Darwin asserts that "[a]s man is a social animal, it is almost certain that he would inherit a tendency to be faithful to his comrades, and obedient to the leader of his tribe; for these qualities are common to most social animals" (310). Therefore, Darwin asserts that "We are all indeed conscious that we do possess such sympathetic feelings" (310). Indeed, Darwin considers sympathy central to human

social life, calling it the "all-important emotion" (309), which seems to align him closer to Smith[53]. While considering the development of the social instincts, Darwin suggests:

> after the power of language had been acquired, and the wishes of the community could be expressed, the common opinion of how each member ought to act for the public good, would naturally become in a paramount degree the guide to action. But it should be borne in mind that however great weight we may attribute to public opinion, our regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows depends on sympathy, which, as we shall see, forms an essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation-stone. (305)

In spite of the importance Darwin places on sympathy, commentators have pointed out that his theory depended on a gendered interpretation of the role of sympathy in human development. As Rosemary Jann asserts, Darwin's model contained assumptions "that made male agency and male control of women the engine of human progress" (149), which was part of a trend of the period to justify "female inferiority on 'scientific' grounds" (149). Jann also suggests that Darwin treated male competition as critical to human progress and "female dependency as crucial to the forging of human society" (152). In her considerations of Darwin and the concept of sympathy, Jann examines the work of Eliza Burt Gamble, a contemporary of Darwin's, who contested some of his findings and proposed alternative models. Her model of early, pre-modern social

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[53] It is important to note that in the Victorian period, and a hundred years prior to it, sympathy played an important role in socialization and education. It was largely a gendered concept associated with women. As Gates claims, "women were called upon to aid children in developing respect and sympathy for nonhuman species" (164). Moral responsibility would be continually reinforced, Gates avers, in "conduct books like Marie Grey and Emily Sheriff's *Thoughts on Self-Culture, Addressed to Women*

relations, for instance, was based on an aboriginal matriarchal concept of social organization which placed sympathy at its centre[54]. Similarly, Barbara Gates revitalizes the work of Arabella Buckley, another contemporary of Darwin, whom Gates calls a post-Darwinian evolutionist. Buckley's studies of adaption and instinct "lead her to speculate that 'one of the laws of life which is as strong, if not stronger, than the law of force and selfishness, is that of mutual help and dependence'" (Buckley, *Winners* 351, qtd in Gates 167). For Buckley this law was not a divine gift bestowed upon humans but rather a "gradual development through the animal world" (Gates 167). Although she follows some of the main tenets of evolutionary theory, ultimately for Buckley "the raison d'être for evolution was not just the preservation of life, but the development of mutuality as well" (Gates 168). In any case, I would like to return to Darwin and his articulation of how sympathy is dependent on "our regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows" (305). If we think of the social spaces that the wealthy capitalist figures of North America inhabit we can see that the neighbourhoods, housing, and modes of transportation suggest that these figures were often insulated from many of their fellow citizens, especially the working class. The spatial barrier between capitalists and their workers creates a *social* barrier that deprives the former of the opportunity to interact and sympathize with the working class and perhaps behave more morally with regards to labour conditions. Darwin suggests that the root of sympathy lies in our strong retentiveness of former states of pain or pleasure. As such,

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(1851), where women again were charged with the duty of inculcating in the young sympathy and benevolence for all 'inferior beings'" (164).

[54] For example, Gamble theorized "a utopian view of early gens or kin groupings, in which all members traced their descent back to a single woman, egotism was unknown, and sympathy 'a sprout from the well-established root, maternal affection', governed all personal relations" (Jann 155)

the sight of another person suffering, feeling hunger, cold, or fatigue awakens in the observer "some recollection of these states, which are painful even in idea" (Darwin 309). These recollections instil in the observer a desire to "relieve the sufferings of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved" (Darwin 309). If this is the case then perhaps the well-off who were born into wealthy families do not have adequate points of reference which would allow them to identify with the slum conditions, poverty, and long hours suffered by some of the workers who dwelled in the same cities. If this is the case we might find evidence to suggest that the upper-class characters do indeed have a certain amount of sympathy (perhaps a great deal) for those whom they would consider their peers, i.e. people of similar social status, and relatively little sympathy for people of lower socio-economic status. However, if we include the standpoint held by Buckley, Gamble, and Smith on the issue the potential for sympathy should include members of different socio-economic classes. This seems apparent if one considers that members of the working class and industrialists alike share a national identity, citizenship rights, the same or similar religious affiliations, and so forth. Thus, I want to suggest that members of the working class and the ruling class should be thought of as being within the same community. Their interactions are strained, however, due to the hegemonic power dynamic at play in the social structure which reifies the relationship by making the owners' actions relatively unaccountable to the workers. This creates a situation whereby elites learn that the approbation or disapprobation of their workers (or for that matter anyone who is not empowered enough to be a threat to them) is inconsequential and they therefore generally do not develop sufficient levels of empathy that would allow harmonious and

fair relations between capital and labour. This theory, I contend, is reflected in Carnegie's, Ford's, and Morgan's extreme reluctance to collaborate with labour.

One way that the novels deal with the interclass relation of otherness is through the trope of the double, which I argue is imbued with a class dimension. The concept of the double was advanced by several thinkers of the early Freudian school of literary criticism, perhaps most notably by Otto Rank in *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Some of the motifs common to the double in literature are, according to Rank, a likeness to "the main character down to the smallest particulars, such as name, voice, and clothing" (33). The double also "works at cross-purposes with its prototype" (33), a behaviour consistent with the doubles in the novels I analyze[55]. I want to suggest that the employment of the double figures in the narratives of Pynchon, Doctorow, and Ondaatje illustrate some key elements of uncanny otherness that we can view through a class lens. One of the key aspects of Freud's theory of the uncanny (unheimlich) is that it is a manifestation of "what is concealed and kept out of sight" (933), which seems to parallel the manner in which the bourgeoisie separate themselves from the working classes; that is, one could argue that they conceal from themselves the negative aspects of the conditions that the workers live in. Moreover, these negative aspects such as sporadic poverty, hard manual labour, and alcoholism can be thought of in relation to Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection. In terms of my argument the working-class subject

[55] My engagement with Rank's concept of the double is partial, partly because aspects of his theory do not apply to my argument and partly because parts of his theory seem old-fashioned and arguably gendered. Therefore, I will not explore the notion that the double causes a catastrophe with a "woman, predominantly ending in suicide by way of death intended for the irksome persecutor" (Rank 33), nor will I explore how the double figure interacts with "a thoroughgoing persecutory delusion or is even replaced by it, thus assuming the picture of a total paranoiac system of delusions" (33).

corresponds to the abject; that is, it stands as the opposition to the "I" of the bourgeois subject. As Kristeva posits:

> the abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain "ego" that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. (Kristeva, *Powers* 1)

I think this definition of the functioning of the abject in relation to subjectivity can be thought to correspond to the manner in which the workers (especially the radicalized workers) are excluded from the dominant discourse commanded by the bourgeoisie, and also can help us to understand the complex ways that the phenomenon of otherness effects human relations and realities. For instance, how the "displacements of our most intimate feelings and attitudes onto some figure of the Other . . . can affect not only feelings but also beliefs and knowledge" (Zizek, *How to Read* 27).

As I have tried to argue, due to a lack of sympathy wealthy capitalists in North American society tend to separate themselves, socially, psychologically, and physically, from the lower-classes which creates a sense of otherness. I have also suggested that this separation is subtended by the tendency for upper-class individuals to have higher levels of entitlement and narcissism as compared with their lower-class counterparts. The novels under study in this project reinforce this theory. F.W. Bennett,

one of the main characters of *Loon Lake*, is a prime example. Bennett buys land in the Adirondacks and builds a luxurious estate for himself and his wife, far from any city or town. Aside from a staff of servants Bennett and Lucinda isolate themselves far from towns or cities, not to achieve a Thoreau-like ascetic meditative state of existence, but rather to indulge in a luxurious lifestyle: they have cooks, servants, tennis courts, horses, and they host a wide range of celebrities, politicians, prominent business people, and underworld figures. Hence, the setting of *Loon Lake* is symbolic of isolation and a manifestation of Bennett's enormous wealth and will-to-power (the relationships between isolation, wealth, and freedom is a major theme of *Loon Lake*). According to Parks, it functions on a symbolical level to reveal the "nature of great power and wealth, its isolation, its freedom and accountability only to itself" (*E. L. Doctorow* 74), suggesting that it is associated with the solipsism of the upper-class. Although the Bennetts are very wealthy it is implied that their marriage is not that healthy. This is evidenced by the fact that Bennett engages in extramarital affairs, while Lucinda is preoccupied with her aviation activities and seems uninterested in a sexual or romantic life. Moreover, the narrator reveals allegations that Bennett "is sexually exploitative" (158). Additionally, as Harter and Thompson point out, Bennett's affairs created a "legacy of nonfruitful marriages to society women where love 'wasn't a feeling at all but a simple characterless state of shared isolation'" (83). If Bennett's promiscuity and failure in marriage are tied to his egoism, then the latter, it can be observed, was developed, at least partially, in tandem with the development of a pro-business worldview. For instance, when he offers Joe $250,00 as compensation for the injuries Joe incurred when he first arrived at Loon Lake and was set upon by a pack

of wild dogs, Bennett's advice to Joe is to "[b]uy something and sell it for profit. Anything, it doesn't matter" (110), which suggests Bennett's attitude towards economic activity is rather narrow and self-centred. The idea that Bennett lacks accountability for his business activities is reinforced in a narrative description of him that states that his labour relations are "lacking compassion or flexible policy understanding" and that his life was "devoted almost entirely to selfish accumulation of wealth and ritual use thereof" (158), suggesting how his business activities were to a significant degree subtended by a sense of entitlement. To summarize, Bennett's luxurious and isolated estate combined with his exploitative tendencies shows he inheres a significant degree of entitlement and narcissism.

We see a similar characterization in Ondaatje's Ambrose Small. Unlike Bennett and Vibe who are born into wealth Small is a "self-made-man", in the sense that he built up his wealth through his own commercial and political activities. Also, Ondaatje's character is based on the historical Ambrose Small, whereas Bennett and Vibe are fictional. Like Bennett Small has several affairs, which suggests that he too may suffer from narcissism and is unable to maintain stable relationships. Moreover, Small's tendency to control people and his inability to accept criticism manifest a sense of entitlement. For example, when the press nicknames him "the jackal" (57), he only "laugh[s] at them" and spins "a thread around his critics and [buys] them up" (57). Furthermore, Small is very rigid and controlling. "Either he owned people or they were his enemies" (58); he had "[n]o compatriots" and took "[n]o prisoners" (58). In addition, Small is fond of saying that "In the tenth century . . . the price of a greyhound or a hawk was the same as that for a man" (58), suggesting he has a callous side.

Additionally, once he becomes a millionaire Small keeps "the landscapes of his world separate, high walls between them" (213). That is, he keeps the significant people in his life separate from one another, so "Lovers, compatriots, businessmen, were anonymous to each other" (213), which suggests Small's life is both secretive and compartmentalized. Furthermore, Rowland Harris, the other significant upper-class character in *In the Skin of a Lion*, also exhibits signs of narcissism. As commissioner for Toronto's public works he develops a rather grandiose vision for the Toronto waterworks, bridge and viaduct. Moreover, his strong determination to accomplish his vision, whatever the cost to the workers who execute the plans, is somewhat self-aggrandizing and deluded[56].

Scarsdale Vibe, the mine owner and financier in *Against the Day*, can be read as having similar character traits. Like Small, Harris, and Bennett Vibe seems to have a dysfunctional relationship with his family, in this case his sons, whom he views as inadequate. This is evidenced by the fact that Vibe courts Kit and offers to make him an heir. Part of the reason Vibe does this is to undermine Webb Traverse (Kit's father), whom he views as his enemy; however, later when Vibe offers Kit the chance to be his heir it is clear that Vibe truly is not satisfied with his own sons.

[56] Although Harris was a powerful public figure he managed to stay out of the public eye. According to Douglas Barbour, Harris was seldom referred to in the press and never referred to in books on Toronto. This seems to be reflected in Ondaatje's omission of physical description of Harris. As Barbour surmises, Ondaatje's interest in Harris seems to be more "as a voice expressing certain perceptions and beliefs, not as a rounded character per se" (232).

The interclass relations depicted in *Against the Day* illustrate a sense of otherness that resonates with the double figure[57]. This kind of otherness is exemplified in the relationship between Scarsdale Vibe and Foley Walker. They first meet during the American Civil War, when they are both young men. In this era, it was common for wealthy families to hire someone to replace their son if he was conscripted into the army. This initial contact between Vibe and Walker can be interpreted as the first instance of doubleness or twinning[58]. Several years after the war Walker decides to visit Vibe's office with papers showing that he was Vibe's substitute during the war. Walker informs Vibe that he took a bullet for him, in the head "near the left temple" (101), and intimates that this has left him with clairvoyant abilities, or what Walker describes as "communications from far, far away" (101). Vibe is sympathetic to Walker's story and the two begin a close friendship. Walker tells Vibe: "you know what the Indians out west believe? That if you save the life of another, he becomes your responsibility forever" (101). This illustrates Walker's affinity for Vibe and foreshadows his devotion to him. If the sense of uncanny involves a mixture of feelings of both strangeness and familiarity, then Walker's offer of help and protection at this initial stage of their relationship seems to resonate with uncanniness. Indeed, Walker's statement is not an empty comment and even in their first reunion he is helpful to Vibe: when the "voices" in his mind impart to him a stock tip, he in turn passes it on to Vibe. Vibe invests in the company and it pays off, providing him with a "critical acceleration in the growth of the legendary Vibe fortune" (101). Soon afterward Vibe tracks down

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[57] It is worth noting that Pynchon's portrayal here of the double resonates with the midfiction concept in that it utilizes both realism to develop the characters and also manifests a Freudian concept, a more experimental literary approach.

Walker and hires him on as an "investigative consultant" (102), and "thenceforward Scarsdale grew increasingly reluctant to make any move of a business nature without [Walker], expanding that definition, in the course of time, to include the outcomes of boxing matches, baseball games, and especially horse races, as to which Foley's advice was seldom in error" (102). Thus, Vibe and Walker were frequently "sighted together" (102) around town "togged out in matching sport ensembles of a certain canary-and-indigo check" (102) and driving in a phaeton "side by side in their pale dusters" (102). Their closeness and similarity even garner them the nicknames "The Twin Vibes" (102). Moreover, because of their close relationship Walker claims "you could make a case . . . for me being more Scarsdale Vibe than Scarsdale Vibe himself" (102). Given these examples, it seems that with his portrayal of these two characters Pynchon is intentionally alluding to the double. Indeed, the relationship between Vibe and Walker resonates with Otto Rank's explanation of the double, that is, the notion that in the latter is a likeness "which resembles the main character down to the smallest particulars, such as name, voice, and clothing" (Rank 33). Additionally, the fact that Walker eventually kills Vibe further embodies Rank's conceptualization of the double as a persecuting presence that "works at cross-purposes with its prototype" (Rank 33). Although Walker is Vibe's long-time companion Pynchon hints that there is an underlying discontent in Walker concerning Vibe, and this resonates with the mysterious quality of the otherness relation. That is, the fact that Vibe and Walker were such close companions for many years and yet Vibe never suspects that Walker harboured resentment towards him embodies how otherness relations inhere an

unknowable aspect. In a sense, Walker's betrayal of Vibe is not that unexpected when one considers Vibe's rather harshly chauvinistic attitude towards the working class and non-Anglo ethnicities, as I have observed in chapter two. His domineering attitude, I want to argue, is linked to the notion that the upper-class may exhibit increased levels of narcissism and entitlement, with Vibe being a kind of extreme example.

An interclass relationship of otherness also exists in Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*. This is seen in several respects but perhaps no more prominently than in the interactions between Patrick Lewis and Commissioner Harris. A good example of how the relation between Patrick and Harris is related to the notion of uncanny otherness is the confrontation that transpires when Patrick takes Harris hostage. The manner in which they interact suggests a need by both parties to connect with their class "other", especially Harris, who as the elite figure exudes a sense of longing to connect with Patrick, but also to control or dominate him, which I suggest is similar to the Orientalist gaze in the Saidian sense of a desire to know the other, and therefore exercise control of the othered subject. Since the chapter that precedes the one in which Patrick holds Harris hostage dramatizes how Patrick has just wired the Bloor Street Viaduct with a bomb, it is not surprising that the exchange between Patrick and Harris in the scene that follows highlights their otherness, which at this point is at a fevered pitch. The chapter begins with Harris asking "[d]o you know me?" (235) and Patrick responding "I worked for you, Mr. Harris. I helped build the tunnel I just swam through" (235). Harris then demands "Who are you? How dare you try to come in here!" (235). This short exchange underscores the notion that Harris is not in touch with the workers who carry out his plans. As well, his haughtiness illustrates his sense

of superiority and, by extension, the unequal power dynamic between himself and the working-class Patrick. Moreover, the confrontation allows Patrick to express his disapproval of Harris's management of the project. For example, Patrick complains that the herring-bone tiles in the toilets "cost more than half our salaries put together" (236). When Harris concedes "Yes, that's true" (236), Patrick snaps "Aren't you ashamed of that?" (236). Patrick's admonishment illustrates his resentment of Harris's use of his authority. Harris attempts to justify his decision to add extravagant features to the buildings by claiming that in fifty years people will still be impressed with the "herringbone and copper roofs" (236), and emphatically adds that excess is necessary as it gives people "something to live up to" (236). Furthermore, when Harris adds that he "fought tooth and nail for that herringbone" (236), Patrick responds: "*You* fought. *You* fought. Think about those who built the intake tunnels. Do you know how many of us died in there" (236). This exchange shows two very different perspectives concerning how the buildings should be designed and perhaps more importantly how resources should be allocated, and symbolizes the proclivities of the upper and lower classes. That is, Harris's presumptuousness illustrates his sense of entitlement as he considers it acceptable to use government resources to appoint the waterworks with extravagant adornments, even when the workers on the project were suffering harsh conditions, injuries, and fatalities. Patrick's view, on the other hand, exhibits a heightened alertness to threat and empathic concern for others, especially his fellow workers, manifesting Piff's theory regarding the self-concepts of lower-class individuals. Moreover, the fact that Harris can justify his ignorance of the hardships the workers suffered by stating "[t]here was no record kept" (236) illustrates an

epistemological gap in the social fabric of Toronto at the time, and, I would argue, expresses the dark side of upper-class solipsism. The epistemological gap also alludes to the manner in which we know or don't know the other. As Slavoy Zizek explains, we need recourse to the "symbolic engagement, precisely and only in so far as the other whom we confront is not only my mirror-double, someone like me, but also the elusive absolute Other who ultimately remains an unfathomable mystery" (*How to Read Lacan* 45-46). Harris's and Patrick's different perspectives regarding the construction and management of the waterworks and viaduct illustrates the radical difference and otherness in their "classed" subjectivities. It is important to point out, moreover, that the manner in which Ondaatje develops the otherness theme is reliant on realist modalities, and as such expresses the value of Ondaatje's midfictional approach.

In spite of the tense situation Harris and Patrick continue to speak civilly to one another. Harris is not very fazed by his capture and is even bold enough to share with Patrick his opinion of him. "[y]ou don't understand power" Harris tells Patrick, "[y]ou don't like power, you don't respect it, you don't want it to exist but you move around it all the time" (236). This illustrates Harris's domineering orientation towards Patrick in that he tries to both control the conversation and to define Patrick. Harris goes on to tell Patrick of a dream where he has envisioned different architectural possibilities for Toronto. Harris says, "[y]ou are like these places, Patrick. You're as much of the fabric as the alderman and the millionaires" (238), which, again, demonstrates Harris's need to define Patrick. Harris continues by telling Patrick that he is "among the dwarfs of enterprise who never get accepted or acknowledged. Mongrel company. You're a lost

heir. So you stay in the woods. You reject power" (238). Again, Harris exhibits a need to define Patrick, which can also be thought of as epistemological domination of the other. Harris's comment about Patrick being a lost heir illustrates Harris's attempt to reach out to Patrick. This is emphasized when, soon after, Patrick turns on the light to find Harris's "eyes looking directly into his" (238), suggesting Harris's desire to make a connection. Additionally, Harris's conjecture that Patrick is some kind of a lost heir exhibits the difference between the two. Given that Patrick inheres a working-class identity and that many of the individuals in this class have lived historically unacknowledged existences resonates with the idea of otherness, that is, the idea that there is an unknowable aspect to the other. If Harris (or the ruling class in general) is the subject whose gaze and epistemological system is dominant, then the unknowable aspects of the objectified "other" will go unnoticed in dominant discourse. The manner in which Harris deals with Patrick in this confrontation illustrates this epistemologically domineering stance, which I would argue is subtended by Harris's sense of entitlement[59].

About halfway through their conversation Patrick asks Harris if he knew Alice Gull. This leads Patrick to share his thoughts and feelings about Gull. Patrick goes on to explain the painful experience of almost saving Alice Gull's life, but arriving too late (she is killed by a bomb). Eventually Patrick falls asleep while Harris stays awake and notices with relief that Patrick's blasting box is on the floor, out of his grasp. At this point Ondaatje's narrative goes into the mind of Harris and explains his thoughts.

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[59] It is interesting to note here that in spite of the characterization of Harris, Ondaatje in an interview with Cary Fagan, expressed a rather sympathetic view of the historical Harris, describing him as "quite a sweet guy . . . very moral, very honourable" (120).

Describing the appearance of the first daylight through the filter of Harris's consciousness, Ondaatje states that "[i]t nestled in the corners of the ceiling, suggested cupboards, and the damn herringbone that seemed to irritate everyone" (241). Harris's thought concerning the herringbone tile here suggests that perhaps Patrick's admonitory remarks earlier have had an effect on him, and made him remorseful for his extravagance. In addition, when a police officer knocks on Harris's office door at six o'clock in the morning while Patrick is still asleep, Harris puts "his finger to his lips before the man could bark out information" (242) and says "Let him sleep . . . bring a nurse with some medical supplies, he's hurt himself" (242)[60]. Harris shows genuine concern for Patrick, even though he had been taken hostage by him, which shows that some kind of genuine connection was made between the two. The point is that what begins as a potentially hostile confrontation between the working-class Patrick and the plutocratic Harris is transformed into a rather free-ranging and open-hearted conversation, wherein both parties reveal a significant amount of their sincere thoughts and feelings. Hence, we can see that there is some sense of longing for connection or interclass solidarity. However, the promise that this episode suggests does not come to fruition: the ambiguous ending of the novel, with Patrick and Hana leaving town, implies that Harris is willing to let Patrick "get away" with his attempted

[60] Patrick's falling asleep echoes the Gilgamesh myth, and, as Winfried Siemerling points out, "the written history we know". Like Gilgamesh, Patrick does not pass the test of conquering sleep. Thus, to take the skin of a lion and rise to the language of historically recorded reality, "remains a story between possibility and dream" (8).

hostage and sabotage, but hardly leaves the reader with a sense that the class issues dealt with in the novel have in any way been resolved[61].

Doctorow also uses the double motif in *Loon Lake* where, like in *Against the Day,* it is imbued with a class dimension. The impulse or attraction to the "classed" other is represented by the fact that the affluent Bennett decides to let the working-class Warren, Clara, and Joe live with him rent-free on his estate. This interclass rapprochement is reciprocal, as all three of the working-class characters decide to stay on at Loon Lake for significant periods of time. Moreover, the impulse to approach the class other can be seen in the manner in which Joe identifies with upper-class individuals. For example, this is reflected in a scene early on in the novel when, after having been attacked by dogs, Joe is convalescing and confined to a bed. Libby, one of the servants, shows Joe a guest book containing the names of prominent people who have stayed at Loon Lake, including Charlie Chaplin, who signed: "Splendid weekend! Gay company!" (69). Joe distracts Libby and while she goes into another room he picks up a pen and signs his name. When Libby returns she's mortified to observe that he has signed the book, in a parody of Chaplin, as "Joe . . . Of Paterson. Splendid dogs. Swell Company" (71). Joe's signing of the book can be interpreted as a kind of doubling, of a powerful cultural figure, and illustrates Joe's ambition. Joe's fascination with the upper-class is further illustrated when Joe and Libby sneak into the Bennetts' private residence. Libby leads Joe through a series of passages until they finally reach one of Bennett's living rooms. It is described as "the grandest room of them all, with

[61] The ambiguity of the ending has been criticized by Marxist-oriented critics such as Frank Davey and Julie Beddoes.

tan leather couches built into the walls, the walls hung with the heads of trophy" as well as "game tables and racks of magazines and clusters of stuffed chairs all looking out enormous windows to the lake" (80). In the midst of this grand salon Joe finds himself "tiptoeing, with a sense of intrusion", his "chest constricted" as he feels "some very fine denial . . . to submit to awe" (80-81). This sense of awe that the splendour of the room instils in Joe parallels the notion of the unknowable aspect to the otherness relation. Concerning the extravagant room, Libby says "'Of course this is just one of their places . . . can you imagine?'" (81). Libby's employment of the word "imagine" when pondering the luxury, and by extension the vast resources under the command of Bennett, signals the radical difference in realities between Libby and Joe and the Bennetts, and further reinforces the idea that there is an unknowable aspect in the otherness relation. Just as he adopts a parodic attitude toward the wealthy and powerful in mimicking Chaplin Joe adopts a similar attitude while in the Bennetts' quarters. For instance, Libby and Joe stroll along a corridor "as if [they] were master and mistress" (81). Joe flings open the glass doors of the porch and says "[l]et us enjoy the view that God in his wisdom has arranged for us, my deah" (81). Here, not only does Joe imitate a stereotypical upper-class speech pattern, but he also mocks a certain kind of perceived upper-class sense of exceptionalism. Joe and Libby continue to frolic and imitate the wealthy. As Doctorow indicates, they had the "run of the house and pretended to be masters" (81), and, as they indulge themselves, "the upstairs maid and the hobo boy were the Bennetts' of Loon Lake" (81). So here not only does the characterization of Joe and Libby point out the sense of entitlement that typically upper-class people, such as the Bennetts, might inhere, but these scenes also enact the

double effect as a kind of momentary role-reversal. I would also point out that Joe's and Libby's attitudes are a combination of mockery and admiration, thus paralleling the uncanny mix of strange and familiar.

This uncanny otherness is also exhibited in Bennett's desire to connect to working-class characters, for example, when Joe and Bennett first meet in the woods when a work crew funded and supervised by Bennett digs out a Dolmen stone. Bennett comes out to speak with the workers and exhibits an unpretentious demeanour. He speaks to the workers "as if [they] were all colleagues on some archaeological expedition" (106). Bennett leaves the site and then returns later to check up on the progress. Sensing that Joe is not convinced of the worthiness of the project Bennett calls him by name and says "you think it's just a rock, don't you?" (107). Joe is "stunned" (107) that Bennett even knew his name. When Joe doesn't respond immediately Bennett invites Joe into his home and says "I want to show you something" (107) and leads Joe into the house where he lectures him "on the burial practices of ancient Indian tribes of New England" (107). This suggests that Bennett not only has an impulse to connect with Joe but also to mobilize knowledge in order to enable him to take charge of the relationship. Bennett displays a similar proclivity when passing on to Joe what he seems to think of as life advice.

> Every kind of life has its demands, its tests. Can I do this? Can I live with the consequences of what I'm doing? If you can't answer yes, you're in a life that's too much for you. Then you drop down a notch. If you can't steal and you can't sap someone on the head when you have to, you join the line at the flophouse. You get on the bread line. If you can't muscle your way into the bread line, you sit at the curb and hold out your hand. You're a beggar. If you can't whine and wheedle and

> beg your cup of coffee, if you can't take the billy on the bottoms of your feet—why, I say be a poet . . . get into that place that's your nature, whether its running a corporation or picking daisies in a field, get in there and live to it, live to the fullness of it, become what you are, and I'll say to you, you've done more than most men. Most men—and let me tell you, I know men—most of them don't ever do that. They'll work at a job and not know why. They'll marry a woman and not know why. They'll go to their graves and not know why. (110-11)

Considering Bennett is from an upper-class family and has enjoyed a first-rate education, and given that the story is set during the Great Depression, his advice for how to live "on the bum" seems rather presumptuous[62]. It also illustrates Bennett's sense of entitlement, which can be interpreted as a tendency for epistemological domination of the other. In the last part of the novel, when Bennett is mourning his wife, he sends most of his servants away but allows Joe to stay at Loon Lake. They take their meals together, as Joe says, "the two of us alone" (249). That Bennett's eyes were "curious when they lit on [Joe] for a moment or two at each measured meal" (249) illustrates Bennett's need for connection. Moreover, like Patrick and Harris, Bennett and Joe have involved conversations. Bennett talks with Joe about intimate details of his marriage and his feelings for Lucinda. This makes Joe glad to be "there on the terrace in the sun at Loon Lake, in all the world the only one privileged to receive" (250) Bennett's confidences. Although the ending of the novel is ambiguous, the annotation on the last page indicates that Joe will go on, beyond the timeframe of the novel proper, to attend college, have a military career, and assume control of the

Bennett Foundation as "Chairman and Chief Operating Officer" (258), and eventually become "master of Loon Lake" (258). In other words, the ending of the novel divulges that Joe indeed becomes Bennett's heir and continues his legacy. This, in a sense, fulfills what has been suggested about Joe through the figure of the double: that he is ambitious and is determined to improve his lot in life (perhaps destined to do so); it also subverts the trope commonly associated with proletarian fiction of dramatizing the possibility of revolution. It also illustrates, it is crucial to point out, that Bennett has maintained his dominance and found a way to pass on his legacy (his only child is an institutionalized macrocephalic), and as such manifests his sense of entitlement and domineering attitude towards others.

Representations of upper class characters imbued with a sense of entitlement that causes interclass relations of otherness can also be seen in several instances in Sweatman's *Fox*. One example of this is the characterization of Sir Rodney, a prominent businessman and the father of Mary. During WWI Sir Rodney travelled to Europe. He didn't serve as a soldier, but rather went there for business meetings. Specifically, he travels to London to meet with the war office (104) and "had somehow been invited along with some other Canadian businessmen to visit the front" (101-102)[63]. Thus, his prominent status as a businessman allows him to avoid combat while witnessing, in the company of other elites, the "last Allied attack on the Somme" (102). The fact that Sir Rodney does not join the military during the war suggests that his elite status as a businessman gives him the privilege of avoiding military duty, not unlike

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[62] Bennett's comment here echoes Henry Ford's out-of-touch perspective regarding labour issues during the Great Depression. Bennett is also a car manufacturer, suggesting the richness of the allusion.
[63] Rodney Trotter is depicted as a self-made man.

Scarsdale Vibe's avoidance of the American Civil War. Sir Rodney had been away on business when the Winnipeg general strike began. When he returns he notices that the general atmosphere seems strange. For example, as he takes a walk he finds that "[t]he streets are very quiet" (102). In the street he observes some children playing a game of marbles "between the streetcar and the tracks" (102). We can assume that these are working-class children, as the narrative describes the neighbourhood as "inhabited by working-people" (102). Moreover, the manner in which Sweatman describes Sir Rodney's consciousness in this scene embodies a kind of classed otherness. For instance, as he watches the children he feels "as if there is a window between him and these events, and he watches the children play on the road without feeling much concern for their safety" (102). He does feel vaguely "that someone should care for them," yet he also views them as a "little army in occupied territory" (102). His observation of the working-class children suggests that the otherness relation that forms in his mind between himself and them is class based. Like other examples cited of upper-class characters "othering" the working class, Sir Rodney's view tends to denigrate and de-individualize the children by referring to them as rival soldiers. At another point in the novel, Rodney is having drinks with his soon-to-be son-in-law, Drinkwater, who asks him for advice regarding the labour question. After pondering the matter Rodney states "[t]he world is becoming a foreign place for men like me" (77), suggesting the distance and otherness he feels regarding the working class.

In another scene we can see a sense of entitlement manifested in Drinkwater's mind in relation to his opinion of the general strike and the working class. Drinkwater is spending the evening with his fiancé Mary and her father Rodney Trotter. The strike

is bothering Drinkwater, and he looks forward to discussing it with Rodney, who has been in business many years and has experience dealing with labour issues. Early in this chapter the reader has a glimpse into Drinkwater's consciousness. We discover that he is frustrated with the striking workers and he thinks of the intentions motivating the strike as "imbecile stupidity" (72). He is irritated with their decision and thinks that they gave up too easily on negotiation. That is, he bemoans the fact that the workers didn't negotiate "like gentlemen", and then he remarks that there is "not a real gentleman among them not even anything you'd call a craftsman nothing but rabblerousers and bolshevists" (72). He also bemoans how workers are joining unions and the strike in secret, and his annoyance is expressed when he calls the strikers a "lousy bunch of foreigners" (72). So Drinkwater's attitude expresses a domineering outlook towards the workers under his employ and towards the working class on strike in Winnipeg at the time. His tendency to denigrate them resonates with the otherness relation and bespeaks of an uneven power dynamic.

To conclude, reflecting on the relationship between upper-class and working-class identities in relation to historical capitalist figures suggests that the vast amount of wealth that can be accumulated through commercial activities can create in those that command economic affairs a sense of entitlement that alienates them from their community, including those whose labour power helps generate their wealth and sustains their enterprises. In the novels of Sweatman, Doctorow, Pynchon, and Ondaatje, the uneven power dynamic that emerges from interclass relations creates a sense of uncanny otherness. Hence, the otherness revealed by the trope of the double employed by Sweatman, Ondaatje, Doctorow, and Pynchon illustrates that even if two

characters enter into a friendship or intimate relation the upper-class characters tend to exhibit a domineering attitude towards the working-class characters, which can be interpreted as epistemological domination of the other. In other words, even as they long for interclass connection they also manifest a sense of domination, either through economic or epistemological practices. Thus, the novels suggest that personal relations may offer the possibility of redemption or a kind of re-harmonizing of relations among members of different social ranks. This narrowing of possibilities is vastly different from the impetus behind much of the proletarian writers of the 1930s who, Barbara Foley claims, adhered to the Communist Party's leadership, which inspired them "with a sense of the revolutionary possibility" (*Radical* 45) and encouraged them to reveal "the emergent revolutionary tendencies in the proletariat" (115). The postmodern neo-proletarian novels offer no such revolutionary possibility nor do they point towards a fundamental change in human relations either within or outside a capitalist society. However, as I have tried to show, they do offer contemporary readers the chance to contemplate class relations and the uncanny otherness that emerges from this relationship.

CHAPTER 4: IMAGINING NEW PATTERNS OF SOCIAL ORDERING: PUBLIC LABOUR PROTESTS AS HETEROTOPIC SOCIAL SPACES

This chapter is concerned with theories of space and how they are related to narrative. Specifically, I will apply two key concepts regarding spatial constructions and social space to the neo-proletarian novels. Although some critics of spatial theory view the emergence of space as a predominant concern of contemporary discourse, not everyone agrees. Frederic Jameson, for example, tends to view space, especially as a postmodern aesthetic strategy, with skepticism. In fact, Jameson perceives spatiality as an aesthetic category to be linked to the logic of late capitalism. That is, he interprets contemporary culture's stress on spatiality as working in tandem with reification and, as such, as contributing to the fragmentation of social reality in the postmodern era. Cultural spatializations, Jameson argues, also mystify the historical dialectic that any kind of true socialist politics requires (*Postmodernism* 54)[64]. Nevertheless, several key theorists, such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja argue that interpreting culture through spatial theories is beneficial, especially for scholars sympathetic to a Marxian standpoint. These scholars also argue that the Marxian analytic paradigm would benefit greatly if it shifted its focus from historical materialism to the social-spatial dialectic. Building on the work of these scholars my chapter will focus on interpreting neo-proletarian novels through theories of spatialization. I contend that the contemporary proletarian novels illustrate how workers and pro-socialist characters mobilize against spatially constructed hegemony through violent confrontations and sabotage as well as through co-opting space to

[64] Regarding space, Jameson points to the fact that conservatives have had enormous difficulty explaining the "exclusion of the justification of original property titles" (*Postmodernism* 266), which he claims "will be viewed as a synchronic framing that excludes the dimension of history and systemic historical change" (266). This insight suggests that the emphasis on spatiality can detract from the will to

organize workers, propagate socialist ideas, and instil a sense of working-class solidarity. I interpret these representations of class struggle in relation to Kevin Hetherington's notion of the utopics of modernity which are formed from the spatial play of competing versions of social orderings that constitute the origins of heterotopic spaces. The specific moments of class struggle that I analyse in the novels manifest this kind of utopics, and the manner in which characters promote alternate orderings to the status quo illustrates how they modify the social-spatial dialectic they find themselves in, and can be related to the concept of heterotopia. Ultimately, my goal is to employ the concept of heterotopia to literary representations of class struggle. Key components of this concept can help us understand the social-spatial dynamic of moments of class struggle, and I want to argue that these moments themselves are a kind of embryonic and momentary heterotopia.

In that it explains to a significant degree not only the nature of complex modern social spaces, but also how alternative social orders come into being, the concept of heterotopias may be useful in interpreting novels concerned with socialist ideas. In his influential essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" Foucault suggests that a central trope in the contemporary era (late 20th century) "seems to be that of space" (*Of Other* 350). Foucault's thoughts on space are rooted in a preoccupation with positionings, or in other words, the "question of the arrangement of the earth's inhabitants" (*Of Other* 351). Foucault argues that this problem does not only concern the growth and distribution of populations, but also more specifically "the relations of

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investigate the historical origins of property, which would work against interests concerned with racial and class justice.

vicinity, what kind of storage, circulation, reference and classification of human elements should take preference in this or that situation, according to the objective that is being sought" (*Of Other* 351). Hence, he concludes that "[i]n our era, space presents itself to us in the form of patterns of ordering" (351).

Taking this concept of space further Foucault avers that "[i]t may be, in fact, that our lives are still ruled by a certain number of unrelenting opposites, which institution and practice have not dared to erode" (351). Foucault regards these opposites as "actuated by a veiled sacredness" (351) and asserts that they consist of contrasts such as those between "public and private spaces, family and social space, cultural and utilitarian space, the space of pleasure and the space of work" (351). In other words, Foucault asserts that we tend to think of space in binary terms. Foucault claims, however, that modern spaces or "[t]he space in which we live [. . .] is in itself heterogeneous" (351), a crucial distinction. The kind of spaces that interest Foucault are arrangements "which are endowed with the curious property of being in relation with all the others, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves" (352), spaces which, in other words, "are in rapport in some way with all the others, and yet contradict them" (352). To summarize, heterotopic spaces in Foucault's conception consist of opposing forces and patterns of ordering which frame and situate the heterogeneity of modern life.

The binary aspect of Foucault's theory resonates with a Marxian class analysis, even if Foucault in his mature work moved away from his early engagement with Marx. I contend that theories of heterotopia can be fruitfully marshalled in order to

build a critical framework for analyzing fiction concerned with class struggle and competing attempts to impose versions of social order through ways of inhabiting social spaces. In order to apply the concept of heterotopia to the central aim of my thesis it will be beneficial to engage with the thought of Kevin Hetherington. In *The Badlands of Modernity*, Hetherington takes up the concept of heterotopia in relation to several important modern spaces, one of which is the factory. Hetherington is particularly interested in Foucault's identifying patterns of order as an important element of heterotopia. Echoing Foucault's concept, Hetherington defines heterotopia as "spaces of alternate ordering", which "organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them" (*Preface* 2). This alternate ordering "marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as examples of an alternative way of doing things" (2 *Preface*). In addition, Hetherington claims that these "new modes of social ordering, found in modernity's Other spaces are not something that have emerged as a completely blind process, nor as something completely planned, but have derived from ideas about the good society" (2). In addition to Foucault's seminal essay on heterotopia, Hetherington also draws significantly on the work of Louis Marin[65]. Hetherington's analysis revolves around Marin's notion that utopia is not "an imaginary place" but rather "an indetermined place" (115). Moreover, one of the main points Hetherington draws out of Marin is the latter's concern with the spatial play that is involved in trying to create "these perfect worlds in the spaces that make up the modern world" (2). In his interrogation of the spatial play between the constructed

[65] The importance of Marin's work on this topic cannot be understated, as Hetherington claims; it offers "the most sophisticated analysis of the significance of utopia to date" (2).

"perfect worlds" and the material and social realities that are lived in, Hetherington is decidedly less pessimistic than Foucault about the nature of modern institutions and the heterotopic spaces inherent in them. In Hetherington's view modernity is concerned with trying to perfect society, by creating one that is "ordered and stable and governed properly as well as one in which the principle of freedom is upheld" (2). In order to analyse the relation between modernity and heterotopia Hetherington looks into the etymological roots of the word utopia and makes reference to Thomas More, who first coined the term in the sixteenth century. According to Hetherington, More "collapsed two Greek words together: eu-topia meaning good place and ou-topia meaning no-place or nowhere. His utopia was a good place that existed nowhere, except in the imagination. And yet ever since, people have been trying to create utopia" (2). Focusing on Marin's analysis, Hetherington claims that he is concerned with pulling "apart the nowhere from the good place, to return utopia to eu-topia and ou-topia and to look at the space, one might say chasm, that opens up between them" (preface 2). Therefore, Hetherington claims that heterotopias do exist

> but they only exist in this space-between, in this relationship between spaces, in particular between eu-topia and ou-topia. Heterotopia are not quite spaces of transition—the chasm they represent can never be closed up—but they are spaces of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, from nowhere, even if they never actually achieve what they set out to achieve—social order, or control and freedom. (3)

Thus, Hetherington claims that heterotopia "do not exist in themselves" and that there is nothing intrinsic about the examples he gives of heterotopias, such as the Palais Royal and the early factories, "that might lead us to describe [them] as a heterotopia"

(8). Rather it is the "heterogeneous combination of the materiality, social practices and events that were located at this site and what they came to represent in contrast with other sites, that allow us to call it a heterotopia" (8). Heterotopias exist when the correspondence between two or more locations is described by a "difference of representation defined by their modes of social ordering" (8). For example, holding a festival next to a prison would constitute a heterotopic relationship, "each space being used to order the social in very different ways" (8). This sense of different social spaces competing to control the social order resonates with the manner in which class struggle is represented in the neo-proletarian novels.

Hetherington's explication of the utopian intent manifested in the social ordering of modernity is certainly perspicacious; however, he seems to rely too heavily on the idea that there is a play between contrasting forces that eventually resolve themselves. This tends to divert attention from the dynamics at play in a class divided society. This lack is evident especially when he discusses the development of British factories. One of Hetherington's central points in this chapter is that Foucault's heterotopia can be seen as an "important concept in understanding how space, within modernity, has been used as a means of attempting to create new modes of social ordering that are utopian in intent" (15). I accept Hetherington's assertion; however, I suggest that in order to conceptualize modern space and social order with an eye towards class relations one needs to consider a Marxian point of view. To add more nuance to his theory of how a utopian idea passed from the imaginary (design, plan) into a material reality, Hetherington claims that the passage from ideas "about a utopian order to its realization is one of ambivalence and deferral" and that such a

space creates its own types of "regulation and techniques of ordering, its own freedom and controls out of which may emerge stable social identities" (*Utopics of Modernity* 32). Although this is an astute description of a complex social phenomenon that Hetherington's statement problematically avoids dealing with how hegemonic relations are formed and maintained. If, as Hetherington contends, the development of industrial capitalism originates, at least partially, from a utopian ideal, it might be fruitful to position this theory within a Marxian critical framework in order to examine how class relations colour the development of social orders that arise from heterotopic spaces. Additionally, it could be equally fruitful to underline how the utopics of modernity that shape heterotopia relate to representations of class struggle, which are themselves inchoate versions of alternate orderings. Examining modern spaces from this point of view suggests that momentary and embryonic heterotopia emerge coterminous with class struggle flare ups.

It is well known that Marxist historicism places dialectics at the center of its thinking. Edward Soja bemoans the fact that this epistemological model has not been applied to the study of space. He believes that this would enable a richer understanding of how a variety of social, individual, economic, historical, colonial, and cultural forces interact to constitute spaces. Since space has been significantly shaped by historical and natural elements Soja reasons that it must also be constituted by political processes (80). In other words, space is both "political and ideological" (80). Soja is inspired by and builds upon the work of Henri Lefebvre, one of the first intellectuals to underline

the ideological and political aspects of space[66]. Both of these seminal thinkers place the political and ideological elements of space at the core of their analyses.

With the political and ideological elements of space in mind, it is important to recall that these elements are strongly influenced by hegemonic forces such as class and gender. Doreen Massey explores how spaces are shaped by gendered preconceptions. Exploring the socio-spatial dialectic from a feminist standpoint Massey emphasizes that localities should be thought of as "constructions", that is, as spaces of interactions and intersections of "concrete social relations and social processes in a situation of co-presence" (138). Massey claims that "[f]rom the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (179)[67]. I will explore how women characters in the corpus of texts in this study often play leading roles in militant political actions that confront, sometimes violently, the hegemony of the dominant class. It is also important to underline how social-spatial dynamics are shaped by

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[66] Soja claims that out of the few voices that reasserted space in contemporary discourse (i.e. intellectual discourse since the 1960s), "the most persistent, insistent, and consistent of these spatializing voices belonged to the French Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre" (16)

[67] Massey also asserts that gender subordination has been subtended by two social phenomena, which she defines as "the "attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other" (179). Massey claims that one of the most evident aspects of this joint control by patriarchal systems over women in terms of spatiality and identity has been related to "the culturally specific distinction between public and private" and the attempt to "confine women to the domestic sphere", which she claims was "both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity" (179). It is relevant to point out here that Massey's career (she began publishing academic articles in the early 1970s) coincides roughly with the reassertion of space into academic discourse, and that she has advanced work that has made a significant contribution to the fields of space theory and geography. Massey's work thus shows us how thinking from a feminist perspective can problematize space theory, something that has been lacking among some of the scholars embracing this field of study, as she has pointed out.

hegemonic forces, structured by class divisions. David Harvey seems to agree with this premise. He claims that although oppositional movements may gain control over particular times and places "they are all too often subject to the power of capital over the co-ordination of universal fragmented space and the march of capitalism's global historical time that lies outside the purview of any particular one of them" (*The Condition* 239). Moreover, the idea that spatial construction works in the interests of the ruling capitalist classes is echoed in the conclusions Harvey draws in "Time and Space as Sources of Social Power". Here, Harvey argues that spatial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs; instead, they always express some kind of class or other social content (239). Harvey's notion that time and space become defined in relation to "the organization of social practices fundamental to commodity production" (239) also suggests the influential role that capitalistic interests play in the development of space. Likewise, Lefebvre claims that "space is not a scientific object removed . . . from ideology or politics" but rather that it has "always been political and strategic" (170). Moreover, Lefebvre states that if space appears to be neutral and indifferent with regard to its contents and thus seems to be purely formal then this is due to the fact that space has already been inhabited and planned and already been the focus of past strategies (171). Additionally, the notion that space has already been pre-planned as it were, is related to the idea that spatial forms "express and perform the interests of the dominant class according to a given mode of production and to a specific mode of development" (71 Soja, quoting Castells). Indeed, one of Soja's main points is that whereas history used to be the method for revealing or demystifying political and ideological elements that lie "hidden" in reality, now space can perform

that function. Therefore, Soja argues that "the demystification of spatiality and its veiled instrumentality of power is the key to making practical, political, and theoretical sense of the contemporary era" (61). Harvey accords with this standpoint as well, as he claims that "if it is true that time is always memorialized not as flow, but as memories of experienced places and spaces, then history must indeed give way to poetry, time to space, as the fundamental material social expression" (218). Given the importance of space for understanding material practices and the ideological content of cultural materials, I propose a spatial reading of the neo-proletarian texts as a way to explore both literary practice and class relations.

By depicting working-class characters employing violence to contest the social-spatial hegemony of the upper-class, the neo-proletarian authors illustrate how working-class movements and individuals have contested hegemony over social space. When, for example, Patrick Lewis decides to attack the Muskokas in Michael Ondaatje's *In The Skin of a Lion*, we get the sense that Patrick is not all that political (he says at one point "I think I have a passive sense of justice") (122). His dramatic actions later in the novel—bombing the Muskoka hotel and his attempt to sabotage the water works—seem to be motivated by his association with the radical Alice Gull. Patrick also seems to be moved by hearing the story of Cato and how he was hunted down and killed for his political activism. It is not lost on Patrick that he is in a way taking Cato's place, as he is romantically involved with Alice. Reading one of Cato's letters Patrick wonders, "who [am I] to touch the lover of this man . . . to stand dazed under a lightbulb and read his last letter?" (156). Here, Patrick seems to be feeling a mix of guilt and respect before Cato's courageous acts for the empowerment of the

working class. Patrick seems to be more influenced by Alice though, as he becomes her lover and gets to know her intimately. On several occasions their conversations turn to political and ideological matters. While discussing the class struggle in Toronto, Alice claims that it is imperative to "name the enemy and destroy their power", and she implores Patrick to "[s]tart with their luxuries—their select clubs, their mansions" (124-25). The fact that Patrick "knows he will never forget a word or a gesture of her tonight" (125) suggests that Alice's ideas about how to struggle against the rich and powerful have planted the seed in Patrick that later develops into his violent act against the Muskoka hotel. Additionally, when Patrick tells Alice that the people in their community "don't want your revolution" (127), Alice replies, they "won't be involved. Just you" (127), and when Patrick asks her what she wants she dramatically enthuses "[n]othing but thunder" (127), which, again, suggests that Alice's passion for revolutionary action rubs off on Patrick.

Alice's anger against the capitalist ruling class seems to stem from her intimate knowledge of working-class life. Through Hana and her father, who was a tannery worker, Alice learned about the difficult conditions these workers endured. Thus, in a conversation with Patrick, she informs him that these workers never get the smell off their bodies. She claims that the rich never experience these foul odours. Moreover, Alice points out the toxic environment the tannery workers experience causes serious damage, such as "skin burns from the galvanizing process" and "[a]rthritis, rheumatism" (124). The insidious way the workers endure these conditions Alice articulates as "sleeping with the enemy" (124). It is important to note here how the images of burns and sleeping foreshadow the burning of the Muskoka hotel.

Additionally, Alice's anger with the ruling class stems from her knowledge of the oppressive and toxic nature of the tanneries which are spaces of commodity production. This suggests that Alice's and Patrick's knowledge of the appalling conditions of tanneries, which ultimately serve the interests of capital while degrading the lives of workers, is what motivates Patrick's act of protest. At one point Alice reads Joseph Conrad's letters to Patrick. The following is her favourite: "I have taught you that the sky in all its zones is mortal . . . Let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of all objects" (135). In a rather cryptic manner Alice's reading of this quotation seems to foreshadow the violent acts that Patrick will engage in later in the story. On one level the idea of the looseness of structures seems to suggest what underlies any radical perspective, that is, the belief that human agency can ameliorate the world. The fact that Alice's favourite quote from Conrad stresses the malleability of all physical structures resonates with Patrick's torching of the Muskoka hotel and his attempt to sabotage the water works. What I'd like to point out is how these incidents all take place within the framework of spaces which are constructed along ideological lines, that is, the hotel and the R. C. Harris Water Treatment Plant representing elite power, the former more capitalist/bourgeois and the later civic/governmental. Although the treatment plant is a municipal utility, Ondaatje's description of how the plant is constructed from Harris's grandiose vision for Toronto is clearly out of touch with the working-class experience of those who performed the bulk of the labour that built the plant, and as such illustrates the class antagonism of the time. Harris's attitude toward the project and his disregard for the workers then provokes Patrick's anger and motivates him to attack the plant. Thus, it is

reasonable to interpret Patrick's violent actions as intended to strike a blow against the dominance of the Toronto elite by attacking spatial constructions that symbolize their power.

Although Alice is committed to a radical form of socialism, her violent proclivities, which Patrick to a certain extent fulfills, are not in accordance with prevalent socialist doctrine of the era. Patrick's violent acts, essentially acts of sabotage or terrorism, would be considered best avoided by most socialist leaders. Trotsky, for example, writing in 1937, argued that the terror that was perpetuated by Marxists in late nineteenth century Russia was futile and costly to the working-class cause[68]. Trotsky believed, moreover, that individual acts of terror were emblematic of "the political backwardness of a country and the feebleness of the progressive forces there" (Trotsky, *Marxism* 23). Indeed, worker revolts that constituted destruction of property and aimless, unorganized violence were common in the early industrial period but tapered off as working-class movements became more organized and politically powerful. In other words, history has shown that violence is more "prevalent in the early stages of a labour movement, and decreases as labour gains organized strength" (Hunter 245). Anarchists as well downplay violence and see it as outside their theoretical prescriptions. In the *ABC of Anarchism* Alexander Berkman claims that anarchist teachings are "those of peace and harmony, of non-invasion, of the sacredness of life and liberty" (5). Berkman does concedes, however, that individual anarchists do occasionally use violence. He explains this by stating that anarchists tend

[68] Given the perceived futility of violence, major Marxist leaders of the early twentieth century—Plekanov, Lenin, Martov—all argued vociferously "against the tactic of terror" (Trotsky, *Marxism* 21)

to be more sensitive to injustice, swift to resent oppression, and therefore such individuals are prone to occasionally voicing their protest by an act of violence (5). In spite of this Berkman insists that "such acts are an expression of individual temperament, not of any particular theory" (5). By the time Berkman published his famous book in 1929, the "Propaganda by deed" tactic, an individual violent act usually meant as a way of "avenging a popular wrong, inspiring fear in the enemy, and also calling attention to the evil against which the act of terror was directed" (6), had largely fallen out of favour with anarchists. Individuals that committed acts of violence such as Patrick's were exceptions to the rule and not looked on favourably by the majority in the labour movement. Patrick's acts seem to fit the "propaganda by deed" category and resonates with Ondaatje's work overall, which shows a marked preoccupation with violence[69].

In Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*, we also see several instances of characters taking violent actions intended to reshape key social spaces of their city in order to symbolically attack ruling class power and bolster their own cause. In particular, there is a scene which takes place during the Winnipeg strike that concerns a group of women workers who have witnessed the company bringing in replacement workers

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[69] Depictions of violent behaviour such as Patrick's are not uncommon in Ondaatje's oeuvre. Indeed, Ondaatje has received critical acclaim for his ability to "stylize violence, to endow it with aesthetic integrity through both technical precision and emotional detachment" (Bok 110). Yet, several critics consider Ondaatje's use of violence "purely idiosyncratic" and portrayed in a problematically neutral fashion (Bok 109). Moreover, one could argue that Ondaatje comes dangerously close to glamourizing or fetishizing violence. Robin Mathews, for example, classifies Ondaatje as a self-indulgent artist, a brand of writer whose use of violence is intimately connected with a celebration of alienation and isolation. This is essentially a romantic tradition that declares "at once the powerlessness and the centrality of the individual as well as his or her pre-eminence before any social structure or contract" (Mathews 40). The use of violence by these authors, according to Mathews, "appears to be the violence of perverse titillation" (40). In short, Ondaatje's use of violence in *In the Skin of a Lion* is not characteristic of the labour movement but does portray the exceptions to socialist doctrine that existed.

from Toronto. They "got the mad anger, they do" (142), the narrative voice indicates, which is "not just the property of the men" (142). The women workers become aware of the schedule of the trucks that transport goods to and from their work place, and plan an attack. The narrator states "[h]ow those women know there'll be trucks coming down this afternoon, nobody can say. But they're better organized than the press knows" (141-42). One of the leaders of the female workers, Helen, has been approaching female clerks all week long and has successfully garnered support for the strike (142). Helen's successful recruiting can be thought of as an act of re-organizing the social space that she and her co-workers inhabit, which is a space of production and consumption largely controlled by capitalist interests. The latter is suggested, I would argue, by the fact that Eaton's hires scab workers, transported from Toronto, and allegedly pays them "better than their honest employees" (142). This suggests that the interests of capital are placed above those of labour. As the trucks pull into the area where the women are waiting, Sweatman foreshadows the violence to come, stating "[y]ou look down on the brown grass and there are 50 shoes, scuffed and flat-soled, pigeon-toed and otherwise, all of them eager to kick somebody's ass" (142). Although the men driving the trucks containing the replacement workers must have seen the female strikers by the roadside they don't seem to suspect any ill will; instead, they surmise that they might get "a sandwich or something, a mug of beer for their efforts" (142). The scene unfolds in a way that makes it clear that these women are capable of as much courage and strength as any group of men and, moreover, they know how to take advantage of the drivers' sexist assumptions in order to sabotage their scab behaviour. For example, as the trucks try to squeeze by the group of women, one

woman reaches up into the cab and pulls at the driver's face. When the driver of the second truck gets out to see what is happening he is hit with a steel pipe "across his face, twice" (143), and kicked by a mob of women. The women continue to attack the men and trucks and "[t]hey don't slow down till the two trucks are wrecked and all the store merchandise is ripped out of the back and spread all over the dead grass" (143). Although the drivers are beaten quite badly, "somehow they get away before they're killed" (143). This violent skirmish ends with the women commandeering the truck. The fact that these women seem to have pre-planned the attack to intimidate the company from trying to continue to do business while the strike is happening, illustrates that violence is used by the workers as a means to advance their political objective. The fact that this battle transpires on a road, that is, a transportation line which is an important asset for the company to keep its business in operation, illustrates that the strikers' assertion of their will transpires in a specific social and spatial environment, one that under normal circumstances favours the interest of capital. With this episode Sweatman shows us how the social-space of the street can become the theatre for the conflicting interests of labour and capital.

Another example of people taking violent actions in order to reshape space according to their own political interests occurs near the end of *Fox* when the striking workers organize a parade. The parade goes down a main boulevard of Winnipeg and at one point becomes violent. This scene occurs when tensions between striking workers and the police are high. Thus, when the mounted police ride through the crowd, some of the strikers "chuck a few stones at the cops" (195), and a young policeman is pulled off of his horse and beaten. Walter, one of the main characters of

the novel, who is on the side of the strikers and also a war veteran, has been trying to use his influence with the veterans association to influence the senator to stop the street cars from running during the strike. Ignoring his pleas the senator decides to operate the street cars anyway. This agitates a group of strikers when they see it approaching and they commence to attack it and set fire to it (195). In spite of the attack the senator still refuses to stop the street cars, essentially antagonizing the strikers, and the mayor then asks the RCMP chief to dispatch more police to the conflict, which results in the police firing on the crowd of strikers. The strikers' violent action against city property is an expression of frustration with how the authorities are handling the general strike and can be interpreted as their attempt to transform a social space in order to make a political point and ultimately advance their cause.

In Pynchon's *Against the Day* we see examples of working-class characters using violence to re-order their spatial and social conditions in order to improve their lot and advance their agendas. A prime example of this is the portrayal of Webb Traverse. Webb is staunchly opposed to the mine owners and ruling class more broadly. In an attempt to explain his politics to his children he recites the slogan on the back of his union card, which states "[l]abor produces all wealth. Wealth belongs to the producer thereof" (93). Moreover, Traverse claims that this idea is "what it all comes down to" (93) and that children probably "won`t hear it in school" (93), suggesting that Traverse feels his identity as a unionized working class individual is marginalized in mainstream culture. An exchange between Webb and Merle illustrates more fully Webb's worldview. The topic of the conversation is chemistry and Merle remarks that "if you look at the history, modern chemistry only starts coming in to replace alchemy

around the same time capitalism gets going . . . [w]hat do you make of that?" (79). Webb responds "[m]aybe *capitalism* decided it didn't need the old magic anymore" and suggests that capitalism devised its own magic, which, "instead of turning lead into gold" is capable of taking "poor people's sweat and turn[ing] it into greenbacks" (79). This exchange illustrates Webb's resentment of what he perceives to be the exploitative nature of capitalism. Later Traverse goes for a walk and reflects on the fact that the labour tensions may soon heat up, which pleases him as he feels that "the day of commonwealth and promise" (79) may be getting closer. This illustrates that Webb sees violent revolution as necessary to ordering society along radical leftist lines. The achievement of Web's vision of a socialist world would necessarily require the destruction of the "temples of Mammon" and "poor folks on the march . . . through the rubble" (79). The fact that Web's vision entails "the temples of Mammon all in smithereens" (79) demonstrates his bitterness and contempt for the ruling class and hints at his proclivity for using violent means against his rivals, which he does several times. An example of this is when Webb and Veikko bomb a railroad. Webb's employment of dynamite to engage in industrial sabotage of the mining industry is similar to the strikers in *Fox*, in that they both employ violence to transform space in order to assert their interests, or at least to contest the domination of the ruling class.

Through the experiences of several characters Pynchon implies that some key working spaces are constituted of hegemonic structures dominated by ruling elites. For instance, reflecting Webb Traverse's consciousness, the narrator states:

> Lord knew that owners and mine managers deserved to be blown up, except that they had learned to keep extra protection around them—not that going after their property, like factories or mines, was that much

> better of an idea, for, given the nature of corporate greed, those places would usually be working three shifts, with the folks most likely to end up dying being miners, including children working as nippers and swampers—the same folks who die when the army comes charging in. Not that any owner ever cared rat shit about the lives of workers, of course, except to define them as Innocent Victims in whose name uniformed goons could then go out and hunt down the Monsters That Did the Deed. (84-85)

This passage suggests that the mine owners care more about the smooth running of their operations than the well-being of the workers that perform the labour, and that their fear of sabotage may be a factor in their aggressive and callous approach to labour issues. Indeed, there are many instances in the Colorado section of the novel that illustrate that the socio-spatial conditions are controlled and dominated by the ruling class. For instance, when Lew the detective falls in with some men who are working security for the mining companies, he meets Nate, a company hired security agent. Nate claims that since the Haymarket bombing in Chicago, he and his outfit have more work than they can handle, and he surmises that, given the anarchist activity at the time, the government was likely to increase Antiterrorist security (25). Nate's remarks illustrate how the ruling class counters oppositional movements by augmenting surveillance and security. This sense of the ruling class collaborating with police and other security operations to control the working class and root out potential radicals is explicit in the novel. An example of this is a brief passage outlining a chapter in the life of Veikko, a friend of Webb's and a worker who co-organized the strike in Cripple Creek for an eight hour day. Viekko had become known to the authorities, including

the state militia. Given his subversive activities the authorities had treated him harshly and on one occasion he was arrested and put with a group of other suspects into a Pullman car, watched by armed guards (82-83). In the middle of the night the men are released in New Mexico, left on their own, and told "to stay out of Colorado unless they want to leave next time in a box" (82-83). Here Pynchon describes a way that authorities disposed of "unwanted" elements. Similarly, Traverse is also subject to rough and unfair treatment from his superiors at work and those in his community who take the side of the mining company. Pynchon lists these intimidation tactics as:

> [s]ummonses to interviews up at the office. Humiliation routines over short weight or docked hours. Saloon ejections and tabs abruptly discontinued. Assignment to less hopeful, even dangerous rockfaces and tunnels. (92)

To add to the pressure, Traverse's children often witnessed these rejections and humiliations. The manner in which Webb and Veikko are moved around and rejected from occupying certain social spaces, due to their political affiliations and activities, symbolizes the manner in which authorities may use rules and force to shape social spaces to subvert rivals and advance their own interests.

A similar instance of workers resisting bourgeois domination by attacking capitalist controlled spatial constructions appears in Doctorow's *Loon Lake*. In this novel there is an important struggle between Joe of Paterson, a working-class young man and Mr. Bennett, the wealthy businessman who dominates many of the spaces of the novel (i.e. the Loon Lake resort, and the car manufacturing plant). Bennett is at the

top of the American economic hierarchy and lives by what Parks calls "the ethos of the capitalist hero . . . an amalgamation of transcendentalism and social Darwinism" (*E. L. Doctorow* 82). Moreover, the setting of *Loon Lake*, the mansion, tennis courts, airplane and other luxuries function symbolically, Parks argues, to "reveal the nature of great power and wealth, its isolation, its freedom and accountability only to itself" (*E. L. Doctorow* 74). Loon Lake then is a symbol of Bennett's stature and his business accomplishments. Thus Parks argues, "Loon Lake is possessed; it is owned, appropriated, corrupted by its 'master'. Its surface reflects beauty, but its depths reveal predation and unbounded will" (*E. L. Doctorow* 74). Parks' insight indicates that Loon Lake has been colonized by the wealthy Bennett and the way that he has imposed his will on the space is more broadly suggestive of how the ruling class tends to dominate space in order to fulfill its desires and pursue its interests. Hence, Loon Lake, in Parks' estimation, is "icy and insular: the perfect objective correlative of capitalism in which the pursuit of wealth is motivated by the desire for complete isolation" (*E. L. Doctorow* 74). Additionally, as Michelle Tokarczyk points out, descriptions of Bennett as "elusive and impermeable with 'a manic energy', and 'impersonal force'" (106-107) suggest that Bennett is "almost a force of nature" (126). In keeping with a trope commonly associated with capitalism, Bennett also has a certain protean quality. That is, he seems to permeate the places that Joe and Clara travel to after they escape Loon Lake. For example, while working for a Bennett-owned auto-plant, Joe notes that through the windows above him the sun

> came through the meshed glass already broken down, each element of light attached to its own atom of dust and there was no light except on the dust and between was black space, like the night around stars. Mr.

> Autobody Bennett was a big man who could do that to light, make the universe punch in like the rest of us. (164-65)

Joe's tone here, half-sarcastic, half-admiring, illustrates Bennett's immense power and the awe and respect it commands. In addition, Bennett's command of space is such that it is difficult for Joe and Clara to escape any territory, town, or employment situation that is not somehow controlled or influenced by him. As Tokarczyk observes,

> [w]hen Joe and Clara try to run from Loon Lake they run right back into his territory, like a couple attempting to flee a storm that is on a specific course. There seems to be no escaping him. Likewise there seems to be no way to outsmart such power and remain on the outside, no effective resistance. Joe thinks he will be able to con Bennett; instead, in a circular motion reminiscent of the lake, Joe ends up running back to him. (126)

In addition, we see how the characters in *Loon Lake*, like characters in the other novels, resort at times to violence in order to voice frustration about their relations with their superiors. While working at the auto plant, and feeling exploited by a job that leaves his bones "vibrating like tuning forks" (165), there is the sense that Joe is entrapped within a space designed to extract his labour and enrich the upper class. For instance, Joe muses: "[a]nd so it had me, Bennett Autobody, just where it wanted me and I was screwed to the machines taking their form a mile away in the big shed, those black cars composed bit by bit from our life and the gift of opposition of thumb and forefinger" (165). Ensconced in this industrial environment Joe hears "stories of people hauling off on a foreman, or pissing on the cars, or taking a sledge hammer to them" (165). These stories Joe absorbs illustrate how some of the autobody workers engaged in violent or

aggressive actions to perhaps express frustration and to reshape the social space, in this case in a haphazard way perhaps, but nonetheless to express disgruntlement with their labour conditions.

The representations of violence by characters in the novels I have analysed show how they challenge the hegemonic social order and in so doing also attempt to change the social spatial dynamic they find themselves in. These actions take the form of individual violent acts, such as Patrick's, Web Traverse's, and Veikko's, as well as the group violence portrayed in *Fox* and *Loon Lake* against scabs, machinery, and public property. Representations of these violent episodes parallel, to a certain extent, Hetherington's concept of heterotopia in the sense that they manifest spaces of alternate ordering that arise out of the desire to create a "perfect" society (Hetherington 2). Given that the characters outlined above are all to a significant degree struggling to impose some form of socialism on their realities, it is reasonable to state that they are attempting to create what for them would be a more "perfect" world than the one they inhabit. The manner in which the characters react against the dominant order, namely through politically motivated acts of aggression, can be read as creating a liminal space within this order, wherein the characters exist momentarily outside of nationally sanctioned legal frameworks and social norms. Even though they don't fully achieve their socialistic goals the characters still impact upon the continuum of existing social relations and this creates a spatial play, as the two versions of social ordering interact. Hence, the politically motivated violent acts show how the characters alter the social spatial dialectic of their existing reality.

In addition to using violence as a means to confront and challenge the master class the novels also demonstrate how workers, strikers, and socialists deployed a variety of social spaces to affirm their intentions, to foster a sense of solidarity, and to propagate pro-union and, at times, various socialist and radical ideas. For instance, in *Fox* there are many scenes depicting pro-worker and often pro-socialist gatherings in churches and parks, which were largely organized by religious leaders who adhered to the social gospel. The social gospel was a broad social movement in North America mainly centred in Protestant churches from the 1890s through the 1930s (Allen 381). It was a reform movement "that was found in church and in secular society, and at municipal, provincial, and, progressively, federal levels" (Allen 381). Allen summarizes the movement as follows:

> The social gospel rested on the premise that Christianity was a social religion, concerned, when the misunderstanding of the ages was stripped away, with the quality of human relations on this earth. More dramatically, it was a call for men to find the meaning of their lives in seeking to realize the kingdom of God in the very fabric of society. It was the measure of the radicalism implicit in the Social Gospel that the Methodist church in 1918 called for complete social reconstruction by transfer of the basis of society from competition to co-operation. (381-82)[70]

[70] Explaining the social gospel Ramsay Cook states that it is generally agreed that the transition to urban industrial capitalism revolutionized most aspects of "social life: relations between classes, sexes, ethnic groups, and even nations". This included fundamental changes in beliefs and values and ideologies. As such, all traditional institutions were forced to reassess their roles in human society (Cook 1). Cook goes on to assert that "[n]early everyone who has written about the social gospel—in Canada, the United States and Great Britain—has, at least until recently, adopted a version of the Marxian account: namely that socio-economic change necessitated alterations in the teachings of Protestantism" (2).

In Winnipeg the social gospel was quite strong and was propagated by Protestant ministers and professors at Wesley College. Cook claims that Winnipeg's Wesley College had become "by the first decade of the [twentieth] century, if not the only, then the most vigorous source of the social gospel in Canada. This was so, apparently both because of the "go-ahead, progressive, atmosphere of the Canadian west which made everyone a bit of a utopian, and because of the increasingly urgent social problems that came as part of rapid, unplanned development" (3). Some of the leading Methodist social gospel figures in the Winnipeg area, such as Salem Bland and J. S. Woodsworth, were especially moved by the social issues plaguing Winnipeg, namely, "materialism, slums, alcohol and prostitution, the plight of labour and the problem of the foreigner" (Cook 3). Sweatman seems well aware that the leaders of Winnipeg's general strike were influenced by the social gospel and reflects it in her novel. This includes one of the main characters, MacDougal, who, as Reinhold Kramer suggests, "is evidently based upon the Reverend William Ivens" (54).

Sweatman portrays how these religious leaders used their positions to lead the strike, which I argue illustrates how they employ social spaces to enhance the agency of the pro-strike working-class collective. Leading up to the Winnipeg General Strike there was animosity and mistrust between the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council and the mainstream press. In fact, three months prior to the beginning of the strike, D. J. Bercuson notes, "the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council voted to exclude newspaper reporters from its meetings because, it alleged, they always misrepresented speeches and proceedings" (118). Once the strike begins Ivens, in the second issue of the Special Strike edition, alleges that the daily newspapers misrepresented the

workers' movement and suppressed facts (Bercuson 118). In light of the strike committee's attitude towards the press, Bercuson concludes that "[t]he closing down of the daily press was not just a side effect of the general strike but was a deliberate attempt to control news fed to the public" (118). The mistrust on the part of the strike committee towards the press suggests that alternative means of communicating became critical, especially in the weeks leading up to the strike and for the duration of the strike. One alternative to the mainstream press was the distribution of bulletins published by pro-labour organizations, but also, and perhaps more powerfully, direct communication between the strike leaders and the strikers vis-à-vis speeches, rallies, marches, and other public events. This latter form of communication, led by enthusiastic and well-established figures in the union and social gospel movements, kept workers informed and motivated throughout the strike. Sweatman's portrayals of these events illustrate the verve and passion of these leaders and how a sense of solidarity was maintained throughout the strike. Importantly for my argument, *Fox* suggests how by taking charge of certain spaces these characters were able to assert collective agency and an alternative mode of social ordering.

An examination of how Sweatman represents the speeches of the strike leaders illustrates the passion and influence these men had on a good part of the Winnipeg public at the time and how they used their positions to bolster the strikers' position by managing the strike and maintaining a feeling of solidarity. For instance, in a speech mixing evangelicalism and socialism, Ivens concludes by declaring "The day of miracles performed by the man of Galilee is not past. For Brotherhood is triumphant once again" (95). Not only can Ivens speak about Christian matters but "he can speak

about the Strike and he can even go into some detail about the Postal employees, or the returned soldiers, words that wouldn't normally be invigorating" (95). But coming from Ivens, with "his enormous voice . . . sense of excess [and] his extravagant anger", it goes off well, because, as Sweatman asserts, "[t]he man could recite the days of the week, and get this response" (95). Given his charisma then, his speech is met with "[c]heers and celebration" (95). Likewise, when MacDougal speaks to the crowd "his words are *like fire*" (96), and, as Sweatman explains, when he speaks it is "as if he is beside you in a small room, and his voice fills the big room and a great sigh runs through the audience" (96). Additionally, at another meeting, when Bill Hoop gets up to speak he "sets fire to the whole bunch of them with his talk about the war and how the world has become a violent place but it's property that's oppression" (7). Hence, these examples illustrate the oratory prowess of the social gospel leaders and how they used sermons and speeches to reshape social spaces, such as parks and churches, to propagate socialist ideas and support the strike. In other words, they reconfigured social space in order to challenge ruling class hegemony.

What is crucial here is the narrative framing of the manner in which the speeches are received at these social gatherings and how a sense of solidarity is expressed. To put it in historical context, according to Bercuson, the strike committee held almost daily open air meetings at Victoria park (140), where strikers could receive "the latest information about the strike or the state of negotiations", or hear "Russell's fiery speeches or Dixon's methodical but passionate presentations", and were "continuously enjoined to keep calm and stay out of trouble" (140). According to Bercuson, Ivens was known to lead services that mixed "labour-oriented hymns and

sermons with speeches from strike leaders" (141) to crowds that sometimes "numbered up to ten thousand" (141). These rallies would yield donations that would be "used to further the striker's cause" (141). One of the gatherings early on in the novel at the Walker theatre is typical. At this gathering "pell-mell voices of the crowd gabble and crow . . . every seat in the place [is] full, men in the aisles and men in the lobby, with all the clamour of an orchestra tuning, they fill the big room, voices hum and rumble from the front stage to the balcony" (6). Here we see a sense of vitality and community amongst the workers. At an informal meeting of strikers, the speakers "look like they'd sing a duet if they knew each other's words, and they nearly do" (7). At another instance when Eleanor is at the labour church, the faces around her are "wide awake" and there is a young man next to her "laughing . . . with his heart" (94), suggesting a sense of sincerity and openness. Lastly, the following description of a gathering buttresses the point that there is a sense of solidarity at the labour meetings.

> There's a congregation warming its hands at the labour Church this afternoon. Dixon's there. For nearly two hours, he talks. Ivens talks. Robinson talks. The people are sitting with their heads in their hands, their eyes on the floor or the woolcoat back of a friend, their chins on their palms, all ears, *Listening*. And the words stitch their brows, harrow thinkinglines from eye to eye. When a face is full of such listening, it lights up from inside like a piece of paper written by the sun through a lens. (32)

By focusing on the audience members' postures and facial expressions Sweatman emphasizes that they are all listening attentively. Capitalizing and italicizing the word listening, moreover, suggests that there is a sense of connection and community

between the workers and the strike leaders. Describing the audience members' faces as having stitched brows and thinkinglines seems to imply that they are awakening to socialist consciousness. The passage also demonstrates that the gathering is crucial for developing collective political agency.

In *Against the Day* Pynchon conveys a similar sense of space being used to create and enhance collective agency for the advancement of an anti-capitalist agenda. This is achieved through the portrayal of the Reverend Moss Gatlin, a travelling anarchist preacher, a minor character who appears at several points in the novel. We first encounter Gatlin when the detective Lew, on orders from his superiors, surveys one of Gatlin's church meetings. Through the eyes of Lew, Pynchon gives us a not unsympathetic description of Gatlin, the people who attend his service, and the general atmosphere of the meeting. This crowd consists of a range of people, described as:

> [u]nemployed men from out of town, exhausted, unbathed, flatulent, sullen . . . Women in surprising numbers, bearing the marks of their trades, scars from the blades of the meatpacking floors, squints from the needlework carried past the borderlands of sleep in clockless bad light, women in head-scarves, crocheted fascinators, extravagantly flowered hats, no hats at all, women just looking to put their feet up after too many hours of lifting, fetching, walking the jobless avenues, bearing the insults of the day. (49)

As we can see from this quotation this group of people are in one way or another worn down by their economic and social conditions. What I want to point out is how Gatlin uses his position in order to bring together people from different walks of life, mostly people who are going through economic hard times, for a meaningful collective

experience. Like the social gospel proponents that led the Winnipeg general strike, Gatlin also mixes typical Christian sermonizing with anti-capitalist rhetoric, in this case decidedly radical anarchist rhetoric. This includes singing songs from "the *Worker's Own Songbook*" (49), which included Hubert Parry's setting of Blake's "Jerusalem," taken, Pynchon explains, "as a great anticapitalist anthem disguised as a choir piece" (49). The song is collectively sung in an emotive and moving fashion, which is evidenced in Lew's response, about which the narrator claims "if it did not break Lew's heart exactly, [it] did leave a fine crack that in time was to prove unmendable" (49). It is also important to point out that, like the outdoor rallies Sweatman depicts, this gathering is imbued with a sense of togetherness, and a key ingredient in this collective feeling is how Gatlin and the crowd collectively name capitalism as an oppressive force and verbalize their discontent. This is exemplified in one of the songs they sing, with lines such as

> On grind the mills of Avarice
> High rides the cruel-eyed foe . . .
> Where is the hand of mercy,
> Where is the kindly face,
> Where is the heedless slaughter
> Find we the promis'd place?
> Sweated, despised and hearthless,
> Scorned 'neath the banker's boot,
> We freeze by their frost-bound windows—
> As they fondle their blood-bought loot. (50)

In one sermon based on Matthew 4:18 and 19, Gatlin says "[a]nd Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two Brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers" (86). Moss then transmutes the biblical story

to the current struggle in the US, situating Jesus near "some American lake", observing "Billy and his brother Pete, casting quarter-sticks of dynamite into the lake" (86). Gatlin wonders out loud "What does Jesus think of this, and what does he say unto them? What will make them fishers of?" (86-87). Gatlin's antics here are typical of Pynchon's penchant for pastiche and juxtaposition, both meant to startle and for humorous effect. Additionally, Gatlin's attempt to bolster worker agency by telling the crowd that "dynamite is both the miner's curse, the outward and audible sign of his enslavement to mineral extraction, and the American working man's equalizer, his agent of deliverance, if he would only dare to use it" (87). Adding to this line of thought, Gatlin maintains that

> [e]very time a stick goes off in the service of the owners, a blast convertible at the end of some chain of accountancy to dollar sums no miner ever saw, there will have to be a corresponding entry on the other side of God's ledger, convertible to human freedom no owner is willing to grant. (87)

Gatlin goes on to espouse ideas typical of anti-capitalist movements of the time. For example, he suggests that "there are no innocent bourgeoisie" (87). In addition, Gatlin claims that class guilt is like "Original Sin, only with exceptions" (87). He elucidates this line of thinking, stating:

> [b]eing born into this [class struggle] don't automatically make you innocent. But when you reach a point in your life where you understand who is fucking who—beg pardon, Lord—who's taking it and who's not, that's when you're obliged to choose how much you'll go along with. If you are not devoting every breath of every day waking and sleeping to destroying those who slaughter the innocent as easy as signing a check,

> then how innocent are you willing to call yourself? It must be negotiated with the day, from those absolute terms. (87)

Gatlin is using his position as a religious leader to perpetuate a brand of preaching that mixes religious sentiments with explicit anti-capitalist discourse, and therefore his manner of street preaching represents a manner of employing social space to re-imagine existing interclass social relations.

As I have argued, *Fox*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, and *Against the Day* all illustrate with significant seriousness how characters generate social-spaces, through the employment of organizational and oratorical skills, that gesture towards new forms of social ordering along socialistic lines; *Loon Lake* manifests a similar impulse, but does not invest as much faith in left-wing leader figures. Like the other contemporary proletarian novels in my study, *Loon Lake* depicts, at various points, characters that make some sort of public presentation which either denounces capitalism or promotes the cause of some form of socialism. But unlike the other novels, *Loon Lake's* advocates of socialism are portrayed as marginalized and ineffectual tramps rather than leaders[71]. Early on in the novel, before Joe has arrived at Bennett's estate, he is a teenager living on the fringes of New York City. He is estranged from his parents and has no real home. As such he is exposed to the underclass that gathers around the docks and other public spaces. It is here that Joe encounters socialist thought through the ramblings of men who "had a vision of things, who could say more than how he felt or what was so unfair or who he was going to get someday" (10). Invariably,

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[71] As Eric Schocket points out, tramps became a major symbol of the effects of economic depressions, not only during the Great Depression, but also going back to the late nineteenth century (112, 113).

Doctorow informs us, this type of man would be "a socialist or a communist or an anarchist" (10). Although these underprivileged orators seem to be down-and-out they nevertheless are capable, Doctorow wants us to believe, of speaking with clarity about society. For example, Joe claims that although these speakers were not "wise or especially decent or kind" (10) they nevertheless had "fitful flashes of lucidity like momentary flares of a dying fire" (10) which would enable them to say "why things were as they were" (10). At another point in the novel Joe encounters a similar anti-capitalist tramp who would "present with incredible grace an eloquent analysis of monopoly capitalism" (11). Although this man seems to be intelligent and eloquent, he does not manifest much agency. This is exemplified in a description of him as a marginally sane alcoholic, a "poor tramp on Sterno" (10) who passes out frequently. This contrasts with Ivens, MacDougal, and Gatlin, who are respected members of their respective communities. Also, the latter use a variety of means, such as speeches, sermons, and songs, within institutional settings such as churches and union halls, in order to generate social spaces amenable to their own interests as labour leaders and socialist thinkers. Doctorow's socialists, by contrast, are mainly placed on the outskirts of town where underclass elements are likely to converge. One such setting is described as smelling of "river scum" (10) and being full of mosquitoes and "rats who butted right through . . . tar-paper shacks and dove into . . . shitholes" (10). The description of the man and the atmosphere of the riverside suggest that he is at the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum and, moreover, that he is not capable of enlisting any significant support for his political views beyond a few of his peers. The insignificance of these marginalized anti-capitalist orators is suggested by their brief

appearances in the novel and the fact that they are not fully rounded characters. Unlike the socialist orators in the other novels who successfully commandeer specific social spaces and reshape them to further their agendas, Doctorow's marginal tramps are incapable of such accomplishments.

Lyle Red James is the only main character that represents a kind of labour leader in *Loon Lake*, but this aspect of his character is not fully developed. For a good part of the novel he appears to be working for Bennett's company as a spy, and then about three quarters of the way through the novel it is suggested that he was a double agent working for the union, distracting the company with diversionary tactics. Thus, the only potential labour leader *Loon Lake* offers turns out to be a fraud.

Perhaps we can gain insight into Doctorow's decision to subvert the figure of a labour leader if we examine Joe's attitude towards life in general, and his apprehension of New York City in particular. In the early part of the novel when Joe is a teenager and living a free-wheeling yet underprivileged existence on the fringes of New York City, we get a glimpse of his outlook on American society. For example, he muses: "I came to make the distinction between the great busy glorious city of civilization on the one hand, and the meagerness or pretense of any one individual I looked at on the other" (9). This thought suggests Joe admires the grandeur of the city, especially as it is expressed through architecture. Doctorow juxtaposes this comment with Joe's rumination on the Empire State Building: "you had to admire the human race making its encampment like this" (9). As well, Joe likens the "sound of traffic rising" to "some song to God and love His Genius for shining the sun on it" (9). On the one hand, Joe admires the city with a kind of religious zeal which seems to signal his approval of

American civilization. Yet when he ponders the individuals who make up the body of American society, his tone becomes cynical. Considering a range of individuals from different strata of society, Joe reflects:

> down on the docks men slept in the open pulled up like babies on beds of newspapers, hands palm on palm for a pillow. Not their dereliction, that wasn't the point, but their meagerness, for I saw this too as I stood at the piers and watched the ocean liners sail. I watched the well-dressed men and women going up the gangways, turning to wave at their friends, I saw the stevedores taking aboard their steamer trunks and wicker hatboxes, I saw the women wrapping their fur collars tighter against the chill coming up off the water, the men in sporty caps and spats looking self-consciously important, I saw their exhaustion, their pretense, their terror, and in these too, the lucky ones, I understood the meagerness of the adult world. (9)

The key word that is accentuated in the passage, *meager*, suggests that Joe perceives a lack of vitality and perhaps authenticity in his social environment. Moreover, in this passage expressing Joe's pessimism, Doctorow includes references to all levels of the socio-economic spectrum. Thus, if Joe sees all kinds of individuals as meager, then it stands to reason that he wouldn't have much faith in socialism, which would require a belief in human capacity to manifest strong traits such as courage, imagination, and determination. This is embodied in his thoughts about adults in general. For example, Joe muses that "[a]dults were in one way or another the ones who were done, finished, living past their hope or their purpose. Even the gulls sitting on the tops of the pilings had more class" (9). Here, the pessimism of Doctorow's central character may be linked to how he portrays socialist leaders as anti-leaders. That is, he seems to favour

individualism and self-reliance over the community-orientation that the socialist orators potentially represent.

Warren Penfield is another character in *Loon Lake* that is presented as having the potential to become a labour leader, but this potential never comes to fruition. Penfield comes from a working-class background and since his youth he has demonstrated a dreamy and artistic personality that worries his parents. Warren's father Jack perceives his character as "mental incompetence" (38). Additionally, Jack wonders if what he perceives as the harshness of life will overwhelm the sensitive Warren when his parents "are not there to protect him" (38). This comment by Penfield's father expresses the harshness of their working-class existence, which does not allow much time to engage in cultural activities, such as reading and writing poetry. In contrast to Jack's opinion of Warren, Neda Penfield, Warren's mother, believes Warren to be "a rare soul, a finer being than either herself or her husband" (38). Moreover, she feels that it was only "[b]y some benign celestial error he was born to them and to their life of slag" (38) and she believes that Warren should have "been the child of a wealthy family going to the finest schools and with every material and intellectual advantage" (38). In addition, Neda harbours the wish that Warren may perhaps earn a scholarship and go away to the city and study (38). On the other hand, Warren's father Jack would rather see his son follow in his footsteps and take on a career as a miner. Jack thinks that if Warren worked in the mines he would eventually develop an inner rage that would lead to bringing out his leadership potential. According to Jack, the emotional response that the hardship of mining would cause would unleash "what glorious flights of power and genius the boy has in him perhaps

to become an organizer a great union orator a radical a leader of men out of their living graves of coal" (39). Jack's thoughts express a sense of bitterness and class consciousness born of hardship. In spite of Jack's wish that his son would rise and use his talents for labour organizing, Warren only works for a short spell in the mines and moves on to a life of drifting, and in the timeframe of the novel proper is a kind of permanent guest of the Bennetts. Throughout the novel Warren proves to be a dependent and rather pathetic figure who never achieves much success as a poet, or in any other professional capacity. Nevertheless, he does exhibit an aptitude for poetry and oratory. For instance, Penfield recites poetry in what is described as a "deep melodious voice" (85) and a "brilliant singsong" (85), which leads Joe to describe Warren's poetry as "beautiful words" (85). At another point in the novel Warren tells Joe and Clara of his experience in World War I. His manner of recounting the story is captivating, as Joe recounts:

> As Penfield sang his words they seemed the most beautiful I had ever heard. I heard them and I didn't hear them, I had no idea he had just written them I thought they were from some book already done. I heard the feeling they inspired in me, that I was living at last! That it was the way it should be, I was feeling Penfield's immense careless generosity, the boon of himself which granted me without argument everything I was struggling for. (86)

The point I want to make here is that although Warren is thought by his parents and others to have latent potential as an intellectual and working-class leader, this potential never comes to fruition. Moreover, he is an alcoholic who is dependent on the Bennetts for his room and board. Thus, although Doctorow portrays Warren as an eloquent and

captivating speaker he ultimately doesn't amount to anything more than a kind of modern "jester" figure for the rich and powerful Bennetts. To summarize, Doctorow seems to have similar inclinations as the other neo-proletarian writers to illustrate how socialist leaders co-opt social spaces and use them to promote their agendas; however, in the world of *Loon Lake*, these would-be labour leaders prove to be ineffectual and do not achieve the potential they appear to possess.

The way that the neo-proletarian novels express how people can reconfigure social spaces in order to advance their interests and challenge the hegemony of the ruling class manifests a key point raised in chapter two. That is, the novelists achieve a politicization of class issues through the employment of realist modalities in order to portray socialist figures, such as Sweatman's Social Gospel leaders, Pynchon's Gatlin, Ondaatje's Alice Gull, and (to a lesser extent) Doctorow's anti-heroes. Thus, it should be noted that the authors here make effective use of one of the main components of midfiction, realism, in order to represent the intersection of the portrayal of political activism and social space. Additionally, the characters' co-option of spaces such as streets, parks, and churches, illustrates that specific moments of class struggle can change the existing social-spatial dialectic (or the continuum of bourgeois social relations). Even though the social gospel leaders, Gatlin, and other pro-socialist dissenters may not achieve the revolution that they may desire, they nevertheless succeed in bringing to light an alternate way of ordering society. This connects with Hetherington's notion that heterotopias consist of spatial play involved with the utopics of modernity in the imagining and attempt to create "perfect worlds" that play a fundamental role in the generation of modern heterotopias. In addition, the dialectic

involved in the class struggle that is represented in the novels corresponds with Foucault's idea that heterotopia evolve out of "unrelenting opposites" that still govern human lives. Thus, like the violent representations, the manner in which characters in the neo-proletarian novels co-opt space in order to disseminate their socialist views and build solidarity, resonates with Foucault's and Hetherington's concepts of heterotopias, and can be interpreted as inchoate, partial heterotopias.

CHAPTER 5: THE RE-INSCRIPTION OF PROLETARIAN TROPES FOR CONTEMPORARY POLITICS AND AESTHETICS

In her study of contemporary historical fiction Lois Parkinson Zamora puns on Harold Bloom's well known anxiety of influence theory and advances the concept of the anxiety of *origins*. Unlike Bloom's theory which views European writers as oppressed or haunted by their predecessors, causing a vexing yet productive misprision (or misreading), Zamora's phrase, anxiety of origins, signals a contrasting tendency in contemporary American fiction. With regards to the context of American experience Zamora observes that origins are often "distant, occluded, contradictory, contaminated or otherwise unsatisfying or unavailable" (*Usable* 8). The strained relationship Americans have with their past, Zamora argues, functions to spur on literary inventiveness. Moreover, Zamora claims that this murky sense of origins creates an anxiety that impels American writers to search for precursors for the sake of building communities around a shared past (5)[72]. Like Bloom's theory, literary works manifesting this new historically informed type of anxiety challenge earlier narratives and in some cases even supplant outmoded literary forms. However, the texts Zamora studies are contestatory in ways that do not adopt a competitive aggression towards their predecessors but rather are "dialogical and textual" (Zamora 5). This anxiety of origins correlates with some contemporary writers' quest for what Zamora and Van Wyck Brooks call a usable past[73]. The concept of usable pasts negates the possibility of innocent histories while remaining open to the possibility of authentic histories. These

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[72] One of the conclusions Zamora draws from her study of contemporary American ethnic women's writing is that in both the criticism and literature there is a "longing for communal coherence in the face of failed or fragmented or emergent communities—a longing that exceeds simple notions of nostalgia … or utopianism" (*Contemporary American* 2).

[73] Zamora's study of American fiction includes both US as well as Latin American literature. Writers focused on in *The Usable Past* include Borges, Hawthorne, Emerson, Williams, Paz, Carpentier, Cather, Fuentes, Cortázar, Rulfo, Cisneros, Puig, Vargas Llosa, Morrison, Garcia Márquez.

come into being when they are "actively imagined by [their] user(s)" (Zamora ix). This concept, which evolves from Zamora's broad reading of American fiction, relates to the postmodern historical fiction of Pynchon, Ondaatje, Doctorow, and Sweatman. These authors share a desire for innovation and also seek to not only find usable elements from the past suitable for literary treatment, but they also seek to revivify a literary subgenre that has fallen out of favour for several decades, namely the proletarian novel.

It is useful to think of the contemporary authors' interest in usable pasts, as Zamora would have it, in relation to the de-mythologizing quality of postmodern texts. As I have discussed in chapter one there is a strong tendency within postmodern thinking to view narrative in terms of myth and to actively adopt either anti-mythic stances or to re-mythologize existing narratives. At this point in my argument, I would like to revisit this theoretical landscape in order to examine how the process of re-mythologizing ties in with how the contemporary class-oriented historical novels embrace history and the proletarian genre. Marc Colavincenzo points out that, as myths develop, the linguistic signs that represent them become impoverished and therefore, as myths become fully formed, these linguistic signs lose their meaning and become "'form' devoid of history" (2-3). In the process of achieving meaning myths create their own value and become a kind of history with a meaning that is already complete. The subsequent removal of history and meaning lends a natural aspect to myth, which is its guiding principle. This gives it a kind of eternal justification and clarity, which doubles as a statement of fact both "imperfectible and unquestionable" (Barthes,

Mythologies, qtd in Colavincenzo 3). Analysing myth and history in relation to postmodern texts, Colavincenzo concludes that given the latter's anti-authoritarianism and scepticism towards meta-narratives they uphold a strong anti-mythic narrative tendency. It manifests this tendency, it's worth noting, by using myth's own tactics in order to subvert myth itself (Colavincenzo 53). In other words, in Barthes' theory, the first-order myth evacuates historical discourse of its meaning and converts it into mere form, and the anti-myth performs this same function (Colavincenzo 53). Thus, Colavincenzo argues that postmodern fiction takes historical discourse as something natural and given and dismantles it by turning it into a mere signifier (53), laying bare the fact that traditional historical discourse doesn't achieve its own claims. Finally, the postmodern writer then takes this "voided" narrative vessel and deploys it "for its own purposes" (Colavincenzo 53). If we situate this manoeuvre of transforming historical discourse into "empty" forms void of meaning to be reconfigured by the postmodern author, in relation to Zamora's notion that contemporary American writers seek usable pasts and wish to engage in more communal, tradition-oriented forms of literature, then we are well-positioned to explore how the class-orientated postmodern novels engage with earlier proletarian novels to construct an analytic framework with which to understand the newer works in relation to their generic predecessors.

Comparing the neo-proletarian novels with the early twentieth century proletarian novels, we notice a marked diminution of political intention in the former. This is significant in so far as it can enable a reading of contemporary politics and how they are treated in contemporary literature. Although the neo-proletarian novels embrace, to a certain extent, the class issues featured in early twentieth century

proletarian novels, I argue in this chapter that they do not formulate a clear political stance. This is consistent with contemporary debates on art and politics wherein both socialistic doctrine and free-market capitalism are often viewed as unsatisfying. Certainly, politics have remained central to debates pertaining to the relationships between identitarian issues and literature; however, the general ambivalence that both socialism and capitalism have instilled in the public has tended to make writers and critics shy away from work engaged with political matters concerning economics and class. In contrast to general literary discourse, it is precisely sympathy for a class perspective and a fascination with radicalism that motivates neo-proletarian novelists to adopt a postmodernist anti-myth strategy and to make of the Depression-era proletarian novel a usable past. However, in spite of their affinity for class narratives these authors are reluctant to adhere firmly to a leftwing ideological stance and adopt instead an ironic and ambivalent posture towards their subjects, especially in regards to two key tropes of proletarian fiction: hyper-masculine images and political conversion plots. In order to go against the grain of these conventional tropes the neo-proletarian writers use realism to create their characters and worlds and nestle them within narrative structures that also conform to experimental strategies.

The kind of irony that mediates the ideological ambivalence I trace in the neo-proletarian novel resonates with broader contemporary cultural tendencies. It is commonly held that irony has become dominant in Western contemporary culture[74].

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[74] As Christopher Donovan explains, "irony has become cultural currency; by the mid-nineties, musicians shrilly evoked it like a mantra in popular music, and journalists endlessly mulled over its pervasiveness and its contribution to contemporary directionlessness, despondency, and insensibility" (9).

Indeed, according to David Brauner, irony has become the buzzword of our time (18). I suggest that this is related once again to political ambivalence, or a significant loss of faith in Western democracy and parliamentary liberal political systems. Discussing American political life generally, Christopher Donovan claims that the "majority of the minority of citizens who vote remain decidedly non-idealistic, disillusioned even with their own candidate" (9) and "[r]elativism is commonplace" (9). This cultural context seems to be central to the disposition of the neo-proletarian writers who concern me. Regarding Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*, Reinhold Kramer speculates that her critique of capitalism has more to do with her concerns about capitalism in the 1980s than about a particular interpretation of the Winnipeg General Strike.

> *Fox's* dramatic return to the Strike, that originary moment of Canadian socialism, may point spectrally to an identity crisis of Manitoba socialism in the 1980s. In the late 1980s the New Democratic Party was attempting to hold onto its socialist rhetoric, a rhetoric which held so much symbolic value for its members (McAllister 9, Loxley 330) at the same time as the party resisted any actions—such as nationalization—which could be interpreted as threatening to private enterprise. After NDP premier Ed Schreyer's initiative to nationalize car insurance in the early 1970s, neither Schreyer's second administration nor one- and-a-half Howard Pawley administrations (1981 until 1988) unveiled any distinctively socialist policies. The liberal makeover of the NDP helped the party at the polls, but weakened its sense of mission. Via Eleanor, MacDougal, and the 1919 General Strike, *Fox* takes a different tack: the novel yearns for socialist origins, prior to the compromises of power. (60)

Sweatman's decision to write about an earlier period, when radical politics were more prevalent, may be considered a form of nostalgia, and the same could be said of all the neo-proletarian novels[75]. Even so, as Kramer explains, this is partially on account of the compromised position of leftist politics in the latter decades of the twentieth century and up until the present. In spite of this nostalgic aspect, and on a deeper level, I think the neo-proletarian novels express an ambivalence and cynicism toward politics that resonate with contemporary attitudes in that they do not adhere strongly to either a right or left political ideology[76]. In an interview with Herb Wyile, Sweatman claims that she cannot "commit to writing a really left-wing book" (175), yet she also adds "I sure hate the right wing . . . [b]ut I actually don't trust the left wing either" (175-76). Sweatman's take on politics seems emblematic of the other novelists I am concerned with and might also be a sign of the times. Like Sweatman, Doctorow exhibits a similar cynicism towards politics, and on a deeper level, the relation between politics and subjectivity. Michele Tokarczyk suggests that Doctorow's writing exhibits what Peter Sloterdijik calls "enlightened false consciousness", a state of being wherein one "recognizes a futility in many activities such as voting in elections, trying to become upwardly mobile, and so forth, but nonetheless goes through the motions because doing so is necessary for economic, and to some extent emotional, survival" (6). Doctorow himself, moreover, seems to have little faith in any political ideological doctrine, as he claims all the major ideologies such as capitalism, socialism, and

[75] This is related to Roxanne Rimstead's thinking on Canadian poverty narratives. These texts tend to "project extreme poverty elsewhere in time or geographical space in order to distance it from the here and now and to make it appear anomalous to the wealthy nation rather than systematic" (12).

communism, have been "totally discredited" (EC, 65, qtd in Harter and Thompson 93). "None of it seems to work", he argues, "[n]o system, whether it's religious or anti-religious or economic or materialistic, seems to be invulnerable to human venery and greed and insanity" (EC, 65, qtd in Harter and Thompson 93). In spite of this rather sweeping statement, Doctorow's work nonetheless manifests an abiding preoccupation with leftist political concerns, and the same could be said for the other three novelists. However, despite their sympathies for the left, they rarely endorse a radical leftism. They remain politically stuck, like many Westerners, between a rock and a hard place and as such their work tends to drift into politically ambivalent themes. This may be due, in part, to the fact that unlike most proletarian writers Ondaatje, Pynchon, Sweatman, and Doctorow do not have significant working-class life experience to draw upon[77]. It is worth reflecting on the notion that insofar as the contemporary neo-proletarian novelists employ elements of proletarian fiction, they do not attempt to promote a political line or ideology. Rather, their use of political themes and proletarian content reflect irony and self-reflexivity in the sense that they seem to be aware that they are reusing an older genre that has a certain amount of "cultural baggage"—a reputation for tendentiousness and didacticism for example—but they adapt it to their purposes, minus the partisan politics that were a part of some of the key

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[76] Linda Hutcheon's notion of the transideological politics of irony is relevant here as it reminds us that irony can be both "political and apolitical, both conservative and radical, both repressive and democratizing" (*Irony's Edge*, 35).

[77] This is related to a debate in proletarian and progressive-era literature which has to do with the legitimacy of middle class writers adopting proletarian themes. For more on this matter see Patrick Chura's *Vital Contact: Downclassing Journeys in American Literature from Herman Melville to Richard Wright.*

texts associated with the original proletarian fiction movement[78]. In other words, the political ambivalence manifested in *In the Skin of a Lion, Against the Day, Fox,* and *Loon Lake* resonates with a kind of irony Allan Wilde claims is indigenous to the contemporary-era. He describes this kind of irony as one that exudes "attitudes and perspectives—distance and detachment" that we associate with a "strategy of non-involvement or disillusion or defense" (*Horizons*, 29). Hence, the neo-proletarian novels' employment of proletarian elements, and presumably their intention to at least gesture towards the valency of left-wing politics without wholly endorsing them, which are conveyed in part through realist modalities, is made palatable to contemporary audiences through their use of postmodernist experimental elements, such as irony and fragmentariness.

Reviewing the intentions, theories, and major tendencies of the North American proletarian moment will help differentiate the neo-proletarian novels from their

[78] This view of proletarian fiction has been increasingly challenged by contemporary critics. For instance, Janet Galligani Casey asserts that "[r]ecent studies of the 1930s have successfully reshaped the contours of a field that had been unhappily delimited by certain prevalent assumptions: that the decade was about economics rather than aesthetics; that its attempts at "serious" artistic expression resulted in simplistic and embarrassingly tendentious works; that the Left could or should be equated specifically with the Communist Party, whose programs were proven misguided at best and un-American at worse" (xii). Moreover Casey suggests that much of the recent reconceptualising of the 1930s left has come through the 1990s emphasis on identity politics and the multiplicities of representations have given new validity to the complex social and political allegiances of the various intellectual figures of the time. This has helped usher in reconsideration of the roles of minorities and women, whose concerns had been "pre-empted in histories of American radicalism that emphasized Left socio-political movements as both white and male" (xii).

predecessors[79]. The key difference between the two lies in the issue of tendentiousness. The earlier novelists adopted tendentiousness as a way to politicize their art and to persuade their readers to view the world through the lens of a Marxist interpretation of history; however, although concerned with class injustices, the contemporary novels distance themselves from this approach, and tend to ironize political intentions[80]. Proletarian writers' adoption of tendentiousness or didacticism is a result of the strong influence that communism had on the literary community in the 1930s, especially on those writers who emerged from the working-class or who were concerned with social issues stemming from the Great Depression. The communist flavour of much 1930s American literature is to a significant degree attributed to the influence of Mike Gold, who was one of the first Americans to encourage a proletarian culture (Irr 102). Gold assumed that novels of the working class, written in a "clean and rugged style" (Irr 102), would "necessarily lead to greater sympathy for Communism, as the ideology of the working class" (Irr 102), and that by "representing the power, strength, and certainty of the American working class, proletarian culture will help create the conditions for that class to gain power" (Irr 102). The American Communist Party and its literary and intellectual chapter branches known as the John Reed Clubs were

[79] It is important to point out that the proletarian movement in literature was significantly stronger in the U.S. than in Canada. It is generally accepted that in Canada during the 1930s there were much fewer accomplished writers engaged with proletarian themes than in the US. The Canadian proletarian literature leading up the 1930s (the period from 1870s – 1920s) was, according to F. W. Watt, not substantial or all that distinguished (173). Watt claims that it never "rose above the level of the crude, naïve, sentimental, or melodramatic" (173). In her study of proletarian literature in Canada Ruth McKenzie concludes, "[t]he truth is, there is no proletarian fiction of any importance in Canada" (59). This alleged lack of significant Canadian leftist literature in the 1930s is both acknowledged and contested by James Doyle. He claims that a dominant liberal humanism within Canadian literary circles has overshadowed the influence that Marxism and Communism had on Canadian writing in the period 1920 – 1960 (1-2).

central to the proletarian moment. A manifesto published in a 1931 edition of the *New Masses* (associated with the John Reed Clubs) espoused the notion of "art as a weapon". As Irr explains, this manifesto linked the project of creating an empowering proletarian culture to a larger cultural analysis (102). Moreover, the 30s left viewed culture as a "zone of contest" (102) and they saw "opposition as the extant condition of culture" (102). Given the proletarian leadership's politics and interpretation of the cultural terrain, they rejected the notion of "art for art's sake" (Homberger 232). Moreover, they also denied the "idealist tradition in aesthetics, which sought to portray art in terms of its inner nature and forms" (Homberger 232) and opted instead to use literature as a way to politicize the issues affecting working-class and unemployed people. According to the party line at the time, culture was a legitimate area for struggle since the capitalist class was already using culture to promote its interpretation of the world (Irr 102). The political fervency of the proletarian moment is perhaps understandable given the urgency of the social issues that the Depression ushered in. However, the politicization of the proletarian novel brought with it what are by now well known negative ramifications that have had an enduring effect on the perception and validity of proletarian culture.

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[80] Within proletarian American circles of the late 1920s and 1930s a Marxist theoretical grounding was both imperative and relatively unspecified. See Foley's *Radical Representations* 118-119.

For one thing, the stand against art for art's sake tended to push aspiring proletarian and working-class writers into an anti-modernist position[81]. Many critics believe that proletarian literature sacrificed aesthetics for politics and this resulted in tendentiousness (Irr 106). Referring to Rahv's analysis Murphy explains that "tendentiousness was actively promoted, not only by members of the *New Masses*' staff but by Communist literary critics in general" (Murphy 7). Irr puts this into perspective in terms of contemporary theory, in particular narratology. "According to narratologists", Irr asserts, "ideological fiction is characterized by a redundancy" when it attempts to be tendentious (114). At this point "the narrator validates certain politically correct sentiments voiced by particular characters or insists on a corrective interpretation of events depicted" (Irr 114). This creates a literary space whereby a "closed, monologic world is created which allows no space for a dialogue of voices or a discrepancy between points of view or a multiplicity of political vocabularies" (Irr 114). Irr asserts, in addition, that the monologic nature of the proletarian novel denies the potential of art by foreclosing on the open-endedness of social reality (114-15). Furthermore, Irr avers that the proletarian novel's focus on "historical inevitability and an ideology of progress" produced "an 'impossible' aesthetic" which, she claims, "[o]f the charges laid against political fictions and the proletarian novel in particular . . . is probably the most serious for contemporary readers" (115). All in all, critics are more or less in agreement that the significant influence of the Communist Party and socialist

[81] On the debate between modernism anti-modernism within proletarian circles, Cowley avers that there was a continued bitter argument between *Partisan Review*, begun in 1934 as an organ of the John Reed Club, and *The New Masses*, which was more directly controlled by the Communist Party. *Partisan Review* advised its readers to "study the new bourgeois writers as examples of technique. *The New*

elements over the proletarian literary movement of the 1930s tended to result in literature that manifested tendentiousness, overt politicization of the narrative, and a dismissal of modernistic aesthetic intentions (art for art's sake). Although the contemporary novels I examine in this dissertation look to the proletarian movement for usable and inspiring elements of the past, the inclination to be tendentious is not an aspect that they revitalize.

A significant aspect of proletarian fiction's tendentiousness is a reflection of the desire of proletarian leaders to instil in writers, cultural workers, and sympathizers the need to represent the proletariat as excessively strong and powerful. This was manifested in a form of "hyper-masculinity", which is viewed today as problematically gendered and containing an underlying and troubling heteronormativity. Even though they embrace the proletarian novel, and fulfill Zamora's anxiety of origins theory, the neo-proletarian novels do not duplicate this form of hyper-masculinity, but rather represent gender in ways that display an ironic stance towards the sentimental earlier versions of masculinity. Associating the industrial working class with male vitality and potency emerges around the turn of the century and thus predates the proletarian moment by roughly twenty five years. Middle-class writers of this era often took an interest in working-class life. They believed that their own privileged backgrounds softened them and degraded their virility, and, as such, they reasoned that "descending" into rugged labour environments would enable them to renew their masculine identity and gain valuable material for their writing in the process (Chura 2).

Masses spoke in several voices, but usually it said, in effect, 'Down with technique and hurrah for writing that follows the party line'" (246).

This resonated with Rooseveltian notions of the strenuous life, which encouraged "physically rebuilding an overly domesticated male selfhood" (Chura 2), a form of masculine renewal and revitalization critics term "'regeneration through incorporation" (Chura 4)[82]. A similar investment in virile masculinity emerged in the One Big Union (OBU) movement of the Post-WWI era. Drawing upon a combination of new and already existing practices (the latter espoused by Canadian labourists and American Wobblies), OBU men created images which differentiated radical manhood from both the class politics and the masculinities of managers and scabs (McCallum 20). The distinction between working-class masculinity and other kinds of masculinity was articulated by the OBU perspective in posters, poems, and articles which were central to how they understood class domination (McCallum 20). All in all, beginning at the turn of the century and lasting until the mid to late thirties there was, in working-class and class-oriented discourse, a tendency to link working-class pride, militancy, and activism with exaggerated forms of manhood.

By the time the proletarian movement emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the image of a strong and powerful proletarian worker was well in place and thought to be an effective measure for promoting socialist ideology. Caren Irr stresses that one of the main preoccupations of U.S. communist circles of the 1930s was the imperative to "conceptualize particular authors as pioneers or rugged individualists"

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[82] It should be noted that this form of regeneration through contact by middle class individuals with the working classes was usually only temporary (Chura 5). In addition, the motivation to make this contact has been viewed as derived from a "crisis of masculinity" that commenced in the 1890s with the Rooseveltian perspective that "manliness was no longer an inevitable product of middle-class life and that the ideals of independence, self-reliance, competitiveness and risk-taking (essentially mythic constructions of an agrarian frontier) were becoming lost to middle-class men in an industrialized culture" (Chura 5).

(5). Likewise, Paula Rabinowitz argues that the depression "demanded a 'vigorous' literature to unite the hunger-ravaged working class and forge it into a revolutionary proletariat" (22), and this entailed constructing an image of the industrial worker as excessively masculine. This image of masculinity is linked, Irr argues, to the fact that left culture in the early twentieth century was "a fictive entity—or an imagined community—that, to some extent, repressed its actual heterogeneity in favour of an ideal citizen, the well-muscled and committed proletarian" (13). Indeed, a central symbol of leftist culture was the "so-called 'positive hero'—the burly, disciplined worker who was a member of a group of fellow laborers" (100). This figure was, as Irr points out, usually "depicted with pneumatically bulging muscles and on a superhuman scale" and evoked the promise of "a bursting of restraints" (100). He also showed up as a dominant tendency in the iconography of the left as muscular male proletarians often graced the covers of the *New Masses* (Foley 221). Although the image was not always employed in a consistent manner, its presence was almost ubiquitous amongst leftist cultural production, appearing in "labor propaganda, post office friezes, drama, reportage, diaries, film, and perhaps most famously, in the controversial proletarian novel" (Irr 101). The masculinist proletarian image was not totally ubiquitous, however, and some proletarian writers chose to depict less virile protagonists. Often women writers, for example, would describe "heroines struggling with love and family as well as work and torn by their contradictory commitments" (Irr 109). Like other women writers during the Depression, female proletarian writers confronted the limitations of gender roles inspired by the economic crisis and did their best to merge "the struggle for survival with the struggle for some kind gender equality" (Irr 109-

110). However, if women wanted to challenge the image of the muscular male worker as the central symbol of revolutionary leftism, they had two main hurdles to overcome. One was the fact that they were simply overshadowed by the men in leadership positions. As Rabinowitz argues, although women were active in the proletarian movement, their literary talents "were used primarily for fiction, poetry, and reportage" (Rabinowitz 59). As such, women tended to be marginalized from the intellectual power centres and were not well represented in scholarly discourse or in editorial positions. In a sense, women "involved in literary radicalism constituted a colony within the movement" (Rabinowitz 34), and often they would review "one another's novels, implying a ghettoization within the pages of male-dominated leftist journals" (Rabinowitz 34). The other hurdle women faced was simply overcoming the psychological barrier that would prevent them from advancing female heroes or leadership role models. Therefore, the dominance of the male literary voice in the official publications gave little encouragement to women writers to "articulate revolutionary politics in a distinctly female voice" (Foley 222). As such, the masculinist image of the proletarian figure tended to dominate.

The neo-proletarian novels, by contrast, go against the grain of the masculinist trope by developing politicized and heroic female characters, and male characters who are not heroic in the traditional sense but who are self-questioning and who periodically become politically apathetic. Additionally, unlike the earlier proletarian novel's use of the masculine trope as a means to stir up revolutionary spirit, the representations of female heroes and male characters do not go so far as to imply or exhort an imminent socialist revolution. Rather, the neo-proletarian novels manifest

views of gender generally consistent with contemporary writers and thinkers[83]. Sweatman's novel *Fox*, for example, goes against the grain of the proletarian proclivity to endorse images of the proletarian worker as an ideal of masculine strength and potency. Her intention is not to emasculate, but rather to explore the subject of the class struggle at the heart of the Winnipeg strike from a standpoint in which feminist, postmodernist historiographical, and proletarian perspectives may converge profitably. Looking closely at the text, one observes that although some of the characters are working-class, the novel does not dwell on characters or scenes typical of the masculinist industrial working class; there are no depictions of factories, construction sites, or rural agricultural environments. Instead, the story revolves mainly around two women, Eleanor and her cousin Mary. From the opening section of the novel Sweatman implies that Eleanor is not comfortable with her bourgeois peers, especially those who will become associated with the anti-strike Citizen's Committee of 1000. Thus, it is not surprising that when MacDougal suggests to Eleanor that she assist in the kitchen that supports the striking workers she readily agrees. Her pro-strike activism contradicts most of her friends' positions on the general strike and signals her siding with MacDougal and the strikers over her own class interests. Eleanor shows up at the strikers' kitchen and tries her best to fit in. She goes to work chopping vegetables and listens to the others, not speaking at first but hoping to earn their respect through her diligence. She even wears a navy blue blouse, dressing "*casually* in front of her

[83] Within the discourses of 1930s proletarianism women tended to both side with the party line and chafe against it in their attempts to assert their own voice and raise issues pertinent to their conditions. Although there emerged some enlightened views on gender egalitarianism it is generally assumed that the movement in general did not adequately meet the concerns and needs of women. As Rabinowitz

mirror, all the time grateful no one could see her" suggesting Eleanor's attempt at "class passing". Given that, as Chura argues, women-authored proletarian narratives sought to instil bourgeois values and aesthetic standards among working-class subjects (5), it is significant that the upper-class Eleanor, arguably the protagonist of the novel, is the character who becomes the most class-conscious and decides to side with the striking workers. The fact that Eleanor's political conversion emerges through discussions with MacDougal, listening to speeches, and helping prepare meals for strikers shows how Sweatman harnesses the postmodernist anti-myth zeitgeist to re-write the proletarian novel from a disenchanted upper-class female perspective. This resonates with Zamora's notion that contemporary historical writers seek precursors and wish to join traditions. In this case, Sweatman fulfills Zamora's theory in a very contemporary fashion by fusing a tradition, the proletarian novel, which had a tendency to over-stress and sentimentalize masculine working-class power, with feminist and postmodernist perspectives in order to achieve a new way of writing about gender, history, and class struggle.

Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* also avoids employing the conventional masculinist proletarian discourse and favours one that embraces feminism and narrative egalitarianism. Out of the two central characters, Alice and Patrick, it is Alice who is the most forceful and committed political activist. Alice's views on class divisions are fuelled by her anger at what she views as an exploitative economic system and the hypocrisy and moral complacency of those who control the system.

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explains, although the CPUSA had "a vocabulary by which to name gender inequality, it never developed mechanisms for organizing against it" (35).

> The rich are always laughing. They keep saying the same things on their boats and lawns: *Isn't it grand! We're having a good time!* And whenever the rich get drunk and maudlin about humanity you have to listen for hours. But they keep you in the tunnels and stockyards. They do not toil or spin. Remember that . . . understand what they will always refuse to let go of. There are a hundred fences and lawns between the rich and you. You've got to know these things, Patrick, before you ever go near them—the way a dog before battling with cows rolls in the shit of the enemy. (133)

Alice's diatribes against the rich and powerful resonate with radical ideas. For example, she tells Patrick "[y]ou must name the enemy . . . [y]ou name the enemy and destroy their power" (124-25). Alice also manifests her political convictions through her work as an agit-prop actor. She believes that the power of art can buttress the cause of worker emancipation. As she explains to Patrick, "[y]ou reach people through metaphor. It's what I reached you with earlier tonight in the performance" (123). In spite of the fact that by today's standards Alice's political stance may seem essentialist and naïve, of the novel's central characters she is clearly the most determined and mature fighter in the class war[84].

Patrick on the other hand is more ambivalent about politics and class. Although Alice is able to convince Patrick to adopt a leftist attitude, she has doubts about his ability to become a committed and mature political activist. Illustrating these doubts, Alice tells Patrick that he can be "easily harnessed" (122). In addition, Alice tells Patrick "[y]ou don't want power. You were born to be a younger brother" (124).

Patrick himself even concedes, "I think I have a passive sense of justice" (122). Moreover, regarding Patrick's insipid politics, Julie Beddoes claims "[i]t is as easy for [Patrick] to make love to a revolutionary as to the mistress of one of the ruling class" (208), while Milena Marinkova asserts that "the success of Patrick's political conversion is questionable" (99). Patrick does take action that is seemingly based on political convictions, but his attempts are somewhat half-hearted and ineffectual. For example, his setting fire to the Muskoka Hotel can be interpreted, as Marinkova argues, as being based more on "revenge for Alice's accidental death" (99) than on political conviction. As well, his attempt to blow up the water filtration plant fails partly because he is talked out of it by Harris. In the course of their conversation Harris reminds Patrick of Alice's death by what he calls an "anarchist bomb" (Davey 154). Patrick's memory of Alice at this point, Frank Davey argues, "transforms Patrick from bomber to bomb-victim, from someone angry and aggressive to someone aggrieved and comforted" (154). Hence, instead of "detonating the charges he has planted he falls asleep" (Davey 154). The fact that Patrick is persuaded to abandon his plans and actually ends up asleep in his adversary's presence demonstrates the relative weakness of his political convictions. This aspect of Patrick's character irritates some critics. For example, Beddoes claims "[t]he novel explicitly discusses militant class politics, yet it foregrounds its postmodern indeterminancy at the moment when its main characters' relationship to a possible collective is at stake" (210). All in all, Patrick's adoption of a leftist political stance seems questionable, and certainly weaker than Alice Gull's

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[84] Milena Marinkova, for example, argues that "Alice's staunchly oppositional ideology, even if espousing social equality, is blind and reductive to the specificity, difference, and opacity of her followers" (97).

political commitment. This suggests that *In the Skin of a Lion* does not embrace the masculinist approach favoured by many of the early proletarian novels, and opts instead for a stance that is ambivalent regarding the traditional association of manliness and working-class identity, while offering a female protagonist as the most active and class-conscious character. The fact that the only politicized characters, Alice and Kato, are killed and die young most likely on account of their political activities, illustrates Ondaatje's ambivalence towards leftism. It is reasonable then to interpret the characterization of Alice, Patrick, and Kato as an ironic stance towards the proletarian novel which Ondaatje seems at least partially indebted to.

Like Sweatman's and Ondaatje's novels, *Loon Lake* also does not reproduce the model of proletarian masculinity that Gold and others promoted. Given that he comes from a working-class background, is ambitious, talented, restless, and strong-minded, Joe seems to be a good candidate for a proletarian hero. However, he never really comes close to developing a sense of class consciousness. In fact, none of the working-class characters do. As Joe Levine notes, Joe, Penfield and Clara flee from their working-class circumstances and "[i]n renouncing their respective familial legacies they all reject the ideal of class solidarity for the ideal of individual realization" (73, qtd. in Cooper 120)[85]. Joe exhibits traits associated with a traditional sense of masculinity such as competitiveness, egoism, initiative, strength and will-power; however, his activities throughout the novel are largely directed toward his own self-interest and not in support of any political cause. He does briefly become involved with

[85] Moreover, Joe's rise from poverty to riches "summons up the countless Horatio Alger stories and the myth of the self-made man" (Parks 75), a genre of narrative that reflects a pro-capitalist stance which would be counter to the radical novel.

labour politics while staying for a period in Jackson City and working for one of Bennett's auto manufacturing plants. He joins the union but much like Patrick Lewis and Kit Traverse he does not develop a commitment to either unionism or radicalism. While working at the auto plant he observes his fellow workers. Listening to their conversations he hears "stories of people hauling off on a foreman, or pissing on the cars, or taking a sledge hammer to them, good stories, wonderful stories, probably not true" (165). Although his comment is slightly sarcastic, it nevertheless shows his empathy for his fellow workers. Joe also admires his co-workers' complex social codes, their "standards of conduct honor serious moral judgment (sic)", and how they work diligently without complaining, bragging, threatening, or currying favour with bosses (165). However, when Joe tells Clara about how he obtained what he calls his "dumb unskilled" job (155) he claims there was "nothing to it": he just showed them his "shining innocent face" (155). Although the young and unskilled Joe was competing for work against more experienced men who had shown up at the recruitment office with their toolboxes and employment records, Joe cockily proclaims that his hire was "[n]o contest" (155). Joe's nonchalant and facetious attitude towards his job and his fellow workers illustrates his lack of interest in working-class people and his unwillingness to invest in working-class solidarity. Joe's privileging of individualism over working-class solidarity is most forcefully conveyed at the end of the novel, when Joe inherits Bennett's estate. Thus, although Joe may embody a conventional type of masculinity and in spite of his poverty and exposure to socialist

ideas he never becomes significantly politicized. Thus *Loon Lake* does not reproduce the proletarian masculinist trope.

It has been observed that the masculinist trope prominent in proletarian culture of the early twentieth century tended to ascend through its marginalization of other dimensions of identity not associated with traditional manhood, namely femininity and non-hegemonic, non-heteronormative forms of maleness. As Rabinowitz asserts, the masculinist image was so closely tied to the image of an ideal and imminently revolutionary working-class man that by a crude kind of logic, the class enemy, the bourgeoisie, came to be associated with what is not "masculine", i.e. feminine and homosexual traits. Regarding Gold's construction of the proletariat and proletarian literature as masculine, Rabinowitz claims he "implicitly connected modernism with bourgeois decay and femininity" (22). Indeed, it was Gold's homophobic attack on Thornton Wilder in *The New Republic* that launched "'proletarianism' in the discourse of American literary criticism" (Rabinowitz 22). In Wilder's work, Gold objected to the language of "the 'pansy' *poseurs* of modernism" (Rabinowitz 22). Moreover, he maintained that Wilder's theology of 'Jesus Christ', the First British Gentleman, was a "daydream of homosexual figures in graceful gowns moving archaically among the lilies" (Gold 351). As such, Rabinowitz argues that Gold's selection of metaphors ultimately set the tone for the homophobic and antifeminine rhetoric of literary radicals, "situating female and gay writers of revolutionary fiction at a precarious angle to the official stance of the genre's institutions" (22-23). Likewise, Irr claims that the Communist theorists, Gold and others, used the male couple as a figure for everything

they disapproved of, "from the careless sadism of a teacher to the decadence of a fading cultural aristocracy" (*Queer Borders*, 512).

The generally gendered and heterosexist attitude that pervaded Gold's prescriptions for the proletarian novel are not rehearsed in the neo-proletarian novels I examine in this dissertation. In particular, the homophobia expressed in the image of masculinity is avoided and even subverted in Pynchon's *Against the Day* through his portrayal of gay characters. The sexual relation between Reef Traverse, Cyprian Latewood, and Yashmeen Halfcourt stands out as an instance of Pynchon's resistance to the early proletarian novel's proclivity for heteronormativity and excessive masculinity. Reef is part of the Traverse clan, one of the central character clusters of the novel, and, like his siblings, he has adopted his father's anarchistic and anti-capitalist standpoint. Given that he is a drifter, a cardsharp, and contemplates joining an expedition to herd camels imported into Nevada suggests his characterization echoes cowboy mythology. In spite of Reef's characterization which is not necessarily that of a typical industrial worker, his activities remain, like his brother Frank's, sympathetic to the working-class cause. In the last quarter of the novel, Reef becomes romantically involved with Yashmeen Halfcourt who is having an affair with the openly gay Cyprian Latewood. Reef becomes involved in a sexual relationship with Latewood and Yashmeen. It is implied that Reef's life up to this point has been strictly heterosexual. For example, during their first encounter, Latewood's initial advances are rebuffed by Reef but he eventually embraces the encounters with Yashmeen and Latewood (881). In spite of his initial reluctance a sexual and emotional bond forms between Reef, Cyprian, and Yashmeen and they continue their encounters for a

significant period of time. Although Reef is initially reluctant to embrace a sexual relationship with Cyprian, he winds up enjoying it. In this ongoing mutually satisfying homosexual/heterosexual relationship among three people, one of whom is a mixture of proletarianism and cowboy mythology, we can see how a postmodern treatment of the proletarian novel ironically goes against the grain of the heteronormative tendencies of the 1930s proletarian genre.

My analysis thus far has shown how Sweatman, Ondaatje, Doctorow and Pynchon created their novels in a manner that picks up on some of the central themes of the proletarian novel while diverging from excessive masculinity, one of the important proletarian tropes. In other words, the contemporary proletarian novels both embrace their generic predecessors while rejecting one of its major tendencies (I will discuss another rejected tendency shortly). This divergence from the proletarian novel, it seems to me, reflects the postmodern novel's co-existence with dominant cultural trends roughly associated with the postmodern era, in particular a respect for heterogeneity and difference with regards to gender and sexuality. Thus the neo-proletarian novels' gaze at the proletarian novel also parallels Amy Elias's concept of postmodern metahistory, which she claims has the ability to "theorize and ironically desire history rather than access it through discovery and reconstruction" (xvii). Furthermore, Elias reasons that given that postmodern writers are ensconced in a culture that is presentist, tribalist, and consumerist, they are likely to be hyper-consciously aware of society's drive to know history, but might also harbour concerns that certain types of history might be either some imperial or fascist desire to control the past, or else a glib and self-serving entertainment version of historical content

(xvii). Hence, this dichotomy of attraction and distancing resonates with Wilde's conception of postmodern irony as conveying detachment and non-involvement. I would point out that the employment of ironically mediated elements of an older fictional tradition, the proletarian genre, mixed with characterization dependent on realism, exemplifies the concept of midfiction. Moreover, as I have tried to argue, the postmodern proletarian novels want to both engage with the quintessentially proletarian theme of class struggle, and yet also back away from taking conclusive political stances. This form of irony seems to encapsulate what is happening with the way that these novels both revitalize the proletarian novel while distancing themselves not only from socialist doctrine, but also from representing a type of masculinity that seems outmoded by today's standards regarding gender and sexuality.

In addition to ironically subverting the masculinist tropes of the radical proletarian novel, contemporary neo-proletarian novels also subvert the tendency of proletarian novels to manifest conversion plots. In the proletarian period large numbers of left-wing novelists wrote what commentators at the time called "conversion plots", and wrote what were "essentially proletarian bildungsromans—accounts of the process whereby a non-class-conscious worker develops into a seasoned and committed fighter for the proletariat" (Foley, *Generic* 43). In *The Dream of the Golden Mountains*, a memoir reflecting on the 1930s, Malcolm Cowley addresses the question of conversion plots in his assessment of the allegedly formulaic quality of proletarian novels. He claims that most of them have "[e]ssentially the same plot", which involves a young and naïve working class man who through the aid of an older Marx-influenced mentor, develops class-consciousness. The workers are, according to Cowley, categorically

oppressed, and always "go out on strike" and "form a union with the older man as leader, and always the strike is broken by force of arms. (Cowley 250-51). Although Cowley's description is somewhat flippant and over-generalized, much of the critical literature on the proletarian novel more or less echoes his opinion. Walter Rideout, for example, in his seminal study *The Radical Novel* identifies the conversion trope as important to the radical novel (35). Moreover, the prevalence of the conversion plot is related, as Galligani Casey argues, to the radical novelists' disregard for the "blatant narrative experimentation of high modernism because of its inaccessibility and perceived irrelevance to working-class concerns" (xi). The aversion to experimentation combined with the commitment to class issues produced, among the proletarian movement, "many social-realist 'conversion narratives'" (Galligani Casey xi). Indeed, Irr claims that one of the four central elements of this genre is "a plot involving confrontation and/or political conversion" (Irr 108). The neo-proletarian novelists' divergence from the conversion plot signals a crucial epistemological shift away from politically motivated didacticism towards an ambivalent and paradoxical take on class politics. This in turn resonates with Wilde's midfiction concept, that is, how the fusing of realism and a world-denying reflexivity invite us to read the "moral, as well as the epistemological perplexities of inhabiting and coming to terms with a world that is itself ontologically contingent and problematic" (Wilde, *Middle Grounds* 4). It is true that Eleanor's development of a political consciousness could be considered a type of conversion plot. However, *Fox* diverges from the conversion plots of the earlier proletarian novels in that Eleanor is an upper class woman, not a young working-class man as was usually the case, and also by the fact that *Fox* does not propose an

imminent revolution or attempt to instil a sense of revolutionary spirit in its reader. In spite of the neo-proletarian novelists' anxiety of origins and their desire to connect to the proletarian tradition, their postmodernist tendency to fill the voided demythologized historiographic narrative inspires them to repurpose the proletarian novel in a manner that undercuts the conversion trope commonly found in 1930s proletarian fiction.

I will begin by examining *Loon Lake's* subversion of the conversion trope as it seems to be the most stridently anti-conversion plot. While staying briefly for a period in Jackson, Indiana Joe and Clara befriend their neighbours Red and Sandy James. Joe and Red work together at a car manufacturing plant. Red persuades Joe to join the auto manufacturing union and Joe briefly flirts with socialism. However, Joe does not become very involved in the union nor does he develop faith in socialism. Although Red is initially portrayed as a committed labour organizer, as the plot unfolds we discover that he is a double agent working for the Tommy Crapo Detective Agency, employed by Bennett to spy on union activity. As Parks suggests, this episode "is handled much like a 1930s-style proletarian novel, in which the worker-hero learns painfully of the evil at the core of the capitalist system" (*E. L. Doctorow* 83). The goal of that insight, Parks argues, is supposed to be the "conversion to socialism or a call to a worker's revolution" (*E. L. Doctorow* 83). However, as Parks points out, Doctorow undermines this proletarian conversion trope and in the process reveals "Joe's complicity in the system" (*E. L. Doctorow* 83). It is also worth recalling that although none of *Loon Lake's* central characters adhere to a leftist worldview, Doctorow portrays a group of marginalized hoboes who espouse socialist ideas. That these

characters are only minor and of little consequence to the story suggests that Doctorow, like Ondaatje, is sceptical of the old left.

Additionally, the sole character who at least initially seems to be a leftist, Red James, turns out to have ambiguous political affiliations. Indeed, he is not fully committed to the union nor to Crapo nor to Bennett; in fact he is killed by Crapo's men. Thus, the ambiguity around James's politics resonates with the novel's broader sense of politics which is also ambiguous. For example, the novel seems to criticize capitalism, through its depiction of Bennett as an exploitative and callous car baron. As well, a narrative commentary that ironizes the liberal penchant for objectivity seems to further this critique. This narrative comment states that liberal democracies are, despite

> occasional suppression of free speech quashing dissent
> corruption of public officials and despite the tendency of
> legislation to serve the interests of the ruling business
> oligarchy the poisoning of the air water the chemical adulteration
> of food the obscene development of hideous weaponry the
> increased costs of simple survival the waste of human resources
> the ruin of cities the servitude of backward foreign populations
> the standards of life under capitalism by any criterion are
> far greater than under state socialism in whatever forms
> it is found. (160)

Thus, in this politically ambiguous novel where "[n]one of the principal characters have or develop a class consciousness, a solidarity with the worker" (Parks, *E. L. Doctorow* 85), Doctorow seems to both criticize and condone capitalism, or at least favour it over socialism. I want to suggest that Doctorow's paradoxical political ambivalence is related to his reverence for existentialism. In an interview with Herwig

Friedl and Dieter Schulz, Doctorow claims that he was profoundly influenced by central existentialist figures, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, from a fairly early age and that their influence instilled in him a trust of "the existentialist vision" (Doctorow, *A Multiplicity* 112). Viewing existentialism as a philosophical reaction to the rise of fascism, Doctorow reasons that because fascism was driven by zealotry the only response to it was the opposite of zealotry, namely distance and philosophical alienation (Doctorow, *A Multiplicity* 112). Doctorow is also quite taken with the manner in which existentialists unravel dogma and develop systems of thought that recognize the universe as fundamentally amoral (Doctorow, *A Multiplicity* 112). I argue that Doctorow's admiration for amoral existentialism is manifested in the scene where Joe is being interrogated by the police about his relationship with Red James. In this scene, Joe believes that he is being framed by a joint effort on the part of the police and the company. In the course of these interrogations, Joe comes to a cosmic realization regarding the corruptibility of the human being. He imagines that Tommy Crapo didn't frame him, but rather that he is a victim of a general tendency for authorities to collude and to oppress the less powerful. As Joe claims, "You don't have to buy the police chief in a company town—he's in place! This dolmen stone skull has been here since the beginning of time" (218). Associating the alleged corruption between Crapo and the police with the dolmen stone skull with its pre-historic connotations suggests that the corruption is not so much the product of modern policing, corporate or union behaviour but rather a universal characteristic of the human condition. If this is the case, then Doctorow's depiction of corruption involving the police, a corporation, and members of organized crime gangs expresses his amoral

existentialist vision in the sense that those who become corrupt are not living up to the full responsibility of citizenship. The latter seems connected to his political ambivalence and his tendency to both use proletarian fiction and working-class history as a usable past, while also retaining a sceptical view of that particular space of history in a manner consistent with Elias's notion of postmodern metahistory.

The ending of *In the Skin of a Lion*, much like the ending of *Loon Lake*, confounds the expectations of the proletarian conversion plot. As I have already discussed, Patrick's political activities, the torching of the Muskoka Hotel and his truncated attempt to blow up the water filtration plant suggest that his politics are not deeply committed. Moreover, Ondaatje also hints at the lack of wisdom in Patrick's more extreme actions. For instance, when Caravaggio ferries Patrick to the waterworks to execute his attack the narrator comments that of the two men it is only Caravaggio that comprehends "the weak spots of this absolute" (228). It is true that Alice Gull, the only major character who is politically committed, has a sort of conversion: when she is saved by Temelcoff. Following this encounter she renounces her commitment to the church and becomes an actor and political activist. However, we are not privy to the mechanism by which she comes to adopt a radical political outlook. Thus, Alice's politics are implied in the statements she makes in conversations and in her acting. As in *Loon Lake*, the ending and its apparent back pedaling from a possibly more leftist conclusion (or argument) have garnered differing criticisms. For example, we have seen how Frank Davey criticizes Ondaatje for creating a sense of "false equality" among the various characters, such that in spite of its apparent anti-capitalist stance, the novel "charitably views both entrepreneur and workman equally as potential

artists" (Davey 153). As well, Julie Beddoes argues that in its celebrating of the marginalized the text is equivocal and ultimately; it is "the novel's own attempt at subversion that is subverted" (Beddoes, 210, 214). Similarly, Christian Bok suggests that

> [w]hile the text tell[s] stories about people who yearn for a sense of socially responsible community, the [writer] betray[s] misgivings about the long-term effectiveness of this idealistic desire, and as a result the [text] threaten[s] to reify the bourgeois argument that, as a viable form of radical politics, communist philosophy in the era of late capitalism has done nothing but prove its own innate ineffectuality. (22)

In the Skin of a Lion's equivocal politics leads Stacey to suggest that it be "treated as a 'proletarian' novel that *betrays* itself and, by extension, the reader, who is either duped into a false consciousness or must actively resist her interpellation within the structures of bourgeois ideology" (446). However, for Stacey this assumption begs the question of whether *In the Skin of a Lion* actually is, or attempts to be, a proletarian novel (446). Moreover, as Stacey's ambition is to situate *In the Skin of a Lion* in the pastoral tradition, he accords with Empson's notion that pastoral politics are not dependent on a system of class exploitation, even if the pastoral text, as in the case of *In the Skin of a Lion*, is overtly about class divisions and antagonisms (Empson 6, Stacey 446-47). Following from this, Stacey argues that this does not mean that "the pastoral is necessarily counteroppositional or even apolitical, but that its politics follow a pastoral and not a Marxist logic" (447). Reading *In the Skin of a Lion* as a pastoral allows Stacy to claim that irony is a central element of the novel. That is, Stacey claims that

> to insist on the pastoralism of the novel is not to evade or sidestep the political in favor of the aesthetic, but to define the politics *of* its aesthetic as precisely as possible. In doing so, we must once again stress the inherent irony of pastoral discourse (447).

In so far as irony can be thought of as central to Ondaatje's text, and given that, as Stacey observes, Marxist-inspired readings of pastoral tend to lose sight of this essential irony, readings of *In the Skin of a Lion* as failed proletarian fiction do not "appreciate the nature of its own particular praxis, which is likewise ambivalent, doubled, paradoxical" (447). Other interpretations of *In the Skin of a Lion* suggest that its non-proletarian conversion plot ending is consistent generally with post-modern and post-colonial sensibilities. For instance, Marinkova's favourable analysis asserts that "[i]f Patrick's micropolitical stance enacts the positive aspect of betrayal—the 'betrayal' of History, macropolitics, and hegemonic ideology is simultaneously an 'un-betrayal' of otherness intimacy, and difference" (97). Beddoes' critical interpretation, on the other hand, claims that although the novel "discusses militant class politics" (210), it "foregrounds postmodern indeterminancy" (210). Critical responses to *In the Skin of a Lion* that castigate Ondaatje for his lack of attention to militant class politics are in a sense insisting that the novel adhere more closely to the radical novel. The defenders of *In the Skin of a Lion* argue that it shouldn't necessarily be measured against the proletarian novel, and that its presentation of workers and class issues within a finely wrought work of literature is enough. The point my argument is concerned with is that whether or not the novel is a failed proletarian novel, or a successful post-modern or post-colonial work of fiction, it manifests a subversion of

the conversion plot. I argue this should be evaluated in the broader context of how contemporary proletarian novelists are responding to a political climate rife with cynicism and ambivalence towards political ideology.

Fox also goes against the grain of the proletarian novel's conventional conversion plot, while also resonating with contemporary sensibilities about gender. Before I examine Sweatman's novel I would like to review some key tendencies of female-authored proletarian fiction in order to show how Sweatman not only avoids the conversion trope but also resists the tendency to create her novelistic world within a masculinist proletarian framework as many women proletarian authors did. Regarding female proletarian writing, Rabinowitz claims that to varying degrees "sexual difference disrupts the picture of the proletariat painted by male authors and critics" (100). In spite of female authors' modifications to the proletarian model, which destabilized gender limitations and revised gender codes, their novels still remained within a patriarchal narrative paradigm. For example, according to Rabinowitz, Clara Weatherwax's novel *Marching! Marching!* (1935) constructs the working class "overwhelmingly as male and masculine" (98), and its plot follows predictable patterns for the portrayal of proletarian collectivity by describing how "the marks of labour and hunger on the bodies of (male) workers transform their (class) consciousness" (98). Likewise, in LeSueur's novel *The Girl* (1978), female working-class subjectivity is conveyed within the structures of male domination (99). Of the women-authored proletarian novels Rabinowitz examines, only Olsen's *Yonnondio* (1974) is successful in undermining "the inscriptions of masculinity on the proletariat that typically constitute its subjectivity" (100). All in all, although female proletarian writers

contested certain masculinist tropes and conveyed female subjectivity they nevertheless remained within a masculinist proletarian discursive paradigm.

Fox not only undermines the conventional masculinist proletarian paradigm but also differs from female-authored proletarian fiction. The manner in which *Fox* subverts the conversion trope ties in with how it also undermines the trope of masculinity. It can be argued that in featuring a female protagonist *Fox* contradicts the major trope of proletarian fiction, which leans towards emphasizing male workers. Proletarian masculinity is also undercut, I would suggest, by the characterization of MacDougal. Although MacDougal is portrayed as a passionate advocate of socialism, he is not a typical working-class hero according to the precepts of proletarian fiction: for example, he is not an industrial or agricultural labourer. He is evidently modelled on the Reverend William Ivens, one of the leading figures of the social gospel movement prevalent in the early twentieth century in Western Canada[86]. Unlike the typical proletarian hero, MacDougal does not engage in industrial labour at any point in the narrative, nor any ostensibly "manly" activities that would fit with the Rooseveltian ideal (i.e. military adventurism, hunting, exploration). Also, unlike the typical proletarian protagonist, MacDougal comes from a well-off family; his father had been a woollens manufacturer in Lanark, until he sold his mills and came to Canada to be a Methodist minister in Ottawa (Sweatman, *Fox* 21). He is described as being "peculiar for many reasons" (10) and spends most of his time reading, writing, minding his bookstore, and occasionally preaching a socialist-influenced brand of gospel. He is far from the veteran agitator or the young impressionable worker

identified by Cowley as central to the enactment of the conversion trope. Given that both MacDougal as "agitator" and Eleanor as "conversionee" are quite atypical when compared with the proletarian genre, we might identify in *Fox* a double ironizing of the conventional masculinist proletarian conversion trope. Furthermore, in so far as *Fox* avoids portraying maternity and mother-daughter relationships which, according to Rabinowitz, are "crucial to narratives of female working-class subjectivity" (136), we can conclude that *Fox* not only subverts the conventional proletarian conversion-plot but also fails to conform to earlier proletarian fiction written by women. This suggests that with *Fox* Sweatman manages to create ironic distance from the key tropes normally found in the early proletarian novel such as the conversion plot and excessive masculine images. Additionally, her text differs from proletarian women-authors, who, in the Depression-era, were not completely free from the patriarchal discursive structures that influenced literary production.

We see a similar undercutting of the conversion plot in Pynchon's *Against the Day*. Although the novel depicts radical and leftist characters, notably the Traverse family, it is really only Lew Basnight that undergoes anything like a political conversion. In chapter two I analysed Basnight in relation to how Pynchon uses realism to express class struggle; here I analyze Basnight in terms of his potential class consciousness, and how his characterization signifies a failed conversion plot. Lew starts out working as a detective for mining and railroad interests. He is assigned to monitor anarchist activity in Chicago around the time of the World's Fair and later migrates to Colorado to investigate the conflict between miners and company-hired

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[86] Like Ivens, MacDougal occasionally preaches at the labour church (Rheinhold 54).

militia. After working undercover for a while and witnessing the lives of striking workers and the abuse they suffered at the hands of company-hired militia, he develops sympathy for the workers' cause. For example, while roaming on the San Juan mountains, which were the setting of bitter labour/management battles, Lew encounters "ragged groups of miners, some with deeply bruised or swelling faces, coatless, hatless, shoeless, being herded toward some borderline by mounted troopers" (178). Witnessing these scenes of apparent injustice gives Lew misgivings about the work he was contracted to perform. He questions the motives of his employers and reflects that how the company and militia were treating the striking workers "was wrong in so many ways" (178). He empathizes with the militant workers to such an extent that he thinks "bombings might help" to bring justice to the tense situation "but would not begin to fix it" (178). Lew's feelings about his work change as he becomes exasperated with how some of the workers are mistreated. As such, he confesses to his colleague that "[t]his case, frankly, is a bitch, and growing more difficult every day" and that he wouldn't mind if his corporate bosses "just took the whole damn ticket back again" (180). In spite of his disillusionment with the corporate interests he is contracted to serve and the way that they treat the unionized militant miners, Lew is not able to effect any real change. As Bernard Duyfhuizen points out, "he can only choose to not play, and eventually to opt out of, the game set up by those in power" (par. 14). Thus, Lew can be categorized with Patrick Lewis and Joe Paterson as protagonists in neo-proletarian novels who develop sympathy for militant working-class causes but do not commit to, or fully assimilate, a leftist ideology. As such, Lew as someone who develops empathy for the working class but ultimately remains "unconverted"

politically exemplifies how *Against the Day* goes against the grain of the conversion trope commonly used by proletarian novels, and thus how Pynchon distances himself from explicit leftwing intentions.

The males of the Traverse family do carry on with intermittent anarchistic activities; however, none of them conforms to the conversion trope described by Cowley. Although Reef and Frank occasionally engage in anarchist activity they are not, in spite of their father's radical militancy, very politically committed. Kit, the youngest Traverse boy, is even less interested in radical politics, preferring instead to focus on his education. The wealthy mining baron Scarsdale Vibe becomes aware of Kit's ambitions and sends his assistant Foley Walker to offer him a scholarship to Göttingen University. In his attempt to persuade Kit to accept Vibe's offer Walker brings up the topic of the class system, presumably in order to gauge Kit's politics. After explaining that he initially was resentful of the class privilege that allowed Vibe to pay him to be his proxy during the American Civil War, Foley asserts that he has subsequently come to accept the exploitation implied in the system. Walker subtly reinforces this point and tells Kit that if he is offended by this kind of attitude he "better speak up, we'll go make other arrangements" (104). Kit for his part does not exhibit much concern for class issues (104) and accepts the offer. Kit's acceptance of the scholarship illustrates his political ambivalence, indifference to the class affiliation of his benefactor, and a lack of family loyalty. Kit's father Web, a long time radical activist who has fought Vibe's company through industrial sabotage, holds the arch-capitalist in great contempt and is bitterly disappointed when he hears of Vibe's offer and that Kit has accepted it. Kit's decision upsets his family and friends and isolates

him from his community. When he leaves, only his mother Mayva sees him off at the train station. This encounter is described as a "chilly parting, and not too long on hope" (106). No other family or friends come to see Kit off, which leaves him pretending "not to understand why nobody else had showed up" (106). Kit accepts Vibe's patronage and when he begins college he even befriends Vibe's son Colfax. What I'd like to point out here is that although Kit develops some mild sympathy for radical politics he turns his back on his father, his family, and their anarchistic values in order to gain an education. As such, Kit's development resembles that of Joe of Paterson: both are central characters, both come from working-class backgrounds, and both turn away from radical values in order to pursue their own self-interest. Perhaps Kit's lack of political engagement and the mild political engagement of his brothers is related to Pynchon's Marcuse- influenced belief in a total system wherein "[t]he incorporation of the working class into the capitalist order was understood to have been successfully accomplished" (Maltby 151). In any case, it is evident that Kit's disavowal of his working-class, anarchist roots suggests that *Against the Day*, like the other novels, subverts the conversion plot.

Ultimately, the neo-proletarian novels' engagements with the proletarian genre express sympathy for a Marxist worldview, and for the plight of working-class people, and go some way towards critiquing capitalism but they do not offer radical themes or present a working-class or anti-capitalist revolution as imminent or plausible. The manner in which authors embrace history, proletarian fiction, and class politics is coterminous with theories regarding contemporary fiction and postmodern attitudes. Specifically, the novelists' employment of history parallels Colenvincenzo's theory of

how some postmodern writers treat historical content as an "empty vessel" to be harnessed for their uses. Ondaatje, Pynchon, Sweatman, and Doctorow have capitalized on this cultural opportunity to garner "usuable" past events in the class struggle and class politics of the early twentieth century, a dimension of history that has often been avoided. This ironic juxtaposing of historical elements with postmodernist formal strategies exhibits how a midfictional strategy has enabled these writers to broach proletarian themes and insert them into contemporary culture. Moreover, in spite of their fascination with radical politics, the neo-proletarian authors demur from advancing a truly Marxist critique. Instead, the novels exhibit political ambivalence and an ironic distancing towards two of the key tropes of the original proletarian novel—namely, the endorsement of a masculinist aesthetic and the use of conversion plots. Although the characters are shown rebelling against the system, overall the novels do not endorse an easy or obvious adoption of a revolutionary spirit. Nor do they try to show that revolution would be a favourable option. Thus, thematically the novels hang in a kind of political limbo that exhibits very postmodern kinds of ambivalence and paradox.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with a concern, shared by many critics, that theories pertaining to the links between class and literature remain under-represented. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that definitions of class have themselves been either diffuse and distorted or elusive. As Laura Hapke explains:

> Over the broad sweep of 150 years, American writers have envisioned workers as human scenery and mob men, anarchists and artisan republicans, individualists and ciphers, yeomen and grotesques, gentlemen and militants, dolts and students and experts. All too often inaccurately portrayed as either falsely conscious or too fully conscious, labouring folk have been demonized, sanitized, co-opted, erased, infantilized, mythologized, depoliticized, politicized, and anesthetized. Workingmen have been called both democracy's lynchpin and its enemy, and workingwomen are either duty-bound but secondary wage-earners or rootless vixens. More, if less honourable, roles have been available to working people of color: sinister plotters or subnormal drudges, luckless menials or manipulative cheats, "low-down folks" or incendiary outcasts. (14)

In general, my project has taken up the problem of the representation of workers as raised here by Hapke. However, I have not been concerned with criticizing literary or cultural works that in various ways misrepresent or belittle the figure of the worker. Rather, I have focused on a small group of contemporary historical novels that engage with working-class realities and, on the broader level of class antagonisms. Moreover, my dissertation examines the intersection of contemporary historical fiction, political ambivalence, and the problematic legacy of proletarian fiction. I have argued that the novels in my corpus deal with memories of class in a way that is motivated by the conditions of the present. Their examination of proletarian issues is similar to

Bauman's articulation of history, which in his view has an afterlife that "reincarnates as a utopia which guides, and is guided by, the struggles of the present" (1). As such, I have focused my study on how, through their treatment of subject matter and generic forms from earlier periods, *In the Skin of Lion, Against the Day, Fox,* and *Loon Lake* engage with both the past and the present. More specifically, their engagement with historical subject matter resonates with the postmodernist tendency to resist meta-narratives while also confronting the political ambivalence that arguably dominates the contemporary period. Moreover, I have situated these contemporary historical class narratives in terms of critical discourses that illustrate how interpretations of historical fiction can be thought of in terms of identity and community formation in the present.

I have attempted to explore the subject of contemporary historical fictional treatments of proletarian themes in relation to some of the lessons of contemporary critical theory. I began by exploring how the neo-proletarian novelists, in keeping with the zeitgeist of postmodernism, adopt a scepticism towards the particular meta-narrative of official historical discourse. I have argued that the neo-proletarian writers have found, as I have argued, inventive ways of destabilizing and questioning the authoritative aura of historical discourse through the employment of a variety of tactics—metafiction, indeterminancy, counter-factual historicity, and dialogism—intended to illustrate the mediated quality of historical discourse. They do this to not only interrogate conventional ways of narrating history but also to assert a more dialogical narrative stance which strives towards expressing something like a totality of the social milieu through a democratic representation of a wide range of characters of different social ranks. The impulse to adopt a deconstructive stance towards official history is a significant aspect of

all the novels in this study; however, it also co-exists with vital forms of realism. My research on critics of realism, such as Armstrong, Scholes, Slattery, Hitchcock, and Levine suggests that realist modalities offer more self-reflexivity than perhaps has hitherto been acknowledged and do not necessarily present omniscient literary worlds. Thus, as I have argued, realist modalities and more experimental literary strategies are not mutually exclusive and can co-exist in ways that are especially fruitful for writers with political subjects. Moreover, the employment of realist modalities enables the authors in question to embody class antagonisms through in-depth character portrayals combined with representations of interclass relationships and events such as strikes and industrial accidents. The conclusion I draw from analyzing theories of realism and its use in political texts points to the fact that it can be amenable to the cognition of "othered" realities and of empathy-building. This empathy-building capacity is a crucial element in the contemporary proletarian novel as it enables their texts to not only revive some of the key elements of the "classic" proletarian novel and a historical era, but also to accentuate the anxieties and injustices that emerge in class-stratified societies. In addition to analysing how the texts use realism to foster cognition of other realities (in this case workers of the early twentieth century facing oppressive conditions) I have also explored how forms of empathy in interclass relationships are portrayed in the novels. Drawing upon biographical works of historical capitalist figures, as well as social-psychological research on social class, socioeconomic status, and social cognition, I explore how the tendency for lower-class individuals to be communally-focused and upper-class individuals to be self-focused shapes interclass relations in problematic ways. Applying this focus to the literary works examined reveals how the vast amount of wealth and social power that North

American societies distribute to a small stratum of their members creates in these individuals a sense of entitlement that alienates them from others of different social rank in their communities. The neo-proletarian novels also explore this uneven power dynamic in a manner that resonates with the figure of the double, thus expressing a sense of interclass otherness. The otherness revealed by the double trope illustrates that even if two characters enter into a friendship or intimate relation the upper-class characters tend to exhibit a domineering attitude towards the working-class characters, exemplifying a kind of epistemological domination of the other. I then moved from the topics of otherness and attempts at rapprochement to exploring class antagonism through the lens of spatial theory. In particular, my research demonstrates that representations of the activities of socialist leaders and radicals that transform social-spatial environments resonate with theories of heterotopia. I examine how heterotpias, defined as paradoxical social spaces, can act as a breeding grounds for alternative ways of ordering society, and I illustrate how this is manifested by the ways in which Ondaatje, Pynchon, Sweatman, and Doctorow represent working-class, socialist characters appropriating streets, parks, and churches; or perpetrating violent acts in order to transform social spaces in ways that expose class antagonisms and further their political objectives. Lastly, my research argues that although the neo-proletarian novels engage with the proletarian genre and express sympathy for a Marxian worldview, they do not offer wholly radical themes or present working-class or anti-capitalist revolution as imminent or even plausible. Instead, the novels exhibit political ambivalence and an ironic distancing towards two of the key tropes of the original proletarian novel—namely, the endorsement of a masculinist

aesthetic and the use of conversion plots. Given their backing away from revolutionary possibilities, thematically the novels remain in an ambivalent, paradoxical space.

Running through my thesis is the concept of midfiction. Interpreting the novels from this vantage point has enabled me to explore these texts in terms of some of the key lessons of postructuralism and contemporary narrative theory, including the understudied topic of contemporary literary realism. The neo-proletarian novels' employment of metafictional devices, ironic juxtaposition, re-mythologizing narratives, theories of social-space, and ironic recombining of past genres are all elements that fit under the umbrella of the experimental side of midfiction. The novels in this study also employ realist modalities to define characters, depict interrelationships that cross class boundaries, and illustrate remarkable events of class struggle, such as strikes and industrial accidents, while drawing attention to problematic labour conditions. Employing the midfiction concept, which combines these two main tendencies, experimentalism and realism, has motivated me to think about how they co-exist to create narrative spaces that achieve what seem to be the apparent goals of the authors in question. I would argue that one of the core goals that all these novels share is to create substantive literary works that will be accepted into the fold of current critical and aesthetic trends, while also giving voice to leftist concerns within a general milieu where leftwing politics are marginal at best[87]. Furthermore, interpreting these texts through the midfiction concept enables a juxtaposition of two narrative tendencies which have been regarded by many as mutually hostile, opposed categories. In my interpretation I show that these two categories can co-

[87] This is important if one accepts Jameson's view that contemporary criticism manifests a repression of and resistance to anything that resembles the reintroduction of "real life", namely, "the socio-economic, the historical context" (*Reification and Utopia* 135).

exist meaningfully. Moreover, I maintain that the midfiction method enables a narrative space in which experimentalism is used to explore issues of mediation and subjectivity while realism is deployed to show how class affects individuals and communities. Together these two modalities make for a valuable contribution to politically engaged literature in a contemporary era rife with political ambivalence, cynicism, and paradox.

In another sense, my discussion of the neo-proletarian novels also relates to a core concept of postmodern theory, namely the postmodern historical sublime. This refers to the notion that generally the past may hold sway over individuals living in the present because the past is constituted of unknowable or untranslatable elements that appeal to human curiosity. This theory relies on the notion that knowing the past in a comprehensive sense is impossible. Therefore, translating the past into the present always manifests a sense of lack due to the fact that, as Amy J. Elias argues, modernity has altered existence irrevocably (14-15). As such, Elias formulates the postmodern interpretation of history as not some knowledge base that can be learned and then possessed, but rather as something "we know we can't learn, something we can only desire" (xviii). Elias claims that once the postmodern mind discovers or is "taught by relativizing social forces that true history is unfathomable, 'history' comes to be merely 'desire' for solid ground beneath one's feet—a desire for a Blakean organized innocence, a desire for the Truth that is Out There" (xviii). The loss of hope that history can be realized as a body of knowledge also translates into a loss of certainty about history in the postmodern era (Elias 19). Citing the postmodern urge to create narratives that resist narrativization, Elias suggests that the postmodern is the condition for articulating the sublime "for it is the modern aesthetic of the sublime unburdened of

modernist nostalgia for meaning" (*Sublime* 28). The class-oriented novels that I focus on in this dissertation embody this resistance to totalizing narratives and the uncertainty about history. Moreover, they use midfiction to both display this uncertainty about transparent historical representation with transparency while also mitigating it by deploying the more recognizable or accessible elements of realism.

Future directions that my research findings suggest are twofold. One area for development would be to apply the midfictional interpretative strategy to other kinds of proletarian themed fiction and literature. This might be particularly useful for early twentieth proletarian novels such as Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondia*, Clara Weatherwax's *Marching Marching*, and John Dos Passos's *USA Trilogy*. Insofar as these novels manifest stridently working-class and obliquely Marxian themes, they also deploy experimental tactics influenced by modernist writers, such as fractured plotlines and stream-of-consciousness perspectives. The act of resituating these early proletarian novels into contemporary literary discourse, which is already in progress, might benefit from reading them in terms of how realism and experimentalism collaborate in order to embody a certain ethics attentive to class subjectivity. Another broad question worth contemplating would be to ask how a midfiction aesthetic that generates a politics of class might intersect with questions pertaining to gender, sexuality, and ethnicity? My interest in heterotopia and space could be employed as a model to critically assess literary representations of political activism in canonical American texts such as Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, for example, which portrays anti-Vietnam War protest rallies in Washington D.C. in 1967, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which depicts communist and civil rights activism. As my study of *Fox*, *Against the Day*,

Loon Lake, and *In the Skin of a Lion* has shown a small cadre of notable contemporary writers have not only looked to the past but have shone their historical spotlight on the difficult issue of class struggle. That these writers made sure, as Ondaatje says about his process of writing *In the Skin of a Lion*, that "something got said, to write about that unofficial thing that was happening" (Fagan 121) is surely a significant contribution to contemporary culture.

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