

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 266

TOPICS VOLUME



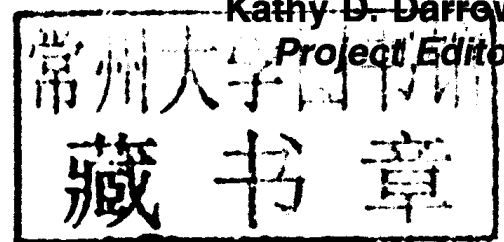
Volume 266

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics  
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary  
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and  
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys  
of National Literatures**

**Kathy D. Darrow**

**Project Editor**



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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

*TCLC* is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

*TCLC* is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism, (CLC)* which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

### Organization of the Book

A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as in other Literature Criticism series.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the numbers of the *TCLC* volumes in which their entries appear.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

## Citing *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Asso-

ciation (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, (2003); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88, no. 2 (May 2005): 284-93. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 356-65. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88.2 (May 2005): 284-93. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 356-65. Print.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*. Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32. Print.

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# American Reform Writers

American reform writers focused their works on advancing political and social agendas at the turn of the century.

## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the century, American writers responded to the rapidly changing world around them. The industrialization of the country in the nineteenth century continued to have a drastic impact on the urban landscape, socially, politically, and environmentally. Reform writers spoke out about such developments through fiction, autobiographical works, and journalistic efforts. In particular, reform writers focused their efforts specifically on notions of equality, whether in terms of voting rights, economic opportunities, or the treatment and rights of workers. Women reform writers often centered their work on reform efforts of particular import to women at the turn of the century, including child welfare reform, maternal health initiatives, and anti-prostitution activism. Other women reform writers explored the same political and social issues as their male counterparts, such as the rights of the working class, but were often regarded in a different light than their male predecessors. Their work as women reformers was sometimes seen through the filter of “women’s writing” as a contemporary construct.

Urban reform writers centered their efforts on addressing the ill effects of the urbanization and industrialization occurring at the turn of the century. Writers such as Upton Sinclair tackled the myriad consequences of industrial production. His work, *The Jungle* (1906), dramatizes the human misery that resulted from the industrial and employment practices of the time. As Steven Rosendale points out, the novel was imbedded with insights regarding the environmental consequences of industrialization as well. Other reform writers centered on the development of urban slums in America’s large cities. Jacob Riis published the novel *The Battle with the Slum* in 1902. A work of photojournalism, the book exemplifies the type of slum reporting that was ongoing at this time.

Social reformers centered their efforts on rallying their readers to take up the cause of equality. Activist Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman spoke on the topic of women’s suffrage when asked to do so by other reformers, but reviewers have noted that this was not the cause

closest to her heart. Rather, the notion of economic equality, and her certainty that national ownership of industry would guarantee such equality, were the factors that motivated her political efforts. Gilman explored her utopian vision in the novel *Herland* (1915). Jean Webster similarly used the novel as a means of advancing a political platform. Her works, such as the 1912 novel *Daddy-Long-Legs*, examine the topics of women’s education and suffrage, along with such notions as eugenics. Webster was known for supporting laws that mandated the involuntary sterilization, or at least the segregation from the rest of society, of the mentally infirm and of various classes of prisoners. Webster additionally argued for limiting the reproduction of society’s most poor and least healthy citizens. Other reform authors were likewise associated with their views on eugenics, but Mary Antin took a different tack with the contemporary scientific theory of eugenics, using it to advocate for the strength and intelligence of immigrant stock, according to Lori Jirousek. Critics Sam F. Stack, Jr., and Irinia V. Rodimtseva explore the ways some reform writers took up the cause of the treatment of minority groups. Stack studies John Dewey’s examination of the African American sharecropping experience, while Rodimtseva assesses the treatment of prisoners forced into hard labor on chain gangs as a topic of reform efforts.

In examining the work of women reformers, Martha H. Patterson demonstrates the way in which some writers regarded the issue of women’s rights as the solution to the economic and social turbulence in the American South. Patterson observes the manner in which novelists Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow, in their realist novels, approached the issues of racial tolerance and women’s suffrage. Despite their apparent views on tolerance, Patterson notes, these women employed a contemporary understanding of evolutionary science to suggest that white women were more evolved than black men. Critics such as Jennifer Burek Pierce and Sidney R. Bland examine the ways in which the writing of some women reformers was characterized by its appeal to women on the conservative end of the political spectrum, mothers who sought to uphold the notion of family values. Similarly, women reformers such as Jane Addams became advocates for poverty relief and child welfare. In her work, Addams studied the family as a sociological unit and incorporated ideas about child development into her attempts to improve the lives of immigrant working classes in industrialized areas. James

B. Salazar offers a detailed exploration of Addams work as a reformer, and discusses Addams views regarding women and reform work.

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## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Jane Addams

*Democracy and Social Ethics* (nonfiction) 1902  
*Twenty Years at Hull House* (autobiography) 1910

Mary Antin

*The Promised Land* (autobiography) 1912

Robert E. Burns

*I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*  
 (autobiography) 1932

Stephen Crane

*Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (novel) 1893

John Dewey

*Race Prejudice and Friction* (nonfiction) 1922

Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman

*Herland* (novel) 1915

Ellen Glasgow

*Virginia* (novel) 1913

*Life and Gabriella* (novel) 1916

Josephine Herbst

*The Executioner Waits* (novel) 1934

Jacob A. Riis

*The Battle with the Slum* (photojournalism) 1902

Upton Sinclair

*The Jungle* (novel) 1906

Jean Webster

*Daddy-Long-Legs* (novel) 1912

*Dear Enemy* (novel) 1916

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## URBAN REFORM

Steven Rosendale (essay date 2002)

SOURCE: Rosendale, Steven. "In Search of Left Ecology's Usable Past: *The Jungle*, Social Change, and the Class Character of Environmental Impairment." In *Upton Sinclair's The Jungle*, edited by Harold Bloom, pp. 45-60. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010.

[In the following essay, originally published in 2002, Rosendale explores the political impact of Sinclair's novel and examines the way the novel may be viewed as a study of the environmental implications of industrial production.]

When it comes to genius, to beauty, dignity, and true power of mind, I cannot see that there is any chance for them to survive in the insane hurly-burly of metropolitan life. If I wanted qualities such as these in human beings, I would surely transfer them to a different environment. And maybe that is what Providence was planning for me to understand and to do in the world. At any rate, it is what I am trying to do, and is my final reaction to the great metropolis of Mammon.

—Upton Sinclair, *American Outpost*

As the immigrant Jurgis Rudkus and his family peer out of their train windows on their journey to Chicago in the second chapter of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the landscape undergoes a remarkable transformation. An hour before they reach the city, the Rudkuses get their first inkling of the possible nature of that change, becoming dimly aware of "perplexing changes in the atmosphere." The air around them is increasingly polluted by an "elemental odor, raw and crude . . . rich, almost rancid, sensual, and strong" (20). Although they are divided in their feelings about this odor, other elements of the environment clearly dismay the immigrants as the train carries them nearer to Chicago. For mile after mile, they witness an increasingly dense "desolate procession" of "ugly and dirty little wooden buildings," all the same, punctuated only by the occasional "filthy creek" or "great factory . . . darkening the air and making filthy the earth beneath." Gradually, as Jurgis's group stares out at the view speeding by their train, its natural elements appear increasingly drained of vigor and beauty. Colors are bleached from the visible landscape. Everything in sight becomes "dingier": the grass seems to "grow less green," the fields become "parched and yellow," the landscape progressively more "hideous and bare."

When the group detrains at their new home, Packingtown, the transformation of the landscape is apparently complete. There remains, it seems, no vestige of real greenery, no trace of unaltered, nonhuman nature. In its place, industry has remade the entire environment in its own image. The "elemental" atmosphere that first signaled the approach to the stockyards, for example, turns out to be a product of the rendering-house smokestacks, which simulate a variety of other natural forces as well. They manufacture the region's weather signs—the "vast clouds" that dominate the sky. Alternatively, their smoke is described as an oily "river" and as a "self-impelled" geological force, since it appears to have come from "the center of the world . . . where the fires of the ages still smoulder." Even the soil upon which the houses of the district sit is a by-product of manufacture: it is "made land," the original soil having been excavated and turned to brick, and the hole from the excavation refilled "by using it as a dumping-ground for the city's garbage" (20). As evening falls on the immigrants' first day in Chicago, the only relic of the natural outside that is left is the remote sun, and it is ignored as the immi-



grant couple survey the horizon: "Jurgis and Ona were not thinking of the sunset . . . their backs were turned to it, and all their thoughts were on Packingtown, which they could see so plainly in the distance. The line of buildings stood clearcut and black against the sky; here and there out of the mass rose the great chimneys, with the river of smoke streaming away to the end of the world" (24).

Metonymically extending "to the end of the world," the Packingtown environment has supplanted not a few particular features of nature but nature itself. Throughout the novel, Jurgis, his wife, Ona, and the narrator will continue to refer to Packingtown as a "wilderness," a "wild," "unsettled country," and the like. Soon after the immigrants' arrival in Chicago, a sound seeps into their frame of awareness, and the procession of similes the narrator provides for it suggests that the by-products of industry have encompassed the entire environment to the farthest horizon: "it was like the murmuring of bees in the spring, the whisperings of the forest . . . the rumblings of a world in motion." The same point is driven home by the narrator's comment that the narrow roads between the houses "resembled streets less than they did a miniature topographical map of a continent," with no pavements but rather miniature "mountains and valleys and rivers, gullies and ditches," with oceanic "great hollows full of stinking green water" (21).

The Rudkus family has, of course, entered the jungle, an encompassing simulacrum of nature to which Sinclair referred in an early version of the novel as the "wilderness of civilization."<sup>1</sup> Although Packingtown initially holds out the promise of a good life for the immigrants (on his first night in Packingtown the factories strike the optimistic Jurgis as a sublime "vision of power"), this hope is quickly gainsaid by the obviously noxious features of the industrial environment itself, a place that increasingly appears bewildering and uninhabitable to the immigrants. Some emphasis upon the crowding and monotony of the urban landscape might be expected in any tale of country folk moving to the city, but Sinclair devotes a full fifteen paragraphs to his initial description of the locale, commencing a critical view of the industrial simulation of nature that is sustained throughout the novel.

Surely one of American literature's great treatments of the environmental consequences of industrial production, *The Jungle* has nevertheless never been taken seriously as a novel with important environmental implications, a failing that this essay seeks to correct. The lack of ecocritical attention to *The Jungle* (and indeed, to the larger Left literary tradition in the United States) can be traced to several sources, the most important of which is a mistaken tendency among ecocritics to confuse the complex and necessary project of developing eco-conscious critical values with a simplistic rejection of

"interhuman" concerns like urban social life and class politics. For some ecocritics, the critical focus on such interhuman concerns has simply failed to provide an environmentally acceptable set of critical values, offering instead just another version of what Glen A. Love has called literary studies "narrowly anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life" (229). "We must break through our preoccupation," Love writes, "with mediating between only human issues, the belief that, as Warwick Fox puts it, 'all will become ecologically well with the world if we just put this or that interhuman concern first'" (227).

The anthropocentrism-busting emphasis in ecocriticism has carried with it a corresponding rejection of traditional notions of politics, including the class critiques of capitalism that so interested the Left in the twentieth century. In the face of global environmental degradation, Theodore Roszak contends, both capitalist and socialist economies resolve into a global and univocally malignant economic "style" that renders even the most basic issues of social justice moot: "We have an economic style whose dynamism is too great, too fast, too reckless for the ecological systems that must absorb its impact. It makes no difference to those systems if the oil spills, the pesticides, the radioactive wastes, the industrial toxins they must cleanse are socialist or capitalist in origin; the ecological damage is not mitigated in the least if it is perpetrated by a 'good society' that shares its wealth fairly and provides the finest welfare programs for its citizens" (33).

Roszak's point is, of course, well taken. Both of the contemporary major modes of economic organization have produced environmental damage on a massive scale, and that damage carries no marker of its political origin. In theory and in history itself, both capitalism and socialism have been driven by a commitment to unlimited production, a similar faith in the power of technology to improve human life, and a virtually identical tendency to hide the environmental costs of production.

The prominence of such ideas in the emerging ecocritical canon explains ecocriticism's failure to examine the environmental implications of Left texts like *The Jungle*. For Sinclair's text is, of course, intensely focused upon interhuman concerns. In contradistinction to the wide array of wilderness-oriented texts already firmly ensconced in the ecocritical canon, *The Jungle* is set in landscapes entirely remade by human industry and agriculture. Despite the novel's extended ruminations on the victimage of stock animals (Sinclair was a vegetarian at the time of the novel's publication), this sympathy is ultimately an anthropomorphism meant to symbolize and accentuate the emphasis on human misery. Indeed, the major political effect of the novel—the passage of federal food purity laws—had nothing to do with the treatment of animals or any other part of non-

human nature. In fact, the entire novel appears to be focused upon "narrowly anthropocentric" issues: class struggle, the possibility of individual and family success within a complex and predetermined economic structure, and the effect of ward corruption and national politics upon working-class life. Despite Sinclair's obvious interest in describing the environmental consequences of production, environmentally minded readers are likely to object even to Sinclair's central metaphor—the jungle—which often uncritically seems to reinforce an antipathy toward nature itself. The narrative, for instance, unquestioningly describes Jurgis's exploiting economic superiors as "wild-beast powers of nature" and "ravening wolves that tear and rend and destroy" (167, 301).

Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons for reexamining novels like *The Jungle* for their ecocritical potential. A growing body of ecocritical thought has begun to suggest that the simple dichotomy of "interhuman" and "environmental" concerns that has grounded ecocriticism's general failure to address literatures of class and of urban life may itself be part of our environmental problem. As Wendell Berry argued more than two decades ago in *The Unsettling of America*, even the central concept of "environment" suppresses the possibility of a mutualistic relation that might otherwise guide our lived relationship with nonhuman nature: "Once we see our place, our part of the world, as *surrounding* us, we have already made a profound division between it and ourselves. We have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and so out of our thought—that we and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another . . . and so cannot possibly flourish alone; that, therefore, our culture must be our response to our place, our culture and our place are images of each other" (22).

In a similar vein, Michael Pollan has persuasively argued in "The Idea of a Garden" that the notion of "wilderness" upon which much environmental activism is grounded must now be recognized as a concept with increasingly limited utility, precisely because it rigidly divides nature from human culture and economy: "Essentially, we have divided our country in two, between the kingdom of wilderness, which rules about 8 percent, and the kingdom of the market, which rules the rest. . . . Useful as [the wilderness idea] has been in helping us protect the sacred 8 percent, it nevertheless has failed to prevent us from doing a great deal of damage to the remaining 92 percent. The old idea may have taught us how to worship nature, but it didn't tell us how to live with her. It told us more than we needed to know about virginity and rape, and almost nothing about marriage" (425).

This kind of suspicion regarding environmentalism's reliance on the foundational dichotomy of nature and human culture suggests the need to return to Roszak's no-

tion of the supersession of social justice issues by environmental ones ("ecological damage is not mitigated in the least if it is perpetrated by a 'good society'") with a new and more critical eye. We might, of course, reverse Roszak's formulation, observing that the traditional class-oriented, interhuman concerns that occupy Left novels like *The Jungle* are themselves not "mitigated in the least" if that oppression is perpetrated by a society that has redressed ecological disaster and developed sustainable modes of production. But the deeper point is the absurdity of conceptualizing "environmental" and "interhuman" concerns in isolation from each other, as Berry's proposition that our place and our culture mirror one another suggests.

A number of political theorists have begun an effort to frankly reassess the environmental legacy and potential of the Left in order to move beyond red-green dichotomies and style a politics that addresses human and environmental exploitation in the "kingdom of the market" that comprises the bulk of the American landscape. As Kate Soper has argued: "just as socialism can only hope to remain a radical and benign pressure for social change by assuming an ecological dimension, so the ecological concern will remain largely ineffective (and certainly incapable of reversing the current trends in the manner required) if it is not associated in a very integral way with many traditional socialist demands, such as assaulting the global stranglehold of multinational capital" (82). Integrating environmental concerns and Left-materialist political theory will surely entail a radical revision of some of the most basic assumptions that the Left has cherished. The Left, for example, will need to rethink its production-based notion of social "progress." Whereas Marxism has traditionally regarded the technological basis of production (even under capitalism) as neutral, it must now revise its model of the transition to socialism to account for the necessity of transforming (rather than simply remanaging) the technological basis of production itself.

Concurrent with these efforts to rewrite Left politics in green is an effort to recover lost theoretical precedents for the necessary changes. The last few years have seen a burgeoning of scholarship reconsidering the underemphasized ecological potential of key concepts in Marxism: alienation, the critical theory of production, the notion of natural limits, and so on (see Ted Benton, *The Greening of Marxism*). This effort at theoretical recovery and revision strives to make areas of conceptual consonance between Left and green thought more visible. Both traditions might, for example, find common ground in their shared rejection of the preeminence of money profits over other values and in their common objection to the hiding of environmental and human costs that accompany the production of commodities.

Although "Left ecology" may be thought to have a recoverable theoretical past, there has been very little

work done to discover whether a red-green synthesis might possess a cultural past that may prove valuable for contemporary environmentalism. William Empson linked the radical novels of proletarian experience and revolt produced in the first four decades of the twentieth century to the pastoral tradition, but his observation was never developed by subsequent critics. This critical lacuna is curious, for environment often emerges as a rather obvious controlling figure in a surprising number of American radical novels, which frequently compress their critiques of the social milieu into images of place: *The Jungle*, *Industrial Valley*, *Daughter of Earth*, *Parched Earth*, *Land of Plenty*, *USA*, *From the Kingdom of Necessity*, and so on. More than just an emphasis on "setting," these titles point to the American literary Left's curiously strong interest in the idea of nature and in the environmental consequences of industrial production under capitalism.

The full potential of an ecocritical approach to the Left tradition in American literature is too large a subject for this essay, but an analysis of Sinclair's *The Jungle* might serve as a token of the contributions Left literatures can make to ecocriticism and vice versa. If *The Jungle* is narrowly anthropocentric, it is also a text profoundly concerned with the relation of nature and human life: how the immigrant experience in industrial cities recapitulated and gave the lie to dominant ideologies about American pioneering, how economic classes experience the environmental damages consequent to production, how natural forces express themselves in class society, and finally, how the notion of uncorrupted nature itself might be reclaimed as a liberatory idea in a class society.

The main contribution of Sinclair's novel—its articulation of class and environmental concerns—was strikingly manifest in his intellectual development, as it was in the careers of a number of writers on the American Left.<sup>2</sup> Most Sinclair biographies stress the alternation of Sinclair's childhood care between his impoverished parents and a set of wealthy relatives as a formative influence on his intense interest in social class (for example, Floyd Dell, *Upton Sinclair*, 16-32). Although it is less frequently noticed, Sinclair's class experience was also closely linked to a pattern of alternation between urban and relatively natural settings. Through his adolescence, Sinclair's family depended on the graciousness of a wealthy aunt who ensconced the family in a Virginia country retreat and in a rustic Adirondack camp; when his father could get a few months' work in New York, Sinclair would return to the bedbugs and economic uncertainty suffered by "the tribe of city nomads, a product of the new age" (Sinclair, *American Outpost*, 22). Thus alternation of geographical environments became associated with an acute awareness of class difference, with the country and mountain existence striking him mainly as an arena of fulfillment and leisure, while ur-

ban life figured as an arena of struggle and poverty. His account of city life is full of dangerous episodes (Sinclair reports, "I was able to reckon up fourteen times that I had missed death by a hair's breadth") that obviously shaped the young boy. The city life presented a vision of harsh natural selection for Sinclair, turning out hundreds of thousands of children onto the street "to develop their bodies and their wits," for "in a rough general way, those who get caught by street-cars and motor-cars and trucks are those who are not quite so quick in their escape-reactions" (24). Usually, such emphases on natural selection support a monistic materialism in which the city life is depicted as equally subject to natural law as the wild, but for Sinclair the class connotations of the urban and the wild preserve an inverted dualism: life in nature, for Sinclair, paradoxically seemed to *escape* the harshest applications of natural law that obtained in the city.

Later in his adolescence, this identification of poverty and the urban, privilege and the rural or wild, was incorporated into Sinclair's career as a writer as well. The despised work at which Sinclair began his career at the age of sixteen—cranking out potboilers and jokes for a meager living while at City College—was expressly an aspect of urban life for the young writer, while major turning points in his development of a more "serious" literary career were associated with nature, the rural, or the wild. One Christmas holiday at his rich uncle's home, Sinclair set out to read his uncle's entire library of unopened leather-bound "classics" in the frenzied course of two weeks. As would become typical of his thought in later years, Sinclair described his appropriation of the literary value of the books by recourse to the environmental metaphor: "Some poet said to a rich man," Sinclair writes, "'You own the land and I own the landscape.' To my kind uncle I said: 'You own the books and I own the literature'" (75).

The aesthetic claim to literature and landscape alike are merged in Sinclair's recollection of his conversion to the literary career. Following his reading frenzy, the young writer had a rapturous hallucination in an open park, wherein he received his literary calling. The sublime experience was repeated, Sinclair reports, many times, often "associated with music and poetry, but still more frequently with natural beauty": winter nights in Central Park, a summer night in the Adirondacks, twilight in the "far wilds of Ontario." The strangeness of the experience drove Sinclair, as it were, deeper into the woods, since, as he admits, "I wanted to be free to behave like a lunatic, and yet not have anybody think me one." After an embarrassing episode when a young girl came upon him while in his rapture, he "became a haunter of mountain-tops and of deep forests, the only safe places" (78).

When he felt ready to forsake potboilers for his first "serious" novel, a romance called *Springtime and Har-*

vest, Sinclair found it necessary to wait until spring was "far enough advanced so [he] could go to the country." "My one desire," he writes, "was to be alone; far away, somewhere in a forest, where the winds of ecstasy might sweep through my spirit." Building a rude cabin on the shore of an isolated lake, the author lived a summer in this "Fairy Glen" a life after the pattern of Thoreau at Walden, observing the "daily miracle" of sunrise and feeling a special kinship with "the great winds that lashed the forest trees" (91). The retreat would serve to solace him again in the throes of his first, unsuccessful marriage, but the more general association of urban environments with want (and hack writing), and of natural settings with material and spiritual fulfillment (as well as "literature"), persisted.<sup>3</sup>

For Sinclair, then, environment and class were inextricably linked, an association that continued to characterize his thought as he shifted from romantic idealist to "proletarian writer" during the writing of *The Jungle*.<sup>4</sup> In an inversion of his usual practice, Sinclair suspended his dislike of city poverty and voluntarily immersed himself for seven weeks in the brutal world of Chicago's meatpacking district, taking meals at a nearby settlement house and moving about the harrowing slaughtering lines disguised in ragged clothes and carrying a lunch pail to gather his facts. The central metaphor Sinclair developed for the staggeringly horrific proletarian district he had observed—the jungle, or "wilderness of civilization"—represented both an outgrowth and a development of his experience with class difference and its correspondence with the contrast of natural and citified environments.

Although nearly all the criticism of *The Jungle* understands its title metaphor as part of the novel's "naturalism," it would be a mistake to assume that Sinclair's jungle metaphor describes a universally deterministic condition. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, for the jungle, whether embodied in Packingtown itself or, later in the novel, in the agricultural countryside through which Jurgis tramps, is a specifically proletarian wilderness. Sinclair is at pains throughout the text to demonstrate that the industrial environment, which appears to Jurgis as a terrifying wilderness, is not experienced universally but only by members of a particular class under a particular economic regime. While begging for food during a period of unemployment, for example, Jurgis is befriended by the drunken son of a capitalist family. The young man, whom Jurgis learns to call "Master Freddie," gives Jurgis \$100, and Jurgis quickly finds himself invited to supper at the family mansion. The house, just a short distance from Packingtown, astounds Jurgis with its display of riches and presents a stunning contrast to the scenes of environmental degradation that surround the novel's laboring characters. While the Rudkuses live (and die) amid the filthy streams and "made land," the wealth they cre-

ate while laboring in the stockyards allows Master Freddie a private reserve on the lakefront. When he arrives at the address with his drunken host, Jurgis can only perceive the vast estate, which takes up a city block, as an element of nature itself—an "enormous granite pile." Inside, the decor also recalls a privileged relation with nature, as Jurgis walks through gleaming stone halls. "From the walls strange shapes loomed out . . . wonderful and mysterious-looking in the half-light, purple and red and golden, like sunset glimmers in a shadowy forest," Sinclair writes: apparently the "nature" in which Freddie lives has none of the threatening overtones of Jurgis's jungle (234-235).

Although this idea is hardly presented in sophisticated terms in *The Jungle*, the novel does provide a strong literary illustration of one of the Left's strongest critiques of environmentalism's claim to social neutrality. As Hans Enzensberger argues in "A Critique of Political Ecology," environmental impairment has long had a class character. In a description that uncannily recalls Sinclair's portrait of Packingtown, he writes:

Industrialization made whole towns and areas of the countryside uninhabitable as long as 150 years ago. The environmental conditions at places of work, that is to say, in the English factories and pits, were—as innumerable documents demonstrate—dangerous to life. There was infernal noise. The air people breathed was polluted with explosive and poisonous gases, as well as with carcinogenic matter and particles that were highly contaminated with bacteria. The smell was unimaginable. In the labor process contagious poisons of all kinds were used. The workers' diet was bad. Food was adulterated. Safety measures were non-existent or were ignored. The overcrowding in the working-class quarters was notorious.

(24)

Despite the apparent nature of these environmental problems, Enzensberger notes, "it occurred to no one to draw pessimistic conclusions about the future of industrialization from these facts." Not even the emergence of environmentalism in the twentieth century would adequately address this class experience of environmental damage. Environmentalism itself, he contends, is a class concern that emerged in part because of the rising cost of isolating oneself from increasingly universal environmental decline. "The ecological movement," Enzensberger asserts, "has only come into being since the districts that the bourgeoisie inhabit have been exposed to those environmental burdens that industrialization brings with it" (25). If Enzensberger's assessment of environmentalism's unacknowledged class character is even partially right, as I think it is, attention to texts like *The Jungle* might begin to provide a necessary class dimension to the project of environmental criticism.

The failure to address the specifically class character of the jungle world has led to a second error in the critical



consensus about the novel that an ecocritical perspective can correct—the astoundingly uniform disparagement of the novel as an aesthetic flop that fails to execute consistently the naturalistic implications of its environmental emphasis. For virtually all critics who have written about *The Jungle*, the novel's major structural flaw surfaces in its division into three fairly distinct sections marked off by changes in the story's settings: the initial naturalistic account of the Rudkus family's destruction by economic forces within Packingtown itself, an episode in which Jurgis leaves Packingtown for a summer on the tramp, and the final chapters, in which Jurgis returns to Packingtown, undergoes a sudden conversion to socialism, and is present during a number of lengthy declamations about the Cooperative Commonwealth. Although critics have uniformly praised the uncompromising depiction of the Rudkuses' grinding existence among the Packingtown proletariat, they have also with very few exceptions disparaged the supposed disruption of the story's organic development by the later sections. Walter Fuller Taylor's treatment of *The Jungle* in *Literary History of the United States* praises the "cumulative power" developed by Sinclair's lurid description of the jungle world, which "little in Zola or Dostoevski surpasses," but also complains that the "fierce partisanship" of the novel's later chapters "estops it from being the fine naturalistic novel implied by some of its philosophical premises" (997). Harvey Swados asserts that "*The Jungle* must renew its hold on the imaginations of an entirely new generation of readers," but nevertheless Swados concedes that "the more we examine a work like *The Jungle*, the more difficult it is to defend its specifically literary merits." "No one could deny that structurally it is a broken-backed book," he continues, "with most of the intensity concentrated in the first two-thirds, which are concerned with the struggle of the immigrants to sustain themselves in Packingtown, and most of the propaganda concentrated in the last third, after the dissolution of Jurgis Rudkus's family and during his conversion to socialism." A critical perspective attuned to the ecological resonance of Sinclair's novel, however, can suggest a thoroughly different view, contesting the remarkably consistent critical consensus about the novel's structural flaws on three major points.

As the discussion above has indicated, Sinclair's fusion of class and environmental concerns ought to seriously challenge the assumptions about Sinclair's commitment to universal determinism that clearly underlie the critique of the novel's supposed structural flaws. Environmental ruin and bestial struggle are the rule in Packingtown, but there are those who live outside the determined landscape—a fact that logically allows the possibility of individual or class ascendance or escape from the jungle.

Moreover, although critics have seen Sinclair's intense interest in environmental description as simply an indication of determinism, the novel also quite evidently manifests a deep interest in the significance of the original nature that the industrial simulation has replaced. Although, as we have seen, the initial description of Packingtown suggests that the industrial perversion has entirely supplanted nature, in fact Sinclair peppers his narration with observations about recalcitrant scraps of nature that have resisted incorporation into the industrial simulation. For example, Sinclair's narrator pauses during the notorious hog-butcherer passage long enough to note an exception to the dingy brown weeds (mixtures of pollution and organic life, Sinclair indicates) that otherwise appear to be the only plant life in the district ("of other verdure there is none," he remarks in the serial version of the novel, "for nothing will grow in the smoke" [Sinclair, *Lost Edition*, 39]). "In front of Brown's General Office building," Sinclair notes, "there grows a tiny plot of grass, and this, you may learn, is the only bit of green thing in Packingtown" (38). Comparing the little lawn to the anguished protests of the slaughtered hogs (and, by extension, to the protests of the exploited workers), Sinclair's narrator partially displaces the deterministic implications of his environment with what is essentially an issue of space: "in what can resistance be embodied?" or, in the environmental idiom of the novel, "what basis—literally, what ground—is there for opposition to destructive capitalism?" As Sinclair will eventually suggest, the answer to this question is that resistance—and renewal—must be embodied in a class-conscious proletariat but also in the environment itself. Redress for the proletariat and the environment go hand-in-hand, and the process of Jurgis's conscious move toward socialism begins, appropriately enough, away from Packingtown. While spending a season on the tramp, Jurgis begins to experience a less adulterated nature as a source of potential restoration. In an extended pastoral idyll that is usually understood as introducing the initial structural flaw in the novel, Jurgis enjoys the pleasures of summer as the land itself provides food, cleanliness, open space, rest, and even recreation. In a poignant episode, he bathes in a small spring, and as the accumulated grime of his industrial labors begins to wash away, he splashes about "like a very boy in his glee." Nature itself, that is, affords Jurgis a material and an aesthetic experience that the industrial simulation of nature cannot. In addition to restoring Jurgis's humanity, the countryside affords him enough respite that he can evaluate his Packingtown experience with some clarity and begin to imagine a better life: as Jurgis argues with a farmer about hiring practices, the reader is aware that his experience of the countryside has begun his progress toward class consciousness. A positive "nature" and improvement of the lot of the proletariat are intimately linked in Sinclair's narrative.