"Life Printed On Dollar Bills":

The Idea of the Marketplace in the Work of Clifford Odets

by

Christopher John Herr

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Toronto

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Abstract

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by Christopher John Herr

Though arguably one of the most talented modern American playwrights, Clifford Odets (1906-1963) has been pigeonholed as a minor writer of the 1930's. The purpose of this study is to re-examine Odets' entire career in the light of these assumptions, to tie his own experience as a writer in the film and theatre industries to the expressions of economic struggle expressed in his plays. It situates his work within the context of the Depression and the Group Theatre, arguing that the economic pressures on Odets as writer influence the shape and content of his plays. It draws parallels between his ambivalence towards the financial rewards of screenwriting and the plight of his dramatic characters.

The thesis uses a methodology grounded in cultural anthropology to examine the final shift from production capitalism towards consumer capitalism, a "culture of abundance." Occurring as it does alongside unprecedented economic catastrophe, this shift gives shape to the structure and to the metaphorical content of his plays. Odets' vision is deeply utopian, but in his work demonstrates continuing ambivalence toward consumer culture as a means to achieve abundance. Odets' fascination with the idea of abundance expresses itself in an obsession with the marketplace. He allegorizes the marketplace in language which embodies the consumerist/utopian
hopes of his characters, and at the same time as a force which systematically denies those hopes.

Far from being implacably opposed to consumer capitalism, Odets is nevertheless aware of the contradictions of the system. Thus, his plays as often subvert and ironize traditional utopian imagery (fruit trees, vegetal and human abundance) as glorify it. Furthermore, for Odets, the most significant commodity in modern capitalism is the human body; his plays are often concerned with the effects of the market upon the physical body. Thus, a discussion of the metaphors of sickness and health, food and comfort are topics central to this discussion of his plays. The last chapter expands the discussion of the marketplace to look at the use of popular culture in Odets' plays, exploring the connections between mass culture and the marketplace in Odets' plays.
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Preface

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the following six Odets plays are taken from the Modern Library Edition (1936) of *Six Plays* (reprinted by Methuen in 1982 with identical pagination): *Waiting for Lefty, Awake and Sing!, Till the Day I Die, Paradise Lost, Golden Boy, and Rocket to the Moon*. These are indicated merely by page number in parentheses in the text of the thesis. Quotations from other Odets plays and screenplays are from the editions listed in the bibliography.

A great deal of source material was used from the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York City Public Library, Lincoln Center. Odets' personal papers are housed at the Center, and where they are cited, it is indicated by the following: (Lincoln Center Archives, date).

Reviews of plays are not included in the bibliography, but are rather cited by date and publication in the text of the thesis.
Introduction: The Critical Marketplace: Odets and the Thirties

The standard "line" on Clifford Odets (1906-1963) is that he is a playwright of the thirties. Usually used as a term of derogation, this characterization is unfair and limiting, for it ignores the quality and importance of his later work. Such an argument also makes a tacit assumption that plays exist best outside their own period, that "art" is universal and therefore to be able to historicize a work is to lessen its importance. As Gerald Weales has argued, this sort of characterization makes it easy to pigeonhole, even to dismiss a playwright: "Odets is so identified with the 1930's that a mention of his name elicits stock responses, the recollection of a time when literature was a weapon and leftist optimism almost mandatory" (Clifford Odets, 14-15). But in a sense, like most clichés, the notion of Odets as a playwright of the thirties (the playwright of the thirties, according to many) holds a kernel of truth, for in his work with the Group Theatre during that decade Odets found the centre of his later work as well. It is impossible to understand his plays outside the context of the Group Theatre, the Depression, the rise of the Popular Front, or the development of an encompassing consumer culture, indeed, the radical questioning of the entire American ethos.

It need not be argued that the arc of Odets' career is inherently of greater interest than his plays. However, given his origins as a leftist playwright and his near-obsession with economic themes and the idea of the marketplace (which deals in people as well as commodities), his decision to write for films and for the stage makes his career a necessary part of any study of his plays. It defines and broadens our understanding of the larger culture in which he participated and gives us a way to better understand the work itself. To be sure, there exists a popular and
persistent idea of Odets as a revolutionary who gave up his ideals for cash, who gave up an idea of community for personal considerations. Such an explanation seems so natural to his story and discussions of his work that a number of critics have commented on the virtual impossibility of separating Odets' life from his work, despite the risk of falling into a narrow biographical reading of the plays. Weales notes in the introduction to his book that Odets the "celebrity" cannot be separated from Odets the "playwright." Gabriel Miller agrees, couching the conundrum in almost identical terms: "it is often difficult to separate Odets the success story from Odets the playwright. . . . Like anyone else who attains celebrity in the arts in America, Odets became a target for those who were waiting to knock him down, and because he himself was not immune to the success syndrome, the critical reception of his early work colored the critics', the audiences', and Odets' own attitude towards his subsequent efforts" (Clifford Odets, 17).

The temptation to examine together the life and work of Odets is difficult to avoid, for as virtually all commentators on his work have noted, his plays are highly personal, written from an emotional and intellectual core in which the interior struggles of Odets are refracted through his characters. Even Odets' close friend and biographer, Margaret Brenman-Gibson, explains her attempt to join the life and work in the fact that "Odets had scribbled, 'I will reveal America to itself by revealing myself to myself.' He proposed to do this in his plays, and now I proposed to extend this revelation by a study of those plays in the context of his life . . . biographers who bravely entitle their life histories 'The Life and Times of . . .' are usually reduced to parallel statements of a life, a time, and a body of work. The difficulty lies in discerning how all these hang together" (xiv).1 It is no accident that all six book-length works on Odets have his name as the title, sometimes followed by a descriptive phrase, sometimes not. The life and the career have
been melded completely not only by Odets' use of the personal, but even more so by the critical reception of his work.²

Many critics see the personal intruding into the plays mostly as Odets' continuing attempts to exorcise the demons of self-betrayal (The Big Knife, for example, is almost universally cited as evidence of self-condemnation—as Weales comments, "[the play] may have begun in unwelcome self-understanding" [159]—and the play's examination of Hollywood, as object and metaphor, de-emphasized). However, one can also see that the plays and screenplays are works which tell us not only about the author's experiences but also about his place in the culture for which those works were produced and the conditions under which they were written. An absolutely necessary step, then, in an examination of Odets' career, if we accept that the life and the work are inextricably bound, that they are part of the same conjunction of personal, historical, and artistic events, is an analysis of the economic conditions that prevailed in both the theatre and the film studios at the time he was working. To examine the external pressures on a playwright working for a financially challenged theatre in the thirties, as an independent playwright in the forties and fifties, and as a screenwriter for the Hollywood studios from 1936 to the early 1960's, then, certainly provides insight into the plays and screenplays themselves. Studies of both life and work benefit from a mutually informed reading, provided financial questions are not ignored. For example, answers to questions such as: What was Odets' position in the Group, artistically and financially? Why did he feel so pressed to accept the Hollywood offers, and so guilty for having done it? What were the fiscal expectations and realities of the Group Theatre and the Broadway stage in general in the thirties, forties, and fifties and how did Odets respond to them? go a long way in determining the cultural relevance and importance of Odets' work. He was always a writer
sensitive to the ambivalence and ambiguities surrounding him, and his work, which accepts the
personal, ripples outward as an examination of the capitalistic society in which he practised his
art.

For in both the plays and the life, economics matter. It is absolutely central to an
understanding of Odets' work that Sid and Florrie don't have a place to sit in Waiting for Lefty,
that Ralph can't buy a pair of black and white shoes in Awake and Sing!, that Phil Cooper has to
sell blood in Rocket to the Moon, that Charlie Castle is a film star who enjoys the Hollywood
lifestyle while hating the films he works in. From Waiting for Lefty onwards, Odets' characters
are caught up in the economic system, bullied by it. They try to beat it, sometimes work within it,
but are conscious always of the ubiquitous power of the marketplace.
Chapter 1: Art in the Marketplace: Odets, the Group, and Hollywood

Throughout his career, Clifford Odets attempted to live with strange, persistent contradictions, caught between the early acclaim he received as America's popular revolutionary playwright in the 1930's, and the subsequent criticism he received as a film writer, a studio "hack," in the forties and fifties. He tried to answer charges that the visionary artist had been subdued by the canny craftsman, to live down the old accusation that a gifted man had diluted his gift and prostituted himself for mere money in the marketplaces of theatre and film. In many ways, it is said by his detractors and admirers alike, his is the same story he told over and over in his plays and screenplays, the tale of the sell-out, the quick, sweet, fatal ride of the American Dream—the ride of Joe Bonaparte, Odets' protagonist in Golden Boy.

Odets certainly seemed to be the "Golden Boy" of the American theatre for at least a few years, beginning with his spectacular debut in 1935, when the first four of his plays were produced on Broadway. Waiting for Lefty (a play which would at one point become the most widely produced—and the most widely banned—play in theatre history [Brennan-Gibson, 316]) premiered in January at a special benefit for New Theatre magazine. It moved uptown to Broadway in March, where it was paired with the hastily written Till the Day I Die. Awake and Sing!, Odets' first full-length script, was presented to favorable reviews in February, and Paradise Lost opened in December of 1935. All four plays, of course, were performed by the Group Theatre, by that time well-established as one of America's leading theatres. These productions marked the beginning of an artistic interdependence between theatre and playwright that would continue until the Group disbanded in 1940.
Odets gained an instant reputation from his early plays. He was hailed by major newspaper reviewers as a genuine talent, a possible heir to the legacy of Eugene O'Neill, who had dominated the American theatrical scene over the previous fifteen years. Richard Watts gave a hint of the expectations Odets' early successes had produced when Watt claimed that not "since the flaming emergence of Eugene O'Neill has the American theatre seen such talent for dramatic writing" (Brenman-Gibson, 336). High praise indeed, for O'Neill had almost singlehandedly rescued American theatrical writing from obscurity with powerful plays like *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *The Great God Brown* (1926), and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), winning three Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936 along the way. Even after the apparent failure of Odets' *Paradise Lost* in December 1935, Heywood Broun defended it—and its author—in the strongest terms possible in American drama: "I was present when the earliest work of Eugene O'Neill was first performed and I was no dope. I said that here was a new and glorious talent in the theater and that O'Neill would go far. Perhaps I am a little late in hurling myself, body and soul, on the Odets bandwagon. But I want to make no reservation in stating the opinion that this young man is a far greater figure than O'Neill ever was or will be" (Brenman-Gibson, 386).

The appeal of Odets was largely attributable to what Mordecai Gorelik called "his amazing intuitive grasp of the American scene" (242). Odets was rough and undeveloped, more promise than polish, the critics said, but he had captured the mood and language of his times more perfectly than any other contemporary playwright. John Mason Brown, reviewing *Waiting for Lefty* and *Till the Day I Die*, remarks that "They may be uncouth and gangling. They may appear to suggest what they never really succeed in doing—at least in terms of any abiding validity. Yet
they have the rare virtue of so occupying your attention at the moment they are being played, that at the time, they—and they alone—seem to exist" (Two on the Aisle, 216). Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times went further, noting that Lefty was "one of the most dynamic dramas of the year in any department of our theatre," and arguing that "Mr. Odets continues to be our most promising new dramatist—on the vivid evidence of Waiting for Lefty and Awake and Sing!" (March 27, 1935).

What is consistent in all the early reviews of Waiting for Lefty is a ringing endorsement of the play's compelling theatrical power, the absolute hold it took over its audience. The first performance of Waiting for Lefty was described by Harold Clurman as a defining moment in American cultural history as well a landmark performance in the history of American theatre:

The first scene of Lefty had not played two minutes when a shock of delighted recognition struck the audience. Deep laughter, hot assent, a kind of joyous fervor seemed to sweep the audience toward the stage. The actors no longer performed; they were being carried along as if by an exultancy of communication such as I had never witnessed in the theatre before. Audience and actors had become one... It was the birth cry of the thirties. Our youth had found its voice.

(Fervent Years, 138-39)

If Clurman can be indicted for overstatement, given his connection to the Group and to Odets, it was clear to other people who witnessed the production that something new had happened in the American theatre. Archibald MacLeish, a respected poet and playwright himself, applauded Odets as the new hope of American drama, seeing in the Group's performance of Lefty a sign that a different less commercial kind of theatre, had not only been born, but was thriving:
Now the point I am trying to make is not that Clifford Odets is a good playwright nor that his work is better than anything else in New York. The first fact is pretty widely known and the second is obvious. . . . Clifford Odets and the Group and a crowded sweltering audience created among them something moving and actual and alive. . . . this moving, actual, living thing existed only in the Longacre theatre and not in the theatres where the regular seasonal offerings familiar to the trade were wheeling through their mannequin ceremonies (Kline, 30-31).

There is a hint even from the beginning, therefore, of the stakes for which Odets was playing (albeit unconsciously) with the success of his first play. With Waiting for Lefty, he had become a symbol for a kind of theatre that promised change, new energy and hope to a country crushed under the weight of a dying economy. The form Odets used was not new—worker's theatres had been presenting agit-prop plays for a few years—but the style of this effort and its effect were particularly powerful. As MacLeish recognized, not only was Odets' dialogue and the Group's boldness artistically exciting to a theatregoing public that had heard or seen nothing like them before, but it was socially exciting as well. It spoke to the audience because it addressed in a theatrically compelling manner the key issues of the day. It told the truth. Thus, Clurman pointed out (and other accounts of the opening night of Waiting for Lefty attest1) that the magic of that production came from a communal feeling between audience and performers. Even the normally reserved Atkinson believed that Waiting for Lefty was an important and accurate reflection of Depression America, and openly urged his readers to see the play: "This column dislikes the egregious office of giving advice, but it does not hesitate to recommend 'Waiting for Lefty.' People who want to understand the times through which they are living can scarcely
afford to ignore it" (March 27, 1935).

Odets' play was, as Atkinson noted, a glimpse of what was happening outside the theatre; it had been born from economic and social turmoil far more confusing than any the country had seen before. Ultimately, an understanding of the milieu is essential to an understanding of the responses to *Lefty*, since like all other Odets plays, it is a deliberate attempt to crystallize on stage the social, economic, and cultural conflicts of its time. Odets is a social playwright in that he writes with an uncannily accurate sense of the cultural trends of the day, a political playwright in his socioeconomic examination of those cultural trends. And for Odets, the strongest of social influences was the Depression, the strongest of artistic influences his work with the Group Theatre. Eight of his eleven produced plays (as well as the major unproduced work *The Silent Partner*) were written and produced in the years between the 1935 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. These two factors influenced the whole scope of his career, from his themes to his dramaturgy, and even to his decision to work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Thus, a careful delineation of the paradoxes and problems of the Depression in general and the Group in specific is essential for any coherent understanding of his work.

I. "A Crisis of Abundance"

To Odets, as to many others in the thirties, it seemed clear that the golden era of benevolent market capitalism, the era of Harding, Coolidge, the Rockefellers and Carnegies, had ended with the Crash in 1929. Any hope for recovery seemed to lie in a reclamation and celebration of the worker, the "common man"—to borrow a phrase from a 1932 Roosevelt campaign speech. The twenties, as F. Scott Fitzgerald had chronicled, were characterized by a
giddy feeling of post-war prosperity, a dizzy return to what passed for "normalcy," to use Harding's famous term. Concomitant with that desire for normalcy was a consistent business-oriented conservatism in government and the public mind. There are indications, of course, that the poverty that became so widespread in the United States in the 1930's had in fact begun during the boom years of the 1920's. Susan Porter Benson notes that there were a great many poor in the States even during the 1920's, that the Crash and its aftermath had the effect of drawing the middle classes downward into the struggling classes (214); similarly, Rick Szostak argues that the 20's can really only be seen as a boom in relation to the Depression which followed it (13).

Nevertheless, America in the twenties had moved to the political right, perhaps as much as a result of the perception of unequalled prosperity than actual fact. Contentment reigned, the elimination of poverty seemed to many a realizable goal.

Still, cracks had begun to appear in the facade of wealth. Rapid industrialization had made American business a model of efficiency and had increased the overall standard of living, but unemployment was one of the side effects of this growth. One sign of coming economic trouble was that membership in unions declined steadily throughout the twenties, an unusual trend in times of prosperity.2 This decline occurred—among other reasons, such as a steady Republican judicial opposition to labor strikes and the development of company unions—because while production increased an astonishing 63 percent in the years 1920-1929, there was an actual 7 percent decrease in the number of person-hours worked (McElvaine, 22). Mechanization had improved to the point where workers were being replaced, and pressure on those who still had jobs was increasing. Contributing further to the disparity between productivity and employment was the continued capital re-investment of the huge profits that the large companies made,
increasing productivity still more, while giving the workers only modest increases in wages. As historian Robert S. McElvaine relates, the distribution of profits was increasingly uneven:

"Between 1920 and 1929, per capita disposable income for all Americans rose by 9 percent, but the top 1 percent of income recipients enjoyed a whopping 75 percent increase in disposable income" (38, emphasis his). Coolidge's hands-off approach to the economy, coupled with America's post-war standing as the leading economic power in the world, gave big business the freedom to increase production without restraint, betting (wrongly, as it turned out) that the supply would create its own market.

On the other end of the political spectrum from Coolidge, labor organizations such as Eugene Debs' Socialists and radical organizations like the International Workers of the World (the "Wobblies") were marginalized, ridiculed, and feared because they fought big business in its quest for greater efficiency and greater profits as the expense of the worker. Nevertheless, until deep economic problems manifested themselves in a concrete way, such radicals were unable to make much progress, much less spoil the party. The elections of Harding in 1920, Coolidge in 1924, and Hoover in 1928 make clear the political and economic situation of the twenties. Not until the stock market collapsed in October of 1929 did a feeling of deep dissatisfaction with the status quo and a longing for communalism that had for thirty years characterized the radical American left edge, slowly but certainly, into the mainstream. But when that time came, the left was prepared to make its case. To the radicals, the capitalist system was bound to fail because it depended on the workers to sustain it, while offering them few rewards for doing so. Ultimately, for them, market capitalism was a self-contradictory system based upon broad private ownership of property, yet it worked to concentrate the vast majority of that property in the hands of a few
industrialists. No wonder, then, that it had stalled: the mass of people didn't have enough money to purchase the array of products offered to them.³

*Waiting for Lefty* is an outgrowth of these arguments, Odets' characters enacting on their small stage the theories the left intellectuals wrote about. As John Gassner put it, "No one gave himself to radical thought stemming from Marxist dialectics as wholeheartedly in the theatre as did Odets, just as no one succeeded in investing cold theory with so much palpitating and tormented flesh" ("American Galaxy," 689). But any argument that *Waiting for Lefty* is a radical play must recognize also that Odets was never a particularly conscious or consistent Marxist. He was a member of the Communist Party for approximately eight months in 1935, and certainly *Waiting for Lefty* bears the influence of his association with the party. But Odets also was conscious of the widespread deprivations that people were forced to suffer in the Depression. As he stated in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952, his membership in the Party was an outgrowth of his strong desire for social change, rather than the other way around: "I did not learn my hatred of poverty, sir, out of Communism" (Bentley, 520).

Certainly leftist—even radical—ideas had become more popular and widespread by 1935. Ben Blake, in his half-historical, half-propagandistic treatise on the workers' theatres of the early 1930's, *The Awakening of the American Theatre*, cites the Group's production of Clare and Paul Sifton's 1931— as an example of an important leftist play ignored by the critics: "its bitter truth proved profoundly disturbing to the smaller sector of the Broadway carriage trade that ventured upon it... In the case of the more socially minded critics, the wish not to believe made itself plainly evident" (32). In that aspect at least, Blake's analysis was not far wrong. The review by Percy Hammond of the *Herald-Tribune* ridiculed the notion that there were poor and hungry
people in America, citing as evidence of prosperity the long lines outside the movie theatres in Times Square: "None of them was cold or hungry. They were warmly clothed and they had the price of admission. No symptoms of destitution were present" (Smith, 69). This at a time when the unemployment rate hovered around 25 percent. Other critics, though less blatantly in denial than Hammond, found fault with the production for its leftist tendencies and its less-than-elegant portrayals of the poor and hungry. Only Atkinson recognized the social power of the play (the name of which had been changed from Son of God to locate it historically rather than in a religious context), though he could not recognize its virtue as theatre. In his review, he stated simply that "seldom has a bad play stunned its audience so completely" (Fervent Years, 65).

If 1931— was often condemned as bad theatre because it seemed shrill and radical, by 1935 the times had sufficiently changed that Waiting for Lefty, also written as a political play, was a living theatrical experience for the critics as well as the audiences. For MacLeish—himself a member of Roosevelt's inner circle—and others, Waiting for Lefty was important precisely because it seemed honest, angry, and hopeful, free of taint from the commercial theatres, where "hokum is . . . a compulsory ingredient" (Kline, 31). The battle, staged in the play as a struggle between the truth of the cabbies' lives and the union leader Fatt's lies, echoes a dichotomy that presented itself in the daily reminders of the Depression raging outside the theatre. The bread lines, the ubiquitous apple vendors, the young men travelling the country in boxcars in search of work contrasted tellingly with the abundance of material goods that filled the shelves of stores and the advertisements that promised plenty for all. Odets was the man of the hour, indeed of the decade, not because what he said was unique (though uniquely said) but because he defined in vibrant language and simple terms the frustration felt by millions of Americans paralyzed by an
economic upheaval that seemed to have come from nowhere and showed no signs of leaving. *Waiting for Lefi* moved the audiences who went to see it because he captured in his play the unsteadiness felt by a people still reeling from their betrayal by the tantalizing dream of material abundance.

It is a serious mistake, therefore, to assume, as some critics have, that Odets was only preaching to an audience of the converted, that his passionate message only made sense to committed Marxists. Edward Murray, for example, dismisses the play's politics as being "as subtle and unobtrusive as a machine gun" (24) and scoffs that "no amount of historical criticism can redeem the artistic crudity of the piece" (23). For Murray, an understanding of its context or of reports of its power in performance does "nothing for the intrinsic worth of the play" (23). In the same way, Michael Mendelsohn asserts more ambivalently that "great drama is indestructible; *Waiting for Lefi*, for all its merits, too often seems as dead as last year's newspapers" (21). But to make such claims is not only to ignore the fact that *Waiting for Lefi*, like all other plays, was written and produced in an historical context, in this case, within the context of the Group Theatre. The Group argued that there is, in fact, little of intrinsic worth in any play: all plays must make sense to the times in which they are produced, and the value of the production comes from a creation of understanding between performers and audience. Mendelsohn's assertion also ignores or underplays the massive popular and critical appeal that *Lefi* enjoyed in the 1930's and beyond.

The more conservative of the contemporary newspaper critics looked primarily to Odets' style, his language, and his energy as a sign of hope for the theatre as an institution, rather than to the politics of the play for inspiration. Stark Young in *The New Republic* asserted that "Mr Odets
is the only new [dramatist] disclosed in a good many seasons. In fact it might have been a good idea to say that Mr. Odets is one of the few American playwrights who is worth thinking about at all. For Young, it is the form rather than the message that carried the day in Waiting for Lefty: "The vim and sharp eyes and theatre invention of much of this play are such as to bring the whole of it up to theatre delight" (April 10, 1935). Still, virtually all contemporary critics praised Odets' talent, and many of them acknowledged, along with Atkinson, that the political messages were not out of place in Depression America. Joseph Wood Krutch of The Nation acknowledged that the radical theatre had developed its own form, and considered it a relevant one: "[Odets] does not ask to be judged by any standards except those which one would apply to the agitator, but by those standards his success is very nearly complete" (April 10, 1935).

Regardless of the reasons why people liked Odets' debut effort, for its formal experimentation, its language or its politics, it is undeniable that they did. Lefty played in hundreds of productions across the United States, Canada, and Europe. It made Odets an overnight celebrity and became one of the best known plays in the American canon (it is still anthologized today, at least partly for its brevity, but also because it is characteristic of the political drama that characterized the 1930's as well as the best known and best-written example of agit-prop drama). Its message struck home with those audiences who heard in Edna's desperate plea—"God, Joe, the world is supposed to be for all of us!"—a crystallization of their own frustrations and in Keller's call to action at the end of the play a bold statement of their own hopes for change: "When we die they'll know what we did to make a new world! Christ, cut us up to little pieces. We'll die for what is right! Put fruit trees where our ashes are!" (31). For critics like Murray—and Mendelsohn, who bypasses the fact that the play was written for
performance by commenting that "on the printed page, the ring [of Keller's final speech] is hollow" (21)—the theatrical experience of the performers and audiences of those hundreds of productions of _Lefty_ worldwide are negligible in terms of "art." However, for audiences of all kinds, including the "converted," hard-to-please critics like Atkinson, and artists like MacLeish, the experience of the play was powerful and true.

Murray (like Mendelsohn, whose assumption of the inviolability of "great drama" is so ahistorical and acontextual as to be almost meaningless) refuses to consider that a play can have artistic merit which lies, in part, in a deep and wide social significance. He sneeringly dismisses the responses to _Lefty_ 's initial production as a sort of false religious experience: "Neither Odets nor Clurman seem to have ever fully recovered from this too fervent experience. . . but drama is not religion; the theatre is not a temple. The ecstasy that attended performances of _Waiting for Lefty_ had nothing to do with dramatic art" (23). What dramatic art consists of for Murray is unclear, but it is certain that the kind of response that Odets' play received confirmed everything that he and the Group thought theatre should be. With his first play, then, Odets had become a revolutionary playwright, not because his politics were more radical or his dramaturgy more developed than those of other playwrights, but because he had given expression to the desires and fears of a generation hoping for change, but unsure about what sort of change was needed, a generation caught between poverty and abundance, between fear and idealism. In one sense, then, Clurman, was wrong: _Waiting for Lefty_ was not the "birth cry of the thirties," since the pleas Odets so forcefully presented had been part of the left for some time. But in another sense, Clurman was correct, for when he asserted that "our youth had found its voice," he recognized that Odets' play encapsulated and made theatrically popular a whole current of thought and feeling
that had struggled to work its way into the centre of national consciousness.

Odets' artistic endeavors at speaking to the problems plaguing America were echoed everywhere, even in the White House. Franklin Roosevelt had been elected for the first time in 1932 largely because Herbert Hoover's laissez-faire economic policy, modified only slightly from that of his predecessors, depended on a fierce individualism and a trust in the free market system which shunned government interference in the economy. Roosevelt, on the other hand, sensed the growing mood of desperation in the country and had campaigned on an idea of co-operation rather than competition: his first inaugural address, in March of 1933, urged that "we cannot take but must give as well; that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline" (Davis, 1.31).

Following his inauguration, Roosevelt immediately started on an ambitious project of economic reform that was astonishing in its scope and, to conservatives at least, almost criminal in its willingness to institute socialistic methodologies into a capitalist culture. Granted, the administration was assaulted from the left as well as from the right. Many socialists and communists—including Odets in Waiting for Lefty—claimed that New Deal compromises with big business left the capitalist structure basically unchanged. Nevertheless, the New Deal at least offered a glimpse of hope for those interested in social as well as economic reform. New Deal projects like the Works Projects Administration, The Progress Works Administration, The Social Security Act, The Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Federal Arts Projects were relatively successful; they emphasized the value of work and the worth of the worker to the economy both as creator and consumer of commodities and in essence, made an effort to recognize the worker's central place in the society and the economy.⁵
Roosevelt’s plan was to accelerate growth by promoting consumption. This was a relatively new economic theory developed most fully by British economist John Maynard Keynes, and supported by Roosevelt advisors like Marriner Eccles (appointed head of the Federal Reserve in 1936) and Rexford Tugwell. Keynes opposed conventional supply-side economics, which supported production over consumption, assuming that increased supply would increase demand. On the other hand, he theorized that increased purchasing power offered the consumer through employment in government-sponsored projects would stimulate production again; demand would call forth its own supply. Roosevelt realized that there were few things more important than alleviating the massive unemployment that continued to plague Depression America. Public works programs were the backbone of the economic recovery as they created workers—and consumers—out of the unemployed.

While the exact causes of the Crash and the subsequent economic devastation remain a contentious issue, most economists agree that at least one of the major causes was a serious underconsumption of what was produced. Keynes himself in 1932 said pointedly that "this is not a crisis of poverty... but a crisis of abundance" (Schlesinger, 1.188). In fact, though the GNP stood in the early years of the Depression at only a fraction of its pre-crash levels, "Depression statistics suggest, surprisingly, that a number of factors (lower food prices, installment buying, and the availability of cheap plastics) helped keep alive the boom years' trend towards a 'higher standard of living'" (Barnard, 23). What this suggests is that there was a surplus of goods; more and more commodities were available to the public, and people who had money would buy them. Still, there was trepidation about so much productivity. Production processes had become so efficient and advertising so ubiquitous that sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd characterized the
culture as "hypnotized by the gorged stream of new things to buy. . . . a culture in which private business tempts the population in its every waking minute with adroitly phrased invitations" (Middletown in Transition, 46). Nevertheless, as Rita Barnard notes in her sharp analysis of the culture of abundance, this characterization is "hardly devoid of hyperbole: the continued sluggishness of the economy well into the next decade indicates that the transition to a culture of abundance remained in the thirties more a matter of commercial ideology rather than of actual practice" (23-24). In Waiting for Lefty and the plays that followed, Odets examines the shift towards an emphasis on consumption. Like Lynd's Middletowners, Odets' characters are hypnotized, both tantalized and paralyzed by the material abundance that surrounds them.

Despite its mixed success in rescuing America from the Depression, Roosevelt's emphasis on spending as the way to recovery reflected the way America had begun to view its economy. The whole era of the Depression, in fact, has been defined by historian Warren Susman as a time of shifting emphasis in American history, a movement from a "culture of production" to a "culture of abundance." This shift is towards an ideological and cultural emphasis on plenty. It is also a sort of Utopian vision that began in reaction against a Puritan production-based economy, and is geared towards a better distribution and consumption of the goods that were produced (Culture as History, xx). Early on, Roosevelt defined this same development as a problem in Keynesian economics: he noted in his first inaugural address that "Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply" (Schlesinger, 1.7).

Others argue that the drift towards a consumer society took place much earlier. Daniel Horowitz dates the consumer culture from the late 19th century in America (earlier in England) though he notes that even in the late 1920's it was "far from complete" and suggests that "for
centuries, people have simultaneously welcomed and questioned the value of new consumer goods and services" (xii). Jackson Lears places the rise of consumer culture earlier than Susman, arguing that the culture of abundance was a very old concept, but that the developments of the Industrial Revolution shifted the emphasis on production from women to men, from hearth to factory, and the emphasis on consumption shifted the other way, from men to women (Fables of Abundance, 1-36). Regardless of when the development began (it seems to be a continuum), it is certain that by the time Odets started writing there was a significant and powerful culture of consumption in the United States, cemented in place by Roosevelt's national policy and fueled by increasing sophistication in advertising.

Thus, the disparity between the productive capabilities of American industry and the crushing poverty evident throughout the country—over 32 million people were estimated to live below the poverty line in 1933—was a primary cause of the growing feeling of national desperation. As Karsh and Garman note, "The new radicalism" that developed in the 1930's was not a theoretically-based radicalism; it "appeared to stem from the plain man's instinctive resentment of poverty surrounded by shops bursting with food and farms smothered under their own production surplus" (84). Such a powerful paradox could not escape the scrutiny or comment of an astute observer like Odets; virtually all of his early plays, especially Awake and Sing!, Waiting for Lefty, and Paradise Lost, as well as later ones such as The Big Knife (1949) and The Flowering Peach (1954), examine in detail this idea of a "culture of abundance." The Utopian promise of plenty for all was for him a fundamental symbol for American life, and he metaphorizes the key economic and social conflicts in his plays in terms of the rewards of material abundance and the costs of the personal and social efforts necessary to attain them.
II. "The Very Heart of the Market-place"

Odets and the Group Theatre, then, were reared in a climate of social as well as economic crisis. Their entire world seemed to be disintegrating before their eyes. In addition to fostering widespread unemployment and poverty across America, industrial capitalism had effectually distanced workers from the products of their labor. By concentrating economic power in large cities, industry eroded the rural and semi-rural sense of community that had characterized most of America until the late 19th century. Increasing dependence on the machine had continued to erode the communal impulse in the individual, and the impersonal city was just another symbol of modern society's indifference to the worker. The image of the impersonal factory and mind-numbing repetitive work are a commonplace now, but in the 1930's people feared the tyranny of mass production, the seemingly endless multiplication of goods. Perhaps the best known example of a satirical look at mass production is Chaplin's *Modern Times*, where the great machinery of the factory swallows the main character. Added to a mistrust of technology was the continuing devastation of the American farm life. Farmers had been suffering from low prices and high mortgages since the end of World War I, the advent of the Depression, exacerbated by a drought in West, made their situation so desperate that many feared a farm revolt if aid were not forthcoming. The entire system upon which America imagined itself to be based, the Jeffersonian notion of small landowners and businessmen, no longer existed. Many reform movements of the late 1920's and early 1930's, therefore, were attempts to find new ways to reconstitute a new sense of community, to find the village in the city. The alienation of modern industrial life, metaphorized and demonized in the impersonality of Henry Ford's assembly line—Ford was, after all, the man who claimed that "Machinery is the New Messiah"—rippled outward to the social and
artistic spheres, forcing a re-examination of all areas of American life.7

Harold Clurman notes in his history of the Group Theatre, *The Fervent Years* (1945), that the theatre grew out of a keen need for community, a place in which to reincorporate the individual into something larger than himself or herself. For Clurman, theatre was ultimately social; it involved a group of people working together to create something, with the audience, of good to the whole. Begun as an attempt, as Clurman puts it, "to establish a theatre in which our philosophy of life might be translated into a philosophy of theatre" (32), the Group hoped to create a permanent American art theatre that would be able to develop the skills of its actors, directors, and playwrights over a period of several years. The ultimate goal of this joint venture was the eventual establishment of a "community" with its audience, whose lives and sympathetic understanding rather than some "abstract standard of artistic or literary excellence," Clurman argues, are the only basis for a judgement of value (30-31, emphasis mine).

The Group therefore deliberately set itself against the leading American art theatre of the time, the Theatre Guild, with which the three directors of the Group, Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg, had all worked at one time or another (and with whose financial help and under whose auspices the first Group efforts were conducted). Clurman notes that while "no other American theatre organization ever brought to the boards so many worth-while scripts," the Guild had "no blood relationship with the plays they dealt in" (24). For him, the Guild was a successful producing organization rather than a true theatre, a respectable collection of individual artists which depended on a middle-class subscription audience for its existence. Its directors were "admirens rather than makers. They were imitators rather than initiators, buyers and distributors rather than first settlers or pioneers" (23).
Clurman's characterization of the Guild is far overstated, given the remarkable number of important American—and European—plays the Guild had brought to the American stage and their commitment to stage difficult or experimental works. Founded unofficially in 1918-19 (officially in 1926) by former members of the Washington Square Players, the Guild was set apart from other theatres of the time by a "strong repertory and its large talented acting company" (Pinkston, 434). Indeed, from the standpoint of producing important plays, the Guild is unquestionably the most important American theatre of the twentieth century, staging the world premieres of such plays as Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, Shaw's *St. Joan* and *Heartbreak House*, and O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, as well as productions of plays such as *Peer Gynt*, *Liliom*, *Man and the Masses* and *From Morn to Midnight*. As historian Glenn Hughes remarks, "it is scarcely debatable that by offering a series of beautifully mounted and intelligently acted productions of such distinguished international plays, the Theatre Guild brought a new artistic sophistication into the American theatre" (383).

Since both the Group and the Guild were committed to high quality drama well produced, the difference between the two seems to lie in Clurman's idea of community, of connection. Clurman believed that true theatre could only be formed through a bond of common interest and aspiration of artists and audience, a union of purpose and vision as well as talent. For him, a new kind of theatre, like innovations developing in other arts, would give artist and audience "a feeling of true personal significance," would reflect and change the world around them, would bring "new forms, shapes, meanings" to an otherwise commercial institution (5). For this reason, the Group remained first and foremost an American theatre. In fact, all of their productions were plays written by American writers, save for Erwin Piscator's adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's *An
American Tragedy, titled The Case of Clyde Griffiths. They wanted, more than anything, to speak to the times in which they lived.

Recognition of the importance of the Group to Odets is central to any discussion of his work, for his interdependence with the people who performed—who helped to create—his first seven plays, and with whom he always identified his idea of theatre and art, makes clear the social impulse of his writing. Odets was always concerned about reaching as wide an audiences as possible, from popular plays to films, and even at the end of his career, in television. For example, in a speech he gave to the Cultural and Scientific Conference on World Peace in 1949, we can still hear echoes of the Group concern with society and the social integration of the artist: "the world that pushes the artist to a solitary view is a sick world. Then it is the first task of the artist . . . to reach out to the healthy world of the people and there find his problems mirrored" (Lincoln Center Archives, 3-4). Furthermore, an understanding of his relationship with the Group helps place his "individual" protest against the socio-economic system into a larger context; his work, like the Group's as a whole, was an attempt to re-create a world where belonging to a community was important and productive.

When Odets followed the immediate and surprising success of Waiting for Lefty with the full length, more measured and mature Awake and Sing!, the critics were reassured that a major talent had appeared on the theatrical scene. John Mason Brown praised the production highly, remarking that "Although the Group Theatre has produced several interesting plays and done some of them very well, it has never presented a more fluent production of so living a script as it did last night, when it brought Clifford Odets' Awake and Sing! to the stage of the Belasco" (New York Post, February 20, 1935). Joseph Wood Krutch suggested that Odets' play "reveals as
interesting a new talent as I have seen in a long time. . . One of the most important things about *Awake and Sing!* is an extraordinary freshness" (*The Nation*, March 13, 1935). Even Stark Young, who was indifferent to the play, largely because of its "recurring ugliness," nevertheless admitted that it showed "great promise. . . It begins, moves along, and develops with real skill" (*New Republic*, March 13, 1935).

In addition to his own talent for dialogue and character, Odets' value to the Group was readily apparent to a number of reviewers. Young stated that it was a "notable point" that the Group's new play came from one of its own members, implying that the sense of community upon which the Group had been founded was beginning to yield results. Even more than Young, Brooks Atkinson, in recognizing that the Group had "found their most congenial playwright" within its "own ranks" (*New York Times*, February 20, 1935), sensed that the interdependence that had begun to develop between Odets and the Group was one that would be mutually beneficial. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Group to Odets' work, or that of his plays to their reputation. Their collaboration over ten years (for five of which Odets was their most important playwright) and seven plays was an artistic symbiosis, a productive joining of forces that provided an impetus for Odets' work and a focus for the Group's. Gabriel Miller has noted that "while Odets was largely responsible for the Group's success, his career was, in a sense, created by the company that supplied both inspiration and foundation for his work" (*Clifford Odets*, 12).

Odets had always wanted the theatre to produce his plays because he had been a Group member from its inception. He always claimed that he had written his plays with the Group actors in mind. Thus plays like *Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost* have six or seven roles of relatively
equal importance and lend themselves to the Group's particular strengths. Odets told Arthur Wagner in a 1961 interview, "these early plays were made for the collective acting company technique... Well, this is purely from the Group Theatre ideal of a stage ensemble, and this so fetched me and took me over that this was how I wrote" ("How A Playwright Triumphs," 67). On the other side, the Group felt that Odets' plays were close to their artistic vision. Because of this, they became increasingly dependent on his plays to help realize their artistic goals. Of course, they were aware that good plays were necessary for financial survival. Increasingly, their dependence on Odets' plays for both artistic merit and box office potential caused tension around productions of Odets plays. Odets initially was pleased with the fact that the Group grew quickly to depend on his work, that they knew he was the kind of playwright that would work with the actors, rewriting until the production was ready. For example, when the Group needed a popular play to help its sagging finances in 1937, Odets provided Golden Boy, which became one of the most profitable and popular shows the Group ever produced.

From his very first taste of success, Odets began to develop a feeling of financial responsibility for the Group. Thus, a position that initially gave him pleasure eventually would cause disharmony, especially between Odets and Clurman. Margaret Brenman-Gibson remarks that the mixed feelings his position in the Group elicited in Odets became increasingly complicated the longer the Group continued: "Odets would have been dismayed to know how vital it was to him to be at long last a man of sufficient means to pay even part of their salaries. From the moment he had become a 'big man,' father to the Group... he had poured into the maintenance of that position a magic belief that through derivatives like loans, gifts, pedagogy, and the like, he could redress his own alienations" (429). Nevertheless, he resented the fact that he was, by the
time *Golden Boy* and *Rocket to the Moon* came to the stage, the Group's cash cow, not only in terms of his own plays, but in terms of money he gave from his income as playwright and screenwriter to support other Group productions. "When did Harold ever raise any money for the Group?" he questioned angrily, when forced to finance *Golden Boy* largely with his own money and that of his wife Luise Rainer. *Rocket to the Moon*, too, was financed in part with Odets' money, as were *Johnny Johnson* and *Night Music*, not to mention countless personal loans and gifts to less fortunate Group members. He offered the Group 15,000 dollars in bonds to keep *Night Music*, his final production with the Group, on the boards, though hurt and angry at the reception of what he felt a botched production, too "heavy and sonorous" for the script (*Time is Ripe*, 50).

Following the initial exhilarating successes of the Group's 1935 productions of Odets' plays were some more difficult times. At first, the fervor showed little sign of slowing. *Waiting for Lefty*, paired with *Till the Day I Die*, ran well into the summer, and *Awake and Sing!* toured the Midwest. And by then, Odets' attention was focused on *Paradise Lost*, the fourth play of Odets' *annus mirabilis*. *Paradise Lost* is the play Odets described later as his "favorite" (*Six Plays*, ix), and so when it was greeted with bewilderment and dislike by the critics, Odets' disappointment in its reception was profound. Suddenly, the offers that he had previously turned down from Hollywood studios became more enticing. With the money, he thought, he could help to prop up *Paradise Lost* until it found the audience he was sure it would find, could reinforce the shaky financial foundation of the Group Theatre, could provide himself with enough income to guarantee time for writing in the future, and could even reach a wide, ready-made audience with his words and ideas in the relatively new medium of sound film. All of these reasons, especially
the last (to which Odets would return again and again in his discussions of Hollywood's promise), bear closer examination, for the quickly expanding sound film industry seemed to offer unlimited potential for artistic expression. Films were certainly popular culture but, to Odets (in theory, and—at least sometimes—in practice) they were culture nonetheless.

The promise that Odets had shown and the increasing dependence of the Group on his plays made Odets' try at screenwriting seem an important test—moral and artistic—of the young writer, and a yardstick by which the rest of his career is usually judged. Odets himself was ambivalent about the movies in 1936, the year he first left for the West Coast to work for Paramount Studios, or so it seemed as he looked back from the perspective of the 1960's: "I thought going to Hollywood was the most immoral thing I could do, and yet who wouldn't want to go to Hollywood? When I finally went it was with a sense of disgrace, almost" ("How A Playwright Triumphs," 70). The "almost" that qualifies Odets' statement is telling, for it underscores the mixed feelings he was to hold about the movie studios (and, in a less vehement way, about the stage) throughout his career. The motion picture industry was a source of much-needed financial support, but offered him less substantial artistic rewards than the stage. Gerald Weales, one of Odets' most astute and sympathetic readers, comments that the evidence of Odets' work in Hollywood, his willingness to stay there for long periods of time, his love of fine clothing, his frequent justifications of his Hollywood lifestyle by arguing that good work could be done in films "somewhat muddies the classic picture of Odets as the young talent raped by success: he was willing, even eager" (Clifford Odets, Playwright, 11). Malcolm Goldstein, similarly, comments somewhat unenthusiastically that "despite his willingness to accept Hollywood's cash and his romantic attachment to and eventual marriage with the Academy-Award winning actress
Luise Rainer, [Odets] was not 'lost' to Hollywood. On the contrary, he remained both a source of plays and the money to finance them and meet the company payroll" (*Political Stage*, 311).

Goldstein, however, goes on to make damning comparisons between Odets and his characters, remarking that in *Golden Boy*, "Odets' intellectual battle left its impress on the play. This battle he had lost: he had gone to Hollywood." Goldstein asks rhetorically, "Is it possible to read the play without seeing Joe's decision in the light of the playwright's?" (321). Like Odets' use of "almost" to qualify his shame, Goldstein's use of "lost" in discussing the differences between writing for the stage and for the screen shifts the choice from a practical concern for financial support or an artistic desire to explore the possibilities of a new medium and gives it moral, political, and ideological overtones. The overt comparison to Joe Bonaparte—a suicide lost to the world of art despite his money and success (in Joe's brother Frank's words, a "waste")—underscores Goldstein's dismissal of Odets' film career. To be "lost" to films implies a moral failure as much as an unwise career choice, a virtual prostitution of talent for money.

Odets' contemporaries used similar arguments. Clurman, the most perceptive of all Odets' co-workers and admirers, delineates in *The Fervent Years* the dangers of financial success facing the playwright in the commercial theatre, using Odets as his example:

Had Odets been a poet, a painter, a composer, even a novelist, the step to Hollywood would not appear so inevitable. The reason for this may be that a serious worker in the arts outside the theatre not only is rarely afflicted with the sudden and dizzying success of a playwright, but rarely lives in expectation of such a success. In a sense the serious artist—particularly the painter, poet, or composer—takes a vow of humility and poverty on entering upon his career. His
work is not likely to pay off in big dividends. He does not dwell too close to the marketplace. The theatre is in the very heart of the market-place, where a feverish and fabulous exchange of goods seems the essential drama. The playwright cannot but be affected by it. If he has had some success, why not more? If he has had little success, and greater rewards for his efforts are open to him in Hollywood, why not take advantage of the situation? This thought process is particularly typical of our more recent playwrights, since respect for the stage as a medium and the tradition of the serious playwright as an autonomous artist are rapidly waning

(*Fervent Years*, 158).

Leaving aside his generalizations about other artists, who may or may not be as implicated in the market as the playwright, but certainly are never free of it, Clurman's analysis deserves close examination because it seems to expose the market practices of the theatre and the necessary compromises of the playwright as a participant in that market. At the same time, however, it distances itself from those practices through a claim of autonomy for the playwright. Clurman's claim is that playwrights sell, or rather sell out, while other workers in the arts are forced by anonymity as much as anything else to accept poverty as their lot. His indictment of Odets in specific and of the playwright in general here is a common and romantic one, a defense of the artistic high ground of creative integrity against the impure. His tale is a cautionary one: Odets the artist surrendered to the sweet but ultimately nefarious blandishments of the marketplace, ignored his vocation, and the theatre lost the talent of another playwright who would be better off toiling in untainted, "autonomous," and relatively happy poverty.

Yet Clurman's own history of the Group undercuts his idea of the artist as one who
would—or could—somehow be free of the marketplace. Clurman’s desire to create a permanent theatre was from the beginning a dream beset by various problems, financial and practical. And though, as Group historian Wendy Smith notes, they succeeded to a remarkable extent in their goal of reflecting American life from the stage, and though the influence of the Group continues to be felt widely and strongly in American theatre and film today, the theatre was still always a Broadway organization. Smith notes that the members of the Group, and especially its directors, felt that “for all its faults, Broadway was the heart of the American theatre, and they wanted to be a part of it . . . they wanted to change the mainstream, not abandon it” (72). Throughout its history, then, the Group struggled to be self-supporting; it tried to lure loyal, committed paying audiences to fill its seats, seats usually offered at typical Broadway prices; it sought to build a base and reputation in the heart of the commercial theatre at a time when theatres and their audiences were challenged by the deprivations of the Great Depression.

Given the difficulties that theatres were facing, it is not surprising that discussions of money appear as often as discussions of plays in The Fervent Years: from the beginning, Clurman’s story of the Group is a history of underfunding and scrambling for cash. As he admits at the end of The Fervent Years, "the fundamental economic instability from which the Group suffered, its piecemeal, bread-line existence, accounts for much of its hectic inner life and explains more about its real deficiencies than any analysis of the personal traits of its individual members. . . a play poorly directed might prove the massacre of our material hopes for the season, a faulty performance by one or two individuals might spell penury for all of us" (265-66). Financial pressures were endemic to the Group; there was always a sense of panic about raising the money needed for a particular production. The flip side of this panic, of course, is that there was always
a dream of having enough money to pay everyone what they were worth. This attitude is reflected in the fact that from the beginning, the Group sought to pay its actors all season long, regardless of whether they were acting in a particular production or not, regardless of the size of the roles they played.

Of course, the panic over finances was naturally and directly related to artistic concerns about the productions, so that arguments soon arose among the members of the theatre about which plays to do, whether they should look for a hit that would fill the coffers, or whether they should gamble on something more in tune with their artistic feeling. This is not to say that the actors and directors of the Group did not make real and consistent financial sacrifices to maintain their artistic vision. In fact, a number of shows they felt artistically "worthwhile" were kept running because the Group members agreed to forego some or all of their salaries. For example, on one of their productions, of Dawn Powell's Big Night, "None of the directors was paid his fee for the production. . . . After working on the play for months, the actors received no pay at all. In fact, none of us save the scene-designer, the builder, and the stagehands ever received a penny from this production" (Fervent Years, 101).

Even with considerable sacrifices in the name of idealism, concessions to the marketplace were necessary. Funding came from Hollywood for a number of Group plays, and a number of the actors, including Jules (later John) Garfield, J. Edward Bromberg, Stella Adler, and Morris Carnovsky, went periodically to work in films as well—as did Clurman himself. The Group also occasionally produced and performed plays that were commercially viable, such as Sidney Kingsley's Men in White, towards which they were not artistically inclined, for the simple reason that they believed a commercial success would allow them the financial freedom to try more
experimental works. Talking about the decision to produce the hospital melodrama, Clurman admits that he and the actors were opposed to the script, that they thought it meant selling out their ideals. Still, they had no answer to Lee Strasberg's rejoinder that there were no other scripts available, and that continuous work was necessary for the health of the theatre. Brenman-Gibson notes that Strasberg believed "the entire enterprise was in danger of dissolution without the 'impurities' of plays sufficiently viable to keep the Group continuously active" (276). Brought into existence to battle the superficial commercialism of Broadway, the Group nevertheless found itself struggling with the same problems as other theatres, and finding increasingly that their own solutions were similar to those that they had previously condemned.

Once separated from the financial support of the Theatre Guild—over artistic questions—the Group struggled to finance their productions. For example, Maxwell Anderson's *Night Over Taos* was financed piecemeal, with contributions by Anderson, Group actor Franchot Tone, and the father of another Group actor. This was the start of a precedent in the Group of looking to individuals connected with the Group itself as a main source of funding. *Night Over Taos* failed quickly, leaving the Group destitute at the end of their first season and forcing Clurman and Crawford once more into a desperate search for money to keep their dream alive. Clurman relates a significant story in *The Fervent Years* about his visit, with Crawford, to the philanthropist Otto Kahn:

> He had seen our last two productions and was impressed by them, We had ideals, he said, and the ability to realize them. What did we want? Not money, I said, and went on to explain the Group's problems generally. He interrupted me: "But you are talking of nothing but money!" No matter how it was put, the economic
problem was closely related to all the others (*Fervent Years*, 75-6).

Looking back at the Group from the distance of a few years, Clurman himself acknowledges that “the basic defect in our activity was that while we tried to maintain a true theatre policy artistically, we proceeded economically on a show-business basis” (263). Other critics have noticed this tension between art and commerce, a contradiction within the Group that was also tied up with the political movements of the day. As Goldstein notes, though the Group was organized as a Broadway organization, it was "never free of an association with the far Left in the mind of the public during the 30's" (*Political Stage*, 75). The Group attempted to sink roots deeply into the commercial theatre, while at the same time decrying the effects of rampant commercialism with every production. Group designer Mordecai Gorelik's often-repeated semi facetious remark that most of the plays the Group chose to do dealt with the question "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" underscores the paradoxical nature of the Group's goals.12 The Group was not necessarily unaware of their own internal contradictions, but a romantic idealism persisted in their business dealings. Ultimately, Clurman's characterization of the Group's "show business" financial policies as a "defect" implies some other possibility, a desire to create a theatre that somehow does not depend on money to survive. Here there is a suggestion that if the Group had chosen to work on a smaller scale, they would have been able to continue.

The Group was not, of course, the only theatre established in the thirties with a sense of common purpose and a progressive vision; it is therefore instructive to look at the other small theatres founded at the same time and examine their financial bases to see what possibilities other than Broadway were open to the Group. John Gassner, in an brief but trenchant analysis of the
leftist theatres of the 1930's, argues first of all that the basis for the leftist theatre in America came initially from a strong belief in Jeffersonian democracy more than any systematic commitment to Marxism. For Gassner, the theatre of the American left developed out of an optimistic opposition to Hamiltonian materialism. It was romantic, enthusiastic, and idealistic in its opposition to the forces of big business and capitalism in general, though not necessarily rigorously analytical or aware of the contradictions in their position (introduction, in Himelstein). Morgan Himelstein likewise argues in Drama Was a Weapon that the small leftist theatres like the Proletbühne, The Theatre Collective, the Worker's Laboratory Theatre (later the Theatre of Action), and the Theatre Union, while marginally successful at first in speaking to a small, committed Marxist audience, never really gained either an ideological or practical foothold in the American theatre. Constantly in need of money, these small theatres were forced to look to other theatre organizations, including the Group, for support. Odets, like many other Group members, contributed both money and time to the Theatre Union. Odets taught acting classes at the Theater Union starting in 1933 and Group actors Art Smith, Elia Kazan, and John Garfield, among others, were involved in various capacities in the other left wing theatres of the time.

Still, these theatres, unable to pay their costs from ticket sales, unable to draw the audiences needed to support them and unwilling to compromise their ideals or the messages their plays espoused, folded quickly one after another, victims of the financial constraints endemic to the theatre and without recourse to the standard commercial ways of financing their productions. The argument, then, that the Group would have been better able to survive as a smaller, less commercial theatre is simply not borne out by the experience of those theatres who tried. Had they been less tied to Broadway, perhaps they would have been even freer to experiment with
their plays. But had they been freer from Broadway expectations and constraints, they would have also lost much of the audience which supported them and the recognition which they sought and deserved. In turn, they would have had even less money to pay the actors, who, they felt should be paid regardless of whether they appeared in a particular play or not. Perhaps the Group directors could have been better business people, as the tales of monetary mismanagement suggest, but to survive in the market economy, one has to participate. As even Clurman realized, because the Group was so committed to becoming a leading art theatre, their participation was both dangerous and inevitable.

So, while at the end of *The Fervent Years*, writing from the perspective of a few years separation from the Group, Clurman decries the fact that “the almost absolute emphasis on the profit motive in the theatre—intensified rather than diminished in the past few years—has impeded all progress [towards artistic development]" (265), he nevertheless strongly denies that capitalism as such is an important cause of the impediment. The claim that money isn't the problem (if only there were enough of it), but rather that the problem lies in the grasping profit-oriented mentality of Broadway, and, by implication, Hollywood, still does not free the theatre from being a business. Clurman's longing for a theatre that is in the market but not of it remains because he refuses to recognize the economic imperatives of art in the American marketplace. A profit-oriented economic system simply cannot exempt artists.

### III. Selling Out and Other Artistic Necessities

Because discussions of money and art invariably raise moral and political concerns, it is necessary to redefine the idea of artistic integrity in a market economy. Such an examination
involves, in fact, a re-evaluation of what might constitute a "sell-out" when the society is constructed around the practices of buying and selling, when it offers few primary rewards other than monetary ones for its participants. Financially, the place of the writer or the artist in general is perilously insecure in North American culture, so much so that it has become a cliché to refer to starving artists, to expect actors and writers to work as "temps," as waiters, as secretaries to make a living while between shows, or while trying to "make it" in the movies. "Art doesn't pay; if it pays, it isn't art", or so the general feeling goes. Bruno S. Frey and Werner W. Pommerehne remark that this image of the poor artist is a romantic notion cemented in place since the industrial revolution by writers themselves writing about starving artists.\(^{15}\) While finding that the difference between artists' incomes and that of the general public is smaller than imagined, they nevertheless concede that the incomes of artists "are usually derived from many different sources" (149), especially teaching, and that unemployment for artists is "considerably higher" than it is for other occupations. Surely the experience of the Group members supports that argument. After the financial failure of John Howard Lawson's *Success Story* in late 1932, a number of Group members were forced to move in together to save money, sharing a "neglected old brownstone with insufficient heat and a generally damp atmosphere" (*The Fervent Years*, 96). While Clurman states that "all things considered, the atmosphere was jollier than one might expect" (97), he nevertheless notes the scarcity of food, the dependence on gifts from more fortunate Group members, the generally depressing attitude that financial straits had forced upon the Group.

The evidence cited by Frey and Pommerehne is borne out by further analyses from other economists, and by evidence from Odets' history with the Group. William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, for example, note that the artist "is likely to be harried by constant economic pressures
and by the need for incessant work, often in occupations far removed from his profession, in order to eke out a living for himself and his family" (99). In essence, then, the artist is in the marketplace whether or not he or she wishes to be; the economic pressures on artists are quite real, persistent, and measurable in their effects. Thus, the conflict in which Odets participated, virtually always phrased (by newspaper reviewers, by academics, by Clurman and other Group members, by Odets himself) in terms of art versus commerce, artistic integrity versus artistic prostitution, is part of a larger, long-standing cultural problem. Nor is the difference between art and commerce as clearly defined as many critics and artists make it appear; there is negotiation, middle ground, a blurring of categories, and Odets' career is an excellent starting point for an examination of that middle ground, for it reflects a deep, continuing, ultimately ambivalent concern with the place of the artist in mid-century American society, as his plays do.

In addition to its commitment to a socially productive brand of commercial theatre, the Group was created during the most difficult financial times the theatre—and the nation—had ever seen. Broadway box office receipts in 1934 were less than half of what they were in 1928 and total productions per year fell an astonishing 44 percent, from 264 to 145, in the same period (Moore, 14, 147). Thomas Gale Moore cites three basic reasons for the decline of the theatres between the late twenties and the mid-thirties. First of all, the sharp drop in income and employment in the early years of the Depression obviously made going to the theatre an unaffordable luxury for most people. But this was not the only cause, for while many other industries regained their pre-Depression levels of production and growth by the end of the 1930's, the theatre never fully recovered its pre-Crash power.

The second reason Moore cites for the initial decline in theatre attendance (and
consequently, in the number of theatrical productions) is the spread of radio; the third, and most important, was the development of sound film. Moore argues that it was not necessarily the loss of audience to the radio or movies that most permanently affected the theatre, but rather the demand for additional personnel who were lured, as they had been to Hollywood, by the promise of secure work and higher wages. In 1934, Frank Gillmore, the president of Actor's Equity, estimated that a full 70 percent of actors working in Hollywood had come from the stage, and Robert McLaughlin adds that "hundreds of actors and writers went to work for NBC or CBS networks either on a full or part time basis to help produce the large amount of material need to supply the growing market" (McLaughlin, 109-10). This demand for personnel makes the growing resentment of the mass media by people in the theatre understandable. Losing some of their most gifted writers, actors and directors to the mass media of film and radio, many in the theatre began to see in these new developments not as opportunities for greater expression, but as a highly developed and powerful economic competitor with the potential to seriously and permanently damage the status of the theatre. Once again, the tense but intimate interweaving of culture and cash becomes apparent in the struggles of the theatre against new technologies, new ways of producing art. The quick disappearance of the vaudeville circuits after the proliferation of film in the early 1900's gives clear evidence of the economic power of the new technologies. The fact that the legitimate theatre survived was as much because it was willing to make compromises with the film and radio industries as it was due to the natural interest and power of live theatrical production.

The rapid development of sound films in the late 1920's definitely had an instantaneous, measurable effect on both film and theatre attendance. Motion picture box-office receipts nearly
doubled in New York City from 1927 to 1931, while those of the musical theatre plummeted by more than two-thirds (Moore, 14). It is interesting to note here that the effect on income for "straight" Broadway shows (defined by Moore as comedy or drama, as opposed to musicals, which were initially those hardest hit by the growth of sound film technology) by motion pictures is negligible in these early stages of development, but not because attendance didn't fall. Rather, to combat falling attendance, Broadway producers raised ticket prices an average of 21 percent over the same period to offset the 60 percent reduction in sales: "Although responsible for only part of this rise, Hollywood must certainly have been a major factor" (15). The introduction of a major competitor to the market forced the theatres immediately to respond. Far from being insulated from the market by their artistic purpose, the Broadway theatres were fighting for their economic lives.

As Hollywood continued to develop, then, those who chose to join its ranks, even for a time, were seen as traitors by those who chose not to go. A 1929 New York Times article lamented that "the American theatre is on its last legs. We are being mechanized out of the theatre by the talkies, the radio, and the people who prefer convenience to beauty" (McLaughlin, 93). The defense against the film quickly became moral as well as aesthetic; it involved a condemnation of convenience in the place of beauty. Hollywood was a standing joke among many serious theatre workers, though their comments about its silliness was more like whistling in the graveyard, given the quick rise and economic staying power of the Hollywood film. Added to this, of course, was the increasing dependence that theatres felt upon Hollywood for the sales of screen rights. Since the average amount paid for film rights to a Broadway show was between 30,000 and 35,000 dollars in the years 1928-35, it seems clear that the freedom wished for by the
Broadway producers was impossible: they were too tied up in the financial considerations to be artistically free, as a 1935 article in the *New York Times* made clear:

Carp as the cynics will of Hollywood's baleful effect upon the once glorious legitimate stage, it remains an incontestable fact that if it weren't for picture sales, other things being what they are, half the producers on Broadway would probably shut up shop . . . the line between the success and failure of a Broadway production is pretty generally drawn by the ability of the producer to close a picture sale (McLaughlin, 122).

The growing interdependence of the theatre and film industries in the 1930's complicates even further the question of artistic integrity in a market economy. This is a question which encompasses the nature of art itself, especially a collaborative art like theatre. Of course, Clurman's analysis of the Group is not the only one which attempts to wrest art at a critical moment from the ravenous maw of the marketplace; accusations of selling out and condemnations of commercialism are as old as art itself. For example, in a typically vehement argument, playwright James L. Rosenberg remarks that "the cancer that is killing the theatre is, as we all know all too well, the creeping commercialism of the marketplace, the fact that plays are treated, not as works of art, but as properties to be sold profitably to a mass public" (227). Here the playwright is not the transgressor who sells out (however inevitably, in Clurman's version of Odets' dilemma), but the victim, a generally unwitting pawn of the market who, according to Rosenberg, must retaliate by consciously refusing to participate in the marketplace at all: "he needs to put money out of his thinking" (226).

Rosenberg's argument is based on what is certainly a bold—if familiar—assumption that a
playwright is one who not only can be free of market influences, but who can be free of all other influences, including those of fellow theatre professionals. His hermit-visionary playwright seeks to produce works of high art, irrespective of what is done to them by others; Rosenberg fails to consider that playwrights do not really exist as playwrights without theatres to produce them. Unlike Clurman, Rosenberg has a dim view of the collaborative process of theatre, remarking that the playwright is “the only true creative artist in the theatre” (228) and noting that the director’s role is “ultimately pernicious” (230). While there is certainly an element of calculated overstatement in his article, Rosenberg’s plea repositions a persistent question about the nature of playwriting and the market: how are artists to survive in a market economy if selling the products of their labor is either impossible—there may be no buyers—or tainted—the product stained a priori because it is produced for consumption?

Given the collaborative nature of theatre, at its best an unsteady structure of compromise and negotiation, the question no longer centres around the integrity of specific individuals (either writers or producers, buyers or sellers), but rather around the notion of artistic integrity itself. In order for a playwright such as Odets to be considered a playwright at all, he must have his work produced, ideally by a professional company. The initial problems Odets encountered in getting I Got the Blues (later called Awake and Sing!) to the stage underscore the importance of a playwright having a sympathetic theatre to produce his work. In 1933, Bess Eitingon, an independent producer associated with Frank Merlin, read Odets' script and immediately purchased the rights to the play on a six month option. But Eitingon noted that there were problems with casting the play: "Although she did not realize it had been written by him specifically for the ensemble company of the Group theatre, finely trained by Strasberg to work as a unit, she found
herself imagining each of eight Group actors in his appropriate role" (Brennan-Gibson, 280). She decided not to produce the play because it was too intertwined with the Group by its very nature.

In fact, Odets realized his dependence early on; he really only identified himself as a playwright when the Group agreed finally to produce *Awake and Sing!* in early 1935. Before that, though he told Clurman that he was leaving the Group a number of times, he confessed that "I was leading him on a bit because I wouldn't have known where to go. Where else could you go? All I really ever wanted was to have the Group theatre do my plays" (Brennan-Gibson, 297). From Odets' own indications, the offer from Eitingon and the interest from the Guild, while perhaps they would have allowed *Awake and Sing!* to be produced, would not have satisfied him, for they were not the companies for which it was written. Odets was conscious that his writing was dead until an actor who knew and understood the playwright's intention brought it to life.16

As Odets' experience with *Awake and Sing!* shows, Rosenberg's idea of a playwright's theatre is chimerical, for without the actors to perform it, a director, a producer, designers and other personnel, the work is simply never seen: theatrically, it does not exist. Of course, this leaves aside as a separate issue the idea of reading plays for pleasure or instruction, which is a good in itself, but an additional one to that of performance, and one practically dependent on performance anyway, since few publishers will print scripts that have never been performed. Nevertheless, most dramatists are not closet dramatists; they write for a stage and for an audience. As such, they take into account (with varying degrees of consciousness) the conditions of production which will enable their work to be seen. That is, in order to get his or her play chosen and produced by the company, the playwright is expected to compromise.17 Thus, Moore and Rosenberg (as much as Clurman) identify the place of the playwright in the theatrical world
and in the marketplace in general as always in contention, always a struggle, if not for supremacy, at least for "integrity" and purity of vision. Still, as the experience of the Group attests, compromise is a sometimes bitter—though almost always necessary—condition of production, for financial as well as artistic reasons.

Given the necessity of compromise, the pressure the Group placed on playwrights—including Odets, Paul Green, and Maxwell Anderson—to revise their work according to the views of the company as a whole opens up an understanding of the participation of the playwright in the marketplace. Clurman notes the hesitancy of Green to change the original ending of *The House of Connelly*, in which the tenant farmer Patsy was strangled by the two servant women. Arguing that Patsy was a symbol of the old South overcoming its past, the Group found the original ending, in Clurman's words, "historically and humanly untrue and in conflict with what we felt to be the theme of the play. . . . Our own sense of the perfectibility of man, or at least, the inevitability of the struggle against evil, not only made us impatient with the play's violent ending but roused Paul's own verve and decision in our direction" (44).

Nor was Odets free from this pressure to change and rewrite according to the feeling of the Group. He promised to rewrite the third act of *Awake and Sing!* even before the Group had agreed to produce it, and worked with Clurman up to opening night revising and rewriting the third act. The Group, believing that a singleness of purpose and a sense of community were more essential to their collective endeavor than a more literal interpretation of the playwright's words, asked the playwrights to change their vision to reflect the mood and feeling of the whole Group. Of course, the close rapport between Odets and the Group made such compromises less bitter than they could have been, at least in the beginning, but the significance of the changes lies not in
the willingness of Odets to do re-writes, but in the power of the Group to force them.

For the Group, the audience was an essential part of the community they were trying to build. The plays they performed had to reflect the feeling and desires of their targeted audience as well as that of the performers and writers themselves. While not denying the extremely optimistic social message the Group was trying to convey through its plays, indeed, through its very existence, behind Clurman's insistence on altering scripts was the knowledge that an audience is what makes a theatre possible, financially as well as spiritually. Moore gives a less romanticized version of the place of the audience and the pressures their expectations place on the playwright, remarking that "As a consequence of the increase on production costs—to repeat an earlier conclusion—plays of limited appeal have been squeezed out. This is the eternal problem of the artist: he may wish to create certain works, but if too few of the public care for his efforts, he may starve" (39). One might take Moore's comment further by suggesting that if theatre, especially in collective ventures like the Group, is interdependent, not just the playwright, but the whole group may starve if the public is insufficiently interested in their work. One can hear in this an echo of Clurman's admission that the Group was always on the verge of financial collapse, that a mistake by any one member might bring them all to ruin. The pressures from the Group on playwrights like Odets, then, were financial (and moral) as well as artistic. The vision the Group wished to express needed to be economically viable, needed to walk a fine line between art and commerce.

The Group understood that theatres cannot exist without playwrights. Apart from the contribution of Odets, for example, the Group lacked good (or "successful") scripts almost as much as they did cash. Goldstein has remarked that "for all its theatrical skill, the Group lacked literary discrimination. . . . their passion was altogether too strong to allow for good judgement"
("Found Generation," 137), and while his reasons for the lack of good plays in the Group are oversimplified, outside of Odets' work, the list of plays produced by the Group in its ten-year existence has few names someone without a detailed knowledge of the period would recognize. A number of plays which closed almost immediately after opening remain obscure: Nellise Child's *Weep for the Virgins*, Anderson's *Night over Taos*, and Melvin Levy's *Gold Eagle Guy*—the play which prompted Group actor Luther Adler to remark in rehearsal "Boys, I think we're working on a stiff." The Group, in fact, turned down two plays, Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*, in 1935, and William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life*, in 1940, that not only became critical successes for the Guild, but also would have provided the Group with some much needed income had they decided to produce them. Clurman knew, perhaps better than anyone in the Group, that "the big problem . . . was the play problem. . . . Plays of an original character were rare" (78-9).

In the face of financial ruin, the Group remained committed to their collective ideal, working together to choose scripts for production, though many of the internal conflicts inherent in the company surfaced around the issue of play selection. The more progressive of the actors urged their fellows to move the theatre ideologically to the left, to produce not only plays of "social significance," but plays with an identifiably Marxist or Socialist bent. However, Clurman, Strasberg, and Crawford tried to steer the theatre towards plays with a wider, less politicized appeal. Following the closing of Odets' *Paradise Lost*, Clurman even issued a public statement declaring that the Group did not necessarily share the political views of its playwrights. In it, he claimed that

The impression has arisen that the Group Theatre is primarily interested in the production of so-called 'propaganda' plays. This is false. The Group is essentially
interested in plays that make for exciting and intelligent theatre. . . any of the following types of plays would have been considered by us as possible Group material: *Journey's End, First Lady, Russet Mantle, Winterset, The Petrified Forest, The Road to Rome, Pride and Prejudice, The Children's Hour, The Jest, Dinner at Eight*" (Smith, 250-51).

Smith notes that the bulk of these plays (save *Winterset*, which the Group had turned down already, and *The Children's Hour*) were conventional dramas, that the rift between what the actors wanted and what the directors felt they could successfully produce was widening rather than narrowing. Ironically, the failure of the Group to find enough viable scripts to produce underscores the collaborative nature of the theatre; without production, a play, whatever its merits, is absent, unfulfilled, just as without an audience a production is a void, empty of significance. Theatre, the Group recognized, depends on community; it is a supremely social activity based on interdependence both among the workers in the theatre and between the theatre and the audience. A playwright without a theatre is a contradiction, a theatre without an audience an impossibility.

The experience of Odets and the Group shows that there exist, then, two prior constraints on the apparently free creativity of the writer, both practical as well as ideological, both inescapable. The first is the necessarily collaborative nature of theatre, which joins the work of the playwright with that of his co-workers in the theatre. Second, the pressures of the marketplace always help to determine what will be produced and seen. Because theatre has a built-in productivity lag—that is, the cost of theatrical production will in theory always rise faster than the general price level because actors and directors and writers cannot be mechanized,
cannot be made more efficient, to keep pace with the mechanization of industry—the economic pressures on a theatre will always increase over time. And while there can be some increase in efficiency on the technical aspects of production (lighting improvements, for example, or the use of computers to simplify complicated design tasks and management duties, or even the use of more powerful machinery to build and transport sets), theatre is, economically speaking, virtually the same industry it has been for centuries. As James Heilbrun and Charles M. Gray show in their analysis of the performing arts in the United States, this productivity lag expresses itself as a cost increase in theatre at an average annual rate of 1.4 percent, compared with just 0.9 percent for the general price level, which, when compounded year after year, significantly widens the gap between theatrical productivity and general productivity in a relatively short time. This, in turn, leads to pressure to increase ticket prices or to cut labor costs, or, as a more permanent solution, to find other reliable sources of income (like the $100,000 endowment Clurman sought for the Group) to offset the productivity lag.

Heilbrun and Gray have noted that there are only a limited number of ways for theatres to offset the inevitable increase in theatrical production costs. The first, to raise ticket prices, is a process that soon becomes self-defeating. The Group struggled throughout its history with the disparity between selling tickets at Broadway prices to cover their expenses (probably higher than other theatres because of the Group's commitment to a long rehearsal period and to large casts, though their salaries were low) and the fact that their productions seemed to appeal more to the balcony crowd, with whom they were in sympathy psychically and politically, but who couldn't by themselves keep the shows open on Broadway.

The Group was conscious of the disparity between their aims and their methods, but saw
little way out of the dilemma. Odets noted in an 1937 interview in the *Daily Worker* that the ticket prices high Broadway rents forced the theatres to charge were ridiculous, and were destroying any attempts at social drama. His plan was to develop a theatre like the Federal Theatre Project, which had low admission prices and took theatre to where people could see it cheaply, but it is ironic to note that he spoke of this in an interview just before *Golden Boy* opened on Broadway, at Broadway prices. Even as Odets dreamed of a left theatre that would combine social significance and art, he was working towards a commercial (as well as artistic) hit on Broadway to save his own theatre from financial ruin.20 Broadway prices had been raised on average 21 percent in the five years between 1929 and 1934, in part because revenues had remained constant, while expenses were increasing: "from the late twenties to 1940, production costs almost doubled and opening outlays advanced by 43 percent" (Moore, 15). Raising ticket prices was clearly not enough to offset the inevitable increases in costs; the Group, like other theatres, were pressed to find other, even unlikely, sources for financial support.21

In addition to higher ticket prices and longer runs, Heilbrun and Gray cite what is perhaps the most common way for theatres to increase income and offset increasing production costs: they need to find financial support from the mass media. Such funding was readily available in the thirties from radio, but even more from Hollywood studios looking to find scripts for the rapidly growing sound film industry.22 But of course, given the artistic and economic competition between the film and radio industries and the Broadway theatre, such financing was fraught with moral and artistic concerns, even accusations, as Clurman notes: "When an artist or a group of artists has made some sort of success—and the Group by now [1936] had definitely become a name—all sorts of opportunities are open to them. These opportunities, however, rarely lead to
more work of the sort that won the artist his name. They lead to commercial by-products only tenuously related to the artist's talent" (166). As in the case of Odets, who first went to Hollywood in part to help prop up the lagging ticket sales to his *Paradise Lost*, often concomitant with the move to other media was the accusation of selling out high art for the easy lure of the dollar. The proponents of the art theatre, Clurman included, found a great nemesis in the successful playwright turned Hollywood screenwriter, who could be demonized as a prostitute, a hack either without talent or without integrity.23

There is also inherent in the idea of selling out a blanket condemnation of the idea of writing for films and an unspoken charge of misusing natural ability. But given that a huge number of American and European writers of note at one time or another went to Hollywood to write for the movies, such a peremptory dismissal of screenwriting is insupportable without rewriting the entire history of 20th century letters.24 Such a collection of talent indicates at least a passing interest in Hollywood by good writers that must go beyond the mere mercenary—or if not, at least that mercenary concerns occupied a large place in the minds of nearly all the good American writers of the early 20th century. Screenwriting was a new occupation, a profitable but not necessarily dishonorable one. The pressures on the writer in Hollywood, as a number of them commented, were strong, the scripts they were expected to produce often banal. But as Stanley Kauffmann has noted, "there is not—necessarily—any prostitution in film writing. Certainly prostitution occurs in film-writing, but so it does in Broadway plays and in books. It is specific to the instance, not inherent in the form" (22).

What is telling, of course, is that the Group itself, while trying to protect its members from the empty promises of Hollywood, easily accepted studio money to fund a number of their
productions, including *Men in White*, *Gentlewoman*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Awake and Sing!* (indirectly, through Franchot Tone), *Golden Boy*, and *Night Music*. About *Paradise Lost*, Clurman notes that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer "had put up $17,000 for the production—for reasons entirely mysterious to me" (155). Clurman's bafflement is scarcely believable, since the studios' search for writing talent and viable scripts led them to invest in any number of promising "properties." Moreover, though the pre-production agreements between Hollywood studios and Broadway for script rights was a relatively new practice, by 1935-36 a full twenty-five percent of Broadway shows had been financed with Hollywood money. McLaughlin notes that the studios were interested in backing plays not only because it was cheaper than buying scripts after successful productions, but also because "play backing afforded Hollywood the opportunity to become more deeply involved in trends developing in the drama and to be more aware of the talent emerging" (124). By the time Odets began his career, the theatre and film industries were already deeply intertwined.

Thus, not even the Group or Clurman were immune from the benefits of Hollywood money, though they maintained a curious, almost secretive attitude towards accepting it, as if the money itself was of no consequence, that it had nothing to do with their theatre, that it was an insignificant means to a significant end. During Clurman's first trip West, he remarked that he was just going "to have a look around" but by the second time he had gone, it was with a number of Group actors (including Luther Adler, Morris Carnovsky, Dorothy Patten, Phoebe Brand, and Elia Kazan) who had been signed by Walter Wanger to work in the film of the new Odets screenplay called *The River is Blue*. The picture was shelved (later to be rewritten by John Howard Lawson and made into the controversial film *Blockade*) but the fact remained that in

times of financial crisis, Hollywood offered rewards unavailable to even the most devoted of Group members in New York: financial security and the guarantee of steady work.

The movement to California of a significant number of Group people in early 1937 followed closely on the heels of another development which made clear the dependence of the Group on the "enemy's" money. In early 1936, the directors of the Group were caught between the attempts of the Dramatist's Guild to get more control over sales of their scripts to the movies and the withdrawal of Hollywood funding which might follow from the Group's support of the Guild. Because Hollywood had previously financed a number of Group productions, the directors hesitated to side with the playwrights and risk a loss of financial support. The actors wanted to side with the writers. Talking about the crisis in her history of the Group, Wendy Smith convicts Clurman of the same sort of sell-out of which he accuses Odets: by hesitating to side with the playwrights: "the directors had betrayed their principles and ignored the wishes of the members in favor of financial considerations" (252).

Ultimately, the ravenous maw of the marketplace yawned wider than the directors of the Group imagined. They recognized, at least tacitly, that the theatre was a part of the marketplace, that it simply couldn't afford to lose a lucrative source of financial backing if they were to continue their stage work unimpeded. The irony was that the movie studios still withdrew funding from the Broadway stage after the Group, among other theatres, signed a new agreement. The directors' wavering had gained them nothing and had in fact precipitated a confrontation with the Group's actors which eventually involved a radical reorganization of the Group. Crawford and Strasberg, in fact, left the Group in mid-1937, Crawford complaining of "strain and difficulty" and confessing that "the inner situation seems to me incapable of solution at this time" (Crawford,
As Clurman admitted in *The Fervent Years*, the financial problem was central.

The difficulty of being in the market but not of it plagues the development of the Group, including Odets' place in it, from the very beginning. Though perhaps their high moral purpose and their commitment to building a theatrical community even in the depths of the Depression may make them a more unlikely candidate for an economic analysis than other, more commercially stable theatres like the Theatre Guild, the Group is in fact a better source for a theoretical examination of the economic pressures placed on the performing arts in a market economy, for in the Group's struggle for recognition and survival, the basic drama of which Clurman spoke—the theatre of the marketplace—is played out. No discussion of Odets as a writer is complete without a discussion of the marketplace. Theatre was, and is, a business as well as an art, its participants are workers as well as artists.

IV. Producer and Product: The Writer as Worker

It was not just Odets and the Group who were trying to reflect the social turmoil of Depression America from the stage. Few critics would deny that the thirties was a time of a highly active social and political drama in America, though some, like Morgan Himelstein, argue that the ubiquity of the social drama has been seriously overestimated. Such protests notwithstanding, the number of plays dealing with the social and economic turmoil in the United States or with the political situation in Europe is astonishing when compared to other periods in American history. For at least a few years, the stage seemed to be a bright, sharp reflection of what was happening in the streets, an attitude best exemplified by the Living Newspaper productions of Hallie Flanagan's Federal Theatre Project. These documentary performances,
culling material from the headlines of the day, attempted to present in a theatrical way the crucial social issues: as Odets did with *Waiting for Lefty*, the Living Newspapers took the Depression from the streets and put it on the stage.\(^{26}\)

Most discussions of the Group, as do discussions of theatre in the thirties in general, take into account the scarcities and political climate of the Depression, but even there, the Depression is treated as a special case, an anomalous time when the stage became a testing ground for economics, politics and social theory. That is, the deprivations of the early thirties are seen as having influenced the content of the plays produced during the period but these discussions rarely go into the *conditions* of production themselves. However, what the experience of the Group Theatre suggests is that the role of economics in the arts is more important, more deeply woven into the fabric of artistic production than many artists or critics will admit. To ignore the economic pressures entailed in the writing of a script or the mounting of a production is to deny that theatre takes place in a socio-economic context that strongly influences not only the content but in fact the very nature of the work produced.\(^{27}\)

Pierre Macherey, in his landmark book, *A Theory of Literary Production*, locates in the traditional belief of artist as autonomous creator a vestigial religious humanism which separates the written work from the labor that has gone into its production. He argues instead that

Art is not man's creation, it is a product (and the producer is not a subject centered in his creation, he is an element in a situation or system): different—in being a product—from religion, which has chosen his dwelling among all the spontaneous illusions of spontaneity, which is certainly a kind of creation. Before disposing of these works—which can only be called theirs by an elaborate evasion—men have
to produce them, not by magic, but by a real labour of production. ... the artist produces works, *in determinate conditions*. ...

The various 'theories' of creation all ignore the process of making: they omit any account of production. One can create undiminished, so, paradoxically, creation is the release of what is already there; or, one is a witness of a sudden apparition, and then creation is an irruption, an epiphany, a mystery.

(67-68, emphasis his)

This analysis is in some ways as overstated as Rosenberg's defense of the artist's autonomy, but there is in Macherey's argument a call to examine cultural and socio-historical pressures prevailing at the time of production that is useful for a study of the career of Odets and his place in American theatre.

Given available modes of funding during the 1930's, even such things such as cast size, actors, scene changes, theatre rentals, and other things all must be taken into account with the writing of the play, consciously or unconsciously. For example, the relative scarcity of theatre spaces in the 1930's (some having been converted to houses for sound films) was part of the reason for a steep increase in costs and a consequent decline in the number of productions. McLaughlin also asserts that the development of the hit-flop phenomenon of Broadway was a direct result of a siphoning off of audience to the movies: "by 1931-32, a pattern had been set where between 80 and 85 percent of all productions lost money during their Broadway runs" (96).

The pressures on a writer such as Odets, therefore, to whom the Group looked as the only playwright who could keep them afloat both artistically and financially, not only influence the content of his work, but also the way in which he wrote and the audience he sought. As Lucien
Goldmann has commented, the broad structures of the marketplace shape the day to day
behaviour of those within it: "any individual in a market society finds himself at certain moments
of the day aiming at qualitative use values that he can obtain only through the mediation of
exchange values" (179). Artistic freedom is restricted by the value in the marketplace of what it
produces, and so the Group's financial problems influenced Odets' writing, its contents, themes,
style and his choice of projects. Odets himself gave an indication of the pressures he felt from the
Group when he talked about how he developed the idea for *Golden Boy* and what it would mean
for his theatre company. Having gotten the idea for the play from attending a prizefight with the
Hollywood director Lewis Milestone, Odets told him afterwards "You have just given me a very
fine play, and what's more, it will make money for the Group" (Brenman-Gibson, 428). He later
told Elia Kazan that his play would be the financial salvation of the Group. It was—for a time.

For their part, the Group showed their dependence on Odets by forcing him to work on
rewrites of *Golden Boy* without distraction, even shielding him from his wife to keep him at the
task of writing. Such examples demonstrate that writers are far from being the "autonomous"
artists Clurman claims they can be. Odets, both in Hollywood and in New York, was of necessity
involved in the economic trials of the industries of which he was a part as much as he was
involved in the theatrical productions. The letters of encouragement that he received while
writing *Golden Boy* often mentioned how important it was to the Group to have a commercial
success, a "hit." Brenman-Gibson notes that the author's anxiety about the play rose as opening
approached: "Odets' awareness that it was essentially his responsibility to 'bring in a hit' for the
economic survival of the Group all but stopped him in his creative tracks" (480). The writer for
the Broadway theatre, then, as this example of Odets and the Group—one of many such—makes
clear, is a worker as much as an artist, a participant in the market economy which feeds him and upon which he is dependent.

One fruitful path of analysis of these contradictions lies in an examination of a statement made by two pioneering economists of the performing arts, William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen. They note that "the work of the performer is an end in itself, not a means for the production of some good" (164). In other words, the theatre professional is both the producer and the commodity, the artist as well as the artifact. While Baumol and Bowen are speaking specifically about the actor, and more generally about the difference between technologically based industries which are easily mechanized and the theatre which is not, there is also a suggestion in their comment of the fundamental paradox that underlies the playwright in a market economy, as worker and artist. The problem of culturally locating the work produced is similar to the problem of locating the worker who produces it. In the case of Odets, his labor was often, if not always, seen as a means to profit as much as an end in itself. The fact that it was also conceived and received—in some circles at least—as art does not diminish the economic pressures placed upon its production.

Of course, theatre is not a mass production industry; there are no assembly lines and perhaps little of the kind of industrial alienation symbolized by the speeding conveyor belt. Still, as Marx describes in Theories of Surplus Value, "a writer is a worker not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher" (cited in Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism, 60). For Marx, the artist is thus, for the publisher, and by analogy for the theatrical producer or the film studio, not only a creator of art works, but also a worker whose labor is a means to profit. Marx argued that in a technological, capitalistic society what is produced by the
workers is increasingly unrecognizable as the product of human labor. Also, when the worker is no longer identified with the work required to produce it, the commodity becomes free-floating, independent, so that ultimately its value is determined by its reception in the marketplace.

As the reactions of Odets and the Group to the assault of economic forces beyond their reach shows, actors and writers are sometimes forced to recognize that they, too, are more involved in capitalist society (and capitalist production, for that matter) than they imagine. And there was, at least in Odets' mind, alienation of a different sort. Recalling his troubled experience with *Rocket to the Moon*, Odets comments that

... He (Clurman) finally got to think that I was kind of like a cow who dropped a calf, didn't know anything about it. Because this is what happened in the Group Theatre and I was very resentful of it. I dropped this calf and some people would rush up and grab it, wipe it off and take it away, and I would be left there bellowing. And while they were hustling this calf around you'd think that I had no relationship to it. I let them, too. I would let them do it, but with a great deal of resentment. I never would let any private producer do anything of this sort.... All the time I wanted to direct the play myself. But in order to direct the play I would have to have at least some decent distance between myself and the play. Well, that never happened. They had to have those veal chops on the table. For the next week, or everybody would go hungry. So in a certain way this gifted calf that I'm talking about, that I dropped, was also veal chops for everybody to eat.

(Brenman-Gibson, 515)

Odets' comments, even taking into account his bitterness at the Group and Clurman, make
it clear that the economic pressures on his working habits deeply affected the way he worked. But perhaps more importantly, they serve to underscore the alienation he felt—even as a member of the Group—from the final disposition of his labour (here, "labour" used figuratively in the image of a cow dropping a calf, and literally in the consideration of the time and work Odets spent writing the play). Finally, because it is a particular habit of Odets to couch his discussion of the marketplace in food images, his characterization of his own play as "veal chops" shows how much he was able to view it as a commodity, something that was produced by him, but given its value apart from the labor. Indeed, the use here of the same images of food and consumption that dominate his plays (see chapters 2 and 3) tie his own feelings of exploitation to the idea of the marketplace, and give us a way to understand the metaphors he employs in his plays. From *Waiting for Lefty* through *The Big Knife* and *The Flowering Peach*, food is both the utopian symbol of a good consumer society and an indication of the degradation one is forced to undergo in order to participate in such a society. In order to feed, one first has to be taken into the market and consumed. By taking up one of his most familiar allegorical images to refer to his own work, Odets identifies his position in the marketplace and at the same time demonstrates the ambivalence he held towards it.

Time and again, Odets would refer to himself as a craftsman, a worker whose work happened to be writing scripts for the theatre or for the films. And, conversely, time and again, Odets would speak of himself as an artist, decrying the lack of support that America showed for its artists. At first, his interest in the film industry was piqued by the mass audiences it promised. In his 1937 essay in the *New York Times*, entitled "Democratic Vistas in Drama," which took as a starting point Whitman's call for a particularly American form of literature, Odets declared, "Let
us, for once, give the movies some credit. They have spoken to this people. . . The movies are now the folk theatre of America." But Odets often grew frustrated with the limitations placed on movie writers. In the same article, he goes on to admit that the "treatment of themes is puerile in every respect. The American gallery remains, as Whitman said, 'unexplored and unexpressed.'" (November 21, 1937). Throughout his career, Odets wavered between the "craft" of writing for films and the "art" of writing for the theatre, arguing, in effect, that there were few differences between them. As he told Michael Mendelsohn in an interview late in his life, the Hollywood structure does not allow the expression of a "small, lyric disquietude . . . the returns that must come in are against that" ("Center Stage," 28). In the same interview, though, Odets remarked that his screenplays "are technically very adept. I have learned a great deal from making and shaping these scripts. . . It's professional work; I'm a professional writer" (30). Odets remained ambivalent, then, towards the promise of the film as a vehicle for expression. He was interested in a large audience, but was always wary of the economic constraints such forms placed on his work.

Notwithstanding, it is fair to say that the popular, the stereotypical, and the democratic are the beginning point of Odets' art. He openly sought a large audience, even though it is a move often accompanied by accusations of hack writing and selling out. For Harold Cantor, Odets' move to Hollywood is evidence of his interior struggle: the moral compromise inherent in the idea of selling out pits the artist as creator against the artist as worker, as if they were separable entities struggling for the soul of the writer. Cantor asserts, with a damning comparison to Joe Bonaparte, that

no one has ever doubted Odets' peculiar qualifications to deal with the next major theme which preoccupied him: the individual's barter of moral principle in
exchange for money, power, and status. . . the accounts of Clifford Odets, playwright, 'king among the Ju-ven-iles,' his associations with the great and famous, his peregrinations to the Mecca of Materialism he alternately praised and despised, were exploited in the press at the expense of Odets the artist, the writer of passionate plays about serious dilemmas in American life (48-49).

In such a Manichaean battle, the contested ground is the work itself. Any examination of the plays forces answers to questions about the artistic expectations for the work, its style, its language, its dramaturgy, but asks additional questions as well about the extent to which social and economic forces bear on their writing.

For example, after he became more and more important to the artistic and financial success of the Group, not only Odets' loyalty (would he go to Hollywood or not?) but his plays themselves became contested ground in the struggle for artistic and financial security. The Silent Partner, an uncompleted play never produced in Odets' lifetime, is one of the best examples of a play that took on great meaning for the Group and for Odets, meaning that perhaps went far beyond its artistic merits. Both Clurman and Odets hoped that The Silent Partner, an allegorical play about a labor strike that Odets was working on for the 1936 season, could be the next great American play; it certainly was a play that the Group desperately wanted. But when Odets submitted the play to his friends, Clurman decided that it needed rewrites and that the Group couldn't afford to produce it. The irony of the Group turning down an Odets play because it couldn't afford a financial failure, given the fact that he had helped the Group to confirm its place in the American theatre with four plays the previous year, was noted by Odets:

After The Silent Partner was in rehearsal for three or four days Clurman said to
me, "Look, we'll produce any play you write. But you know this will be a very heavy and expensive production. We budgeted it for $40,000." So I said, "Why are you telling me all of this?" and he said "Well, the play will fail. We'll be out all that money and the actors will be out of work. But if you want us to do the play we will ("How a Playwright Triumphs," 73).

The pressure by Clurman on Odets to finish rewrites of *The Silent Partner* (without assurances that the play would ever be produced) placed Odets in the curious position of having to work for his own theatre company, without compensation, without promise of compensation or promise of any other rewards. The play becomes in this sense a commodity whose worth is not determined by some objective set of criteria, but by the fluctuations of the market, by supply and demand. Clurman's argument against the play was not merely that it was a difficult, muddy script (Clurman was aware that Odets always rewrote as rehearsals progressed) but that it was a financial risk. Even in his theatre, Odets is a worker, with as little determination over the final use of the products of his labor, almost, as the screenwriters in Hollywood.

It is useful, in fact, to make another comparison between the Broadway theatre and the Hollywood film industry during the 1930's and after, since the screenwriters in Hollywood during the early 1930's were going through an analogous problem to that of Broadway playwrights such as Odets. In their attempts to organize a union and win autonomy from the control of the studio system (under the guidelines established by the Wagner Act of 1935, which provided for the creation of an independent body, The National Labor Relations Board, to rule on the formation of unions), Hollywood screenwriters found that they were permitted to unionize only because it was determined that they had no control over the final product of their work.
Among the Hollywood screenwriters at the time there were two warring factions: the Screen Writers Guild, made up largely of leftists and moderates, and the Screen Playwrights, generally comprised of conservatives who wanted to work within the studios for minor change. The Screen Playwrights was, for all practical purposes, a company union. Following a court decision that upheld the Wagner Act, the NLRB ruled that the movie producers were financially dependent on the work of the writers, but that the writers in essence had no control of the final products of their labor. After months of deliberation and labor unrest in Hollywood, the NLRB ruled in favor of the Screen Writers Guild, awarding them sole bargaining rights for the writers in Hollywood. Nancy Lynn Schwartz has commented that "the producer-power establishment was aghast when the National Labor Relations Board had ruled, on June 7, 1938, that the screen writers were employees under the provisions of the Wagner Act, defining an employee as a worker who has no control over his or her final product, functioning in an industry engaged in interstate commerce" (123). It is telling, of course, that the writers were allowed to gain more control over their production only by admitting—even legalizing—their alienation from it.

Other Hollywood unions, such as the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, were outraged that writers had been defined as worker. Their president, George Browne, remarked that these "so-called guilds" were a "mockery on organized labor which creates dangerous resentments over their pretensions to be classes in the ranks of American labor" (124). Browne even tried to get the AFL to revoke the charters of the SWG's union. While Browne's statements are more indicative of the fact that he resented a rival union rather than a union of writers, the persistent cries that writers were not workers but artists plays on a deeply held cultural tension between the commercial and the artistic that Odets had experienced with the
Group. This is not to make Hollywood and the Group mere equivalents, to say that the businesses of the theatre—especially the Group Theatre to which Odets was integral—and of films operate in precisely the same way, but that the reification of the writer as an artist rather than a worker points out the contradictions inherent in trying to be an artist in a capitalistic society.

Odets was aware of these contradictions. In his files at the Lincoln Center Archives are notes for an article he was writing about the labor situation in Hollywood in 1947. In them, he notes that Hollywood is "a company town. A private industry, companies hire workers to manufacture their product. Legally it is their right to hire whom they choose. Free speech does not enter as an issue. Discriminatory activities do enter (All is complicated by the fact that directors, writers & actors think of themselves as artists & not workers & trade unionists)" (Lincoln Center Archives, dated 12/47). Odets here highlights the practical problems inherent in failing to recognize the writer as a worker.

This cultural tension between writers as authors and writers as workers often resolves itself through a reification of the idea of "author" which reinstates, much in the same way as Rosenberg does, the identity of an artist a creator somehow producing without labor, as it were, conjuring inspiration out of thin air. This is also reflected in Rosenberg's suggestion that playwrights treat their work not as a profession but as an avocation, a calling instead of a job. Macheray's argument locates the source of this split in an ignorance of or deliberate refusal to consider the processes of production. Terry Eagleton, moreover, has commented that the logical conclusion of such a movement is to idealize and separate once more the artist from his own history, and elevate the productive work (small "w") of the author to the status of the canonical
Work (capital W) of the author: “such an inspirational, individualistic concept of artistic production makes it impossible to conceive of the artist as a worker rooted in a particular history with particular materials at his disposal. . . . Once the work is severed from the author's historical situation, it is bound to appear miraculous and unmotivated” (68-69).

It is also to ignore the social nature of the individual as well as the supremely social nature of the theatre, both of which are inextricably bound up with the history and economics of their time. In fact, Raymond Williams has argued in *Marxism and Literature* that the reification of the idea of an author as somehow able to operate outside the influences that pervade his history, and makes any attempt to reinsert this reified author back into a discussion of the social and historical context a self-contradictory one. He argues, in fact, that it "can become complicit with a process which rejects, deforms, or actually destroys individuals in the name of individualism" (194). Critics like Rosenberg (and Clurman, though to a far lesser extent), who refuse to consider the totality of social and historical influences on the formation of the writer's work, are then forced to measure playwrights by the standard of artistic integrity, a standard which is itself a-historical and reified.

With Brenman-Gibson, then, we are forced to agree that the problem lies in seeing how the life, the work, and the times "hang together," since as Williams argues, and as evidence from the career of Odets both inside and outside the Group makes clear, they do indeed hang together. Odets' plays were deeply interrelated with his society, with the contradictions and paradoxes of the Group theatre which both gave to and took from the individual artist, and with the rise of a popular culture and mass media such as radio, film and television that seemed to be everywhere at once. Most of all, though, Odets was concerned with the economic hardships and dreams of the
Depression and their concrete manifestations in the lives of people around him. For him, the metaphor of the marketplace became a central one, expanding outward as it did from his own experience as a playwright and screenwriter in the arts industries of the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's to encompass the developing consumer culture and the cultural dominance of mass media.
Chapter 2: The Anxiety of Abundance: Odets' Dubious Paradise

As the director of the Group's production of Odets' *Paradise Lost* (1935), Harold Clurman believed that the play was as much an examination of the psychic state of America in the mid-1930's as an attempt to illuminate the economic effects of the Depression:

Wherever I went it seemed to me I observed an inner chaos. People hankered for things they didn't need or really want, belied their own best impulses, became miserable over trivialities, were ambitious to achieve ends they didn't respect, struggled over mirages, wandered about in a maze where nothing was altogether real for them. *Paradise Lost* seemed to me to reflect this almost dreamlike unreality and, in a measure, to explain it (*Fervent Years*, 156).

Given the fact that by the time of Roosevelt's second inauguration, one-third of the country was, as the President said, "ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished," the disorientation and frustration Clurman witnessed were not hard to understand: the American dream of material abundance had become a nightmare of scarcity and poverty before their eyes, with no end in sight. It was as if not just the Gordon family, but the entire country had been thrown out of Eden, and was wandering, like Adam and Eve after the fall, with no sense of direction and only a vague cognizance of what had been lost. But it was clear that something certainly *had* been lost. The terms in which Clurman delineates the reactions of America to the Depression, the emphasis on unreality, on people looking to find meaning in objects they didn't need or want, reflects the shift he had noticed towards a culture founded upon a loose collection of images and commodities. He saw a culture developing which elevated the individual above the community, the object above the
ideal. The uncertainty that Clurman describes, and which in part the Group was founded as a reaction against, is a central concern of Odets' plays. In Clurman's brief analysis of the milieu which spawned *Paradise Lost* there is a clue to the central concern of almost all of Odets' Depression plays, and to a lesser extent, his later plays as well: the consequences of a consumer culture and a highly developed market capitalism upon the American idealism he cherished.

I. Expectations of Abundance: From the Madonna to Mrs. Consumer

Prior to the Wall Street crash of 1929, the American ideal of individual success careened merrily forward as it had for decades, propped up by two interlocking mythologies. First, there was the belief that hard work necessarily merited moral and financial rewards, a myth grounded, at least theoretically, in the Puritan work ethic and given its most fantastic manifestations by the rags to riches novels of Horatio Alger and the only slightly less incredible "true" stories of people like Andrew Carnegie. Sociologist C. Wright Mills noted in 1956 that while the reality of the Algeresque hero, self-created through productive work, began to crumble (if it ever existed at all) with the advent of industrialization and the alienation of the workers from the products of their own labor, "as an ideological figment and a political force, he has persisted as if he inhabited an entire continent. He has become the man through whom the ideology of utopia is still attractively presented to many of our contemporaries" (34).\(^1\) Rita Barnard adds that while historical conditions can shift quickly, ideologies die slow deaths. The fact that the Depression seemed to offer little support for an Algeresque vision of the world in no way precludes its dominance as ideology. She points to the deep sense of shame, worthlessness and personal failure often felt by the unemployed during the Depression as evidence of an internalization of the belief that hard
work should necessarily lead to success (18). In Odets, such a belief is echoed by characters such as Myron in *Awake and Sing!*; when he tells Ralph in response to Ralph's complaints, "Never mind son, merit never goes unrewarded. Teddy Roosevelt used to say—" (41).

But such ideologies, no matter how monolithic, how supported by religious belief, government policy and other institutional practices, are nevertheless always open to attack and revision, and in the twenties and thirties the rags-to-riches ideal was under heavy attack from all sides. One need only look to such profoundly anti-Alger plays as John Howard Lawson's *Roger Bloomer*, not to mention the Group's productions of Lawson's *Success Story* and Melvin Levy's *Gold Eagle Guy*, to see that Mills' concept of the economic hero as ideological force is perhaps better seen as a cultural ideal that was challenged, reworked, ironized and questioned from the very moment of its formulation. Indeed, much of literary culture was aimed at a critique of the Gospel of Wealth, most notably novels like Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Theodore Dreiser's work from *An American Tragedy* and *Sister Carrie* to *The Financier*, John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* and Nathanael West's *A Cool Million*. Into this already contested ground Odets appeared, adding his voice to that of Lawson and others in his examination—and condemnation of—the Alger myth.¹ In *Awake and Sing!* Myron's daughter Hennie's response to his platitudes about Teddy Roosevelt is a mocking "It rewarded you—thirty years a haberdashery clerk!" (41).

In the same vein, Uncle Morty in *Awake and Sing!* is part of Odets' complicated response to the Alger myth. He is a man who claims to have "started from a poor boy who worked on an ice wagon for two dollars a week... I made it honest" (71). Morty is certainly rich, but there is a flaw in the self-involved drive for personal success that he embodies; indeed, Odets tells us in his description of the characters at the beginning of the play that "something sinister comes out of the
fact that the lives of others seldom touch him deeply. He holds to his own line of life" (39). But as a playwright with profound sympathies for the "common man," Odets was most concerned about the effect such ideologies had on the daily lives of people, the concretization of the myth in American life. As he said late in his life in a different context: "Madison Avenue has taken the enemy out of American life. We don't know who the enemy is with a capital E. This is a frightening thing. Who gives a goddamn about moon shots when you see zombies walking around with lost souls? This is why I have to write plays" (Time, 14 December, 1962: 37).

Waiting for Lefty, Paradise Lost, Awake and Sing!, especially, but in fact all of Odets' plays are in large part examinations of the workings of such a mythology in the lives of his characters, their attempts to make sense of a culture predicated on progress and advertising, a culture of success.

This idea of "success" appears over and over in Odets' plays, most often as a term of derogation, an indication of something unnatural, twisted or petty. Thus Jacob in Awake and Sing! can mock Morty and Myron's platitudes with the sardonic "Don't live, just make success!" (66) and "A boy don't turn around without having shoved in him he should make success" (71). In Golden Boy, Mr. Bonaparte pleads with Lorna to "Help Joe find truthful success" (269). But by the end of the play, the idea of a truthful success has been completely submerged in the violence of the marketplace: Roxy remarks to Joe's father (after Joe has killed another fighter) "You see how a boy can make success nowadays?" (317). The Big Knife more than any other of Odets' plays is concerned with the idea of economic success, which often entails fame as well as money. As Hank Teagle remarks about Hollywood, "success has made them all so dull" (38).

The contrast between life and success that Jacob notes comes to pervade the marketplace metaphors that Odets uses throughout his work. In this sense, success is always related to social
expectations rather than individual expectations or beliefs. It moves outward from the individual producer to the marketplace, where it finds value only as a commodity to be purchased by others. Success means selling; in Joe's case and Charlie's, the selling of their talent, and most importantly, their ideals, for a social notion of what is accepted and admired.

However, it would be a serious diminution of the complexity of Odets' work to suggest that it is a repeated diatribe against the development of consumer capitalism or a complete rejection of the notion of economic success professed by ideologies like the Alger myth. Odets is outraged by the lack of opportunities offered many of his characters, and condemns outright the systematic denial and denigration of the poor and outcast. But he also uses his outcast characters to represent the deep utopian visions inherent in much of his work, the promises that America—including its material culture—offered. It is essential, then, to suggest, following the suggestions of Mills and historian Warren Susman, that the Alger myth, like any mythology, is at one level inherently utopian, perhaps profoundly so. Therefore, while the facts of historical circumstance may contradict that mythology, it nevertheless can maintain its cultural position as a result of its underlying utopianism, and can deeply influence the direction of historical change.

Susman comments, for example, "it is the realm of myth . . . to provide much of the vision, the hopes, and the dreams of any group. Myth, therefore, continues as what I call the utopian element in any world view" (Culture as History, 9). In spite of his condemnation of capitalists like Morty or the union leader Fatt in Waiting for Lefty, Odets possessed an undeniable, egalitarian optimism that in many ways mirrors the hopes expressed by the Alger myth. His deep awareness that at the time his plays were produced life was "printed on dollar bills" is modified by the equally fervent belief that it would be possible someday to have a life not printed there.
Susman goes on to argue that the gap between the real and the ideal helps to drive creative endeavor:

it is this very tension between the mythic beliefs of a people—their visions, their hopes, their dreams—and the ongoing, dynamic demands of their social life recorded by students of the real past and the actual present (with perhaps an often implied future) that provides many artists with their theme, a theme reflecting a basic conflict within the culture itself. This is in fact one of the basic tensions that help define the nature and kind of culture that exists (*Culture as History*, 11).

The Depression-era plays of Odets, in fact, are evidence of the kind of tension that Susman describes, for in his repeated examination of the economics of daily life, Odets both identifies with and distances himself from the consumer culture he sees operating, the daily marketplace in which his characters participate. In this sense, the tension in the early Odets plays is that between the utopian vision of plenty and the historical fact of Depression-era poverty and want. He is extremely sensitive—largely because of his own ambiguous position as an artist in the theatrical marketplace of his day—to the ambiguities and paradoxes of a culture that drives people to want, even to expect, abundance and yet never leaves them satisfied.

If the Calvinist-Protestant work ethic in its various manifestations was one of the bulwarks of early twentieth-century capitalism, concomitant with a belief in financial success as the natural and necessary reward of hard work was the exultation in the natural bounty of the land, its sheer magnitude as well as its rich soil, mineral and timber reserves, rivers and lakes. Most historians date the acceptance of a "frontier" mythology as a way to understand American development from historian Frederick Jackson Turner's address in 1893 titled "The Significance of the Frontier in
"American History"—at a gathering, significantly, made in conjunction with Chicago's Columbian Exposition, which emphasized industrial progress. Turner's thesis argued that the frontier, with its vast expanses of dangerous, apparently unsettled territory and unused resources, had deeply influenced the American way of thinking, making Americans (among other things), self-reliant, work-oriented, progressive, and democratic:

to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are the traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier (37).

Turner suggested, moreover, that the first, frontier period of American history had ended with the expansion to the West Coast, but as Tiziano Bonazzi has argued, the implication in his thesis was that it "is meant to be a gateway to a consciousness of historical continuity through change. . . . It should not come as a surprise that in Turner's view the frontier naturally, if too rapidly, gives way to industrial society" (163-64, emphasis his). Indeed, cultural leaders, politicians, and businessmen picked up on Turner's thesis and extended its possibilities into the future. Now that the period of the physical frontier had ended, America tried to turn its attention to other frontiers, namely technology, engineering, and the development of machinery that would better control the natural world. The future was planned with an eye towards these qualities that the frontier
experience had supposedly already imbued in the American people.  

Susman notes that Turner's frontier thesis—because it was more or less able to satisfactorily explain historical phenomena in terms of a national mythology—was generally accepted as the "official" version of the history of the West, but says that the Turner thesis was fine-tuned by various groups for their own purposes. For example, "American business enterprise had also appropriated the frontier past for itself and insisted that the pioneer spirit was being carried forward in modern industrialism. . . . The use of the frontier past and its extension into the present mark a central cluster of images applied in defense of the processes of American enterprise in the twentieth century" (32).

Susman goes on to note that there was a backlash against the idea of the frontier in the early 20th century, an argument that the pioneer spirit had produced no coherent social structure, but rather "anarchic individualism" and, according to a number of social critics, made high culture impossible: "the frontier became the scapegoat for all that was wrong with contemporary America" (36). Still, he notes that no serious challenge to the central Turner thesis, that the pioneer experience had formed the American character and society, appeared until the late 1920's, suggesting that by the time Odets was writing, the idea of the frontier was still a powerful force in American thought. Of course, as Christopher Lasch has argued, the idealism which hoped to create the New World, the practical component of which was economic expansion into all territories, also had a dark side, for by persistently seeking the frontier, they had of necessity destroyed it. There was from the beginning, then, an ambivalence about progress, a sense of profound loss that accompanied the gains. For Lasch, this "curious conjunction of 'improvement' and regret gave the national imagination its distinctive flavor and furnished themes to which
interpreters of American life returned again and again, with obsessive interest... the conquest and settlement of the continent made Americans deeply uneasy" (93).\(^5\)

Perhaps as much in reaction against this uneasiness as anything else, the quest for new frontiers in technology and business took on greater political as well as economic meaning; expansion was viewed as a democratic use of the land. It aimed not only to ensure prosperity for the few, but for all. The vast expanses of untouched frontier, long looked upon in the popular and literary imaginations as the modern Garden, had virtually disappeared. They had been opened up and brought under control by the telegraph, the factory, the combine and thresher, the railroad, and eventually the radio, telephone, and automobile. The goal of modern American society was now simple, and industrial: to ensure production—and consumption—enough for all. In short, the development of industrial technologies was seen as a guarantee of a new admittance to Eden, this time a man-made Eden hewn out of the wilderness, an efficient, progressive, democratic, productive, rational, ordered Garden.

A great many historians have discussed the shift in the American ethos from a producer culture to a consumer culture, and though there is some debate about when such a shift actually took place, it seems clear that it was largely complete by the late 1920's. The rise of the department store in the 1910's and 1920's, the birth of the supermarket in the late 1920's (coupled with the quick acceptance of electric refrigeration), the standardization of automobile production, and the popularization of radio as a means of mass communication helped to secure the place of the consumer in the society and made buying habits something of deep concern to advertisers and producers. But of course, the movement towards a culture of consumption could only be made with a corresponding adjustment in the attitude of consumers. T. J. Jackson Lears, among others,
has seen the rise of modern advertising in the 20th century as definitive evidence of this development. Lears argues that the association of products with personal transformation was merely the institutionalization of a long-standing cultural belief: "Goods have always served symbolic as well as utilitarian purposes, and advertisers' efforts to associate silverware with status or cars with sex were but a recent and well-organized example of a widespread cultural practice" (*Fables of Abundance*, 4).

The early development of American advertising was therefore marked by its own brand of romantic utopianism, one disguised in part by emphasis on industrial productivity. One interesting and important figure was Bruce Barton, a figure who seemed to be equal parts conservative moralist, prophet of abundance, and businessman. In addition to a number of books on business, he wrote an extremely popular book about Jesus in 1925, titled *The Man Nobody Knows*, which re-read the New Testament in the light of the developing consumerism, casting Jesus himself as both salesman and consumer. The best-selling popularity of Barton—who, with his strong free-enterprise beliefs, became a vociferous opponent of Roosevelt's New Deal as a Congressman from New York—makes it clear that he was part of a strong cultural shift that attempted to re-work the traditional Protestant ideal of hard work and saving into a vision of material plenty.

The subjugation of the land by hard work manifested itself in an industrial order separated from the natural world, but nevertheless dependent on the abundance of that world. Plenty was a Providential gift to be used. But as Lears comments, as in Carnegie's attempts to organicize the emergent industrial order, there was something incongruous about the mixture of the natural and the industrial: "Advertisers yoked traditional maternal imagery with an emergent effort to systematize bodily processes and sanctify physical symmetry. The strategy made for an awkward
combination of visual and verbal idioms" (*Fables of Abundance*, 112). Later advertisers became more willing to disassociate productivity from the land and attribute it to industry. They appropriated more and more the traditional, religious idea of an earthly paradise and recast it in an industrial mold, so that the ages-old notion of material abundance symbolized by the natural world, especially surrounding the fecundity of women, had been replaced by the efficient productivity of the machine and the factory. By the early years of the twentieth century, the Madonna had become Mrs. Consumer: "after 1900, with startling abruptness, machine replaced mater; mythic emblems of fecundity yielded to unadorned photographs of male-operated threshers and harvesters, sometimes juxtaposed against drawings of primitive peasant methods" (*Fables of Abundance*, 121). Lewis Mumford, writing in the 1930's, theorized the split between the machine and the body as more violent and dangerous: "As the machine tended toward the pole of regularity and complete automatism, it became severed, finally, from the umbilical cord that bound it to the bodies of men and women: it became an absolute" (301).

But of course, echoes of the natural world remained as evidence of a residual cultural myth. Lears argues that despite the widespread shift in cultural emphasis from the natural to the industrial, a feeling of nostalgia for an Edenic, pre-industrial productivity remained. Furthermore, this pre-industrial vision reappeared in cultural images during the Depression. Trying to account for the resurgence of images of natural abundance in the Depression, he argues that

... the creators as well as the consumers of these images were recalling the nurturant world of warmth and plenty embodied in an older iconography of abundance. Those sorts of desires remained largely subterranean in corporate advertising until the 1930's, when the shock of the Depression intensified the white
middle class's yearning for psychic as well as economic security. The reassuring vision of an organic, cohesive American Way of Life pervaded WPA murals and Popular Front posters as well as popular cultural artifacts from Porgy and Bess to the film version of The Grapes of Wrath, from Oklahoma! to It's a Wonderful Life; in most of its mainstream versions, this folkish ideology presented the American family as the center of that Way of Life (124).

In Odets' 1932 journal, he remarked that "Certainly something is happening in America. Ads now feature halfnaked women; breasts pop out in ads for toothpaste, breakfast cereal and what not; women in ads are actually portrayed smoking cigarettes! these things would have been impossible only five years ago! . . . I can't go into what is responsible for such a change, but I think it may be for the best" (Lincoln Center Archives, dated May 25, 1932). Odets' recognition of the iconography of abundance—women's breasts figure prominently in the advertisements, and indeed, in Odets own iconography—indicates a growing understanding of the culture of consumption that was developing. Furthermore, his fascination indicates an ambivalence towards the promises such images convey that would permeate all his plays.

In fact, the conflicts between a belief in industrial progress and a nostalgic longing for Edenic abundance are central to Odets' work. The son of an advertising man himself, and a man who had at one point himself considered a career in advertising copywriting, Odets was both fascinated and repulsed by this shift from natural to industrial productivity, and even more fascinated by the language and images used to convey it. His plays are themselves a cornucopia of images of produced objects, both of natural abundance—fruit is the most common—and of mass production. He is a playwright formed in the Depression, then, not only in his subject matter
but in the language he adopts to speak of it. It is in the negotiations of the new marketplace that the conflict is centered, where the gains of material culture are measured, usually unfavorably (but not always so), against the human costs necessary to attain them. Furthermore, for Odets, the family is indeed the testing ground for this conflict, but not in any utopian way. Rather, his families, like the Bergers of *Awake and Sing!* and the Gordons in *Paradise Lost*, show the tears in the fabric of an "American Way of Life" even as they attempt to wrap themselves in it.

II. "Once More Back in the Edenlike State"

Advertising, the frontier and Alger mythologies, and a fervent belief in the capabilities of technology were therefore melded together in the movement from a producer capitalism to a consumer capitalism. Coupled with a shift from home to factory as the centre of production was the shift from country to city as the centre of consumption. It is not surprising, therefore, that the rise of modern advertising is largely dependent on the demographic shift to large urban centres. For example, Alice Marquis notes that by 1933, "half of all Americans lived within an hour's drive of a city of 100,000 or more" (120), and suggests that concentration of large number of consumers in urban centres made it easier for a mass consumer culture to grow. Advertisers could reach more consumers more easily. The rise of the ideal of mass consumption, too, was predicated upon a democratization of goods, a recognition that anyone with money enough to buy a certain good was the same in the eyes of the advertisers. Odets' plays, which are virtually all plays of and about the city, therefore absorb and reflect back the increasing concern with consumption that urbanization implied. As he noted in a *New York Times* article in 1940, the mood of his city, New York, was "feverishly intense... the most intense in the world." He
attributed that intensity in part to the economic basis of the city itself: "We take it completely for granted that people ride jammed up in the subway. But this is a business made thing, not a human thing. This city hasn't grown up. It's never grown up in relation to the human needs of its people—always in relation to a business transaction" ("Three New Yorks", March 31, 1940).

As Odets recognized, given the improvements in transportation, more and more people were able to behave as urban dwellers and to have access to the same goods and services, just as within cities, mass consumer culture was gaining an increasing foothold at the expense of traditional community associations and practices. Mass production and a culture of consumption worked to distance the individual from other individuals; everything became mediated by processes of the marketplace. The city, in short, was an economic entity more than a social one. For example, Lizabeth Cohen, in her study of the consumption habits of working class Chicagoans in the 1920's and 1930's, has demonstrated that the increasing importance of chain grocery stores eventually eroded neighborhood associations which bound people together in a social matrix. Consumer culture became more widespread, more standardized, and working class consumers became more and more acculturated to the idea that mass production and mass consumption meant full participation in American culture. In Waiting for Lefty, Odets had noticed this shift and wove it into his examination of the economic pressures on his characters. For example, Edna comments bitterly that Joe's talk will do her no good at "the A & P" (one of the national chain stores, most of whom refused to offer credit to consumers, in contrast to local merchants who often proffered credit to retain customers in hard times). In the same vein, she speaks bitterly about the "stack of grapefruits" and "orange juice" that "the papers" prod her to consume. Still, her recognition of the power of advertising and of mass marketing in no way makes her less
willing to participate in the system.

A benevolent vision of an ordered business society such as the one proposed by Barton, acceptable in the boom years of the twenties, was far less so in the thirties. The fruit Enda longs for is tantalizingly out of reach. But even in the depths of the Depression, industrialization appeared to be working, making goods faster and cheaper than ever before, allowing more farmland to be cultivated more cheaply with less labor. In fact, even in the devastating early years of the Depression, a greater number of people enjoyed a higher standard of living than at any previous time in history. With the traditional problem of producing enough finally solved, advertising, by concentrating on large number of consumers, attempted to stimulate the economy by democratizing the consumption of goods. Just as the Alger-Carnegie myth suggested economic success was open to everyone, so advertisers attempted to show that all commodities were available to everyone, that it was up to the consumers merely to choose the products—or the images—they preferred.

Anthropologist Pasi Falk argues that the development of a consumer culture is ostensibly based upon a democratic mode of thought: "modern advertising requires a concept of 'consumer' which is at once general and specific, just as democracy requires a concept of equal and individual state citizens" (159). Still, these modes of expression are always in an uneasy balance; the individualization of the product seduces the consumer by its very individuality among the choices of mass production available to him or her: "the individualizing mode of communication creates an imaginary relationship between the assumed consumer and the identified product that is personalized by means of positive characteristics, a relationship which appears to every consumer to be as unique as a romantic love affair" (160). Thus, the consumer is offered the choice of
individual products, all of which are mass produced.

But the strategy of promoting products via images only works when the view from the consumer's side of the fence is similar to that on the advertiser's, that is, when there is a need or desire to be stimulated in the first place. These desires, of course, take various forms for various individuals, and invest the products of the marketplace with talismanic properties particular to their own situations and hopes. As Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold have noted, "the distinction between a product and how it is perceived is not solely determined by advertising, since it depends on the social and cultural context within which consumption takes place" (197). Cohen argues that for her working class families, access to the market was seen as a way to eradicate class differences, since everyone had access to the same products. However, she argues that the use of certain commodities also fostered a sense of working class solidarity across racial and ethnic lines:

the shared culture of rank-and-file workers should not be underestimated. More "Americanized" than an earlier generation who often could not even communicate in English, these workers we also consuming the same kinds of standardized products from the same chain stores instead of buying from local ethnic grocers; listening to the same national, commercial network radio . . . and watching the same movies in theatres that were now owned by the Hollywood studio chains (152).

Thus, while both middle and working classes may have access to the same products, the perception of the value of those products can vary from individual to individual as they can from class to class. They can be both a symbol of identity and a goal of socio-economic striving. In
Odets, for example, a simple piece of fruit, with its Edenic implications, means something quite different to Moe in *Awake and Sing!* from its meaning of bourgeois respectability for Bessie Berger, and something slightly different still for Clara Gordon in *Paradise Lost.* The negotiations between individual dreams and the promise of consumer abundance are subtle and changeable, the power of mass production less hegemonic than it might appear.

It would be only half-accurate, then, to argue that advertising was responsible for the rise in consumption; rather, the quick acceptance of a new way of looking at commodities indicates that there was a market for them before advertising tapped it. As production increased, the only way to get rid of the surplus was to change the buying habits of Americans; the evidence suggests that they were willing to have them changed. Richard Wrightman Fox, for example, argues that it is wrong to see consumers as passive victims of the manipulations of advertisers; rather, "they became consumers through their own active adjustment to both the material and spiritual conditions of life in advanced capitalist society" ("Epitaph for Middletown," 103). Nor can it be argued that advertising was simply a cynical business method to improve profits; indeed, much of the new advertising was based in a utopian vision of plenty for everyone. Susman calls what appears by the 1930's not only a consumer-oriented culture, but a "culture of abundance," in which the emphasis shifted towards a real belief that modern industrial society would be able to realize the New World through efficient production and distribution of goods.

The former goal of producing sufficiency had now become a realizable goal of producing abundance; the greatest problem lay in distribution of those goods. Thus it is without irony that Herbert Hoover, an engineer by profession and a firm believer in the power of technology to overcome human problems, said in 1928 that "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph
over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us. We have not yet reached the goal, but given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon with the help of God be in sight of the day when poverty is banished from this nation" (Schlesinger, 1.89). The apparent triumph of technology over the natural world therefore manifested itself in the paradisiacal ideal of abundance. The transfer of a large portion of the nation's productive power from farm to factory was coupled with the newfound power of advertising to stimulate the needs that would promote consumption. This utopian view was common, even among industrial progressives. Lewis Mumford, hardly a conservative, argued in his book *Technics and Civilization* that "when automatism becomes general and the benefits of mechanization are socialized, men will be once more back in the Edenlike state . . . The ritual of leisure will replace the ritual of work, and work itself will become a kind of game" (279).\(^{11}\)

Consumer culture, as Odets was well aware, offered real, often substantial rewards for its participants, both in the satisfaction of bodily desires (the sickness that Edna hopes to prevent with citrus, the pleasure Moe gets from eating an orange, or Morty a piece of hot pastrami) and psychological desires (Jacob's Caruso records in *Awake and Sing!*; Gus' motorcycle in *Paradise Lost*, Ben's copy of Shakespeare in *Rocket to the Moon*). The number and quality of products available to them were staggering when compared to previous eras in history, the prices of such products often lower than the wildest dreams of an earlier generation. In one sense, then, Hoover was correct, for there was enough produced in America to offer a modest plenty for everyone. And, of course, the participation in mass consumer culture of working class families like those Cohen describes in her studies or those Odets depicts in *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing!*
was in part evidence of a belief in the utopian vision the advertisers promoted. To participate in the market economy, to view oneself as a consumer (as Fox argues Americans increasingly did, recognizing in the twenties and thirties "the emergence of a new consciousness of the centrality of consumption in American life" [103]) meant, at some level, to buy into the utopian vision upon which the marketplace was built.

However, as Lears points out, the arguments and enticements used to offer consumer goods to the public were often couched in images and language that promised far more than any product could deliver. He argues that the rise of modern advertising in the twentieth century has much in common with the development of the "therapeutic" ethos that came to dominate America at the turn of the century. This ethos played off the feeling that modern society had left people feeling unanchored to the beliefs and values which had held them in the past. Disorientation—the same disorientation Clurman had seen reflected in Paradise Lost—resulting from changing technology, rapid urbanization, and the expansion (and subsequent collapse) of a national market economy were counteracted by a culture of personal transformation. Vibrancy, robust health, self-improvement, and a richer, fuller range of experience were taken as the chief measures of a good life: "the therapeutic ethos was rooted in reaction against the rationalization of culture—the growing effort, first described by Max Weber, to assert symbolic control over man's external environment and ultimately over his inner life as well" ("From Salvation to Self-Realization," 17). Advertising, which turned from providing information towards attracting attention through the promises of personal transformation, played upon widespread feelings of alienation to promote the fulfillment of personal desire. Lears argues that "the most potent manipulation was therapeutic: the promise that the product would contribute to the buyer's physical, psychic, or
social well-being; the threat that his well-being would be undermined if he failed to buy it" (19). The resulting paradox is that advertiser's claims came increasingly to offer the consumer a respite from the alienation and anonymity of modern life by offering commodities completely enmeshed in the technological mass production system which produced the sense of alienation in the first place.

There is, therefore, a persistent and troubling gap between the products consumers were offered and the visions that were used to offer them. The Edenic promise of a new world manifested itself in a glut of comparatively useless, unnecessary products—or worse, useful, even necessary products that people could not afford to buy. The gap between Edenic ideal and grim economic reality that animates so many of Odets' plays isn't signified merely by the fact that advertisers lied about the benefits of their products. In fact, the whole system of advertising was predicated upon a utopian vision of personal transformation that was, in part, disallowed by the mass-market oriented culture of business advertising that promised it. Indeed, following the sociologist Colin Campbell, Lears has described the emerging consumerism of the early twentieth century as one branch of a dual Protestant ethic—the Augustinian vision of personal transformation—in conflict with the other branch—the Calvinist organizational ethic which depended on restraint and mastery over both self and world (*Culture of Abundance*, 47). This tension manifested itself in many ways, often taking on the protective garb of a language of morality: thus while Henry Ford could offer his workers five dollars a day (twice the going rate in the auto industry), he was careful to admonish them to put work before pleasure. The guilt surrounding the act of "giving in" to personal pleasure is the Calvinist counterpart to the ideal of personal transformation inherent in advertising.
The admonition against pleasure ties the idea of guilt to the notion of luxury. Odets was well aware of this connection. His protagonists, especially Joe Bonaparte and Charlie Castle, obtain luxury, but somehow feel that they have broken a law, passed beyond the boundaries of what is permissible. They have obtained the forbidden fruit. Indeed, Falk argues that the Edenic myth is the archetypal story of luxury:

[There is] something deeply paradoxical in the Edenic situation: no lack in terms of needs but a fundamental lack in terms of desire. The Garden of Eden supplies everything that is needed but, on the other hand, it involves an additional element, the forbidden tree and fruit, creating or articulating the lack, that of human imperfection in relation to the all-perfect God... So, there is simultaneously a desire for transgression (breaking the Law) and a transgressive desire (to acquire the perfecting supplement)... There is no solution to the problem... the forbidden fruit will always be eaten and the Pandora's box opened—and that is what human culture in the last instance is all about.

(Consuming Body, 98-99, emphasis his)

Odets uses this difference between need and desire to examine the promises of a culture of consumption. His characters are filled, always, with desire for what they are not. Joe Bonaparte, for example, asks plaintively, "do you think I like this feeling of no possessions?" (252). Of course, the lack Odets' characters feel is not always (or even usually) one of material goods, but the desire is for what is seemingly prohibited, if not by law than by a moral code such as the one articulated by Joe's father: "What ever you got in'a your nature to do is a not foolish" (250). That is, the material object comes to stand in for other desires, desires that are outside of what is
"natural" or expected.

This Calvinist restraint took other forms as well, for the tension between productivity and consumption did not disappear with the ability to produce more efficiently. Gary Cross notes, for example, that instead of maintaining stable wages and increasing leisure time (the work week has remained essentially at 40 hours since Ford instituted it in his factories in the early 1930's and Roosevelt made it law in 1938—while productivity increased 63 percent in the 1920's alone), workers were encouraged with high wages to buy more products. Thus the new emphasis on consumption is yoked to the old emphasis on production, to ensure a permanent, ever-growing market for the commodities produced. As Cross states:

A very different solution to the burden of "overproduction" was to lift the cap on needs. This would create both mass consumers and disciplined workers. The central discovery was that unlimited consumption did not mean waste and declining effort. Rather, with increased spending, growth and labour discipline could become compatible. The result would be a more positive assessment in the democracy of time and money but also a bias in favour of consumption (39).

By the time Odets started writing his plays, then, the natural world and the marketplace had become intertwined under the apparent benevolence of a Providence much like Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand;" the new Garden, which even in the Depression was symbolized by bounty and surplus, was as dependent on those who dwelt in the marketplace as the marketplace was upon the natural materials obtained by subduing the frontier. The transformation from a culture dependent upon natural production to a culture which linked industrial production to a culture of consumption guided by advertising was one of the most significant cultural shifts of the twentieth
century. It offered the promise of a new paradise to its participants, a utopia of personal and societal transformation that would eliminate want, end poverty, and satisfy desires still only half expressed. In this context, the market crash and subsequent economic devastation were not simply financial disasters, but spiritual disasters as well: the Great Crash became a second Fall. The cultural confusion Clurman saw Odets depicting in *Paradise Lost* was evidence of that fall, and the images Odets returned to again and again of a deeply conflicted consumer culture, caught between plenty and scarcity, consumption and production, the machine and the natural world, are part of his attempt to reflect American life from the stage.

**III. How Many Grapefruit Does it Take to Starve a Family?**

We can read much of the work of Odets, especially his obsession with images of production and consumption, as an attempt to theologize the banishment from America's Eden. As R. Baird Shuman pointed out in the preface to his book (the first full-length study of Odets), "A full understanding of Odets' plays is dependent upon the willingness of the audience to realize that the author is very often writing allegorically." Shuman's assessment, which follows the argument of John Gassner in a 1949 *Theatre Arts* article (written before Odets' last, and arguably most allegorical play, *The Flowering Peach*, was written) has never really been challenged, nor does it seem likely to be. While Shuman's strong emphasis on allegory in Odets may be overstating the case—the playwright's symbols are often grounded in a naturalistic world in which they make sense as objects as well as ideas, and his characters are as often individuals as types—it is true that Odets often uses certain significant, often-repeated images to carry the theoretical weight of his plays. Harold Cantor identifies some of the key symbols to which Odets returns
again and again as "the polarities of water and sleep images versus procreative and redemptive images; animal images; images of boats, cars, ships and planes; and . . . the use of music and musical instruments" (119), and Gabriel Miller remarks in his discussion of The Flowering Peach that "as always, fruit is an important symbol in Odets' work, combining allusions to life, growth, sexuality, and nourishment" (Clifford Odets, 215). Indeed, as time and again Odets examines the Edenic myth (that he called his favourite play Paradise Lost indicates the degree to which he considered the topic a significant one—Odets, like other allegorists, is not renowned for his subtlety), images of fruit and food become ubiquitous. Food, the commodity most directly tied to human needs—in essence, the most basic symbol of production and consumption—helps to give shape to a body of work in which both processes are examined on the level of the daily lives of his characters.

The centrality of fruit as a symbol in Odets' work is evident from a story told about the writing of Golden Boy (itself subtitled "An American Allegory" in an early draft):

"You hung me up for weeks," [Odets] later told [Luther Adler] with that remark, "again fruit?" Adler, noting that Poppa Bonaparte was a fruit vendor, had asked Odets, to no avail, why he was so occupied with fruit trees and fruit. Odets did not know, but he was obsessed with it—and temporarily hung all his doubts about the play on this question" (Brenman-Gibson, 477).

Odets' continued use of fruit imagery, which would operate in conjunction with other images of food consumption—most notably, that of meat—in plays like Awake and Sing!, Paradise Lost, Rocket to the Moon, The Big Knife and The Flowering Peach, was more conscious and deliberate than Brenman-Gibson suggests. With fruit as a central metaphor, Odets was able to examine both
its ideological meaning as a symbol of Eden, and its economic meaning as an indicator of material possession. Given the Group's intimacy with Odets' previous work, it seems more likely that Adler's remark was meant in jest and that Odets, always unsure about his third acts, was sensitive to any criticism, especially about a metaphor so important to a play deeply connected in his mind with the American Dream.

Nonetheless, in a majority of his plays, and even in his screenplay *Sweet Smell of Success*, food, especially fruit, becomes a special commodity for Odets. What is human is identifiable in terms of what is consumed, so the alienation of human beings from their world is measured by their ability or inability to eat, metaphorically and literally, the fruits of their labour. The abundance and fecundity of the natural world are suggested by allusions to citrus, as Biblical associations are implied by apples. However, these are not simply the symbols of a paradise forever lost. It is important to note, as I have suggested above, that the terms of the developing consumer culture contain a fundamental paradox, which Odets examines carefully in his plays. Rita Barnard, echoing Frederic Jameson, has declared that it is naive to pretend that consumer society offers no consolations. In fact, consumer capitalism is formulated in terms that are profoundly utopian, and offers real satisfactions to its participants: more food, lower prices, more selection, and so on: "We should at the very least . . . regard consumer society not as a universal rip-off in which the masses are mindless dupes, but as a bribe—a transaction that offers concrete benefits, including, for most Americans, a degree of comfort unparalleled in history" (19). Odets attempts to come to terms with the shift towards a consumer culture by measuring the utopian vision—and the real rewards—of a "culture of abundance" against the human price that must be paid for that shift, but he does so keeping sympathy and compassion for those characters whose
lives are the testing ground for the new culture. Moe Axelrod's dreams of a paradisiacal place where fruit falls into his mouth is not deliberately ironic (though in contrast with the circumstances of *Awake and Sing!* it may appear so), nor is Leo Gordon's speech at the end of *Paradise Lost*, in which he announces that "no fruit tree wears a lock and key" (230).

The use of fruit as both ideological symbol and material good manifests itself throughout Odets' work; in *Waiting for Lefty*, for example, fruit is held up as an ambiguous symbol of goodness, serving as an indication of plenty promised to the characters, but also as a measure of their success or failure in achieving that promise. In this sense, it is both the Garden itself and the flaming sword which signifies expulsion from it. Thus, when Edna argues with Joe about the taxi strike she points specifically to their inability to buy citrus fruit as an indication of their failure to achieve a desired level of wealth—and consumption:

> Sure, I see it in the papers, how good orange juice is for kids. But dammit our kids get colds one on top of the other. They look like little ghosts. Betty never saw a grapefruit. I took her to the store last week and she pointed to a stack of grapefruits. "What's that!" she said. My God, Joe, this world is supposed to be for all of us (10).

We hear in Edna's words an echo of the creed upon which modern consumer society was founded, that improved productivity will lead to a democratization of goods. The world is available to "all" simply by virtue of being in a productive society. But democracy has failed Joe and Edna. They peer through the bars of the Garden gates and wish for the plenitude always promised but rarely delivered. The problem for the characters in this play is not simply the inherent manipulations of the marketplace (though there are brief indications that to be able to
consume implies a complicity with, or surrender to, the powers of capital, as in the suggestion that the lab assistant Miller give into Fayette's demands that he spy in order to get a raise) that create a desire for increasing consumption. The problem does not lie primarily in the fact that paradise is bought and sold, but rather in Joe and Edna's inability to buy it. The dream of paradise, symbolized by consumer goods in general—fruit specifically—remains for the most part unchallenged. The problem is, as it seemed to be for Roosevelt and his advisors, a faulty distribution of goods. As Richard Wrightman Fox notes, "The Depression and the Second World War, far from undermining the consumer ethos, merely delayed for many the day of gratification. The ideal of fulfillment through consumption and leisure was if anything furthered by the experience of involuntary deprivation" (103).16

The parallels between Edna's complaint and Roosevelt's attempts to stimulate the moribund economy by spending rather than saving (like Lears' assessment of the rise of advertising) point to the increasing expectations of consumers in a developing culture of abundance. No longer were they satisfied with what formerly seemed sufficiency, but were consistently prodded to purchase more. The modified Keynesian economics of the first two Roosevelt administrations saw the power for recovery in the hands of the consumer and attempted (with moderate success) to eliminate bread lines by putting vast sums of government money in those hands. At one point in 1933-34, it has been estimated, the government was putting money directly or indirectly into the hands of one-sixth of the nation, an estimated 26 million people, money that they were encouraged to channel back into the economy (Phillips, 257).17 As Roosevelt promised, and as the papers trumpeted, consumption had its rewards, not just for the individual, but for the economy as a whole; it was, in Lears' sense, therapeutic to
spend. Thus, while there was an honest attempt to alleviate the suffering of the impoverished, the administration, as Barnard notes, still found itself caught up in the problem of defining what was necessary to a healthy life, a difficulty that was exacerbated by growing consumer expectations. For example, even the most minimal budget suggested by the government included the price of an occasional treat and even a movie once a month for a family: there was a growing sense that everyone is "entitled to the consumerist pleasures of 'the little things in life'" (Barnard, 23). One hears an acknowledgement of this cultural shift in Florrie's first line to her brother: "I gotta right to have something out of life. I don't smoke, I don't drink. So if Sid wants to take me to a dance, I'll go" (17). The creed of enjoyment and personal transformation had become, as Odets recognized, endemic to the culture. It was already difficult to clearly separate needs from wants.18

Thus for millions of consumers, commodities were made increasingly attractive and seductive, but more importantly, the expectations of the consumers grew with their increasing purchasing power. In *Waiting for Lefty*, even the sober and hardworking Miller is dazzled by Fayette's opulent office. He likes it "very much" and confesses that it is something he never dreamed existed "outside the movies," an idea which Fayette immediately picks up on:

FAYETTE: Yes, I wonder if interior decorators and bathroom fixture people don't get all their ideas from Hollywood. Our country's extraordinary that way. Soap, cosmetics, electric refrigerators—just let Mrs. Consumer know they're used by the Crawfords and Garbos—more volume of sales than one plant can handle.

MILLER: I'm afraid it isn't that easy, Mr. Fayette.

FAYETTE: No, you're right—gross exaggeration on my part. Competition is cut throat today. Markets up flush against a stone wall. The astronomers had better
hurry—open Mars to trade expansion.

MILLER: Or it will be just too bad!

This exchange clearly identifies the stakes of the developing consumer culture. Miller knows that the dream of plenty for all (even Martians!) is not easily realizable, but there is no indication, even after he refuses to spy, that this dream is entirely false; the fault lies in dishonest, inhumane business practices—making poison gas and war—rather than in the dream of abundance.

In _Waiting for Lefty_, it is, of course, Edna's real and justifiable concern for the health of the children that prompts her outburst and threats. But while there is certainly a difference between need and want, Thorstein Veblen noted in the early 1900's that the line between the two is often thin:

Goods are produced and consumed as a means to the fuller unfolding of human life; and their utility consists, in the first instance, in their efficiency as means to this end. The end, is, in the first instance, the fullness of the life of the individual, taken in absolute terms. But the human proclivity to emulation has seized upon the consumption of goods as a means to an invidious comparison, and has thereby invested consumable goods with a secondary utility as evidence of relative ability to pay. This indirect or secondary use of consumable goods lends an honorific character to consumption, and presently also to the goods which best serve this emulative end of consumption (154).

Indeed, though Veblen was writing at a time when consumer culture was not as widely or powerfully woven into American culture as it was to become, and while Cross and others have argued that Veblen ignored the complex psychology of choice in consumer purchases in his
theories of consumption as class distinction, there is in his analysis the seed of an understanding of consumerism that goes beyond any basic notion of "invidious comparison" or "conspicuous consumption." Veblen acknowledges that human relations to commodities are complex, and in fact that the same commodity can function both as necessity and as superfluity, marking it as both a means to attain social status and as a product with true use value. Fine and Leopold give as an example the fact that food is often substituted as a symbol for other hungers: "apart from feeding the stomach, it is generally recognized that appetite for food responds to a variety of emotionally and socially determined needs displaced onto feelings of hunger. These needs are not and cannot be straightforward" (171). Odets' characters thus eat not only because they are physically hungry, but spiritually and emotionally hungry as well. In one sense, then, they are what they eat, but they also eat what they want to become.

In the light of Veblen's and Cross' analysis, we can read Edna's use of fruit as a means for comparison to the bosses—in effect, she tells Joe that their poverty means "we're not like the others"—as Odets' commentary on the complicated, multiple functions of the commodity in a consumer society. Fruit for Edna is something that, in its glaring absence, confirms low social standing as well as endangers their health. Certainly, one cannot deny the truth of her grievance that sickness and hunger are real and tangible results of their poverty. Throughout the Depression, millions of people went hungry, lived from meal to meal, scratched together an existence from whatever means were at hand. The struggle to maintain good health in the Depression, as Robert McElvaine has recognized, was a hardship for many; illness and hunger abounded, and the payment of doctors and hospital bills were often a real burden on family finances: "One study of health in eight cities found that families with a fully employed member had
66 percent less illness than those of the unemployed. Desperate people took desperate steps to feed themselves. In rural areas hungry people sometimes turned to eating weeds. Less appetizing were the urban scenes of men digging through garbage cans and city dumps" (80).

But despite the growing awareness of widespread hunger throughout the country, there is in Edna's bitter accusations even more than a frustration at ill health. There is a sense of the deeply held, consumption-oriented, utopian expectations she has come to have: "Everything was going to be so ducky! A cottage by the waterfall, roses in Picardy. You're a four-star bust!" (9).

The social expectations of living in a consumer culture have led Edna to swear not only that "this world is supposed to be for all of us!" but that participation in that world means participation in consumer culture, the possession of ideals by possessing the commodities representing those ideals. Her bitterness arises in part from the comparisons she makes between her family's condition and that of the bosses, in part from her comparison of their circumstances to consumerist dreams conditioned by the culture.

What is important to realize, too, is that while her desire for healthy food is one that attempts to meet a basic human need (though it can be argued that if vitamin C is necessary for good health, citrus itself is not necessary to human life—it is a therapeutic good), the dreams Edna expresses of the cottage by the waterfall are no more romanticized than the desires Sid and Florrie express for velvet gowns, brandy and soda, and "fifty or sixty" dozen roses. Nor are they more false or superfluous than their desire for a place to sit somewhere together. As Fine and Leopold have noted, as a result of recent work in consumer studies

the theory of real and false needs has been legitimately brought into disrepute.

Beyond the bare minimum of physical survival, all needs are socially determined
and it is arbitrary to divide them into those that are genuine and those that are not.

... more recent literature concerning deprivation has recognized this by defining it in terms of a capacity to participate in society, which immediately construes needs in terms of access to socially agreed norms of consumption (67-8).

For Edna, the lack of fruit, the reduction of her life to "slavery and sleepless nights" (12), the fact that if she "[doesn't] have Emmy's shoes soled tomorrow, she can't go to school" (8), all combine to underscore the deprivations she feels in comparison to what she feels are reasonable social expectations.19

It is also impossible to ignore Edna's citation of the newspaper as an authority to back her anger. Edna reads in the paper how good orange juice is for children, and absorbs, along with the scientific information that vitamin C can prevent colds, the idea that in a "good" society citrus should be available to everyone. This appeal to the newspaper, which functioned with radio as the main source of advertising in the developing consumer culture, while not invalidating her legitimate concerns, places them in a more ambivalent light, for it calls attention to the mass consumption aspect of food marketing, the appeal to buy a piece of Eden for themselves. Indeed, we must already be fairly suspicious of the papers since the corrupt union leader, Harry Fatt (a more allegorical name would be hard to imagine), has cited the same papers as evidence not to strike: "The records prove it. If this was the Hoover regime, would I say don't go out, boys? Not on your tintype! But things is different now. You read the papers as well as me. You know it" (5). Defensively, Fatt again and again returns to the papers as evidence that the country is getting better, or that Russia and other places are worse: "You think that's bunk? Read the papers!" (6).

Like the infinitely reconfigurable image of utopia, newspaper reports are open to
negotiation not only because they contain inherently contradictory messages, but because they are centered in a mass commodity to which everyone has access. The newspaper, like commodities in general, begins to become unhitched from any stable or fixed meaning and assumes different values for the different characters in Waiting for Lefty. For Fatt, they serve as an indication that there is a "a good man in the White House" (5) and things are looking better. For Edna, however, the newspaper, like the stack of grapefruits in the A & P, is much more ambivalent: it promises plenty and at the same time reminds her how far they are from the ideal. Likewise, in the "Lab Assistant Episode" which immediately follows the scene between Joe and Edna, Miller and Fayette hold different relationships with the newspaper. Fayette, another manifestation of corrupt capitalism (though not specified in stage directions, Fayette is a part usually played by the same actor who plays Fatt; even their names are similar) tells Miller that a war is coming and questions derisively, "Don't you read your newspapers, Miller?" Miller's resistant "common-man" response, "Nothing but Andy Gump" (16) underscores the difference between their perceptions of the world. Fayette represents the practical, everyday world of consumer capitalism, while Miller's escape to the comics recasts the everyday world where war is reality into a desire for a world where pleasure is the main goal. The complex responses to the mass media mirror the complex responses to a developing consumerism.

Indeed, Odets' consciousness of the ability of mass media to both seduce and taunt consumers gave him the ability to distill large cultural shifts into compelling stage drama. In this sense, Waiting for Lefty is a sort of documentary drama, though it heightens and simplifies the emotional and political issues for the sake of dramatic effect and political action. Across the country, Edna and Joe's personal dilemma of scarcity amid abundance was reflected over and
over—on a scale never before seen in history. The same newspapers that offered cheap, mass-produced furniture to couples like Joe and Edna on the installment plan carried countless stories of evictions. The same papers that carried travel advertisements to New Yorkers of the Depression and promised them a world full of easily available clothing, food, and commodities also carried story after story about the government sponsored destruction of agricultural "surplus" to hungry readers in 1933.  

Kenneth Davis notes that it was in the full sight of a public, including myriads of hungry and ragged Americans, that pigs were slaughtered by the million, that acres of cotton were plowed up by the million, in the summer and early fall of that year—a deliberate, laborious destruction of potential food and fiber that was organized and subsidized by government at a direct, immediate cost to taxpayers of between $100 million and $200 million. The spectacle struck many who watched it as both insane and obscene. . . . But by the overwhelming logic (illogic) of the prevailing economic order (disorder) what other could be done? (1.270-71).

As Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace noted, those who criticized the government's handling of farm overproduction were in effect criticizing a system based on profit. Roosevelt's New Deal was unable to commit itself to the overthrow of capitalism, so it was forced into the ironic situation of destroying food to encourage consumption at a level that would ensure future production. Production beyond the capacity of the marketplace was useless to a capitalist system; only when it was tied to consumer's ability to buy commodities would it truly signify a "culture of abundance." As in the case of the destruction of farm surplus in the early 1930's, in Waiting for Lefty a certain knowledge that abundance existed, coupled with bitter personal experience of
scarcity, gives the characters' experience a bitter taste of utopia: banishment from the Garden means something only if the Garden seemed real and possible in the first place.

IV. "Put Fruit Trees Where Our Ashes Are!"

*Waiting for Lefty* remains a bitter condemnation of a system which allows Joe and Edna's marriage and the health of their children to be threatened by a corrupt union and an unsympathetic employer. The play is, in fact, a militant call for change, for the creation of a new world. As the Stenographer says in the "The Young Actor" scene, quoting Revelation (21:1): "And I saw a new earth and a new heaven; for the first earth and the first heaven were passed away; and there was no more sea." But as a number of critics have noted, this call to action is a more general one than was standard in agit-prop plays. Gerald Weales notes first of all that "*Waiting for Lefty* says a great deal less about the actual taxi strike of 1934 than it does, by implication, about the general labor situation at the time" (43) and Malcolm Goldstein calls the final exhortation of the play "blunted but jarring" (*Political Stage*, 94). Gabriel Miller pulls the play back even further, arguing that the aim of Odets' play, in contrast to other agit-props, was "to achieve not an immediate result, but a more symbolic call to arms. . . . *Lefty* is agitprop drama that resists identification with any specific time-bound problem" (*Clifford Odets*, 169).

Support for Miller's assertion comes from Odets' use of the agit-prop form to examine a strike that had taken place a year before: in that sense, it was not what so many other agit-props were, a call for specific future political action. As an example, Miller cites the agit-prop written by Odets' fellow Group members Art Smith and Elia Kazan, a piece called *Dimitroff*, which called for a specific action at a specific time: the release of political prisoners in Germany. Though
Weales has given strong evidence that Odets used a number of factual incidents from the 1934 New York taxi strike as the basis for his play, he recognizes like Miller that *Waiting for Lefty* is only tangentially about cab drivers. In fact, three of the episodes—the Interne, the Young Actor, and the Lab Assistant—have nothing at all to do with the wages and working conditions of cab drivers; they instead show how those members of the committee became drivers in the first place. In this sense, *Waiting for Lefty* is less specific than other agit-props, a general examination of the economic and political situation of the time.

Odets' call for action at the end of *Waiting for Lefty* is vague, but it is insistent. Indeed, Odets himself admitted in an interview much later that the strike which is the ostensible result of the play is only a local objective: "it is not enough to go out on strike and ask for better wages; it is much better to go out on strike and say 'This is a beginning'... It will give you the chance, in a democracy, to find your place, to assume your place and be responsible for your growth and continued welfare and happiness in that place" (Mendelsohn, "Center Stage," 18). Odets is not interested in the taxi strike as a particular labour action—the union is generically depicted, just as whatever individuality Fatt might have had is compromised by the same actor playing the theatrical producer and the industrialist Fayette—but rather as a symbol of protest against the whole system which denies abundance to a large number of its participants. But Miller's virtual de-historicizing of *Waiting for Lefty* in favor of universal themes seems at odds with the fact that the Depression milieu is the entire basis for the play; it is a stretch for Miller to shift the emphasis away from the fact that Sid and Florrie, for example, have what Odets (through Sid) calls "the 1935 blues."22 Odets' play is not "time-bound" in the sense that it calls for specific political action, but rather in that it could not have been written outside of a historical moment which juxtaposed
the scarcity of the Depression with the abundance of unprecedented production capacity.

Therefore, Keller's call for a strike was not simply for better working conditions, but for a romanticized, paradisiacal "new world," as Clurman noted: "'Strike!' was Lefty's lyric message, not alone for a few extra pennies of wages or for shorter hours of work, strike for greater dignity, strike for a bolder humanity, strike for the full stature of man" (*Fervent Years*, 139). This is not to deny Odets' radicalism, for he certainly held a strong belief in specific and dramatic social change. At the time he wrote *Waiting for Lefty*, he was a member of the Communist Party, and any reading of the play must see in it the major concerns of the radical Left—war, the increasing alienation of workers, poverty, and the uneven distribution of wealth—characterized with striking accuracy and foresight. Furthermore, his solution to those problems is often couched, like other agit-prop drama, in terms taken straight from Communist doctrine: the Stenographer tells the actor about the *Communist Manifesto* (significantly, equating it with a loaf of bread—each costs a dime), Sid goes into a long, personalized explanation about the class nature of war, Keller uses the Communist salute in his strike call, "the good old uppercut to the chin!" (30). But what separates *Waiting for Lefty* from other agit-props (despite what skeptical critics like Mendelsohn and Murray might say), even more than its generality, is a realization that human beings are involved in social change. The play attempts to reconcile the material and physical desires of individual characters with their sufferings. Edna, Joe, Sid, and Florrie certainly suffer from the deprivations and indignities that low wages bring: as Edna says "[money] is the subject, the EXACT SUBJECT! Your boss makes this subject... He's giving your kids that fancy disease called the rickets. He's making a jellyfish outa you and putting wrinkles in my face" (12). Keller's glass eye is a reminder of the horrible conditions of many factories, as the actor's dilemma
indirectly reflects Odets' own experiences with the economic pressures of Broadway theatre.

On the other hand, Odets' protagonists are more ambivalent about their position in society, indeed about their dreams, than their radical rhetoric suggests on the surface. Odets is also more explicit about his utopian beliefs, however romanticized, than other agit-props seem to be. The Young Actor wants to get his foot in the Broadway door; he believes in the dream of his name in lights. Florrie, like Edna, has a dream which sounds like the sort of consumer paradise the advertisers offered: "Don't you see I want something else out of life? Sure, I want romance, love, babies. I want everything in life I can get" (18). Keller's rousing speech at the end of the play goads the drivers to action; it is both a condemnation of the present state of things and a call to help create the "new world" the Stenographer talked about:

This is your life and mine! It's skull and bones every inch a the road! Christ, we're dyin' by inches! For what? For the debutant-ees to have their sweet comin' out parties in the Ritz! Poppa's got a daughter she's gotta get her picture in the papers. Christ, they make 'em with our blood. . . Tear down the slaughter house of our old lives! Let freedom really ring (30)

After Lefty is found dead, Keller exhorts his fellow union members—and the audience—in a final rousing speech:

HELLO AMERICA! HELLO. WE'RE STORMBIRDS OF THE WORKING-CLASS. WORKERS OF THE WORLD . . . OUR BONES AND BLOOD! And when we die they'll know what we did to make a new world. Christ, cut us up into little pieces. We'll die for what is right! put fruit trees where our ashes are! (31)

Keller's use of the fruit tree as a symbol for the longed-for new world is significant structurally
and culturally, for it ties into Edna's desire for fruit as well as tapping into the utopian images inherent in Communist ideology. In this sense, Keller's idea that it will take a bodily sacrifice to achieve the goals they are setting—"Christ, cut us up into little pieces"—refigures into political action the Christian ideal of martyrdom leading to salvation.

Keller acknowledges that the battle in which he engages is fought on the battleground of the body; his "bones and blood" speech identifies the physical violence that follows from class conflict (echoing the remark made by Joe at the beginning that the cabbies are "the black and blue boys" [7]). It demonstrates, too, that the Marxist concept of alienation, as well as a clear psychological component, has a demonstrable physical component manifesting itself in hunger, in physical pain, in sickness. But while the play places the blame squarely on the shoulders of a corrupt system, it unconsciously retains at the same time the utopian vision of health and fullness upon which consumer capitalism is predicated. As I have argued, the utopian vision is not particular to either a Christian or a Marxist position, but was also the way in which the developing consumer culture, propped up by American frontier ideology and the economic policies of the New Deal, came to view itself. In the play, personal comfort and enjoyment are ideals as often looked to as any idea of "productive" work or social change. For every "Doc" Benjamin who looks to work in socialized medicine, there is a Florrie who simply wants to have babies and to get everything she can; for every Miller who wants to work with an important chemist, there is an Edna who looks for her cottage by the waterfall, or a Joe who merely wants his "living wage."

The topics of concern are hot meals, a place to sit with your beloved, and citrus fruit as much as specific and sweeping social change.

What is at stake in *Waiting for Lefty*, at least in some of the vignettes, is a level of
increased bodily enjoyment that the characters long for, a fact which Fatt plays on when he threatens "starvation and broken heads" for strikers. Thus, Edna's lack of food for her children is metaphorized in her avowed readiness to offer her body to Bud Haas in exchange for food and material comfort. The testing ground of the marketplace is the human body, as Lears argued in his examination of the therapeutic function of advertising. Likewise, Keller's characterization of their old lives as a "slaughter house" (an echo of the line characterizing Lefty as having "more guts than a slaughterhouse"[7]), his reference to the debutante pictures in the paper being made with the "blood" of the workers, and his willingness to be cut into little pieces is more ironic in the light of Edna's withering—and equivocal—remark to Joe that "any hackie that won't fight, let them all be ground to hamburger! . . . Only they don't grind me to little pieces. I got different plans" (11). So Keller's final plea for a strike, emotionally moving and rhetorically powerful as it is, is complicated by the ambivalent nature of the food and fruit imagery it employs. The paradise Keller imagines is the same one that Edna reads about in the papers, full of fruit trees, but the only way to enter its gates is to sacrifice oneself for the bodily pleasures it promises, to be cut into little pieces. Thus, in Waiting for Lefty, Odets' sincere leftist protest against the economic conditions of the Depression cannot escape a lingering fascination with the developing consumer culture, which had adopted the utopian vision for its own. Odets' use of fruit imagery as a whole follows much the same pattern: it indicates a utopia, but a utopia caught between physical necessity and consumer desire.
Chapter 3: The All-Consuming Marketplace

The process of the marketplace is certainly a central concern of Waiting for Lefty. Likewise, metaphors of fruit and consumption continue in Odets' full-length plays, especially Awake and Sing!, Paradise Lost, Rocket to the Moon, and The Big Knife, as well as in the 1957 screenplay for the film Sweet Smell of Success. The idea of the marketplace is embedded deeply within the structure of these Odets works; buying and selling operate at the most basic level of human needs and desires. There is in these dramas no successful escape from the marketplace, for every idealized attempt by the characters to step outside the marketplace is figured in terms of consumption which pull them back into it. As the characters in these plays recognize (some better than others) the pitfalls and benefits of a consumer culture, they attempt to determine how much sacrifice is necessary to gain the utopia it promises, returning over and over to food imagery to express their desires and frustrations.

Odets remained deeply ambivalent about the idea of abundance, intimating that the utopian visions with which he ends a number of his plays are at odds with the functioning of the marketplace on a daily basis. That is, the marketplace places pressure on the characters to sell themselves in one way or another—to become, as it were, commodities. As the plays progress, from the relatively innocuous concessions that Ben Stark makes to his wife in the name of bourgeois security in Rocket to the Moon to Charlie Castle's selling of his body in The Big Knife, the dangers of the marketplace to individual lives become more pronounced. The Depression demonstrated forcibly that rapid industrialization, in addition to increasing productivity, brought with it alienation of people from the products of their labor, so that the human body becomes in
Odets the testing ground of the marketplace, the physical location where consumption meets production.

I. "Ever Seen Oranges Grow? I Know a Certain Place—"

In Odets, food is everywhere in various manifestations, all of which carry strong—and often conflicting—cultural associations. It can offer escape or salvation, it can be an indication of fertility, or a measure of success. On the other hand, especially in the later plays, food also indicates failed idealism, debased consumption, alienation, and an uncritical complicity in the marketplace. The sheer volume of food imagery makes it a necessary part of any study of Odets, for clearly he saw consumable goods as a metaphor for large cultural processes. In *Awake and Sing!* alone, for example, there are apples, halvah, duck, pastrami, chocolates, cake, chopped liver, and bread and jam on stage, as well as direct references to oranges, tangerines, chop suey, pickles, eggs, knishes, tea, coconuts, peaches and cream, raspberry jelly, and champagne—usually as figures of speech referring to economic matters. The play opens with the family at supper, another dinner is the setting for all of Act II, and there is a feast set out in Act III for Jacob's funeral, prompting the Group's property man, Moe Jacobs, to remark to a *Herald-Tribune* reporter that "for him the play was 'one long meal'" (Smith, 279-80).

Certainly *Awake and Sing!* , with its ubiquitous use of food (as well as other consumer goods, such as the pair of "black and white shoes" Ralph longs for) as a indicator of personal and social ideologies, makes even more explicit the problems of developing consumerism that Odets had begun to explore in *Waiting for Lefty*. At the very beginning of the play, Bessie identifies the discrepancy between Ralph's desires and the family practicalities: "You mean we shouldn't have
food in the house, but you'll make a jig on the street corner?" (41). Ralph promptly turns the eating image on its head, characterizing his life as sitting around "with the blues and mud in your mouth" (42). Food is the most basic form of idealism, but an idealism that is configured differently for each of the characters. For example, when Sam gives Hennie a gift of candy, she mocks its cheapness: "Loft's weekend special, two for thirty-nine" (44). As a knowledgeable consumer, Hennie understands the social ideologies which Sam suggests with his gift and reinterprets the meaning of the candy as a representation of a naive immigrant view of the world. By mocking Sam's gift, she mocks the life she wants to avoid. Even from the beginning, then, the commodity begins to unmoor from any fixed meaning in the culture and becomes associated with individual desires in different ways. Jean-Christophe Agnew, following the work of anthropologist William Leiss, has noted about consumer society in general that "Neither the commodity nor the consumer remains definable in terms of some steady or persisting nucleus of traits or needs. The result, according to Leiss, is a "'brownian movement" of particular consumer needs within the fluid medium of the market,' a seemingly random movement of detached and fragmentary motives and goods through a radically defamiliarized and symbolic landscape" (71).

Leiss' own analysis begins with the assumption that in a market economy there is "an 'ensemble of satisfactions and dissatisfactions' . . . that constitutes the dynamic bond between the individual's perceptions of his needs and his judgements about what can satisfy those needs" (49). Furthermore, as human needs become more and more fragmented, the objects which people seek to satisfy those needs become less stable. That is, "commodities are not straightforward 'objects' but are rather progressively more unstable, temporary collections of objective and imputed characteristics—that is, highly complex material-symbolic entities" (82). People believe in the
value of commodities not only for their use value, but for a vague and shifting value determined by social desires. Furthermore, these needs are socially determined but individually realized:

A stranger transported suddenly to the industrial paradise of consumption would have to learn how to want things. . . . he would discover that the dominant social cuing in our society occurs only with reference to the ever-changing world of goods as a whole, rather than to specific goods which are available at any particular time, and that he was expected to journey alone toward the Mecca of satisfaction, despite the fact that everyone else apparently had the same compass bearing (84).

We hear in this passage a theoretical statement of Odets' intuitive understanding of the functioning of the commodity in the modern marketplace. He expresses through his characters and dialogue a deep concern with the relation of the individual to a social world based upon production and consumption, as well as with the power of social norms and expectations to transform desire into need. But most of all, Odets looks at the ability of utopian beliefs to shift form and cling to whatever material objects present themselves as likely carriers of that ideology.

In fact, all the characters in *Awake and Sing!* seek to consume in a manner that confirms their world view, investing their consumption choices with the ideological power of an entire belief system. The symbolic value of consumption moves far beyond the simple use value of the objects consumed. For Bessie, then, the Sunday dinner she cooks for Morty in Act II serves as an indication that the family is "respectable," that they have achieved some approving recognition in the eyes of the neighbors which is so important to her—even though she admits that "I never saw conditions should be so bad" (61). As long as food is on the table, Bessie clings to the belief that
the family is doing well. Further, she uses invitations to the supper table to include or exclude people from the family circle. When Hennie announces her pregnancy, Bessie declares that the family meal will serve as a vehicle to get Sam to marry Hennie: "He'll come tomorrow night for supper. By Saturday they're engaged" (55). Conversely, Ralph's fiancée, Blanche, is deliberately excluded from the family by being excluded from meals. She is to Bessie "a skinny consumptive looking" girl; Bessie is scandalized by the fact that "[Ralph] brought her once for supper. Believe me, she didn't come again, no!" (65).

On the other hand, Moe Axelrod surrounds his consumption of food with a symbolic matrix that, while cynically expressed, is far more romantically idealistic than Bessie's bourgeois practicality. To him, the lack of oranges indicates not only the tight economic circumstances of the household, but a sort of moral and social failure indicated by the Bergers' inability to participate in the consumer utopia: "No oranges, huh?—what a dump!" (49). The lack of fruit for Moe is not disappointing because he really needs an orange, but because it would symbolize the Bergers' (and by association, his own) participation in plenty. In a similar way, Bessie's persistent attempts to feed people ("Cake?" [to Moe, 58]; "save your appetite, Morty" [74]; take a sandwich, Hennie" [91]) are a way to assert her world view by controlling consumption. These attempts are in conflict with the alternate interpretations of consumption held by Moe, Ralph, and Hennie, all of whom use food as a symbol of a more romanticized utopia. What Odets does in *Awake and Sing!*, then, is use the images of fruit and food consumption to indicate the ambivalent place of idealism in a world where meaning has begun to be exchanged like a commodity. The younger generation is more in tune with the promises of a consumer culture than the older. Thus, while Odets' stage direction can characterize Bessie as "naively delighted" (43) by Sam's gift of
chocolates, Hennie is able to re-contextualize the romantic ideology Bessie (and Sam) assume are invested in a particular commodity into one of much different consumer—and ideological—expectations.

*Paradise Lost,* similarly, continues Odets' use of fruit and food images to signify the readjustment of ideologies that follow from a shift towards a widespread culture of consumption. The obvious metaphor of a disappearing Eden, formerly fruitful and abundant, becomes the symbol for a increasingly disillusioned and ineffectual middle class, blindly unaware of their problems. Clara Gordon, for example, almost automatically answers any question or challenge with her tag line, "take a piece of fruit" (161—twice, 162, 166, 180, 197). For Clara, offering fruit is not only a humorous way to dissolve tension within the household, but an indication that all is well with the world, that the Gordons have achieved a measure of success: "I never worried a day in my life. Here today—gone tomorrow. Take a piece of fruit, Gus" (161). The title *Paradise Lost,* of course, indicates that her ritualistic use of fruit is increasingly out of keeping with the poverty spreading in the streets of Depression-era America. Therefore, as the play progresses, her line becomes less and less convincing, and less frequently used. In fact, the images of plenty symbolized by fruit are mingled with and eventually superseded by other, darker images of consumption such as rat poison, tapeworms, and tainted canned fruit.

The tension within the play heightens as the promise of plenty indicated by the initial presence of fruit is undercut by a gradual acknowledgement that such plenty is not a free and necessary result of living in a productive world. Paul, one of the homeless men who comes in at the end of the play, tells the Gordons, "You had a sorta little paradise here. Now you lost the paradise. That should teach you something. But no! You ain't awake yet... You have been
took like a bulldog takes a pussy cat! Finished!" (229). The violence of his simile mirrors the violence of the world they have come to slowly recognize. The image of consumption shifts from one of effortless abundance to that of a natural world predicated upon violence, a world where the consumers become the consumed.

The grim awakening of the Gordons is what Clurman saw as the important lesson of the play. As he remembers telling the Group actors, the characters in *Paradise Lost* have "their hearts full of fond dreams, their eyes beclouded with illusions inherited from the past, while their hands groped in a void that was full of terror. When facts finally confronted them with unmistakable concreteness, they were the facts of bankruptcy and destitution, a house empty of all its foolish and kindly furniture" (*Fervent Years*, 156). Clurman's characterization is incomplete, however, for he neglects the hopeful ending, where Leo imagines a new Eden:

> No! There is more to life than this! Everything he said is true, but there is more.
> That was the past, but there is a future. . . . Truly, truly, the past was a dream.
> But this is real! To know from this that something must be done. That is real. . . .
> *No man fights alone.* . . . Yes, I want to see that new world. I want to kiss all those future men and women. What is this talk of bankrupts, failures, hatred . . . they won't know what that means. Oh, yes, I tell you the whole world is for men to possess. Heartbreak and terror are not the heritage of mankind! The world is beautiful. No fruit tree wears a lock and key (229-30, emphasis his).

This ending, far more so than Keller's speech in *Waiting for Lefty*, is idealized in its vision of a "new world" that is "for men to possess," and is distanced temporally and spatially from the concrete economic turmoil which occasioned it by the utopian imagery it employs. It is
noteworthy that his Edenic vision of a paradise regained uses as one of its principal metaphors the
free, laden fruit tree. Leo, like Keller in Waiting for Lefty and like Moe in Awake and Sing!,
maintains a belief in a paradise of eating and pleasure even while the system that promised to feed
him instead feeds upon him. In fact, unlike Keller's clear acknowledgement that a physical
sacrifice would be necessary, Leo's vision offers no indication of how this utopia is to be
achieved; it remains a vague, optimistic belief in the power of abundance.

Harold Cantor has identified an Emersonian influence on Odets that is very much in
keeping with the kind of idealism he chose to put in the mouths of characters like Ralph and Leo,
or later, in Charlie Castle in The Big Knife. Certainly Odets was no stranger to the tradition of
American Romanticism coming from Emerson and Thoreau through Whitman, or to the European
tradition symbolized by Victor Hugo. As he once wrote, "Hugo . . . inspired me, made me aspire.
I wanted to be a good and noble man, longed to do heroic deeds with my bare hands, thirsted to
be kind to people, particularly the weak and humble and the oppressed. From Hugo I had my first
feeling of social consciousness. He did not make me a romantic, but he heightenened in me the that
romanticism which I already had" (Time is Ripe, 334). While the Hugo-inspired brand of
romantic idealism manifested itself in an outrage against contemporary social conditions, the
Emersonian brand of idealism for Odets was more future-oriented; it dealt with the possibilities of
life on earth. It is thus without irony that Leo cites Emerson before his lyric ending to Paradise
Lost: "Emerson was a great man. He promised men they would walk the earth like gods" (228).
Even though the homeless man retorts acidly "then he was a goddamn liar!", and though Leo
himself recognizes the ideal is far from being realized, the fervent hope that someday it would be
achieved is what animates his lyric speech—and in fact animates much of Odets. The hopeful,
utopian innocence of Leo's final speech is more than an attempt to delineate Odets' idealism; it is a direct response to the culture of consumption around him.

The conviction that America had been betrayed by the dream of material success, therefore, while continuing to be a major theme in Odets' work, is never without a counterpart in romantic optimism. At the end of *Awake and Sing!*, Moe convinces Hennie to escape the Berger household with him, seducing her with much the same kind of vision as Leo uses at the end of *Paradise Lost*. He tells her of "a certain place where it's moonlight and roses. We'll lay down, count stars. Hear the big ocean making noise. You lay under the trees. Champagne flows like—" (98). Certainly Moe's vision is more personal and more specific than Leo's, and more hedonistic. Indeed, one hears in lines to Hennie like "There's one life to live! Live it" and "Make a break or spend the rest of your life in a coffin!" (99) exhortations to embrace the kind of personal transformation that T. J. Jackson Lears identifies with the burgeoning consumer culture. To buy a product—in this case, a "Ten day luxury cruise to Havana" or "ritzy hotels, frenchie soap, champagne" (68)—is to buy a chance at paradise. Happiness is no longer measured by productivity, but by the economic ability to fully participate in abundance. Of course, a number of critics have noted that Moe and Hennie's leaving does not really change anything, that they are guided by less-than-ideal motives and act irresponsibly in regard to Hennie's baby. But even were that true, their objections ignore the profoundly utopian, if profoundly consumerist, language in which Odets drapes their escape. Their leaving is an act of faith far more than one of reason; it is a compromise, a wager, or as Moe characterizes it, "one thing to get another" (100).

Nevertheless, there are real and profound costs to the participants in a consumer culture, as Odets noted in both *Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*. The most devastating of these is a
loss of idealism. For example, Myron, wandering onstage as an unambiguous Adam figure at the end of *Awake and Sing!*, says to no one in particular, "no fruit in the house lately. Just a lone apple. Must be something wrong with me—I say I won't eat but I eat" (100). Here, the Fall from the Edenic promise of abundance into a debased consumer capitalism seems complete and irrevocable. The beaten, cowed Myron shuffles around the house, quoting useless information from the paper, eating more or less constantly, looking for refuge in the past rather than the future (much the same way Gus Michaels does in *Paradise Lost*: "I can't explain it to you Mr. G, how I'm forever hungerin' for the past" [207]—with the added emphasis on hunger). The dream of abundance symbolized by the Garden is clearly out of place in the world where Myron lives and works. Ultimately the only fruit, indeed, the only reward of any kind, is the proverbial apple which indicates a banishment from the Garden. Things are stripped away from Myron even as he grasps for them, so he reaches out for the safety of the past.

On the other hand, Odets is never entirely willing to repudiate the possibility of the ideal in his delineations of the real. At the end of the play, therefore, Moe stakes his future (and Hennie's) on the belief that some sort of redemption is possible. He beguiles Hennie with another vision of the Garden: "Paradise, you're on a big boat headed south. No more pins and needles in your heart, no snake juice squirted in your arm. The whole world's green grass, and when you cry it's because you're happy" (99). Moe tries to extricate the vision of utopia offered by consumer culture from the ideologies of the work ethic which had laid claim to it, to enter the Garden on his own terms. For Moe, consumer goods are both symbol and concrete evidence of the possibility of abundance. As cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken has noted, because of the idealism that humans invest in material goods, there is "an intimate connection between consumer goods
and hope in consumer societies" (116). The differing utopian visions of Moe, of Leo Gordon, and of the therapeutic culture of modern advertising are therefore connected through the idea of hope—and cast in strikingly similar images of abundance.

More idealistic than Moe and Hennie, Ralph applauds their decision to leave because he believes it mirrors his own plan to "fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills" (97). He views their escape to a land of plenty as an individual realization of the goal which he seeks on a larger scale. Of course, it can be argued that the juxtaposition of his socialist vision—inspired by Jacob's words—with Hennie and Moe's consumerist paradise makes their voyage more ambivalent than it first appears, for it suggests there are underlying moral differences between the two visions of paradise. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that in the play, Moe's dream is made to appear quite similar to that which Jacob hears in his favorite song, *O Paradiso*. Moe and Jacob both look to a kind of paradise, even if Moe's is more directly identified with individual consumption than social change. He asks Jacob early on, "Ever see oranges grow? I know a certain place—One summer I laid under a tree and let them fall right in my mouth" (50). It is a mistake, however, to deny that Moe and Hennie's escape has a strong utopian element. He calls her "Paradise" over and over again, a nickname that is both ironic and earnestly romantic. Their escape is associated with romantic love and a withdrawal from economic and social pressures; it is idealistic, hopeful, future-oriented.

It is, however, also significant that Moe figures such an escape in consumerist terms. The distant world they leave for is the one they are unable to attain in the Bronx, one filled with consumer goods and oranges that fall right into their mouths. In the lyrical visions that come at the end of *Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*, then, Odets offers a hopeful idea of a possible
Eden. However, his is an Eden which is constituted in terms which suggest a consumer paradise, a world where consumption is easily attained and desires are quickly satisfied with commodities. Edenic abundance, symbolized in these plays by fruit specifically and consumer goods in general, remains the goal by which Odets characters judge their lives, even if their participation in consumer culture is the increasingly dubious means to gain it.

II. "You Harvested the Fruit from Your Labor?"

It is not just Moe and Hennie who attempt to escape the confines of a narrow life. Jacob, too, escapes repeatedly to his own paradise, seeking refuge from the contentious Berger household in his music. His refuge, however, is tinged with the sadness of a lost idealism. Indeed, while Odets characterized the whole of the Berger family as sharing "a fundamental activity: a struggle for life amid petty conditions" (37), he also remarked that Jacob is "an observer of the others, compares their activities with his real and ideal sense of life . . . He is a sentimental idealist with no power to turn idealism to action" (38, emphasis mine). Jacob's fondness for his records—Caruso's recording of O Paradiso is his favorite—is the measure of the gap between the real and ideal, as the gap between Odets' own romanticism and the realities of the Depression are a driving force behind his entire body of work. The distance between the promised "paradise on earth!" (50) of which Caruso sings and the household where, as he says, "economics comes down like a ton of coal on the head" (71) is too great for Jacob to negotiate. He is forced in Act I, and again in Act II to withdraw into the dreams his records symbolize, a withdrawal very similar to Myron's escape to the past. Indeed, Jacob disappears so often into his room that the playing of the records has become a joke around the house. For example,
disappointed that there are only apples in the Berger household, Moe ridicules Jacob's love of Caruso's *O Paradiso*. He caustically asks, "Ask him does he see any oranges?" (51). In the same way, Bessie mocks Jacob's idealism, sending him away like a child when the family discusses Hennie's pregnancy: "Go lay in your room with Caruso and the books together" (56).

Gerald Weales suggests that Odets was being more ironic than it appears by using a piece of music that coupled images of paradise and prison:

> When Vasco sings *O paradiso* in L'Africaine . . . It is such a double-edged symbol that one cannot help supposing—hoping at least—that Odets intended to let the records themselves undermine their value for Jacob. Such intricacy is too much for an audience in the theatre to grasp, but Jacob's vulnerability does not hinge on an aesthetic reaction to Bizet. . . . His records fail him because, like most dreams, they are fragile and Bessie can and does smash them (*Clifford Odets*, 63-4).

Jacob's dreams are fragile, as Weales suggests, partly because they are invested in a commodity that can be destroyed. McCracken remarks that when a commodity which serves as a bridge to an idealized past is actually acquired, "the owner has begun to run the risk of putting the displaced meaning to the empirical test" (112). The records' relationship to paradise is an equivocal one at best; however, the ideals Jacob finds in his albums are not intended to be read by the audience as deeply or inherently ironic. The records are the ideal, easily smashed, but nevertheless hoped for as a good. Thus, it seems more useful to place the records in the same category as the fruit images Moe employs, a utopian vision stated in terms of consumption.

As Moe's mockery of Jacob points out the discrepancy between the apartment and the world the records speak of, so Bessie's criticism also has a kernel of truth in it, for it
acknowledges the ultimate passivity of Jacob's utopian vision. While Jacob's rhetoric is strong and sharp throughout the first two acts, always critical of the state of affairs in the Berger household and in the world in general, speaking in exhortations like the one which gave the play its title, he nevertheless speaks in resignation, with a hopeless sense that he is too old to achieve anything. The fiery power of such lines like his remarks to Bessie "Marx said it—abolish such families!" (55) and "In this boy's life a Red Sea will happen again. I see it!" (72) is greatly tempered by his admission to Ralph that he has been unable to do much but talk:

Look on me and learn what to do, boychick. Here sits an old man polishing tools.

You think maybe I'll use them again! Look on this failure and see for seventy years he talked, with good ideas but only in his head. . . you should act. Not like me. A man who had golden opportunities but drank instead a glass tea (77-8).

Jacob's admission to Ralph, then, is an assertion that a disparity exists between real life and his desired life as well as an ideological investment in Ralph's future. Jacob uses his records much the same way he uses Ralph: as a shield against personal failure. If Ralph can, as Jacob says, "graduate from my university," his inaction will be erased by the action of his grandson, his passive consumption (of tea, of music, of books) turned into active production (of social change).

Ralph's decision to work to "fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills" (97) is therefore best seen as an inheritance—contrasting with his other inheritance, the insurance money—from his Marxist grandfather. It is an attempt not only to overcome the sterility of the small life that surround him, but to step outside the marketplace in a way quite different from that of Moe and Hennie. Indeed, the shift in Ralph's beliefs does not come suddenly at the very end of the play, but rather is a gradual drift away from an emphasis on personal consumer desires toward the kind
of idealism Jacob espouses. In Act I, Ralph complains, "all my life I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them. It's crazy!" (42) but by Act II admits that "all right, I can't get my teeth fixed. All right, that a new suit's like trying to buy the Chrysler building. You never in your life bought me a pair of skates even—things I died for when I was a kid. I don't care about that stuff, see. Only just remember that I pay some of the bills around here" (66). Finally, in his last exchange with Bessie, he comes to Jacob's realization of the gap between real and the ideal:

BESSIE: Ralphie, I worked too hard all my years to be treated like dirt... Summer shoes you didn't have, skates you never had, but I bought a new dress every week. A lover I kept—Mr. Gigolo!... If I didn't worry about the family who would? On the calendar it's a different place, but here without the dollar you don't look the world in the eye. Talk from now until next year—this is life in America.

RALPH: Then it's wrong. It don't make sense. If life made you this way, then it's wrong!... life's different in my head! (95, emphasis mine).

Ralph's idealism, unlike Moe's, is predicated on a movement away from consumer culture. Because he claims that life is different in his head, he believes by the end of the play that it is possible to gain the consumer paradise without being trapped among material goods in the warehouse where he works: "once upon a time I thought I'd drown to death in bolts of silk and velour. But I grew up these last few weeks. Jake said a lot" (96). It is in the contrast between these two visions of paradise, both depicted sympathetically in Awake and Sing!, that we can see Odets' ambivalence about a culture of abundance. Moe and Hennie's consumerist utopia and Ralph's Marxist vision are intimately connected through images of fruit and other commodities,
but the methods to achieve them are diametrically opposed.

Thus, the status of Jacob's records is another indication of Odets' lingering uncertainty regarding the marketplace, for *Awake and Sing!* invests material objects themselves with the idealism of Jacob's ineffective socialism. He plays his records over and over because he is unable to bring his ideas to fruition in practice. He takes comfort in the commodity as a symbol of the ideal. Of course, it is common for human beings to place talismanic importance in a consumer good, especially in response to what is perceived as a failure of idealism:

Confronted with the recognition that reality is impervious to cultural ideals, a community may displace these ideals. It will remove them from daily life and transport them to another cultural universe, there to be kept within reach but out of danger. The displaced meaning strategy allows a culture to remove its ideals from harm's way. . . . Like cultures, individuals display a characteristic refusal to attribute the failure of ideals to the ideals themselves (McCracken, 106, 108).

Jacob has invested his records with the power to signify utopia, since in the real world where lack of material things pester all the Bergers, he is unable to realize such dreams. To keep them safe from practical rebuttal and destruction, he transfers them to the consumable object, an accepted form of idealism in a consumer culture. McCracken argues that the investment of material goods with cultural meaning transfers the realization of that meaning to another time: "Sometimes it is not a glorious past that becomes the location of unfulfilled ideals but a glorious future. . . [they are] temporal locations in which in which ideals can find protection from the possibility of contradiction" (107). Like Myron's longing for the days of Teddy Roosevelt, Jacob's imagination of a future "new world" is dislocated from the present reality in order to
protect the fragile possibility of those ideals. Moreover, Jacob’s confession of failure to Ralph is not merely a ritual of self-abasement, but rather a deliberate dissociation of his failure to act from the ideals that called him to change the world. By admitting that the ideas were sound, but the practice faulty, Jacob can continue to believe in the utopia promised by the Caruso records and continue to listen to them with pleasure. He can continue as well to look upon Ralph with hope.

The records become a central symbol of the play in another way, for they affiliate visions of paradise with the mechanisms of popular, consumer culture, highlighting the incongruity between the idealism with which Jacob regards the records and the thoroughly common, mass produced and easily obtainable means of promising those desires. After all, Morty the businessman was the one who purchased the record player for his father. In this sense, Jacob’s vision of utopia is ultimately dependent on consumer-oriented industrial productivity. The therapeutic escape from the alienation of modern society is promised by commodities available as a direct result of mass production, and available only to participants in a culture of consumption. Therefore, though the records function as a repository for ideals which keeps them from danger, they are tied up within the consumer culture by virtue of their status as commodities. McCracken sees this ideological investment in material goods as unavoidable: commenting on the film *Citizen Kane*, for example, he argues that "the real nature of Kane’s difficulty is not that he seeks happiness in things. The displacement strategy moves all of us to similar attempts. The real nature of his difficulty is that he is unable to determine in which of his possessions this happiness is really (or apparently) present" (111).

Kane’s lack of knowledge, of course, is not Jacob’s problem; he is quite clear about where his happiness is invested: his records and his books. In *Awake and Sing!* , however, it is clear to
everyone that Jacob's records are powerless to achieve practical action—Moe's and Bessie's mockery of Jacob are underscored by Morty's dismissal of his father's critiques of capitalist society: "that's a pile of chopped liver, Pop. . . . I bought you a phonograph . . . stick to Caruso" (72). The power of the records, rather, lies in what future happiness, transcending the "petty conditions" of the Berger household, they suggest for Jacob. Odets indicates by the use of the commodity as repository of Jacob's idealism, however, that such an escape had become chimerical by the time Awake and Sing! was written. The consumer culture had already deeply, inexorably and inescapably pervaded American life and idealism.

Even Jacob, then, has become implicated, unwittingly, in the consumer culture. Indeed, the language he speaks is often similar to that used by advertisers and the capitalists, indicating that the language of the commodity has become the common means of communication in the Berger household. They are able to communicate only in terms of food and consumption, even when they are condemning the effects of consumer culture. For example, Jacob's delineation of Ralph's problems is profoundly anti-consumerist while at the same time equating plenty with material goods: "in a house like this he (Ralph) don't realize even the possibilities of life. . . . He dreams all night of fortunes. Why not? Don't it say in the movies he should have a personal steamship, pyjamas for fifty dollars a pair and a toilet like a monument? But in the morning he wakes up and for ten dollars he can't fix the teeth" (71-2). The terms of dispute are now thoroughly wrapped up within the language of commodities and advertising, so Jacob can only argue that Ralph's frustration comes from a lack of material goods rather than an overabundance of desire. The "possibilities of life" of which Jacob speaks—like the "consumerist pleasures of 'the little things in life'" which Rita Barnard noted had become a concern even for the poorest of
families—are very much in keeping with the growing cultural emphasis on consumption. Even someone as opposed to a system of mass production as Jacob can find no language outside that system with which to voice his utopian desires. The language of utopia had already been co-opted by the advertisers, the practice of consumption cemented in place by government policy.3

Jacob's inability to escape the consumer culture is an indication of how clearly Odets recognized the pervasiveness of the marketplace in the daily lives of his characters. In his plays, the commodity carries ideological power and meaning as well as having practical use. Part of the power of material goods lies in their sheer physicality, their actual presence. Thus, while Morty and Bessie can point directly to the food on the table as evidence that they are well off, Jacob can only cling to a vague idealism that is itself invested in material objects. For example, Morty tells his father, "Without a rich man, you don't have a roof over your head. You don't know it?" (72). The physical presence of the consumer culture is an indisputable fact; Jacob cannot refute it, for the ideology is invested in the countless physical objects surrounding them. Like the recognition of characters such as Keller and Edna in Waiting for Lefty, the consumer culture fights its battles on the physical as well as the ideological planes.

In his book The System of Objects, Jean Baudrillard has argued that "Man's technical power . . . has no common measure with the human being or the human body" (55). Indeed, Baudrillard's thesis suggests that the separation of the body from the physical effort required to do something by way of mechanization—he uses the example of a light switch—has a parallel in the distance between the produced object and the effort made to produce it. Commodities, separated from the labor that made them, are produced seemingly without effort. Furthermore, this distance between subject and object implies a pervasive belief system underlying the mass produced object,
a system which takes the object as a measure of the ideal as well as the real. As Baudrillard comments, "The way objects are used in everyday life implies almost an authoritarian set of assumptions about the world. . . . what the technical object bespeaks . . . is a world without effort, an abstract and completely mobile energy, and the total efficacy of sign-gestures" (58).

There is a difference between natural production from the land and mass production of the factory, but as Odets was aware, and as Lears has demonstrated, the lines between factory and field were often deliberately blurred. Jacob's attempts to get at the roots of a burgeoning consumer culture are doomed to failure. The marketplace operates on the level of the physical but signifies at the level of the mythological.

McCracken, too, has noted the difficulty of dissociating the physical object from the ideology with which it is invested: "Radical groups may successfully dispute the political and social principles on which their society is founded. But it proves much more difficult to root out old ideas from the most secret and perhaps most persuasive loci, the physical objects of the material world" (132). Thus, while Odets favorably contrasts Jacob's Marxist speeches and reasoning with the self-serving sensualism of Morty or the bourgeois desire for respectability that characterizes Bessie, it is harder for Jacob (as it is for Ralph at the end of the play—he's still "Looking for a chance to get to first base" [97], as he was at the beginning of the play) to escape the consumer culture which surrounds him: he buys cigarettes, books, records. Indeed, it is precisely because of this emotional and ideological investment in material goods that Bessie's violent smashing of the albums, an act that precipitates Jacob's suicide, seems even more grotesque to an audience. It is clear that these records are the last vestige of his idealism; her act is the symbolic shattering of any utopia existing outside of consumer capitalism.
Bessie's act of retribution is prefigured by Myron's indulgently indifferent response to Jacob's sharp accusations earlier in Act II. Jacob asks him:

You! You worked for all the capitalists. You harvested the fruit from your labor? You got God! But the past comforts you? The present smiles on you, yes? It promises you the future something? Did you find a piece of earth where you could live like a human being and die with the sun on your face? Tell me, yes, tell me. I would like to know myself. But on these questions, on this theme—the struggle for existence—you can't make an answer. The answer I see in your face... the answer is your mouth can't talk (73).

As if in confirmation, Myron does not respond immediately. His next line, in fact, is the simple but telling "We're ready to eat, Momma" (74). Jacob's use of fruit as a metaphor for the benefits of a supposedly productive society mirrors that of Odets in many of his plays; fruit is here both literal and figurative, a commodity as well as an ideal. Jacob's assertion that Myron is unable to use his mouth for anything other than consumption (ironic in the light of his own admission to Ralph that he has done nothing but talk and drink tea) is in part confirmed by Myron calling everyone to the dinner table. But the Berger family still has food on the table, perhaps a direct result of working for the capitalists that Jacob derides. To Morty's assertion that "Without a rich man, you don't have a roof over your head. You don't know it?" Myron adds the admonishment "Now you can't bite the hand that feeds you" (72).

At one level in *Awake and Sing!*, consumption of food appears to be a good only affordable within the limits of a consumer society, and as such, the escape from a consumer society is as implausible as Jacob's belief in his Caruso records. The accusatory rhetoric of Jacob,
which imagines a paradise full of sun elsewhere (it is snowing that day outside the Berger household) is rendered less effective by the food that surrounds them at the dinner table. Odets recognized that there were clear rewards for the consumer culture, and while his idealism may have been with Jacob and Leo Gordon in imagining a future world of free and easy natural abundance, such visions are perhaps so vague because even by the mid-thirties it was virtually impossible to imagine American culture outside of a consumer ideology.

Just as it is particularly important to an understanding of Odets that we recognize that the vehicles of such utopian desires are commodities, it is necessary to see that the successes of the culture of abundance are, as much as the failures, at the centre of his plays. Of course, in the Depression world of which *Awake and Sing!* was a reflection, the disparities between real and ideal show themselves greater than in times of prosperity: more people were unemployed, more people hungry. In the play, Jacob is unable to find work, Ralph is only working a few days a week, as is Myron, and the hard-working Sam only brings in twenty-one dollars a week. As commodities become more valuable in terms of real (physical and psychological) cost to the purchasers, they become increasingly idealized. Rather than leading away from a consumerist ideology, it leads people further into one, for as the commodity becomes the concrete symbol of the possible ideal, its purchase is hard evidence of the ideal's possibility. McCracken argues that "the use of goods to recover displaced meaning is one of the origins of consumption in modern society" (114, emphasis mine).

Baudrillard goes even further than McCracken, arguing that "everything that cannot be invested in human relationships is invested in objects... Objects undoubtedly serve in a regulatory capacity with regard to everyday life, dissipating many neuroses and providing an
outlet for all kinds of tensions and for energies that are in mourning" (System of Objects, 90).

Thus the struggles, pain and disillusionment of the Bergers are in part mediated by such a "regulatory" investment of belief in the consumer good. Indeed, the capitalist paradise Jacob ridicules is the economic norm for most of the other characters in the play, and while Ralph has never had the pair of black and white shoes he always wanted, our sympathies are with his desire for them. The Bergers do not suffer the kind of economic hardship that plagues Joe and Edna in Waiting for Lefty (or even that which is implied for the Gordons at the end of Paradise Lost).

With Morty's reluctant help, they have gained a small measure of physical comfort, some ability to enjoy the "fruits" that are offered by their society. They have food on the table (though by the end of the play, there is just a "lone apple" in the house); they have enough money for a doctor when they need one; they even have the ability to go to a movie every now and then.

However, underlying Bessie and Myron's practical belief that they can't bite the hand that feeds them is a kind of desperate capitalist idealism that ignores the economic hardships that Jacob claims are endemic to consumer society. Their persistent attempts to achieve plenty by bypassing the traditional platitude that Myron espouses ("Merit never goes unrewarded" [41]) take various manifestations—games, contests, the horses, and the Irish Sweepstakes—and culminate in their attempt to capitalize quickly on Jacob's death by "shtupping" the insurance adjustor. Reality belies the promise, so they look to the past (Myron's idealization of Teddy Roosevelt) or to a golden future as a way to circumvent the Alger success formula without explicitly denying its validity. The fact that a family two streets over won the Irish sweepstakes is evidence that prosperity is quite literally just around the corner. Bessie admits "they threw a out a family on Dawson Street today. All the furniture on the sidewalk. A fine old woman with gray
hair." But when Myron tells her that a butcher "won eighty thousand dollars," her economic opportunism takes over: "Say, you can't tell—lightning never struck us yet. If they win on Beck Street we could win on Longwood Avenue" (43).

The ideal of Edenic abundance therefore remains—for Myron and Bessie, at least—ideologically rooted in the strictures of the puritan work ethic despite the failure of that ethic in practical terms. Certainly there are tangible rewards from the abundance offered by industrial production and efficient management of natural resources, not only for Morty the "self-made" capitalist, but for everyone in the play: variety shows, movies, chopped liver, even fruit. But Odets also suggests that in a consumer culture, how one acquires consumer goods is as important as the fact of possession. Participation is a recognition of merit, as Bessie's emphasis on respectability shows, but it is also an indication of having surrendered a deeply utopian idealism for another, more commercial one. If the system is, as Moe characterizes it, "All a racket—from horse racing down. Marriage, politics, big business—everybody plays cops and robbers" (71), the price for participation is a surrender of the kind of idealism Jacob espouses. But by emphasizing the similarity between Moe's consumer paradise and Jacob's (and Ralph's) Marxist utopia, Odets evinces a deep ambivalence about the culture of abundance which had taken over the American marketplace. Because he was certain that consumer culture had already transformed American life radically and permanently (though he recognized that ideals like the Alger myth remained powerful in capitalist ideology), Odets wanted instead to understand what the costs would be in human terms. The problem was not that the marketplace was necessarily evil. The problem, rather, lay in how to gain full participation for all without being smothered in goods (as Ralph fears), devoured (as Bessie imagines that her life has been "sucked away" [85]),
or becoming a commodity oneself (like Jacob).

III. The Sweet Smell of Decay

If fruit (or food in general) in plays like *Waiting for Lefty* or *Awake and Sing!* is generally used as an indication of natural bounty and the somewhat idealized abundance of a free marketplace—whatever problems may exist in distribution—the irony remains that while fruit works as an apt metaphor for paradise it is nevertheless the temptation of fruit which ultimately evicts its residents from the Garden. As I have argued, in Odets' plays food enters the marketplace as a commodity at the same time it serves ideologically as a symbol. Thus, it becomes a sign of power on two levels. First, the free consumption of natural bounty becomes enmeshed in the biological food chain and in the vicissitudes of the marketplace. People must find a way to afford the food they desire and which they need for survival. Secondly, on a more abstract level, the drama Odets depicts in his later plays shows how the mythology of the Garden is confronted by the ritual of subservience and self-destruction which gains access to it. To be able to consume freely means that one has to sell oneself, figuratively (Kewpie in *Paradise Lost*, for example) or quite literally (Charlie Castle in *The Big Knife*). The marketplace starves idealistic dreams as it feeds the body. Ideologically as well as practically, then, consumption requires sacrifices. As Odets suggested in *Waiting for Lefty* and *Paradise Lost*, it requires participation in the marketplace on a literal level, as a buyer and seller. Furthermore, it requires that one be metaphorically consumed oneself, as a commodity, in order to participate in the marketplace at all.

In *Waiting for Lefty*, Joe and Edna's problems, like Keller's, are defined as much
biologically as ideologically, their hunger is a function of both the body and the soul. *Awake and Sing!* develops the symbolic use of food further, leading into the ideological examination characterizing many of Odets' later plays. Of course, fruit remains fruit, food remains food, and commodities remains commodities at a concrete level, but they also serve in these early plays as generally unambiguous indications of Edenic plenty. Where images of consumption in *Awake and Sing!* and *Waiting for Lefty* become symbolic, it is generally to indicate the promise of plenty, both consumerist and utopian. Food and fruit are concrete goods, material objects are to be wished for. But from *Paradise Lost* onward, such generally pleasant images of abundant food and fruit become coupled with darker ones: Eden fills with menace. Healthy and unhealthy images of production—mostly of the natural world—are mixed as Odets suggests that the dream of plenty held by the characters is not only out of reach, but that to gain it means to be consumed oneself. Food is one commodity among many, part of the marketplace with its own price, but at the same time it is a special commodity that serves an ideological purpose.

Thus, when Pike in *Paradise Lost* speaks of the evils of war and the failures of American idealism, he invests much of his language, characteristically, with notions of consumption:

> The bellyrobbers have taken clothes from our backs. We slept in subway toilets here. In Arkansas we picked fruit. I followed the crops north and dreamed of a warmer sun. We lived on and hoped. We lived on garbage dumps. Two of us found canned prunes, ate them and were poisoned for weeks. One died. Now I can't die. But we gave up to despair and life took quiet years. We worked a little. Nights I drank myself insensible. Punched my own mouth. Yes, first American ancestors and me. . . . Living on a boat as a night watchman, tied to shore, not
here nor there! The American jitters! Idealism! *(Punches himself violently)*

There's for idealism! (191).

This speech by Pike, the radical voice of the play, is a striking contrast to the romanticized vision of a new world offered by Leo Gordon at the end of the play. Where Leo's speech is vague and visionary, Pike's is specific and condemnatory. Fruit is no longer the product of a teeming natural world brought under benevolent control by technology. It is rather a dubious and dangerous necessity, poisoned by the technology that cans it and the "bellyrobbers" who offer it for sale. The marketplace reveals itself in Pike's bodily suffering and in the destruction of his idealism. A fruit picker himself, Pike is excluded from the products of his labor by the industrialization of the natural world, and feeds off the waste products of that world. It is not hard to see, then, in Pike's violent declarations that he punched his own mouth and drank himself into oblivion that consumption is no longer a pleasure. The mouth, the site of bodily consumption, is a painful reminder of the banishment from the "Eden" he helped to create with his labour. His outburst is a strong indictment of the ideal of consumption, a check on the idealism promised by Leo at the end of the play by the sheer hard facts of Pike's own existence.³

Gabriel Miller disagrees that Pike's radicalism is a defining concept in the play, noting that "he looks forward to change but does nothing to put his theories into action, nor does he seem entirely sure that the system should be changed" *(Clifford Odets, 56)*. Michael Mendelsohn, on the other hand, sees Pike as being one of only two distinctive voices in the play (the other is Kewpie), and one who also "becomes Leo's guide and mentor" *(Clifford Odets, 36)*. C. W. E. Bigsby remarks that Pike is both radical and romantic, much like Odets himself: "he represents not only the need to work for the transformation of his society—a need in which he himself is
deficient—but also the necessity to make space for beauty. He is . . . an expression of Odets's own amalgam of romanticism and radicalism" (161). While Pike seems as passive and confused as the other characters in the play—he responds to Leo's question "what is to be done?" with a plaintive "I don't know . . . I mean I don't know . . . " (191)—he nevertheless has a clearer vision of what is happening to the country than the others. He is, as he says, merely "waiting for a whole world to hang itself. Enough rope inchin' up to strangle all of us! In the meantime, look for tough minded people" (198).

There is scarcely in Pike's world view a romanticized vision such as exists for Leo, Jacob, Ralph, Keller, or even Edna, a sense that the fruits of production can be better distributed, that plenty is available for all. Rather, Pike is a constant reminder to the Gordons (and the audience) of the ills of a system which perverts the natural world, a system that promises plenty but betrays the dream. Mocking the politician Foley, who theorizes that many people are tired because they don't get enough alkaline in their diets, Pike restates the contrast between acid and alkaline as a contrast between abundance and scarcity: "this is about the richest city in the world. A person starves to death in it every other day. Not enough alkaline. That's what it means! Hunger and degradation—eighty-twenty" (168). Pike is more a realist than a romantic; he draws pictures of a man who starved to death on the street, and compiles statistics about unemployment, poverty, and disillusionment, an ongoing documentation of the failure of abundance. He therefore questions Clara's assertion that "Rich and poor—it's a natural condition" by recontextualizing the word "natural." He tells Clara, "it is not natural for men to starve while means to produce food are close at hand" (166, emphasis his). Like the destruction of agricultural overproduction while millions went hungry, Pike recognizes the paradox of a culture of abundance in which many are
unable to consume. For Pike, what is natural is what is plentiful, but any vision of a free and easy paradise like Leo’s has been deeply undercut by his bitter experience of Depression America.

It is also significant to note that Pike does not seem to participate deeply in the consumer world that surrounds the Gordons. He is a simple, practical man who tends furnaces and plays chess with the Gordons’ son Julie. The coat the Gordons gave him is the first one he’s owned in four years. By virtue of his difficult life (he has lost his two sons in World War I), Pike realizes better than any other character in the play the price that must be paid to participate in consumer capitalism, the toll that participation in a market economy takes on the lives of individuals. His exchange with Pearl near the beginning of the second act emphasizes the personal nature of the Depression for Odets’ characters, its effects even on individuals who imagine themselves immune:

PEARL: I’m homesick all the time. For what?

PIKE: No one talks about the depression of the modern man’s spirit, of his inability to live a full and human life.

PEARL: What?

PIKE: I’m sayin’ the smell of decay may sometimes be a sweet smell. There she is alone in her room with the piano—the white keys banked up like lilies and she suckin’ at her own breast.

PEARL: You must be crazy! What are you talking about?

PIKE: You. Your brother—

PEARL: Yes, I know. You think radical ideas will save us all. Just give the world its pound of bread! For my part, I discovered long ago the comic aspects of this so-called class war.
PIKE: Yes, sixteen million unemployed is a pretty comic situation.

PEARL: Who cares about sixteen million? I'm interested in myself!

PIKE: Let's take yourself. Where's your boy friend?

PEARL: Mind your business!

PIKE: You liar and traitor to your own heart's story! (suddenly whirling on Pearl, and gripping her by the arms) You! Lay awake dreamin' at night. Don't you know it ain't comin', that land of your dreams, unless you work for it?

PEARL: I'm not sex starved, do you hear? I'm not! (199, emphasis his).

In his characterization of Pearl, Pike identifies the chief concerns of Paradise Lost: the sterility and overweening self-absorption of the middle class, the failure of the American dream, the psychic and physical toll on ordinary people trying to participate in the culture of abundance. He characterizes Pearl as feeding on herself, virtually dead, hypnotized by her unrealized dreams to the point of inaction. In Odets, the physical bounty of the American Eden is reconstituted on a human scale; the body, especially the female body, becomes equated with food quite specifically so that the participation in a culture of abundance becomes dependent upon the surrender of the self for consumption. The nature of consumption as an economic process is dependent on the willingness of people to offer their bodies (as Keller has given his eye, or Pike his health) for the sake of production; the physical production and consumption of commodities is based upon an ideological consumption of people. Thus, Pike's vision of Pearl feeding on herself (an act of consumption outside the domain of the marketplace) is for him one more indication of the generally violent nature of the world outside, a world that feeds on people. Disappointed in love, unwilling to participate in the "class war" she sees as comic, Pearl tries to escape a world where
money is important to the living of everyday life (as Jacob tries to do in *Awake and Sing!* ) by playing her piano and hiding in her room. In this sense, Pike's image of her is fitting. Because she is unwilling, or unable, to feed on the fruits of a consumer society, she is forced to feed on herself.

As Pike suggests, there are no rewards for those who do not participate in the marketplace. The "smell of decay" of which he speaks, then, is the stench of rotting fruit, the waste of potential abundance, of life. Indeed, at the end of the play, when her source of nourishment, the piano, is sold like the rest of the Gordon's furniture, Pearl is left broken and isolated; Clara comments, "that piano's her whole life" (222). Like Jacob's records but without the supporting ideology, Pearl's music is her attempt to escape the marketplace, to invest a material object with a hope denied by the deprivations of her life. But as the experience of the Gordons shows, until one is taken into the market and consumed, one cannot afford to consume. Pearl's life is taken away because she refuses to let herself be consumed: she dies on the vine.

**IV. Bodies Like Mushmelons**

Pike's sharp analysis of Pearl's situation therefore identifies another key metaphorical complex woven into Odets' plays surrounding the power of the body, especially the female body, as a source of production. Woman are in Odets identified directly with life-giving powers of reproduction and creation as well as with images of consumption. Indeed, Pearl's strange response to Pike's accusation—"I'm not sex starved, do you hear?"—seems almost a *non sequitur* until we acknowledge that in Odets' plays, the biological acts of sex and reproduction are intimately connected with the production and consumption of consumer goods. The struggle for a "pound of bread" is therefore transmuted into a larger struggle: for dreams, for love, for sex, for
babies, for a full human life. Where others are starving, Pearl is "sex starved;" instead of feeding off the abundance of Mother Nature, she lies there "sucking at her own breast," yearning for a world that no longer exists.

Odets' next play to deal with images of fruit and consumption in a similar way was *Rocket to the Moon* (1938), which deals with the attempts of a middle aged dentist to find love and meaning in an affair with his young secretary. At the time of its first production, *Rocket to the Moon* both intrigued and disappointed newspaper reviewers. Brooks Atkinson, one of the few who liked the play, nevertheless remarked that it "expires in a state of loquacious confusion. . . nothing much has been accomplished or clarified." Still, Atkinson remained a fan of Odets, remarking that the play was "torn out of the quivering fabric of life. Mr. Odets has a special genius for portraying footless characters who are imprisoned within the shell of economic circumstances and personal desires." He notes Phil Cooper's long, anguished speech in Act II as one of "the dramatic moments of the season" (*New York Times*, 23 January, 1938). While they generally admired the performances of Morris Carnovsky as Ben Stark and Eleanor Lynn as Cleo Singer, other contemporary critics were less kind about *Rocket to the Moon*. George Jean Nathan, always dismissive of Odets, remarked that "Clifford Odets continues to disappoint those critics who over-estimated him in the first place" (*Encyclopaedia*, 288) and dismissed the play for being merely a trite and hackneyed love story. John Mason Brown admired the first act as "the finest Mr. Odets has yet written" but ultimately calls the play "the most exasperating kind of failure" (*Broadway in Review*, 176, 178). The most common reason cited for the failure of the play was that the ending seems false, that there is, in reality, no escape of the kind Cleo seeks.

Still, where Cleo is going remains unclear. Her act is one of rejection rather than assertion, but as
Pasi Falk has noted, the idea of luxury (for Cleo, abundance means "a whole full world with all the trimmings") "is first of all defined negatively, as a violation of Law and Order" (99). Thus, her rejection of both men is an attempt to locate abundance outside of a world where she is expected to serve as a commodity, a world which sees her as a mistress to Ben or an ornament to Prince.

Cleo, the central female character in Rocket to the Moon, is an important example of the female body as commodity, perhaps the clearest in all of Odets' plays. She is the one character with youth and vitality in a play about middle age crisis and frustration. She is, as Mr. Prince comments to the frustrated Dentist Ben, one who can "make you a living man again" (350). She is a woman who wants to have "babies, three or four... I'm healthy enough to have a dozen!" (374), and who refuses a marriage of convenience to seek a "whole full world, with all the trimmings" (417). Cleo is associated generally with production and creation, but more importantly and specifically with the natural abundance of fruit. Of course, her association with fruit is, as in the rest of Odets, ambivalent. On the one hand, she is the only character who can in some way still offer the promise of abundance. Ben has, as both Frenchy and Mr. Prince remark, fallen asleep in his marriage; Belle, his wife, is unable to bear children (the play opens on the third anniversary of their child's death), and Mr. Prince has a very different view of life from Cleo, less idealistic and romantic. He is old, safe, unproductive; his only enjoyments seem to be making money on the market and listening to music, both passive pleasures. As Cleo tells him, "You've lived your life. I think you're good, but you're too old for me" (417).

On the other hand, Cleo's association with fruit also puts her in the position of a commodity, something that must be consumed in order to have value in a world occupied by the marketplace (as Veblen well knew, commodities that are not consumed have no value; only in
deliberate use, or deliberate waste, do they come to mean anything in a marketplace). Thus Cleo is objectified by others, characterized as a commodity at the same time that they envy her: Frenchy calls her "Juicy Fruit" (361) and "Angel Skin" (like her dress of angel skin satin [359]); Ben—cribbing from Shakespeare—remarks "how green you are and fresh in this old world" (387); Mr. Prince tells her "you're a girl like candy, a honeydew melon—a delicious girl" (369), and comments to Ben (in front of her) that she has "womanhood fermenting through her veins" (370). Even Cleo herself, in an image that looks back to both Awake and Sing! and Paradise Lost, tells them at the end of the play, "No man can take a bite out of me, like an apple and throw it away" (411). Here, the Fall has taken bodily form, so that a culture of consumption which promises everything requires in turn that the self serve as a commodity.

Nevertheless, while Cleo may resist her own commodification, her only answer, like that of Moe and Hennie, is to seek Paradise elsewhere. When Prince questions her choice not to marry him, "You'll go down the road alone—like Charlie Chaplin?," she responds lyrically, in a manner typical of Odets endings:

Yes, if there's roads, I'll take them. I'll go up all those roads until I find what I want. I want a love that uses me, that needs me. Don't you think there's a world full of joyful men and women? Must all men live afraid to laugh and sing? Can't we sing at work and love our work? It's getting late to play at life; I want to live it. . . . I don't ask for much. . . . I'm a girl, and I want to be a woman, and the man I love must help me be a woman! Ben isn't free. He's a citizen of another country. . . . none of you can give me what I'm looking for, a whole full world, with all the trimmings! (416-17)
The endings of most of the early Odets plays, as I have argued about Waiting for Lefty, Awake and Sing!, and Paradise Lost, offer new beginnings, or rather long for them, but these new beginnings are generalized because it was difficult even in the early stages of a consumer oriented culture to imagine a place outside it. Indeed, a tentative belief in an escape from consumer capitalism is, more than any other reason, why Odets plays (especially this one) seem "dated" to many critics. The idealism which triggers hopeful endings to a number of his plays is increasingly out of step with the powerful consumer culture in which his characters are trapped.

It is not an overstatement to say that the ending of Rocket to the Moon has confused and irritated critics since the beginning. Gerald Weales doesn't necessarily see Rocket to the Moon as dated, but finds in Odets' economic determinism—"his play is finally based on the assumption that society created the characters" (CO, 134)—the foundations for the same sort of false ending that characterized Paradise Lost and Awake and Sing!. He argues that Cleo's leaving at the end "embodies not real hope but the sentimental longing for the happy land" (Clifford Odets, 135). Edward Murray also argues that too much has been made of the economic problems in Rocket to the Moon and suggests that "there are . . . many things other than economic going on in the early plays" (92). Gabriel Miller argues in much the same way that economic considerations have little to do with the problems that Ben's office partner, Phil Cooper, experiences. Rather, Cooper "functions as a warning figure for Ben, his disillusion and despair . . . prefiguring Ben's eventual state if he does not take the chance to ally himself again with the 'poetry' that Cleo represents. . . . In Cooper, Ben and the audience may glimpse the painful consequences of forsaken idealism in the life of a man overwhelmed by the pressure of the mundane" (Clifford Odets, 105).

While Weales is certainly correct in his assessment that the ending of Rocket to the Moon
is vague, perhaps even sentimental, the economic imperatives that the characters face are not obviated by such an ending. Certainly for Odets the idea of creation and production, was intimately connected with the economic constraints placed upon people in a market economy. For example, Odets' bitter characterization of the script of *Rocket to the Moon* as "veal chops" for the Group makes the connection between his life and work even more explicit. The economic concerns of the writer in the marketplace are never entirely absent from his work, but are bound up in the very act of producing it. And while Murray and Miller are correct to say there are other concerns than economic ones in the early plays, it nevertheless remains clear that what shape the world of Odets' plays takes is largely determined by economic factors. People do not always talk of money, nor are their actions entirely determined by economics, but it is also true that Odets recognized that participation in a market society necessitates certain kinds of behavior. Cleo's exit, alone, at the end of the play, then, is both an acknowledgement of the power of a consumer society as well as a bold and idealistic attempt to escape that power by refusing to become a commodity. Her dreams are a direct reaction to a difficult economic situation. She remarks to Ben at one point, "My home life is fearful—eight in one apartment... I have all of the inconvenience of love with none of the pleasure" (373). Nevertheless, she vows to escape the narrow economic circumstances: "Would you laugh if I told you I want to be a dancer? Would you? Or an actress?... they won't hold me back" (373-4).

Cleo's rebellion against her own commodification is thus posited as a creative act, an assertion of self in the face of the impersonality of the city and a culture which alienates human beings from their own lives. Cleo's belief in the natural goodness of the body as working against the monetary pressures of the marketplace becomes clear when she tells Ben conspiratorially:
I think happiness is everything. You can have a castle, and what have you got if you're not happy? An important person once told me Mr. Rockefeller—you know, that one, his father—he had a silver windpipe. With all that money! It goes to show you (363).

This image is a significant one for Odets' play, for it directly connects the idea of the body to the idea of the commodity. Rather than merely saying the wealthy are not happy, she locates the source of unhappiness in the human body. The idea of a piece of Rockefeller's natural body replaced by precious metal is a horrifying image to Cleo's way of thought. It is the Alger myth turned on its head, a reconfiguration of a popular mythology in the light of bodily pleasure. Cleo's idealism leads her (as Lear argued the therapeutic culture did) to seek experience rather than to accrue wealth, but her dreams are so vague—and clichéd—because there is no language outside of popular culture for her to express her idealism.

Thus in her visions of cruises, fancy parties, the "beautiful coat" that Prince gives her, the marketplace attempts to reinscribe itself on her body even as she tries to escape. Cleo is aware of this tension, and clings to the notion of a natural bounty and a native idealism that need to be protected from the mechanisms of the marketplace. When Prince tells her at the end, "I know your needs. I love your needs. . . . What do you have to lose?" Cleo responds, "Everything that's me" (416, emphasis in Odets). Cleo's body is therefore the contested ideological ground of Rocket to the Moon; it signifies the natural world so completely that Willy Wax, the loathsome dance producer, who describes himself as "a mechanical man in a mechanical era" (410) is bewildered by Cleo's fury at his advances.

Even more explicitly than Cleo's struggles for maturity and independence, Phil Cooper's
struggles are as manifestly economic as they are spiritual, moral, or emotional. Throughout the play, Cooper is at the brink of economic disaster: he is turned down for a loan, he cannot pay his rent, he is unable to pay the doctor's bills for his son's broken arm. Indeed, a closer examination of Cooper's position in the play makes clear the economic backdrop upon which Odets built *Rocket to the Moon*. While Ben and Cleo are more or less satisfied with their incomes (though Cleo's is referred to by Mr. Prince as "pigeon feed!" [342] and Belle is constantly worried that Ben is working for free), Cooper is unable to participate on even the most basic level in the society for which he went to war. A graduate of Columbia, he is dependent on Ben's largesse to keep his position. Things become so difficult for Cooper that he is forced to sell his blood in order to make money, the price of one pint exactly equal to one month's rent at the office:

COOPER: I decided to become a blood donor on the side.

CLEO (horrified): Oh, no!

COOPER: They pay well, thirty dollars a pint.

CLEO (in a low voice): A pint's a lot of blood, Dr. Cooper.

COOPER: A boy there gave fifteen times last year: a young fortune. He told me he lives on a plain diet, onions, and bread, no meats or anything.

STARK (after a pause): Phil . . . you mean it?

COOPER (bitterly): They didn't want me at first. But it seems I'm a type everybody needs . . . I'm a very common type.

STARK: Phil, you don't mean that!

COOPER: Why not? It's a legitimate business, like pressing pants or cleaning fish. 

(377)
The fact that Cooper can equate selling a product of his body with a "legitimate business" makes clear the economic nature of his predicament. The body has become quite literally a commodity. Indeed, though more despairing than Pike in *Paradise Lost*, Cooper is the voice of realism in *Rocket to the Moon*. His bitter realization that there is no paradise for him to look forward to—"If only they invented hydrants in the streets which give out milk and honey! . . . we'd be happier people. . . . Where can I sail away? To where?" (376).—is placed significantly as an interruption of Cleo's confession of love for Ben, showing that for Odets, it is clear that there is a deep interrelationship between personal desire and economic stability. There is throughout *Rocket to the Moon* a tension between functioning within the marketplace (Cooper's realization that he is a "common type") and finding rewards that apparently only exist outside it (Cleo's affirmation of the power of the "self"), or as Cooper pithily comments earlier in the play, "Who's got time to think about women! I'm trying to make a living!" (352).

Indeed, much of *Rocket to the Moon* is concerned with the effects of modern life upon love and relationships, but the images Odets utilizes almost invariably hover around economic concerns or images of consumption. Perhaps the clearest expression of Odets' belief that outside pressures come to bear on people seeking love comes from Frenchy in Act III:

> Who's got time for "love and the grace to use it"? Is it something apart, love? A good book you go to in a spare hour? An entertainment? Christ, no! It's a synthesis of good and bad, economics, work, play, all contacts . . . it's not a Sunday suit for special occasions. . . . In this day of stresses I don't see much normal life, myself included. The woman's not a wife. She's the dependent of a salesman who can't make sales and is ashamed to tell her so . . . the free exercise
of love, I figure, gets harder every day (404).

A number of critics have commented specifically on this passage in their analyses of *Rocket to the Moon*. Weales, because he sees determinism as marring the play, reads Frenchy's speech as implying that "love (happiness, the full life) would become possible only if the environment were altered" and suggests that "the play's social bedrock indicates that the situation cries out for another Ralph, another Leo to point towards the promised land" (Clifford Odets, 134). Gabriel Miller suggests that "insofar as the play's conclusion bears him out, Frenchy must be seen as the play's thematic spokesman" (Clifford Odets, 109). Both Weales and Miller are correct to a large degree, but while Weales identifies the economic strictures on Odets' characters, he suggests that Odets issues a blanket condemnation of the "system" rather than examining a culture of abundance and the effects it has on individuals. On the other hand, Miller recognizes that Odets is talking about idealism and the individual, but leaves out outside pressures entirely.

Mr. Prince, still embittered by his marriage, ties images of consumption and economics together in his characterization of that relationship. He comments to Ben "My daughter calls me a clown. The two of them, my wife included—with their bills they ate holes in me like Swiss cheese" (341). Developing the image further, Ben tells Belle towards the end of the play that "We're always worried. . . . we're two machines counting up the petty cash. Something about me cheats you—I'm not the man to help you be the best woman it's in you to be" (401). And just as Prince and Ben recognize the economic pressures on love relationships, Cleo and Cooper recognize the financial pressures on any human life in a capitalist marketplace. Cooper sees no escape into a consumerist paradise such as the one that motivated Moe and Hennie, and while transportation images abound in the play (the rocket of the title, the ships in the harbor that Prince
urges Ben to see, the cruise ships of which Cleo dreams, the "jalopy" that occupies Frenchy's free
time, even the fanciful image of Aladdin's lamp that Ben uses to pacify Belle's desire for a
vacation) the only one who actually goes anywhere is Cleo, and not until the end of the play. The
hot, stifling atmosphere of the dental office where the entire play takes place connects itself to the
fundamental unproductiveness of most of the characters.

Still, because of Cleo's exit at the end, *Rocket to the Moon* seems to be the most hopeful
of Odets' works about the possibility of escaping the paradox of the marketplace. Other of the
plays, and even the screenplay for the 1957 film *Sweet Smell of Success* (co-written with Ernest
Lehman, who wrote the original story upon which the script was based) are more pessimistic,
because the seductions of the consumer culture are too powerful. But as I have argued, if
commodification threatens all the characters in the plays, it is especially dangerous to women. In
many of Odets' plays, the idealism of a free and abundant Eden is manifested in the physical body,
especially the female body, as a source of natural productivity. However, the conflation of the
(idealized) productivity of the female body with images of consumption forces any reading of the
plays to recognize the deep ambivalence inherent in the work.

One must ask, too, whether the persistent references to female bodies as consumable
goods is the product of Odets' fertile imagination more than an examination of the Paradise myth
in the Depression. As Brenman-Gibson has detailed in her long psychoanalytic biography of
Odets, he was in many ways misogynistic, though she argues that it is a misogyny deeply
imbedded with idealization:

In a seductive pursuit of literally hundreds of women over the course of his life,

Odets in a concentration of underlying purpose would try actively to master a
variety of undigested experiences. . . . Having . . . come to the angry and depressed conclusion that no woman could be trusted to meet his wild hunger, and that every woman would, like his mother, betray and abandon him, he commenced early—with the precision of a computer—to choose women . . . he would feel justified in betraying or, indeed, destroying . . . although he would later achieve some mastery over these conflicts by shifting the arena to his plays, the pain throughout his actual life in his driven, compulsively repeated and mostly losing struggle for a liveable resolution of his early crises would be inordinate (627-28).  

It seems, though, that however Odets' misogyny manifested itself in his personal life, in the plays, the commodification of woman is mirrored by the commodification of men, albeit in a somewhat different way. Sometimes, they are commodities as well, as in the cases of Cooper, Joe Bonaparte, and Charlie Castle, but often Odets' male characters function as parasites upon the fecund world of production and consumption, a sort of nature gone awry. Kewpie, the small-time gangster in Paradise Lost, sleeps with his friend Ben's wife, Libby (whose body is characterized, typically, as "soft" and "juicy... like a mushmelon"[174]), despite the fact that he idealizes, even worships Ben.  

He continues the metaphor of consumption by telling Ben towards the end of the play, "I'm in you like a tape worm" (204). Like Pike's tainted fruit, the tapeworm is an unmistakable instance of consumption gone wrong, of a natural bounty that has become "nature red in tooth and claw."

Thus while Ben is caught up in the daily work of an overproductive marketplace—trying to sell useless "Mickey Mouse Drummer Boy" toys on the street corner—Kewpie, who operates (like Moe and like Fuseli) outside the legitimate marketplace, is having an affair with Libby.
Indeed, Ben's household is supported by Kewpie's secret donations, so that Ben is essentially consumed by that which offers him bounty. He is bitten by the hand that feeds him. Kewpie's vision is that of a debased utopia, one in which abundance is not natural but torn out of the world, and the imputation of parasitical dependence is shifted to those who wait, like Pearl, for oranges to drop into their mouths: "You gimme worms, the whole bunch..... I don't stop to say it ain't my cake. I cut a piece without asking" (223). The work ethic has taken the next step from a subjugation of the land to produce abundance to a subjugation of people to satisfy desire. Throughout Odets' work, the visions of Kewpie and Leo compete for precedence.

In his later work, especially The Big Knife (1949) and the screenplay of Sweet Smell of Success (1957), fruit and food imagery take on a more sinister cast. Images of meat, generally associated with debased (male) capitalism in the earlier plays (Morty in Awake and Sing! is associated with duck, goose, chopped liver and pastrami, all in two acts) abound, and the offer of natural abundance, symbolized by fruit in the earlier plays, is almost completely submerged in the examination of the human sacrifice necessary to participate in the consumer world. The Big Knife is the story of a film star trapped by blackmail in a studio he hates, but a life of abundance he loves. It uses the most bitter terms Odets can muster to indicate the failure of the culture of abundance. Thus California is characterized as "a place where an honest apple tree won't grow" (40), where Charlie Castle's early belief in Roosevelt is transmuted into belief in "what we had for lunch—roast beef, rare!" (7), where a woman is pictured as "cute as a skinned, parboiled ham" (40), and where talking frankly is characterized as throwing "the raw meat on the floor" (42). Charlie himself has become a piece of meat for the film studio, a commodity who refers to himself as a "rotten bunch of grapes" (49) and who kills himself to escape further degradation and
commodification: of the studio boss he says, "he gave me an appetizing name and now he thinks he'll eat me" (72). Thus, the commodification of those who would partake of the bounty of the culture of abundance is virtually complete. For Charlie, the idea of Eden has become completely debased because he has been forced to feed himself to the studio in order to keep consuming.

Much like The Big Knife, Sweet Smell of Success (1957), Odets' most successful screenplay, shows a world almost completely separated from any vision of paradise, and while images of food abound, they are almost invariably images of decay, corruption, parasitism, and exploitation. So the corrupt press agent confesses that the even more reprehensible columnist "uses any pepper to spice up his daily garbage" and defines their relationship in terms of a perverse religion: "a press agent eats a columnist's dirt and is expected to call it manna," while the columnist responds by calling the press agent "a cookie full of arsenic." Even the rare use of fruit imagery is separated from any notion of natural beauty; the cigarette girl tries to fight off the press agent's attempts to prostitute her by protesting that she is "not a bowl of fruit, a tangerine that peels in a minute," and while there are echoes of other female Odets characters compared with fruit, there is no sense here of any redeeming bounty or creation. Of course, The Big Knife and Sweet Smell of Success are more closely tied to Odets' work in Hollywood and work from a more overblown version of the Edenic myth and the corrupting process of the marketplace on the individual seeking that paradise.

Finally, any analysis of images of paradise in Odets would be incomplete without an examination of his last play, The Flowering Peach, written in 1954. In one sense, it harkens back to the earliest plays in its hopeful ending, as Noah, his sons and their wives set forth to begin the world anew after the flood. The image of the flowering fruit tree, as in the earlier plays, once
more reappears as a symbol of bounty, seemingly freely offered. But there is, as Noah reminds us, a price to pay for this rebirth. The outside world is destroyed, and even on the ark, Esther, Noah's wife, dies on the journey. Her loss is an indication of how difficult it is to "be fruitful and multiply" (83), that plenty implies sacrifice and loss. Indeed, throughout the play, Esther has been the dominant symbol of bounty and abundance, the glue that holds the family together and provides it with material and spiritual sustenance. Like Bessie in *Awake and Sing!*, she is almost always involved in the preparation of meals, and often uses food as a way to control situations; at one point, when Noah's visions become too much for her, she declares "we'll eat supper—that's real" (19). Later, when they pack for the ark, she takes to wearing a hat with fruit on it (Noah jokes that "with such a hat, you couldn't go hungry" [45]), thus identifying her visually throughout the rest of the play with images of abundance. Indeed, they know she is dead finally because her hat has fallen off.

It should be noted that the tone of Odets' final play is different from most of his other work, though it harkens back to *Awake and Sing!* in its use of Jewish themes and Jewish humour. Indeed, many contemporary commentators on the play noted that it was mellower and more gentle than many of Odets earlier works. Brooks Atkinson called it "beautiful. His finest [play] in fact" (*New York Times*, December 29, 1954) and noted that Odets is not setting himself up as an oracle. He does not pretend to have the magic formula." John Gassner remarked that *The Flowering Peach* appeared to be the personal testament of a rueful man content to accept contradiction and shortcomings in man and the world (*Theatre at the Crossroads*, 155). Certainly it is less strident than his earlier plays. As Odets himself commented, in an interview at the time the play was first produced, "I couldn't have written *The Flowering Peach* twenty years ago. As
you grow older, you mature. The danger is that in broadening, you may dilute your art. A growing writer always walks that tightrope" (New York Times, December 26, 1954).

However, despite the less strident tone of the play, it nevertheless remains consistent with his earlier work in the use of allegory and its emphasis on the fecundity of the natural world. There is tension in The Flowering Peach is most clearly delineated in the conflicts between Noah and his youngest son Japheth about the proper use of the world. Before he is knocked out by Noah and dragged onto the ark, Japheth refuses to board. He chooses rather to die in protest of the coming flood, declaring that "Someone . . . would have to protest such an avenging, destructive God!" (19). Japheth's reasons for resistance are made clear in a speech to Rachel. Looking down at the roads criss-crossing in the valley, Japheth exclaims, "Those roads down there! The patterns they make! They're not cobwebs, those roads, to be brushed away by a peevish boy! Those roads were made by men, men crazy not to be alone or apart! Men, crazy to reach each other! Well, they won't now" (49-50). The sense of community that Japheth sees in the idea of the roads is in direct conflict with Noah's divine mission to take the family out of the world and begin again. Noah wins the first part of the conflict by getting Japheth on the ark, but when Japheth gets Noah to agree to put a rudder on the ark, everyone undergoes a transformation. There is a radical change in attitude. The complete surrender to the will of God has become a joint responsibility between human action and divine guidance. Odets is thus able at the end of the play to suggest that "it's in man's hands to make or destroy the world" (85). The conflict is seemingly resolved, and though the world has been destroyed, it has also been recreated. As Japheth says, "the world looks washed" (82).

Nevertheless, the question remains about what kind of world has been created. Early on,
for example, Noah tells Japheth that he should take a wife because "the new world will need babies, bushels and bushels of babies." Though Japheth counters with "and what about the bushels of babies who will die in the flood?" (29)—a question that the play never satisfactorily answers—the use of the word "bushel" to indicate human beings is significant, for it equates human beings with grains, a product of the natural world but also a product produced for consumption. Still, there is a shift by the end of the play. When the ark lands, the human beings aboard it have become both the producers and the consumers of the natural bounty; there is a balance, an easiness of production that is distanced from the marketplace that has characterized most of Odets' previous plays.

In one sense, *The Flowering Peach* reads like an escape fantasy, the escape from a marketplace where people are commodities. The world is washed clean, and so can begin again. It is freed from all connections to a corrupt life, from the world where Noah is harassed in the town's market, where the businessman Shem bribes the tax collector. But Odets' hope is tempered by a realization that great effort is necessary to begin change, and a recognition that change may in fact be minimal. Indeed, there is an indication that everything will proceed within the family much as it did before the flood. For example, Noah decides to live with his son Shem because "it's more comfortable" (83), and Shem himself has acquired more cows and more material goods than all the others on the ark. It is in this tempered vision of a new paradise, one that recognizes the power of the marketplace and hopes rather to turn its benefit for good, that we see the greatest difference between *Waiting for Lefty* and *The Flowering Peach*. The radical message of Keller's "put fruit trees where our ashes are!", which seemed possible in the radical atmosphere of the thirties, had become by the Eisenhower era a similar sentiment expressed quite
differently: "I hope everyone gets everything their hearts desire" (83).

Thus, even though it shifts towards the end of his career, the examination of the myth of a lost paradise is central to much of Odets' work. It is also central to a study of his own career as a writer. Odets was obsessed throughout his later career with images of corruption, commodification and decay, but as the use of fruit and food images in the early plays suggest, Odets early on noted the pressures on an individual to maintain some sense of productivity in a culture rapidly giving itself over to consumption. Complaining about the poor reception of his play Night Music in 1940, Odets pictures himself besieged on all sides from people who want to devour him: "I sit here, believe it or not, like a juicy melon and they all keep coming at me with a spoon or fork or both!" (Time is Ripe, 69). The echoes are unmistakable—they suggest Libby, Cleo Singer, Hennie, a culture of consumption, and the misuse of natural abundance. The consistency of the images Odets uses to identify commodification in his plays and in his life suggests that he saw them as related, and so it is possible to read the life (though not as some sort of secret key to understanding the plays) as inextricably bound up with the same issues his plays address.
Chapter 4: "A Real Artist of the People": Odets and Popular Culture

Throughout his career, Odets was fascinated by the power of popular culture and determined to find a mode of artistic expression that would reach a large audience without becoming debased by an economic system of mass production. Much as he cherished a utopian vision of material plenty even in the midst of deprivation, he harboured even during his severest criticisms of consumer capitalism a strong vision of a progressive, useful popular culture. Such ambivalence towards the power of popular forms of art often emerges as a sort of cultural schizophrenia within Odets' work. On the one hand, he is among the sharpest and most constant critics of the debilitating power of mass-produced culture as a tool of consumer capitalism. He recognized popular culture as a dubious vehicle for the ideology of abundance. For example, in an unmistakable criticism of the "boy-meets-girl and they live happily ever after" formula of Hollywood movies, the bloody climax of his Clash by Night (1941) takes place in a projection booth. Jerry Wilinski strangles his friend Earl Pfeiffer (because Earl has had an adulterous affair with Jerry's wife) while "a typical Hollywood 'product'"—described by one character as "Suave and swank junk" (226-27)—plays on screen. On the other hand, Odets worked for most of his career at least part-time in the popular culture industry and maintained a belief that mass media had a potentially liberating and uplifting effect on audiences. By reaching a large number of people with the right message, progressive political and social action was possible.

Odets' ideal vision of popular expression usually took the shape of a socially committed theatre, much like the one he experienced with the Group or what he saw happening in the Federal Theatre Project. Indeed, more like the Federal Theatre than the Group, since Odets
always cherished the idea of his work being produced on a large scale. As Brenman-Gibson notes, he was "preoccupied" in 1938 with a plan to have the Federal Theatre Project mount simultaneous productions of *The Silent Partner* all over the country: "Odets was convinced that under these auspices he would convey ... authentic human experience... It was a dream for a serious national American 'folk-theatre'" (491). Odets was well aware of the limitations of Broadway, where even a socially committed theatre like the Group ended up succumbing to financial pressures before reaching a wide audience. He looked for a way to bring a meaningful—for both artist and audience—work of art to a great number of people. In a telling example, Brenman-Gibson relates a conversation Odets had in 1938 with actress Helen Hayes and her husband, playwright Charles MacArthur, detailing his ideas for a "Charlie Theatre":

> When Miss Hayes asked what he meant by a "Charlie Theatre," Odets replied, "Well, you're an actress married to a man named Charlie. I'm a playwright and I have a brother-in-law named Charlie. So-and-so is a director and he has a son named Charlie. Suddenly the government passes a law everybody named Charlie is going to be electrocuted at midnight, New Year's. So you and I, so-and-so the director, all of us who have Charlies threatened, get together and we write, direct, stage, and act a play, and the audience comes and everybody in the audience has some Charlie whom he's trying to save and then you get something going on between the people on stage and the people in the audience that I call a Charlie Theatre, and that's what we need" (491-92).

This idea of a progressive, popular theatre would remain a primary goal of Odets' throughout his writing career. It embodied his most important principles: the socially connected
artist working for the good of all, the artist in opposition to political wrongs, and the union of the aims of the artist with the needs of the audience. It is artistic, democratic and political. In Odets' later work, then, there is a desire to systematically recreate the kind of theatre achieved on the opening night of *Waiting for Lefty*, where the struggles of the Depression were crystallized on stage in a form instantly and joyously recognizable to the audience.

However sweet this dream, Odets was conscious that a national folk culture uniting people in common artistic and social endeavor was far from a reality. Theatre, too, he recognized, was the least effective (and, at least in its Broadway manifestation, probably the least democratic) way to create a popular art, though it offered enough freedom and enough rewards to draw him back repeatedly from Hollywood to write for the stage. Like many other writers of his era, Odets was fascinated by the possibilities of mass media, lured by the potential of reaching a national audience. Still, he remained wary of watering down his message. A profound distrust of popular forms of culture surfaces in virtually all of his plays, especially *Golden Boy*, *Night Music*, *Clash by Night*, *The Country Girl*, and *The Big Knife*, as well as in his work in—and analyses of—Hollywood. Odets weaves within these plays an examination of popular culture as part of an overall examination of the marketplace in American society. More often than not, he condemns that culture for its debilitating, simplistic forms and its false promises. Just as consumer capitalism preached plenty while denying even the most basic desires to many of its participants, Odets suggests, popular culture promised uplift and artistic pleasure but delivered only clichéd blandishments to an increasingly narcotized public.

Nevertheless, as Ralph Willett has argued, Odets' use of popular culture is nuanced and complex. He recognizes that "however corny the images of beauty and contentment circulated by
popular culture, they at least provide a language through which the inarticulate can express their desires. Odets' respectful use of the clichés of popular song and film is a measure of his authentic sympathy for the classes he writes about and of his identification with their yearning hopes” (74). Odets knew that however debased they might be, media like radio, film and television were still in many ways the art of the people and expressed cultural meaning that rooted far deeper than their superficial forms. Therefore, while remaining wary of their power to control audiences, he tried to utilize their wide reach to make the same sort of connection he had made with Waiting for Lefty in 1935. Ultimately, Odets' was an art aimed at the common experience of Americans across the country; he envied the reach and scope of popular forms and looked for ways to gain popular recognition without adulterating his art.

Furthermore, Odets is a writer deeply involved with the issues of his own time and place; his tightrope-walking ambivalence towards film and other mass media reflect the ongoing discussion about popular culture that occupied much of American intellectual life from the 1930's onward. These cultural debates are in fact inseparable from any discussion of Odets' work. With the rise of radio and the popularization of sound film, culture was increasingly enmeshed in a process of artistic reproduction and commodification that made it very difficult to separate useful forms of art from culturally debilitating ones. Weaving numerous references to popular culture throughout his plays and screenplays, Odets dramatizes much of his society’s anxiety about the new forms of culture and proves himself a full participant in the ongoing discussion.

I. Kitsch and the American Folk Theatre

While Odets examined in his plays the effects of consumer capitalism on individual
characters, there is implicit in them a deeper understanding that the marketplace tested not only
the individual, but the entire society, especially in matters of culture. Pasi Falk has noted the
confluence of mass culture, advertising, and the therapeutic culture, arguing that

Modern advertising is born with one foot in the world of goods and the other in
mass culture . . . At the beginning of the century figures for the consumption of
mass culture and the world of goods skyrocketed: films, magazines, department
stores, and the advertising that links all these together. Mass culture transformed
experiences into marketable products and advertising turned marketable products
into representations, images, and with time, into experiences again. In other
words, the consumption of experiences and the experience of consumption . . .
have been interlinked from the very outset (178).

In this sense, the cultural object—be it play, film, popular song, World's Fair, radio
program, opera, comic strip, sporting event or television program—is inextricable from the
systems of production and consumption that had helped to produce it. Modern consumer
capitalism shapes both form and content; it circumscribes both production and reception. And, as
a number of critics of the thirties, forties and fifties argued, it elides the gap between high and folk
culture, tending to blend everything into a middle culture manufactured for and by popular
consent and cemented in place by prevailing economic structures. One art critic for the Partisan
Review, Clement Greenberg, argued in a seminal essay titled "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939)
that mass production techniques, universal literacy and a demographic shift to urban centres had
fostered the development of an ersatz (popular) culture he derided as Kitsch. For Greenberg, true
art is necessarily elitist because it is difficult and challenges accepted notions. Thus, any attempt
to popularize high art invariably waters it down, resulting in this weak, commercialized imitation:

Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensitivity [to the values of genuine culture]. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of customers, not even their money (102).

For Greenberg, the real danger of kitsch is that it parasitizes the forms of avant-garde art without a concomitant progressivism in content, and in so doing, imperils the avant-garde through cheap repetition. His complaint is not about popular art per se, but about art that is popular merely because it is familiar. Furthermore, while he is concerned about the effects on an audience, he worries even more about the development of artists. Because kitsch contains within its form a predetermined emotional response, it is immediately accessible to the popular audience; furthermore, because it is popular, it is profitable. This potential, Greenberg suggests, places enormous pressures on writers to "modify their work under the pressure of kitsch, if they do not succumb to it entirely" (103). The overall result is a sort of disease or contamination, the impurities of kitsch poisoning whatever remains of true art. Needless to say, the methods of advertising, which depend on quick recognition and emotional identification, tend towards kitsch.

Greenberg's position was one of the most extreme in the developing debate over the social and political usefulness of popular culture. It placed art in a oppositional relationship to technology, arguing, in effect, that the two systems were fundamentally incompatible, that
technology necessarily adulterated free artistic expression. In the same way, Leo Lowenthal argued in 1950 that "the decline of the individual in the mechanized working processes of modern civilization brings about the emergence of mass culture,\(^2\) which replaces folk art or 'high' art. A product of popular culture has none of the features of genuine art, but in all its media popular culture proves to have its own genuine characteristics: standardization, stereotypy, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods" (55). In this view, technology makes popular art merely something to be bought and sold, the cultural commodity stained \textit{a priori} by its intimate connection with mass production.

Greenberg and Lowenthal decried the influence of audience expectations and demands on the production of art, though some of the severest critics of popular culture recognized that its commercialism was perhaps more a matter of degree than of kind. For example, Theodor Adorno remarked in 1954 that "It would be romanticizing to assume that formerly art was entirely pure, that the creative artist thought only in terms of the inner consistency of the artifact and not also of its effect on the spectators. Theatrical art in particular cannot be separated from audience reactions. Conversely, vestiges of the aesthetic claim to be something autonomous, a world unto itself, remain even within the most trivial product of mass culture" (474). Odets and the Group had always recognized what Adorno grudgingly admitted: theatre was a social art dependent on a real and powerful connection between the stage and the audience; the difficulty they struggled with was how much they had to compromise in order to meet audience desires.

If, as their detractors argued, mass media elided the difference between high art and kitsch, they also elided the personal differences among consumers of popular culture. The individual was melted dangerously into an unthinking, uncritical mass. As Greenberg asserted, if
the structure of kitsch was such that it contained its own inevitable responses, then as the products became standardized, so would the responses. This process was seen as self-perpetuating, a sort of demonic machine whose continual operation was more important than the product it generated. Dwight Macdonald, more open early in his career towards the regenerative possibilities of popular culture, by 1950 had declared that: "the Lords of kitsch sell culture to the masses. It is a debased, trivial culture that voids both the deep realities (sex, death, failure, tragedy) and also the simple spontaneous pleasures... The masses, debauched by several generations of this sort of thing, in turn come to demand trivial and comfortable cultural products. ... the engine is reciprocating and shows no signs of running down" (72). The language of aesthetics had been superseded by the mechanisms of mass production and mass consumption.

Not that all writers about popular culture decried its effects. There were critics, such as Gilbert Seldes, who located the origins of popular art in the democratic tradition of America, arguing that much of American high art was an elitist project, virulently critical of the average person. Drawing a direct line from the Age of Jackson through Whitman and Emerson, Seldes argued that while the mass media often failed to achieve their goals, and while they were shot through with commercialism, there was nevertheless hope for the "popular arts," as he called them: "persistence of change reflects the one emotion all Americans hold in common... the future is theirs to create. It is a confession that the present is not perfect and an assertion that nothing in the present can prevent us from changing for the better" (87). Nevertheless, Seldes' optimistic assertion is undercut throughout the rest of his essay by a partial dismissal of the achievements mass media had made. Thus, even the defenders of popular forms of culture were forced again and again to admit to the paucity of "real" culture in mass media, arguing (as...
did about film) instead for the potential of those media to achieve what they promised.

Andrew Ross notes, however, that the intellectual backlash against popular culture of which Greenberg, Lowenthal, and Macdonald were a part came (especially after the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of 1939) as much from an increasing identification of such culture with Communism as it did from a genuine fear of mass media. "The anti-Stalinist intellectual's attacks on popular culture from the late thirties on were almost coterminous with attacks on the sub-intellectual lives and tastes of Communists themselves" (22). During the era of the Popular Front from 1935-1939, the emphasis by the Communist Party on inclusion of anti-Fascist fellow-travellers had encouraged these left-leaning intellectuals to embrace the political potential of a particular kind of popular culture, while still retaining a sense of distance from the people for whom it was intended:

Even in the broadened cultural base of the Popular Front period, intellectuals could still see themselves as missionaries, offering the masses an alternative folk culture (or through the social agency of Hollywood Popular Fronters, a "progressive" film culture) that was more germane to their interests than what was seen as the debilitating political effects of commercial popular culture. Attempts to forge a proletarian culture . . . or, after 1935, a people's culture, were posed as a way of competing with the rival attractions of industrial mass culture (Ross, 49).

Thus, it is impossible to separate the debate over popular culture from political considerations, since it had its origins firmly rooted in the social upheaval of the 1930's. Indeed, the effect that shifting political allegiances had on the debate about popular culture after the war is paramount to any discussion of the arts during that period, and therefore to any discussion of
Odets' career. After 1939, for example, an increasing disenchantment with Stalinism caused many intellectuals to grow more pessimistic about the ability of popular culture to serve as anything more than a dangerous form of social control. Accordingly, following the war, there was a virtual rewriting of American intellectual history (led by Macdonald and Bernard Rosenberg) which argued that the true tradition of American arts was an elitist, aesthetic one. They valorized those artists who tried to operate outside the cultural marketplace, who refused the pressures of the "people" to produce a certain kind of art, and who were seemingly immune to economic pressures. But Ross remarks that "this is a claim... that depends on forgetting the enormous efforts of the thirties, when intellectuals en force devoted themselves, in however imaginary a fashion, to the task of politically creating a culture that would be both national and popular" (62). In this way, Odets' work, part of a larger cultural trend rooted in the ideology and practice of the Popular Front, is enmeshed in the debate over the politics and economics of popular culture.

It is not surprising then, that Odets, a vital part of that thirties culture, was one of those against whom the backlash was directed. In fact, the reaction against Communism became so widespread in the McCarthy era that artists of popular culture—including Odets himself, who was, according to a article by Oliver Pilat in the New York Post (October 24, 1947) the first Hollywood worker listed to testify by the House Un-American Activities Committee (he did not actually testify until 1952)—were under attack from all sides, accused of fostering "subversive" politics that ten years earlier had been part of a popular movement. The price these workers were forced to pay for their leftist attachments was, in part, the threat of economic and political destruction tendered against those who refused to cooperate with the Committee. Symbolically, the threat to remove the connection between the artist from his audience, thus denying the power
of the artist to infect a large number of people with his "subversive" ideas, confirms the Committee's fear of the popular arts and suggests that, even among conservatives, a belief in (or fear of) the possibility for real social change through popular art had never disappeared.⁵

Odets' fear of the committee suggests the difficulty of separating the political effects of popular culture from the economic conditions of its production. Frederic Jameson has argued, in fact, that late capitalism is a necessary historical condition for the development of popular culture:

with the coming of the market, [the] institutional status of artistic consumption and production vanishes: art becomes one more branch of commodity production, the artist loses all social status and faces the options of becoming a poète maudite or a journalist, the relationship to the public is problematized, and the latter becomes a virtual "public introuvable" (136-7).

Thus, as mass production shifted the Western world towards an increasingly standardized and frenetic consumer capitalism, culture began, as Odets recognized, to be seen as what could reach the largest audience. The practices, if not the aims, of the advertiser and the artist were becoming more alike than most artists probably would have cared to admit. In short, aesthetics were in part driven by consumer demand. For the first time, it was possible for "art" to become truly popular.

Still, as the history of the Group Theatre attests, and as Greenberg had recognized, the opportunity to gain the attention of a large audience—Odets' goal from Waiting for Lefty onward—places pressures on the production of the art itself, a game of anticipation and expectation the artist plays with his audience. Anticipating Jameson's argument by forty years, Walter Benjamin argued in one of the first important analyses of the effects of mass production on art, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) that the existence of
systems of mass production had radically changed the way in which art was created, or rather *produced*. As Benjamin noted, "for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (224).

Benjamin's analysis contains something of the ambivalence that was to characterize Odets' attitude toward popular culture in his work. Perhaps more importantly, it encapsulates the mixed feelings he exhibited towards his own writings as objects of culture. Benjamin seemingly applauds the emancipation of art from ritual, remarking that such a movement shifts art from the realm of the ritualistic to that of the political. In this orientation lies its greatest promise, its greatest hope for social change. But despite benefits that might accrue from the politicization of art, there is a deeper danger of mass control, since along with modes of production, "individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce" so much so that "the greatly increased mass of participation has produced a change in the mode of participation" (234, 238). Consumer capitalism had changed the mode of production and consumption. Thus (as the American critics argued), the danger of mass-produced art for Benjamin is that it shapes an audience in which individuals see themselves as part of a mass, or worse, are part of a mass without realizing it. In Benjamin's view, this sort of social control is the aesthetic counterpart to Fascism; rather than fostering democratic change by expressing the will of the people, it defuses political action through artistic expression: "Fascism sees its salvation in giving those masses not their rights but instead a chance to express themselves" (241).

Granted, the mass media and the theatre operate on different principles, the former on the principle of highly efficient reproduction and the latter on the principle of the far more inefficient
repeated singular event; it is perhaps disingenuous to compare them. But Odets' bouncing back and forth between Hollywood and Broadway makes such comparisons inevitable; furthermore, his own writings invited them. For example, his essay "Democratic Vistas in Drama," written after he returned from Hollywood for the first time, makes explicit the connection between the popularity of the movie form and its ramifications for the theatre. In it, Odets calls for theatre practitioners to look at the Hollywood film as a guide towards a new folk theatre:

> Let us, for once, give the movies some credit. They have spoken to this people. The movies have explored the common man in all of his manifestations—out of the Kentucky mountains, out of the Montana ranch house, out of the machine shop, from the docks and alleys of the great cities, from the farm, out of the hospitals, airplanes and taxicabs.

> The movies are now the folk theatre of America. But they are still not what Whitman asked for in 1871. Hollywood has a great genius for business and technical organization. More important, it has great talent for picking important American types and interesting and vital themes—in order to exploit them for business purposes.

> Yes, the movies have explored the entire range of American types. . . But the experience of these cinema heroes and heroines is still something virginal and wonderfully young. The treatment of the themes is puerile in every respect. The American gallery remains, as Whitman said, "uncelebrated and unexpressed"

*(New York Times, November 21, 1937)*

Odets' critique identifies the power of the film in its ability to reach the common man by
presenting him with his own image. In this way, he implies, the artist can bypass the traditional bourgeois culture of which the Broadway theatre was a part and foster a direct connection between the artist and the audience. For Odets, the Broadway theatre had lost touch with what the popular audience wanted to see. It existed instead in a merely symbolic—and authoritarian—relation to them, as a vestige of traditional, bourgeois "culture." Through his immersion in the Group, Odets had come to believe in a particular kind of theatre, one rooted in the social life of his time, and aimed at social action. "We are living in a time when new art works should shoot bullets," he wrote in the preface to his Six Plays (1939).

But Odets is wary, too, of the economic basis of Hollywood films from which he would draw his types. He acknowledges that Hollywood is adept at mirroring the social conditions of the time, but that because of the economic structure of the film industry, remains unwilling (or unable) to use them in socially progressive ways. Like many other contemporary critics of popular culture, Odets believed that films had a profound influence on audiences. It gave them standards of behaviour and expectations of life that belied the difficulties of Depression America:

It is sad to consider what movies are doing to America's consciousness of itself.

Men are simple, credulous, imitative animals for the most part. Hollywood has set our citizens examples of conduct and behavior patterns fit only for the lower animals. Movies have imposed upon the land a glossary of experience definitions which would make the humble monkey howl. Every week 50,000,000 watchers are instructed in these standards of living and conduct by Hollywood.

There is, of course, in this argument a strong taste of elitism of the sort espoused by critics like Macdonald and Greenberg. Odets sees himself as relatively immune to the nefarious plots
perpetrated on the millions who watch films. He places himself outside the action, as it were, identifying the danger inherent in the Hollywood film as a doctor diagnosing a disease. On one hand, then, Odets evinces a disappointment in the tastes of the "common" man which borders on disgust. He finds no real fault with the movie producers who make the films (they are "clever" and have "great talent" for finding the right types and themes; their job is to make money, and they perform it admirably). To an extent, by characterizing people as imitative and credulous, he supports the sort of blanket critique of mass culture that Ross argues characterized the late thirties and early forties "whereby the fat cat, capitalist 'lords of kitsch' set about ventriloquizing an inert and prefabricated mass of consumers" (35). As an early example of the critiques of popular culture that were to emerge over the next two decades, Odets here contrasts the passivity of the filmgoers with the activity of the artist. He places the responsibility for change squarely on the shoulders of theatre practitioners to convert the masses to better art. At best, Odets claims that the "people" need to be challenged with an accurate look at their world; at worst, he refuses them autonomy to resist or read alternatively movies or other forms of popular culture.

Given the power of these forms, Odets' diagnosis for the disease of Hollywood falsehoods is to use Hollywood types to better advantage, to correct the errors by telling the truth:

The movie producer in this country, it seems, is cleverer than the playwright. He goes "where the masses are" for his material—it is his business to do so. Why not make that the business of the playwright, too? Why should the phrase "movie theme" be tossed around so scornfully by the critic? The playwright would be wise to look at movies as "documentation". . .

Here is the essential point: a playwright might follow the movie trend of
themes with great profit. But in each he would have to tell the truth where the film told a lie, starting each time where the picture left off.

It is significant to note that Odets does not interest himself in the differences between working as a playwright and working as a screenwriter. The contrast between the debased movie world and the theatre is one of intention rather than method. In Odets' curious adaptation of the language of capitalism, the playwright's "business" is to reflect society rather than make money; the "profit" of which he speaks is moral rather than financial—though there certainly is an intimation that financial rewards are possible. In fact, *Golden Boy* was one of the most successful—financially and artistically—of all Group productions. Furthermore, Odets suggests that because the film industry exists solely to earn profit that it is natural for producers to find themes that reflect the desires of the largest share of the people. But where more people equals more "profit" financially for the producers, it means more "profit" artistically and socially for Odets. Odets craves a movie audience without claiming to seek financial rewards. In essence, like Clurman's characterization of the Group on Broadway, he wanted to be in the world but not of it, to use the audience created by the financial structures of Hollywood towards a more socially useful end.

This is not to say that his analysis was entirely, or even largely, disingenuous. In fact, Odets' plea for a new, socially committed and popular drama ends with an affirmation of the nobility of the masses: "A writer of talent could begin a great career that way—as "celebrator and expresser. Great audiences are waiting now to have their own experiences explained and interpreted for them." For Odets the politically democratic has somehow to be reconciled with the culturally democratic and the economically democratic: popular art must speak to and for the
people. Nevertheless, while his affirmation somewhat redeems his earlier characterization of them as passive and malleable, he is never really comfortable with the idea of the "masses" calling forth their own art. They are still "waiting" for someone to interpret their experiences for them.

In this article, written in part as a defense of Golden Boy against charges of undue Hollywood influence, Odets' deep ambivalence about the nature of popular culture crystallizes into a cultural dilemma. For him, it is essential to reach the people, to reflect their needs and desires. It is this responsibility of the artist to the people—an attitude that characterized all of Odets' work from the Group onward—that gives his plea a ring of authenticity. On the other hand, he does not consider them equal participants in the union of artist and audience, and so he feels a kind of aesthetic stewardship over the stories and themes of the common folk. Thus, the "folk theatre" Odets calls for is both progressive and conservative: the danger of a soporific and hallucinatory popular culture is balanced by the real social power of the masses who call it forth, and by the real social needs and desires popular culture does express.

II. "Those Cars are Poison in My Blood"

Given Odets' fascination with popular culture and his tendency towards allegory, it is not surprising that the themes and concerns of popular culture woven into his middle and late plays are directly related to the larger examination of the "culture of abundance" that he had begun in his early work. In his allegorical mode, Odets attempted to adumbrate complex cultural ideas through concrete images, to find the common cultural object and allow it to reflect deep meaning. Thus, in these plays, popular culture becomes, like the fruit in Waiting for Lefty and Paradise Lost or Moe and Hennie's trip to Havana in Awake and Sing!, both a consumer good and the focal
point for an entire ideological system. As Benjamin had noted, the rise of consumer culture places cultural goods in a new, increasingly ambivalent relation to their audience: the lines between popular and high culture become blurred, and cultural objects circulate in the marketplace in a way never before seen. Working as he does in both the traditional and popular culture industries, Odets is extremely sensitive to this shift. In all his plays, but most notably plays such as *Golden Boy* (1937), *Night Music* (1940), *Clash by Night* (1941), *The Country Girl* (1950) and *The Big Knife* (1949), specific examples of popular culture become enmeshed in an ideological system that questions the success of a culture of abundance while remaining hopeful that such abundance could be achieved. An examination of his complex use of popular music, movies, the World's Fair, even common objects like cars or spectator sports like boxing gives us a far deeper understanding of the functioning of the marketplace in Odets' plays.

*Golden Boy* is a play that moves quickly, both in its structure and its themes. Indeed, as a number of reviewers noted, the impression created by the original performance was one of quickness and straightforward active progression. Brooks Atkinson described the play as "robust," a "pungent, flashy story of a prize fighter who knocks out his own ego;" he described Luther Adler's performance as Joe as having "the speed and energy of an open field runner" and even called the sets by Mordecai Gorelik "a mobile parade of scenery" (*New York Times*, November 5, 1937). George Jean Nathan, never a fan of Odets, remarked that "He can write scenes, beautiful scenes, but the noisy express train that is his drama steams past them so furiously that one only recalls a quick and insufficient glimpse of them" (292). Nathan attributed the fault for this senseless movement to a Hollywood influence, an idea which has persisted in later interpretations of *Golden Boy*—for example, critics have discussed the short scenes and the
boxing milieu as evidence. But as Gerald Weales has noted, though "the influence of the movies is clear even in the word 'fadeout' at the end of scenes. . . . there is nothing in that kinship that need demean Joe as a character or cheapen the theme of the play" (Clifford Odets, 125-6).

There is surely some of Hollywood in *Golden Boy*. Odets readily admitted in "Democratic Vistas in Drama" that the character of Joe Bonaparte was taken directly from the "gallery of American types" he saw expressed in the movies: "Where is there a more interesting theme than a little Italian boy who wants to be rich? Provided, of course, you place him in his true social background and show his fellow conspirators in their true light." But while some influence of Hollywood may be present in the plot, the setting, the formal structure, and even the characters of *Golden Boy*, the sense of movement it generates is far more integral to Odets' plan than most critics have suggested. For Odets, the quick tempo of the play directly reflects the themes of *Golden Boy*: the pressures on the artist in a capitalistic, competitive, mass-production society and the fervent desire in America for instant popular and financial success fostered by the seductive images of popular culture. Margaret Brenman-Gibson identifies the important elements in the play when she calls *Golden Boy* "a prophetic paradigm of the unravelling of the American Dream, a world-image of redemption through Success on a rapidly changing path of upward mobility, a road unthinkable without the Gun and the Machine. It is not fortuitous that Joe Bonaparte's wasteful and meaningless death is a self-destruction in his powerful and expensive automobile, his beloved Deusenberg" (466).

In his astute theoretical examination of the ideological myths of American life and culture, Jean Baudrillard has suggested that the legendary American fascination with cars and driving is directly linked with the idea of Utopia:
The way American cars have of leaping into action, of taking off so smoothly, by virtue of their automatic transmission and power steering. Pulling away effortlessly, noiselessly eating up the road, gliding along as if you were on a cushion of air, leaving behind the old obsession with what is coming up ahead, or what is overtaking you. . . . All this creates a new experience of space, and, at the same time, a new experience of the whole social system (America, 54)

For Baudrillard, the new experience of the social system is one which lives outside of history, which constantly effaces the past and therefore recreates a utopian belief at every moment. The driver's experience is thus a microcosm of the American experience of history: "America is the original version of modernity. . . . it cultivates no origin of mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth. Having known no primitive accumulation of time, it lives in a perpetual present. . . . Octavio Paz was right when he argues that America was created in the hope of escaping from history, of building a utopia sheltered from history" (76, 80).

Baudrillard's suggestion of the automobile as one of the two technologies—the other, significantly, is the cinema—that best exemplify the rootlessness, the constant movement, the eternal "present" of American culture finds an echo in Odets' work, especially in the automobile metaphors that pervade Golden Boy. Like Baudrillard, Odets connects the idea of speed and the idea of a utopian version of the world that exists outside of time. For example, in the first act, Joe confesses to Lorna that "those cars are poison in my blood. When you sit in a car and speed you're looking down at the world. Speed, speed, everything is speed—nobody gets me!" When Lorna responds, "You mean in the ring?" Joe makes the connections between his own career and the car unmistakable, "In or out, nobody gets me. Gee, I like to stroke that gas!" (266). For Joe,
the car, like boxing, is a way to escape the painful history that has characterized his life, a history only partly compensated for by the joys of his music: "People have hurt my feelings for years. I never forget. You can't get even with people by playing the fiddle. If music shot bullets I'd like it better—artists and people like that are freaks today. The world moves fast and they sit around like forgotten dopes" (264).

Joe's feelings of aggression come partly from a difficult childhood, but Odets is careful to indicate economic factors as well. In the first act, a restless Joe defensively explains his reasons for choosing to fight:

Don't want to sit. Every birthday I ever had I sat around. Now's a time for standing. Poppa, I have to tell you—I don't like myself, past, present and future. Do you know there are men who have wonderful things from life? Do you think they're better than me? Do you think I like this feeling of no possessions? Of learning about the world from Carp's encyclopaedia? . . . You don't know what it means to sit around here and watch the months go ticking by! Do you think that's a life for a boy my age? Tomorrow's my birthday! I change my life! (252).

The emphasis Joe places on time is significant, for his reasons for boxing stem directly from his projection of the past into the future. Anxious and afraid, Joe looks for movement of any kind. He believes that both the boxing ring and the car offer freedom and the annihilation of opposition; his pursuit of both is an anxious response to the slow ticking of the clock. In one sense, then, Joe's attempt to erase the past through speed, in and out of the ring, is a utopian attempt to begin again, to recreate his world. But as Lorna comments—and the play bears out—this form of escape is predicated upon violence, on the denial of human connections. Her early warning, "You
sound like Jack the Ripper" (266) becomes by the end of the play a damning conviction of Joe's alienation: "You murdered that boy with the generous face. God knows where you hid the body! I don't know you" (308).

Odets is conscious that the automobile is, in America at least, the most significant mass-produced object of the twentieth century. Furthermore, as Brenman-Gibson suggests, he was aware that by the mid 1930's, it had become such a powerful icon of American culture that it was impossible to separate the object from the ideologies of popular culture associated with it. John Gassner notes that Odets' choice of the automobile as the vehicle around which Joe clustered his desires was "singularly fortunate. Dealing with a piece of Americana for which a common understanding existed, Odets did not have to force too many parallels outside the realistic context of the work" ("Long Journey," 30). According to Marshall W. Fishwick, by the late 1930's, the car captured the American imagination in a way few other mass produced objects ever had:

In 1908, Ford's first Model T came from his factory; five years later, the assembly line was operating. The rugged Tin Lizzie, ugly but useful, won a unique place in American poplore. . . . In two decades, Ford produced 15,456,868 Model T's in thirty assembly plants, selling them for as little as $265 each. He put us on wheels. America, quipped Will Rogers, was the only country on earth where a man could ride to the poorhouse (150).

In this sense, though ostensibly private, the car functions as an extremely public commodity, and as Baudrillard suggests, embodies all that fascinates in modern American mythology: speed, efficiency, technological domination of the natural world and freedom. By using such an object as the vehicle for Joe's escape fantasies, then, Odets heightens the conflict
between Joe's old-world idealism (represented by his violin) and the pressures of mass production and popular culture (represented by the boxing ring). Unfortunately, Joe's trouble is that he is unable to discern accurately the difference between the kind of freedom music offers and the kind of freedom a speeding car offers. To him, they both mean an ability to move beyond the world. Furthermore, unlike music (musicians are "forgotten dopes") the car is an easily identifiable symbol of one's place in the world as well as the means to change that place. It signifies both freedom and imprisonment. That is, Odets suggests that while possessing a car is an indication of a comfortable participation in a consumer utopia, it also is oriented socially within popular culture to indicate a complicity with a system that devalues the individual. Even more than participation in the culture of abundance, Joe's dream of the Deuesenberg offers the ironic promise of using a mass-produced (if expensive), popular (if rare) commodity for getting outside of the mass, outside of the constraints of social and economic conditions, outside of history entirely.

As he professes in "Democratic Vistas in Drama," Odets is deeply interested in finding progressive social uses for popular culture. Therefore, in Golden Boy he mines the relationship between democratic idealism and consumer capitalism, trying to discover whether it is possible to create a useful popular culture in modern consumer society. Odets makes a direct connection between the mass production of material consumer goods, like automobiles, and the mass production and consumption of cultural goods, like movies or spectator sports. For example, it is vitally important that the kind of car Joe wants is identified both by brand name (Joe announces he has a date with "Miss Deuesenberg"[277]) and as the kind that Gary Cooper drives. Here, Joe's original desire for escape manifests itself in a concomitant desire for fame, money, and social recognition. Ultimately, he seeks something profounder than speed, namely, the sense that he is
larger than life, looking down at the world, untouchable, unafraid. At one point, he found that kind of release in music: "with music, I'm never alone when I'm alone... I'm not afraid of people and what they say" (263). But with the image of the car as "poison" in his blood, Joe moves beyond a desire for private peace into the realm of the public: "down in the street... it's war! Music can't help me there" (264). That is, in order to be untouchable in the public sphere, larger than life, one has to be seen by others as being so; personal achievements in a competitive society can only be measured by their distance from the achievements of others.

Joe wants a car like a movie star's, not only because of what the car offers, but because of what the image of the star suggests. The lure of Gary Cooper's image is not merely that it allows participation, but that it offers a special status in the marketplace. Odets intimates that the effect of speed is something like the logic of advertising: to possess a car like Gary Cooper's is to partake in the popular culture aura of a movie star. Furthermore, as Baudrillard suggests, the image of a star produces the same sort of instantaneous utopian freedom that characterizes the speeding automobile: "Screen idols... are not something to dream about; they are the dream. And they have all the characteristics of dreams; they produce a marked condensation (crystallization) effect and an effect of contiguity (they are immediately contiguous), and above all, they have that power of instantaneous visual materialization (Anshaulichkeit) of desire, which is also a feature of dreams" (56). Like the Deusenberg, then, Gary Cooper's image is a vehicle in which Joe can escape; it lures him with the power of immediacy and the promise of inviolability. In this way, Odets connects popular culture to the idea of the (American) dream: to be famous is to be rich is to be fast is to be free, or so Joe's fantasy would have it.

Hence, when Joe's boxing career accelerates, he is even more anxious for recognition:
"Get me some main bouts in the metropolitan area. . . . And how about some mention in the press? Twenty-six bouts—no one knows I'm alive. This isn't a vacation for me—it's a profession! I'm staying more than a week. . . . you can't go too fast for me. Don't worry about autos" (277).

Joe's impatience for recognition is an anxiety born of the realization that the only rewards that accrue to a boxer are material goods and fame. Unlike the rewards he describes from music, there is no spiritual or truly social reward for winning in the ring; rather, everything is directed outward, as competition and self-aggrandizement: "the whole essence of prizefighting is immodesty" (305). Soon, Joe's desire for recognition and untouchability (the twin pillars of fame) is pervasive. He becomes a virtual machine, so much that the eventual purchase of the coveted Deusenberg is made possible by his being, like the car itself, "speedy as the wind" in the ring (254).

It is important to understand, then, that the means by which he succeeds is by necessity extremely public. His career as a boxer depends as much on the newspaper reporters who write about him and the "nine thousand" people who pay to see him fight as it does on his prowess in the ring. David Q. Voigt has remarked, in fact, that sporting events are not simply public events, but popular events in every sense. The language and beliefs of sports have infused our culture on the deepest level (117). Odets is certainly aware of this in his other plays—baseball metaphors, for example, abound in Awake and Sing!, and the fact that Ben is an Olympic athlete in Paradise Lost is one more indictment of the American Dream in that play. Odets knows that the popular requires talent as well; one of the characters in Night Music, a former baseball player, is called a "real artist of the people" (64). In Golden Boy, however, we get Odets' clearest expression of the connection between Joe as sports hero and Joe as cultural hero created by mass media attention.

By placing all his hopes on the search for fame and escape, Joe shuts off the possibility of
doing "what's in his nature." His "nature" has been overshadowed by the blur of speed and image. In fact, Joe becomes increasingly aware as *Golden Boy* progresses that he is becoming increasingly mechanized, though for most of the play he readily participates in his own commodification. Thus, while he is consistently referred to as an object of which a "piece" can be bought or sold, he nevertheless tells Moody and Fuseli "cut it up any way you like" (279). However, near the end of the play, he has come to a final realization that Fuseli owns him, that he exists only as a machine for others to use: "You use me like a gun! Your loyalty's to keep me oiled and polished" (309). The reference to himself as a gun reiterates what he says after his father sadly rejects him: "Now I'm alone. . . . I'll show them all—nobody stands in my way. My father's had his hand on me for years. No more. . . . When a bullet sings through the air it has no past—only a future—like me! Nobody, nothing, stands in my way!" (299). As Brenman-Gibson warns, the motion initiated by the dream ultimately must run its course. Once the bullet has been fired, there is no retrieving it; once in the speeding car of the American Dream, there is nothing to do but keep driving.

Conversely, Odets contrasts Joe's car with the horse-drawn fruit wagon his father drives (the connections of the fruit he sells with the utopian visions of fruit in the earlier plays is unmistakable; here the abundance of the natural world is juxtaposed with the violence of the technological). Mr. Bonaparte, throughout the play the perfectly wise, loving father who serves as a reminder to Joe of his past in music, is completely at odds with the world of speed Joe seeks. Mr. Bonaparte sits around the kitchen talking with his friend Carp, makes his own wine, wanders around the city talking. He is never in a hurry, always gentle. In essence, he is the character who stands for a kind of traditional culture which exists outside the marketplace, a person for whom
the populist spectacle of a prize fight is utterly senseless violence: "If they was a fight for cause or for woman, woulda not be so bad" (300). He is content to find his rewards in the simple human connection. Thus in response to Carp's suggestion that Joe won't be able to make a living as a violinist, Mr. Bonaparte responds: "Don't expect for Joe to be a millionaire. He don't need it, to be millionaire. A good life'sa possible. . . . Joe love music. Music is the great cheer-up in the language of all countries" (249).

For Joe's father, the benefits of music are not economic, but spiritual. By championing the local and the non-technological, he underscores Odets' doubt about the social usefulness of mass-produced commodities. Odets admits that the car is certainly a convenient mass produced good, and there is in Joe's fascination with cars an unrepressed fascination with mass production technology—he confesses admiringly to Lorna "they make wonderful cars today. Even the lizzas" (266). But automobiles are also shown to be an obvious threat, to the point where Gerald Weales ridicules the play's "ludicrous overpreparation for the death by automobile" (128). For example, in the first scene, Moody reminds Lorna that one of his former boxers "got himself killed in a big, red Stutz" (238); Moody also reveals that Joe "drives like a maniac" (276). However, for Joe's father, the danger symbolized by the automobile is not merely physical, but moral. He sees the speed and fame Joe craves as a sort of predatory disease, a confirmation of Joe's statement that the cars are "poison" in his blood: "He gotta wild wolf inside, eat him up" (295).

Mr. Bonaparte, unlike his son, sees in human connection and family the basis of meaning in life. Thus while Joe refers repeatedly to his desire to be free and untouchable, Mr. Bonaparte constantly worries about where Joe is, wondering why he hasn't returned home. Where Mr. Bonaparte sees freedom in doing what one was born to do (even if it means driving a fruit
wagon), Joe sees freedom in untouchability. Of course, Joe wavers from time to time. He reaches out to Lorna, pleading with her for redemption: "I develop the ability to knock down anyone my weight. But what point have I made? . . . I want you to be my family, my life—Why don't you do it, Lorna, why?" (282). But at the end of the play, when he is overcome with grief and remorse for killing his opponent in the ring, his only thought is escape. His final speech, also to Lorna, indicates how far Joe has travelled down the path of self-destruction. It is another attempt to escape the past, to realize a utopia that obviates history. When Lorna urges him to find "some city where poverty's no shame—where music is no crime!—where there's no war in the streets—where a man is glad to be himself, to live and make his woman herself?" Joe naturally responds: "Ride! That's it, we ride—clear my head. We'll drive through the night. When you mow down the night with headlights, nobody gets you! You're on top of the world then—nobody laughs! That's it—speed! We're off the earth—unconnected! We don't have to think!! That's what speed's for, an easy way to live! Lorna darling, we'll burn up the night!" (316).

The significance of this speech centres on his use of the word "unconnected." For in his pursuit of the fast, slick dream of the movie star and the Deusenberg, Joe has become a commodity like them, an object of exchange, unconnected to anything living or human. He realizes this himself, when he tells Lorna "I murdered myself . . . Now I'm hung up by my fingertips—I'm no good—my feet are off the earth!" (315). Like the mythical Antaeus, Joe has lost the connection which gave him strength. He finally understands the danger of his desire for complete freedom. The isolation of popular success, metaphorized in the isolation of the car and the boxing ring, has left him incapable of creating a new connection, and thus his last lines serve as a premonition of their suicide by car—there is in reality no "easy way to live." It is only at the
end of the play, and only through the earth-bound character of Mr. Bonaparte that we are able to get a return to human connection: "Come, we bring-a him home. . . where he belong . . ." (321).

III. "Here's the Fair—It Don't Guarantee Me Meals"

Part Hollywood and part Broadway, part examination of a culture of material abundance and part probing of the deleterious effects of popular culture, Golden Boy can be seen as a bridge between the early plays and the later plays. Before Golden Boy, the plays are largely concerned with visions of material abundance signified by fruit (though the spectre of popular culture lurks behind such visions, especially in Awake and Sing!) in particular and consumer goods in general. After Golden Boy, while never abandoning his concern with the culture of abundance that had developed in Depression America, Odets turned his attention more specifically to the influence of popular forms of culture on the beliefs and lives of his characters. Following Rocket to the Moon (with Golden Boy part of the transition period) his next two plays—Night Music and Clash by Night—are more explicit in their probing of the effects on American life of the ideals expressed in popular movies and songs. For example, the last of his plays produced by and for the Group Theatre, Night Music (1940) is shot through with the forms and structures of popular culture.

Night Music opened on February 22, 1940, with great expectations for Odets and his director, Clurman. Odets wrote in his journal after the first performance "the performance of the play was tip-top . . . a beautiful show, smooth, powerful and yet tender, fresh, moving, and touching, with real quality in all the parts" (Time is Ripe, 47). But despite consistent high praise for the performances of Elia Kazan as Steve Takis, Morris Carnovsky as Detective A. L. Rosenberger, and Jane Wyatt as Fay Tucker, the "incidental music" by Hanns Eisler, and the sets
by Mordecai Gorelik, the play was panned by newspaper reviewers, rejected as pointless, self-indulgent, and wandering. Richard Lockridge of the *Sun*, while grudgingly admitting "it is . . . crankily alive and full of pungent dialogue and often very funny," commented that it was "not shaped to any vital purpose," and ultimately dismissed it as "minor Odets" (February 23, 1940). Richard Watts, Jr. of the *Herald-Tribune* was less kind, archly opining that "it is almost worthy of your attention and respect" (February 23, 1940), while Brooks Atkinson in the *Times* dismissed its style entirely, commenting acidly that "Now that Odets writes like Saroyan, Doomsday is near" (February 23, 1940). Atkinson added later the qualifying observation that *Night Music* "bristles with talent, though it is a shiftless play" (March 3, 1940).

Given Odets' love for this play, as well as the Group's dependence on the income from a successful run,7 the critics' responses were especially frustrating. They effectively blocked his deepest ambition: to capture the attention of a large audience.Smarting from the harshness of the reviews, Odets fantasized a retreat into small, insular (and inexpensive) theatre:

My feelings were and are very simple. I felt as if a lovely delicate child, tender and humorous, had been knocked down by a truck and lay dying. . . . It was Boris A[ronson] who called the turn. He said "This show is very moving to me, a real artwork, but I don't think they will get its quality—it is not commercial." . . . I think now to write very inexpensive plays in the future, few actors, one set; perhaps hire a cheap theatre and play there (*Time is Ripe*, 48-9).

Odets' frustration comes from a belief that the newspaper reviewers had simply misunderstood the point of the play, which he and Clurman saw as an examination of the loneliness and unrest that pervaded American life during the period of the "phony" war. As Clurman pointed out in a
response he wrote to the *New York Times* (later printed as the preface to the published version of *Night Music*), "the play stems from the basic sentiment that people nowadays are affected by a sense of insecurity; they are haunted by the fear of impermanence in all their relationships; they are fundamentally homeless. . . it is the 'melody' that pervades the play." He goes on to suggest that "this play is nearest amongst Odets's plays to our conception of 'pure' entertainment" but cautions that unthinking criticism such as appeared in the reviews "may end by sending everybody out to Hollywood, where all writers are the same" (*Night Music*, x-xiii).

Following a failed 1951 remount of *Night Music*, Clurman wrote another article in defense of the play, this time in the *New Republic*. Clurman explained the second failure of the play thus:

for a play to be successful, it seems to me, its basic premise (even when unstated) must be made acceptable to a majority of the audience. . . Odets' rebellious *Waiting for Lefty* was comparatively popular and approved of by even politically conservative critics because it was produced at a time when the play's protest found some echo in the most sedate heart. . . Yet the majority of our theatregoers either do not recognize *Night Music* as a play or do not understand what it means.

The reason for this is that in it Odets takes for granted that we all recognize our homelessness, that we all believe the rootlessness and disorientation of his hero to be typical, that we all know that most of the slogans of our society are without substance in terms of our true emotions. . . Hence they find no meaning in a play that is *as clear and simple as a popular song* and in writing and characterization very rich. The source of every dramatic idea is a community myth (a commonly held belief or sentiment) and *Night Music*, though it is composed of the most
Clurman identifies the populist themes of Odets' play, suggesting quite correctly that they mirror a popular song in their appeal to common beliefs of the American community. The simplicity of the plot, its wistfulness, and the pervasive sounds of different kinds of music throughout the play—Steve's clarinet, the musical score by Hanns Eisler, the singing of the crickets that gives the play its title—underscores the comparison. Yet even with the popular appeal, Clurman argues, Odets has done something different. Rather than merely confirming the community myth, Odets opens it up to investigation. He takes the accepted and dismantles it; he forces his audience to examine the deeply buried assumptions which are the support for popular ideas.

Clurman's two responses to Night Music's reception underscore a fundamental paradox that had troubled Odets since his first popular and artistic success with Waiting for Lefty. He wanted to learn how to use popular themes without losing a sense of artistic purpose, in Aronson's terms, to gain a "commercial" audience with an "artwork." In this play, as he had in Golden Boy and Rocket to the Moon, Odets attempted to broaden his themes. Night Music is an attempt to reflect a wide spectrum of American life. Understanding this, Clurman suggests that Night Music is close to "entertainment" in that it tries to appeal to the popular imagination. This is not far from Odets' own conception of the play. For example, in a journal entry written a month before the opening of Night Music, Odets had suggested, along the lines of his "Charlie Theatre," that an appeal to a broad audience was the only way a theatre could work for change:

My personal feeling about social change is this. I have one opinion as a private citizen. But in the world of theatre, in relation to my plays and audiences for them,
leftism as understood by the Communists is impossible. Any excessive
determination in the play defeats the very purpose of the play itself... To be
socially useful in the theatre, one cannot be any more left than, for instance, La
Guardia. Unless one is writing pamphlets or agitational cartoons, only clear but
broad generalizations are possible. But one must make sure to write from a firm
core even though, in my opinion, an attempt to reach as broad an audience as
possible should be taken into consideration (Time is Ripe, 15).

Wendy Smith notes how far the "fiery" Odets had come from Waiting for Lefty in just five
years, and argues that "Night Music was as mainstream in its aspirations as Golden Boy, but the
earlier play challenged basic American assumptions about success in a way that they new one
never did" (395). And to a certain extent, she is correct. The mood of Night Music is less
strident, more wistful, diffuse and delicate than Golden Boy, less grim than Clash by Night or The
Big Knife, almost nothing at all like Waiting for Lefty. But Smith ignores the complexities of
Odets' use of the popular in Night Music, whereby the seemingly mainstream and trivial is made
unfamiliar, ambiguous and indicative of larger social processes. Rather, as Clurman suggests, the
play never slips into a facile or superficial use of popular culture such as exists in Hollywood.
Popular culture is used allegorically, to characterize the tension characterizing a nation caught
between Depression and war, between hope and fear, between scarcity and abundance.

On the surface, the entire world of Night Music is manufactured like a Hollywood plot, a
typical "Boy Meets Girl" romance. Add to that the fact that this is the only play of his for which
Odets also wrote the screenplay, and it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that Malcolm Goldstein
does, that "the influence of Hollywood is evident" in the number of scenes, the shifting settings,
the incidental music, and most apparently in the fact that "In Hollywood fashion, Odets lets his principal characters 'meet cute'" (*Political Stage*, 332). Goldstein's analysis is certainly accurate to a point. There is a deliberate attempt by Odets to appropriate the style and themes of the Hollywood movie, even in the plot. The brash and obnoxious Steve Takis, himself a worker in the film industry, is stranded in New York when the trained monkeys he is transporting steal a necklace from Fay Tucker, an aspiring actress. Steve's frustration and anger at his difficult life manifest themselves over the course of the play's twelve scenes, but through the beneficent offices of a Detective assigned to investigate the theft, the two are happily united by the end of the play.⁸

None of this seems to challenge the assertions made by Smith or Goldstein. But against the background of an imminent war, autumn falling upon the city and the real or symbolic homelessness of most of the characters, these simple plot elements take on allegorical significance. As even Goldstein recognizes, the appropriation of Hollywood forms is turned to a different purpose; he admits the play has "charm, comparable to that of a very serious child in whose utterances insight and naiveté alternate in an attractive rhythm" and, disputing the common attack that Odets had imitated William Saroyan, calls it "more pointed, more determinedly didactic than any of Saroyan's works" (331). Popular culture is the source of Odets' plot and theme and yet also the subject of his critique in *Night Music*.

In fact, *Night Music* is Odets' attempt to measure the promises offered by popular entertainment against the loneliness and frustration pervading American life. The newspaper reviewers clearly missed this essential point. For example, Wiella Waldorf in the *New York Post* remarked that "as a play it is little more than an excuse for Mr. Odets to introduce a succession of neatly etched and often delightful characters who have nothing to do with the case. . . . For no
particular reason, Mr. Odets even takes his leading trio on a visit to the World's Fair where they sit at the feet of Washington's statue and discuss life" (February 23, 1940). Waldorf's claim bears some examination, for the scene at the World's Fair is the centre around which the rest of the plot of Night Music revolves. It is the key moment in Odets' play where the unguarded optimism of popular and technological culture meets the human victims of that culture.

A World's Fair—the New York version was contemporary with the first production of the play—is an event which is manufactured as popular culture. In fact, it must capture the popular imagination, since it requires an enormous audience to exist at all. In addition, as historian Warren Susman has shown, by 1939 the Fair had developed into something that existed largely on the level of mass-produced spectacle, a sort of homage to commodity capitalism produced by commodity capitalism and promoted through the channels of the popular media. Susman has identified the inherent contradictions that marked the New York World's Fair in particular. Billed as "The People's Fair," and aimed, as the organizers phrased it, "to delight and instruct them," it nevertheless was also structured to work well with the aims of consumer capitalism:

The Fair, more than had any previous effort, promoted as a major purpose the availability of consumer goods and services. It was a Fair that from the very start viewed the people not only as observers but also as potential consumers of the products it displayed. Indeed . . . the most popular exhibits tended to be those of producers of consumer goods. Thus the advertising potential of the Fair and its promotion of the growing consumer culture of the time marked a subtle change in the role of the Fair—for the People (Culture as History, 214-5).

Thus, the Fair was built by and for the marketplace at the same time it was built for "the
people." Through exhibits such as the Futurama and the World of Tomorrow, it offered extravagant promises of the glorious plenty which only modern technology and consumer capitalism could provide, and yet exacted a price from each person who wanted to see the realization of that world. The prospects presented by in the various pavilions and exhibits could only partly mask the hard facts of high unemployment, looming war and a dim economic future. There were, of course, other contemporary observers such as Garner Harding, who noted the irony "that of the 16 houses in the exhibit, only six 'meet the absolute minimum requirement of social usefulness in costing less than $10,000 apiece'" (Susman, 223). In addition, a 1939 Gallup poll established that the reason given by 63 percent of those who did not attend the Fair was that they couldn't afford it. Not only could "the people" not afford to buy what was offered; many could not even afford to window shop.

Odets is well attuned to the sort of cultural contradictions Susman describes. He uses a visit to the Fair as a way to question the cultural assumptions that underlie its very existence: the prevalence of widespread consumer capitalism, the usefulness of popular culture in meeting real, pressing social needs, the possibility of a "World of Tomorrow" in a world on the brink of war, the possibility for a home at all in a period so characterized by homelessness. As Steve says, "They call this place the world of the future. . . . The world of tomorrow, don't they? It don't feel any different from than the present an' past, I couldn't get in here without the buck . . . I don't respect that world of the future. Here's the Fair—it don't guarantee me meals" (161). Odets brings the point back to the simplest level: the dignity and expectations of the common man. The utopian promise of the Fair is directly confronted by the economic hardship and spiritual malaise of the "millions . . . tens of millions" that Steve represents (162).
Widening the metaphoric basis of the play, Odets directly links the idea of the forgotten man to music, using song and the idea of harmony to underscore Steve's isolation. Steve, whose only pleasure comes from playing his clarinet and composing songs, takes issue with Fay's hopeful assertion that if crickets can sing, "I can sing. I'm more than them. We're more than them. . . . We can sing through any night!" (160). He responds:

I'm a real harmony boy in my heart, if I get a chance. . . . What kinda life where you gotta compare yourself to crickets? They're bugs! I vamp around an' I vamp around an' nothin' happens—you can't get a start. You're keepin' me there on a low A when I'm good enough for a high C! An' then came the war. . . . An' that's what I'm good for. . . . that harmony boy who mighta been! (180).

The musical ideal of harmony is thereby connected with the unreal promise of the world of Tomorrow, and with the looming prospect of war. While not explicitly connected to specific popular songs (as Odets would do in *Clash by Night*), the intimate relationship Odets senses between music and the promises of the Fair is reflected in Susman's assertion that the immediate and overpowering sense of visitors to the Fair was that it was "a festival of sight and sound—always sound. . . . There were always bands, orchestras, and even, from some exhibits, the allure of interior sound floating out onto the general grounds" (216). But such joyous music, like the model homes that make up the World of Tomorrow, exists only within the consumer-sanctioned confines of the Fair. Thus, Steve's notion of harmony, of connection with others engaged in a common purpose, is directly at odds with the homelessness and isolation that beset all the characters, from the three main characters to the loners gathered in the lobby of the Hotel Algiers and the peripatetic men Fay and Steve meet in Central Park. As it does in *Golden Boy,*
music exists to make a spiritual connection with others. The sense of being kept from reaching his potential—stuck on a low A—only adds to Steve's frustration and sense of homelessness.

The visit to the Fair is foreshadowed in an earlier scene of *Night Music*, when Steve encounters a homeless man named Roy Brown in Central Park. Roy tells Steve that he is joining the army, but before he leaves, he wants to go to the Fair: "I'm trying to get in and see that World's Fair for months. Never had the buck. Now it's closing. Tomorrow I'll get in or bust a rib! See my point?" (86). The Fair is a magical goal, a symbol of success, a spectacle to be consumed. It is significant, therefore, that Odets immediately contrasts it to the threat of war. Where Roy has been trying for months to gain entrance to the Fair and has been unable, he is certain that the army will take him as soon as he is ready to enter. Odets uses Roy as a "specter of Steve's war thoughts." Thus when Steve asks Roy if he would like to have ice cream with them, Roy responds ominously "that don't mix with mustard. So long" (165). This reference to mustard gas would be out of place in most other examinations of an 'entertainment' like the Fair, except that in Odets' conception of it, the Fair is a symbol of the dubious pleasures of consumerism, which offers pleasure to all, but at a steep price for most.

Odets, of course, is not the only one to see a certain irony in having a World's Fair in the midst of a Depression at home and under the shadow of a certain war abroad. Other observers noted that the fair was "riddled by an odd sense of anomie in the midst of optimism, a mood quite understandable given the nation's tentative recovery from the Depression and its anxiety as it watched Europe going to war" (Stern, 727). But most were of the opinion that, as one writer for the *New Yorker* put it, "the Fair would seem to be about as good a place as any to take refuge in when one wants to stop thinking about the world for a moment" (Orr, 55). And while Odets is
conscious of the pervasive sense of anomie, there is nevertheless a strong thread of hope running throughout the play—even in its darkest moods. The trip to the Fair does in fact represent a welcome escape from the realities that have confronted Fay and Steve over the first two acts: her play has closed, he will likely lose his job; she is being pressured to return home to her parents, he has no home at all. After a visit from Fay's father and ex-fiancé becomes a shouting match, Rosenberger offers to take Fay and Steve to the Fair to forget their troubles for a moment.

The fact that Rosenberger offers the tickets is a point in the Fair's favor, for throughout the play, he has been the voice of calm reason and optimism, a father figure to the young lovers. He tries to buoy Steve and Fay's spirits, to show them the power they hold for changing the future. As he tells Steve late in the play:

There are two ways to look, Mr. Takis—to the past or the future. We know a famous case in history where a woman kept looking back and turned to a salt rock. If you keep looking back on a mean narrow past, the same thing can happen to you. You are feeling mad. Why shouldn't you feel mad? In your whole life you never had a pretzel. You think you have to tell me it's a classified world? There's an old saying, "a hungry man is an angry man." We understand that. But your anger must bear children or its hopeless (189).

Rosenberger, though dying of cancer, goads and protects Steve and Fay, always looking towards the future. It is in this sense that Odets admires the Fair, for like Rosenberger, he maintains an optimism that the "world of tomorrow" can be achieved. Indeed, Rosenberger's tag line sums up his character nicely: "I am love with the possibilities, the human possibilities" (105).11

In much the same vein, Rosenberger calls the Fair "Beautiful," suggesting that its true
hope is not in its achievements—they are transitory—but in its vision, its human potential. In this sense, the Fair is represented in Odets' play as a sort of beautiful lie, beguiling, seductive, but to this point unfulfilled. Nevertheless, like the utopian vision of plenty offered by consumer capitalism, it is also a goal to reach for; the Fair is truly lovely. One character warns them before they go, "don't miss that Futurama—you'll get goose pimples" (157), and when they arrive, even the surly Steve is beguiled. He says, "This place looks like they sprinkled it with gold dust," to which Rosenberger adds ("Admiringly"), "You should see how it looks at night" (161).

There is evidence from early drafts of the play that Odets consciously tempered his criticism of the Fair as Night Music progressed. For example in the typescript of the first draft, Rosenberger says "It will be remembered as a tragic period when the Fair opened, an unfortunate year." Also, he rather than Steve is given the line about gold dust, to which Steve then responds, "gold dust sprinkled on an October corpse" (Lincoln Center Archives). These lines changed in the final script most likely because Odets was unwilling to repudiate hope in the face of the unfulfilled promises of the Fair, and by association, of American life. The objections of critics like Edward Murray to the end of the play, that "the remedy proposed bears no relationship to the deeper issues posed by Odets" (126), are valid to the extent that Odets does not offer specific solutions (he never had). Nevertheless, the ending is very much in keeping with the guarded optimism that characterizes the whole of Night Music. Rather than using the high art of the theatre to condemn popular culture outright, Odets tries to couch his critique in a form which mirrors popular culture itself. Rather than abandoning hope, Odets prefers to find a progressive use for popular forms, to place the power to choose their future "in the hands of the people."
IV. "The Anti-Picnic Facts"

If, then, Odets' critique of the effects of popular culture is greatly tempered in *Night Music* by his romantic optimism, in his next play, *Clash by Night* (1941), the mood becomes much darker and more ominous, and the critique of popular culture almost completely damning. Opening in New York only a few weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, *Clash by Night* is surrounded by a mood of dangerous tension and despair that mirrors the political climate into which it was born. Newspaper reviewers were quick to sense the shift that Odets' attitudes had taken over the course of a year and a half, and few were more pleased by new grimness than they had been with the optimistic whimsy of *Night Music*. Even with generally high praise for Tallulah Bankhead in the role of Mae Wilinski, and for former Group member Lee J. Cobb as Jerry, the reviews were far more negative than Odets or his producer Billy Rose (who promised that the play would win the Pulitzer Prize) could have anticipated. John Anderson of the *Journal-American* called *Clash by Night* "one of Mr. Odets worst plays, a rambling, episodic, lurid, and rather pretentious drama," declaring that "when the externals of his playmaking are as trashy as this, the point hardly seems worth arguing" (December 29, 1941); Robert Coleman called it "sordid, depressing, and intermittently moving" (*New York World-Telegram*, December 29, 1941) Burns Mantle of the *News* deplored its "unsympathetic, uninteresting subjects" and noted that it is "completely unrelieved in mood and tone" (December 29, 1941) Of course, Odets intended the sense of impending doom that the reviewers found so difficult to take in the play. In his increasing frustration with the unfulfilled promises of American life, Odets wanted (as he implied in the title he borrowed from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach") to set his play in a "world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams" but "where ignorant armies clash by night."
An article he wrote for the *New York Times* in 1942, titled "Genesis of a Play," describes the process by which Odets shaped *Clash by Night* into its final form. The article includes excerpts from his journals which point out the developing themes of the piece: "August 8: The theme is taking place in my mind, intensely personal but generally significant feeling behind it. The theme, I will say here, has to do with the need of a new morality, with a return to voluntarily assumed forms in a world of democracy where there are no forms but plenty of appetite and irresponsibility." Again, on October 21, "Part of the theme of this play is about how men irresponsibly wait for the voice and strong arm of Authority to bring them to life." In the title of the play and these brief notes we see once more the major concerns of other Odets plays. He is concerned with the disparities that exist in a world that promises a utopian dream but operates most often on the level of violent ignorance. He is also concerned with the narcotizing influence of modern consumerism which influences people to concern themselves only with their own appetites rather than the social good. There is in Odets' conception of the play, in fact, a connection between these appetites and the tendency he speaks of to submit to authority unquestioningly, for an unthinking complicity in the economic and cultural marketplace parallels an unthinking complicity in the political marketplace. As critical in its own way of the prevailing order as *Awake and Sing!*, *Clash by Night* tries to demonstrate how the foundations of democracy are undercut when the responsibilities of the individual are subverted into the quest for material goods. In this play, therefore, the critique of popular culture that Odets began in *Golden Boy* and *Night Music* finds its clearest and most vitriolic expression.

*Clash by Night* opens with Mae and Jerry Wilinski, seven years married, sitting on their porch with their friends Joe and Peggy. While the others are absorbed in watching the moon rise
over the house, Mae is occupied with visions of escape: "An old song was running through my mind (singing softly) 'I'm the Sheik of Araby, this land belongs to me. At night when you're asleep, into your tent I'll creep. . . 'Anyone remember that song?" (4). The memory of this and other popular songs returns to Mae over and over throughout the play, assuming greater and greater emotional importance. It even structures the way she thinks about relationships. For example, when Joe and Peggy leave, Mae tells Jerry why Joe ought to marry Peggy: "She happens to be very much in love with that self-centered gent. She wants him to creep into her tent and he won't" (15). Mae's idea of love comes out of a popular song; it offers escape and excitement, everything that contrasts with the boredom and unhappiness she feels with Jerry. Her use of the song is significant as well because it contrasts Jerry's wide-eyed wonderment at the beauty and distance of the moon and stars with Mae's orientation towards popular culture. The popular song Mae sings expresses desires that she is unable to fulfill; it exists for her as a sense of longing and half-articulated hope. To that extent, it is like the folk tune that Jerry's old father plays on his concertina: "It's a Polish song . . . about the little old house, where you wanna go back, but you can't find out where it is no more, the house . . . " (10-11). Music in this play has subtly shifted, from the "great cheer-up" that Mr. Bonaparte describes in Golden Boy towards the language of the inarticulate, dispossessed and disaffected.

Mae's preoccupation with the mythologies expressed in popular culture is reflected throughout the play by her reactions to the other characters. For example, Earl, Jerry's friend, is a movie projectionist who becomes for Mae an embodiment of the desires excited in her by the movies. Thus, though Earl tells Mae and Jerry that his job is "good pay but dull work" and suggests that "they're not happy, those movie people, none of them," Mae nevertheless expresses
her longing for the "money, cars, and chauffeurs" that to her signify the exotic life of the film (27). To Mae, the sixty dollars a week that Earl earns in the booth is a small fortune compared with the scratching and saving she must do with Jerry. Thus in a very concrete way, the movies mean something magical or idyllic to Mae. They represent the freedom from material want as well as the promise of escape from her life of drudgery (it is also significant, then, that the night in which Jerry confronts them about the affair, they have been to the "amusements," since amusement is precisely what Mae seeks throughout the play). On the other hand, while she looks to Earl for support, she treats her husband Jerry, a carpenter on the WPA projects, like a child. Her constant cynicism towards Jerry's enthusiasm—"you talk too much Jerry. You jump on everything like it's a plank and you're gonna saw it in half" (6)—emphasizes her desperation with "life on the installment plan" (94). Odets sets up a contrast between the bright, almost utopian promises of a vague land where the Sheik of Araby creeps into your tent, and the hot, small Staten Island home where Jerry and Mae live with their crying baby, barely making ends meet.

Perhaps the clearest delineation of the contrast between real and ideal comes in Act 1, Scene 2, at an ocean pavilion. Amidst a score of contemporary references to news events, popular songs and dances, political developments in America and in Europe, talk of sporting events and the like, Earl begins his crude seduction of Mae. The background of this scene, including the seemingly irrelevant tangents, is more important than the actual seduction, for it indicates the scope of the problem as Odets saw it, the connection between popular culture and social responsibility. Nearly all of the reviewers were correct in their assessment that the story of Clash by Night is nothing original. It concerns the development of a love triangle over the course of a long hot summer, and culminates in the violent death of one of the participants. But it is the
way in which Odets frames the seduction within the context of 1941 America, against the background of a popular culture that fills people's lives with images of bliss, that makes it stand out from other plays centering around love triangles. In this scene alone, for example, there are references to Father Coughlin, the Giants, the songs "Mexicali Rose," "The Beer Barrel Polka" and "Avalon," and the rhumba.\(^{12}\)

However, these references are not shiftless attempts to gain audience interest by the depiction of what's familiar. Certainly, the audience was expected not only recognize the references, but also to identify with the sense of deep foreboding that the juxtaposition of comments about war and fascism with "happy" popular songs generated. To an extent, they did. For example, Charles Gentry of the *Detroit Evening Times* remarked when the play opened there on its pre-Broadway run that *Clash by Night* had "poetry, social significance and a timeliness which is amazing" (October 28, 1941). Gentry recognized that in this setting, Odets wanted to demonstrate the potential dangers of popular culture. He works out from a core of specific references to a general indictment of the false promises of a culture which is now tending towards mass culture, a culture of suppression and control. Mae's bewilderment at the power of popular songs is expressed in her comment to Earl about the song "Avalon": "It gives me the jim-jams... always gets me. I used to sell sheet music in the dime store. A place called Avalon... no worries there, sort of flowers in the winter. I don't know how all that stuff gets in a song, but it does... Well, keep smiling! I don't blame Jerry for what he is" (75-6).

Her use of "Avalon" as an expression of bewilderment, like her use of "The Sheik of Araby" as a sort of shorthand expression of discontent, demonstrates the visceral power of popular culture to influence people's lives and language. Likewise, her "keep smiling" refusal to
consider the consequences of a belief in those false promises dooms her attempt at escape to failure. All the characters in the play wander through their lives without having a clear sense of direction; as Mae tells Earl: "you impress me as one of those who needs a new suit or a love affair, but he don't know which" (80). To add this sense of aimlessness, Odets uses the action of constant drinking throughout the play. From the first scene on the porch to the final scene where a drunken Jerry kills Earl, alcohol figures prominently in *Clash by Night*. Odets supports the idea of popular culture as a narcotic influence on those who buy into its message of easy living by using alcohol as a parallel to Mae's songs. Both booze and popular culture are an attempt at escape. As Earl puts it, "that's why I drink this varnish, lady—to get unborn" (103-4). It is the sort of connection that Odets makes more explicitly in *The Silent Partner*, where the baker Corelli says of popular culture: "Many workers is such dope fiend—baseball and boxing dope fiend, movie dope fiend" (Lincoln Center Archives, dated 1936).

Few critics have understood the absolute centrality of cultural references in the play or the anxiety that Odets had about the nature of the popular. Gabriel Miller gives the strongest challenge to *Clash by Night* when he dismisses Odets' critique of popular culture as fundamentally undeveloped:

the gimmick only suggests that Odets' play is not much more meaningful than the average film, or the cited popular songs, 'The Sheik of Araby' and 'Avalon.' The attempted criticism of popular culture is ambitious, but the terms of the charge are not fully explored in this play. Characterizing the movies and radio as a cause for discontent rather than a symptom is an issue Odets has not, in fact, addressed here; nor does the equation of such popular escapism with the onset of fascism find any
echo in the plot of *Clash by Night*. . . Because Odets has established no adequate connection in the play between the personal and the social, his sudden attack on the popular culture is as vague as his treatment of economics, fascism, and war.

*(Clifford Odets, 138)*.

Miller's reference to Odets' use of popular culture as a "gimmick" and his derogation of Odets' play as no more meaningful than a popular song implies an elitist critique of popular culture that is at odds with Odets' more complex understanding of it. In order to be popular at all, it must reflect some real or ideal belief system of a great number of people. For Odets, because something is popular it is in fact meaningful, and it is for this reason precisely that it is also dangerous. Nor does Odets condemn popular culture per se, but rather those who buy its promises unthinkingly. In the key passage, Joe tells Peggy:

> We're *all* afraid! Earl, Jerry, Mae, millions like them, clinging to a goofy dream—expecting life to be a picnic. Who taught them that? Radio, songs, the movies—you're the greatest people going. Paradise is just around the corner. Shake that hip, swing that foot—we're on the Millionaire Express. Don't cultivate your plot of ground—tomorrow you might win a thousand acre farm! What farm? The dream farm! Am I blue? Did you ask me if I'm blue. Sure, sometimes. Tricky Otto comes along, with a forelock and a mustache. Then he tells them why they're blue. "You been wronged," he says. "They done you dirt. Now come along with me, Take orders park your brains, don't think, don't worry; poppa tucks you in at night!" . . . And where does that end? In violence, destruction, cripples by the carload! But is that the end for us? No, sweetheart, not while a brain burns in my
head. And not because we're better than them. But because we know the facts—the anti-picnic facts. Because we know that Paradise begins in responsibility (217).

Miller is partly correct in arguing that Odets has not prepared the audience for Joe's strong and specific attack on popular culture towards the end of the play with other explicit criticisms. But the implicit criticisms are there from the beginning. No audience would be unaware of the utopian promises of the American Dream that Joe criticizes, of the popular songs used earlier in the play (or the ones parodied in his speech), or of the ongoing debate surrounding the nature and uses of popular culture. Perhaps Odets' play is shaped so much from the common stuff of the world that it seems mundane and petty—the dreary Staten Island setting irritated a number of critics—but it should be remembered that the underlying premise is utopian. His call is not for an annihilation of popular culture, but for a recognition of its power and for an understanding of the social ramifications of that power. He calls for individual responsibility towards the social, rather than the individual surrender to the social implied by Kress' fascism. Thus a well-grounded person such as Abe, Earl's fellow projectionist, can dismiss the films he screens as "propaganda for the bug house" (227) and focus instead on his work and family, "Make a plan. Have respect—do your work with respect" (230). Only then can the paradise promised by the American myth and shaped by the forms of popular culture be achieved.

V. "This Whole Movie Thing Is a Murder of the People"

If Clash by Night and Night Music concern themselves with the development of the forms of popular culture and its ramifications for individuals within a social order, Odets' next two plays,
The Big Knife (1949) and The Country Girl (1950), are at once both more removed from and more entwined with such concerns. Ralph Willett suggests that by the time The Big Knife was written, Odets was trapped in Hollywood; he had become "a highly paid lackey . . . in a system to which he finally could envisage no alternative. And the images of popular culture, which had expressed the youthful dreams of the Depression era, were no longer drawn upon when the theme became decay and exhaustion in middle age" (78). Willett accurately notes the lack of specific references to popular culture in the later plays—popular music, for example, virtually disappears—and while Odets' work is never free of contemporary references, they don't serve the same central purpose in these two plays as they had in the earlier ones. But Willett's easy characterization of Odets as a Hollywood "lackey" ignores the complexities of his dual career as well as the ambivalence he maintained in The Big Knife and The Country Girl about both the theatre and film industries. Both plays contain strong criticism of the costs of seeking popularity, as well as analyses of the pressures placed on artists in a market economy. In fact, any understanding of either play is incomplete without an understanding of the relationship between them. Even more important is an understanding of the relationship among the plays, popular culture, and Odets' Hollywood career. These two plays are, in one sense, an attempt by Odets to allegorize his own life in terms of the American Dream, to do what he once wrote in his journal, "I will reveal America to itself by revealing myself to myself" (Brenman-Gibson, xiv).

First produced in 1950 and directed by Odets, The Country Girl was received by the newspaper reviewers as some of his best work. John Chapman of the News called it "tight, taut, and trim;" (November 11, 1950); Richard Watts in the Post called it a "tense and absorbing play" and cited Odets' "intelligent compassion" and "feeling for humanity" (November 11, 1950);
Kenneth Tynan noted that the London production was "quite an important evening in the English theatre" (Curtains, 21). While Harold Clurman dismissed it as "lightweight Odets" (New Republic, December 11, 1950), Brooks Atkinson called it "the best play Odets has written for years. Only 'Awake and Sing!' stands above it in the lexicon of his career" (New York Times, November 19, 1950). Overall, it was hailed as a triumphant return to the theatre for a writer who had been lured from the stage for Hollywood, and whose last play, The Big Knife, had been dismissed as a bitter self-reproach at selling out to the film studios. It is ironic, then, that such praise (except from Clurman, who knew Odets better than the others, and who had given advice during the development of The Country Girl) came for a play which Odets held in low regard.

Odets was not particularly pleased with The Country Girl mainly because he had written it specifically with box office success in mind: "I set down deliberately to write a success . . . it's a good show; it's a theatre piece" (Mendelsohn, "Center Stage," 19). A play written to make money is certainly not new for Odets; after all, the pressures placed upon him by working for the Group forced him to consider financial questions as well as artistic ones. Golden Boy, for example, also was written specifically for money. But Odets realized that in Golden Boy he had found a popular form for his examination of the American Dream that he hadn't in The Country Girl. Nevertheless, he was unable to dismiss his "theatre piece" entirely: "It does have about it a certain kind of psychological urgency, because if you are creative, things do creep in despite the conscious impulse. For instance, there crept into that play a central problem of my own life. And this did give a certain urgency and heat to much that went on in the script. I didn't mean for that problem to come out; I cannily and unconsciously disguised it. But that is unconsciously what came out in the writing of that play" (Mendelsohn, "Center Stage," 19). Still, Odets found it sadly
ironic that the least ambitious, the least socially oriented of his plays, was among the most popular. He had once more gained access to the audience he always wanted but this time with a play he felt said nothing really important.

*The Country Girl* is structured tightly. It is a compelling psychological study of the interdependence between the aging alcoholic actor Frank Elgin, his younger wife Georgie, and the theatre director Bernie Dodd. It is deep in characterization, integrated in feeling and form, and moves towards a convincing ending with a sense of purpose. Elgin's breakdown and rehabilitation and the shifting relationship between Bernie and Georgie are compelling drama on every level, and there is a never a sense of unreality or fakeness about the theatre scenes. Nevertheless, there is a slick feeling to the play that suggests more than a grain of truth to Odets' claim that it was manufactured from the outside in, and only as the play was being written did the depth of feeling enter. As if in confirmation, shortly after *The Country Girl* was produced on Broadway, Odets wrote an article in the *New York Times* (April 22, 1951) titled "Two Approaches to the Writing of a Play." He sets up an opposition between a "false" play and a true one:

In the first case, the writer sits down to "fabricate," without personal affiliation or personal relatedness to the material; he is reporting an objective event, performing a technical operation or what you will, but fabricating he is. The second writer, with equal technical grasp of his medium, begins always with the premise of expressing a personal state of being. Fabrication, do not misunderstand me, may exist on a very high level of observation, technique and competence; but it is only the second kind of writing, in my opinion, which merits the use of those dread words "creative" and "art."
Apart from the implied criticism of his own play (and its reception) there is also in *The Country Girl*—as well as in Odets' article—an implicit criticism of the theatre industry as a whole. Furthermore, his indictment of the theatre parallels his criticism of the film industry in *The Big Knife*. In that play, Charlie Castle, the compromised film star, asks "Don't they slowly, inch by inch, murder everyone they use? Don't they murder the highest dreams and hopes of a whole great people with the movies they make? This whole movie thing is a murder of the people" (70). While "false" theatre is obviously not as dangerous as the "murderous" consequences of a dishonest movie industry, Odets suggests that, just as Hollywood appropriates the dreams of America to make money, theatre is easily trapped within the marketplace mindset that makes a play a commercial rather than an artistic entity. Like kitsch, commercial theatre appropriates the forms of true art to mask its inferior content; it is inherently dishonest. As an industry, then, theatre is capable on a large scale of the kind of falseness inherent in a "manufactured" play.

Despite the fact that Odets notes in his *Times* article that "the creative and deeply felt play is the exception rather than the rule with us, and our theatre the poorer for it," he is never willing to abandon the theatre entirely. In *The Country Girl*, therefore, the indictment of Broadway is less vehement and less permanent than is his criticism of Hollywood in *The Big Knife*. For example, Bernie tells Georgie towards the end of *The Country Girl*, "I'm interested in theater, not show business. I could make a fortune in films, but that's show 'biz' to me." When Georgie responds, "What do you call this play, Literature?" Bernie is forced to acknowledge the parallels between the two industries: "That's true: it's show business trying hard to be theater" (103). Still, Bernie's admission of the true nature of the show he is directing does not deny the fact that there is something useful in it, for the young playwright Unger and the actor Frank especially. Bernie
believes that "A man like Elgin, giving his best performance—he has the magic to transform a mere show to theater with a capital T!" (103). There is a chance at redemption in *The Country Girl* that never surfaces in *The Big Knife*, as is readily seen in a comparison of their final lines. In *The Country Girl*, Georgie says "Wrestle, Bernie. You may win a blessing. But stay unregenerate. Life knocks the sauciness out of us soon enough" (124). On the other hand, the final words in *The Big Knife* are Marion's "Help! . . . Help!! . . . Help!!!", a screaming that Odets' stage direction indicates "does not stop and will never stop in this life" (77).

Odets' assertion of hope at the end of *The Country Girl* is paralleled in the hopeful ending of his *Times* article. Writing about the playwriting class he was teaching at the time for the Actor's Studio, Odets asserts "No theatre need worry for its future while such young people are working and waiting in the vestibules of our common life." The idea of a common life, the sort of collective experience at which his work with the Group was aimed, is in direct contrast to the mechanistic, isolated, profit-oriented film industry he pillories so mercilessly in *The Big Knife*. In fact, the theatre is held out to Charlie in *The Big Knife* as the only possible source of hope: his wife Marion tells him "the theatre can still give you a reasonable living." But even though Charlie responds caustically, "The theatre's a stunted bleeding stump. Even stars have to wait years for one decent play" (15), there remains in the background of *The Big Knife* a lingering belief in theatre as liberating social art. Though there is a danger that theatre will orient itself towards falseness in its desire for recognition and money, there is always the chance to redeem it by the creative individual working for the common good. Odets' criticism of the theatre is thus not made from despair, but from a hopeful belief of the possibilities inherent in the medium.

On the other hand, film is depicted throughout *The Big Knife* as a debilitating form of
popular culture that uses the social myths for private ends and thereby devalues them. The voice of conscience in the play, Hank Teagle, tells Charlie, "I don't want Marion joining the lonely junked people of our world—millions of them, wasted by the dreams of life they were promised and the swill they received! They are why the whole world, including us, sits in the middle of a revolution! Here, of course, that platitude carries with it the breath of treason. I think lots of us are in for a big shot of vitamin D: defeat, decay, depression, and despair" (57). In The Big Knife, the film industry is completely unredeemable because it denies the human connections it pretends to create. In the play, Charlie's marriage is failing, he has an affair with his best friend's wife, he is involved in the coverup of a fatal accident in which he was involved. His isolation continues to the point where in despair he cries out to Marion: "Look at me! Can you face it? Look at this dripping fat of the land? Could you ever know that all my life I yearned for a world and people to call out the best in me? How can life be so empty? But it can't be. It can't! It's proven—statistics and graphs prove it—we are the world's happiest, earth's best. . . " (72). Here Odets connects the idea of material prosperity with the desperation of spiritual malaise. The disbelief Charlie expresses is for Odets the expression of the entire American ethos. The phrase "dripping fat of the land," of course, recalls Night Music and Steinbeck, and suggests again the utopian promise of America denatured by commodity capitalism and cheap popular culture. As with kitsch, the outer form of utopia has been manufactured, but the shell is hollow. The social connections are lost in a world predicated on private gain, and so Charlie chooses suicide rather than continue in disconnection.

Similarly, it is around a difference between the public and the private artist that most of Odets' concerns about Hollywood—in The Big Knife and in his writing about the film
industry—are centred. Marion's plea for help at the end of the Hollywood play underscores the isolation Odets sensed was inherent in the film industry, the difficulty of the individual to create something useful in a culture where only conformity was rewarded. As Odets was aware, the moral pressure to conform obviates any chance at individual expression, or as Charlie says in *The Big Knife*, "free speech is the highest priced luxury in the country today" (11). Nevertheless, it is not necessary to accuse Odets of bad faith or greed in his early encounters with Hollywood to understand the vitriol of *The Big Knife* in his later career. As he delineated in "Democratic Vistas in Drama," Odets was excited about the potential audience that film could reach, and about the possibilities of disseminating a positive social message to millions of people. Nor was Odets the only one of his generation to think so; it was a generally accepted idea that movies influenced their viewers, and while some recognized that the economic structure of the industry locked the industry into aesthetic and political conservatism, others saw in the development of the new technology the chance for social change.14

In practice, Odets' optimism for work in the film industry was in part thwarted by the structure of the studios. Michael Denning has asserted that "the great paradox of film and broadcasting has of course been that the genuine democratization of cultural audiences required such large capital investment and technical training as to have restricted greatly the productions of films and broadcasts" (15). Colin Shindler argues that the economic structure of Hollywood had in fact been cemented in place before the advent of sound film, so much so that, by the 1930's "the art of screenwriting was valued but the office of the screenwriter wasn't" (54). Shindler argues as well that this economic structure restricted writers' freedom: even the most "radical" films of the radical 1930's were not particularly so. For example, he remarks that the reception of the film
version of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (dir. John Ford, 1940) was anticipated with inordinate fear among the press. Trade papers worried that the film would cause rioting and unrest around the country. But Shindler suggests that the film is religious rather than political in tone, far more optimistic than Steinbeck's novel, especially its final appeal to the people: "We're the people that live. Can't nobody wipe us out. Can't nobody lick us. We'll go on forever, Pa. We're the people" (Shindler, 77). The democratic appeal to the popular is here wedded to the economic machinery of the motion picture industry: "[producer Daryl] Zanuck was interested in the triumph of the common man because it was his patronage upon which Twentieth Century's prosperity was founded" (78). Thus Odets' ambivalence about the popular nature of film reflects a deep rift within the structure of the film industry itself.

The history of the screenplay of *Night Music* is another example of the economic pressures on workers in the film industry. The fact that Odets wrote no other screenplay based on his plays (though some, including *Golden Boy, The Big Knife* and *The Country Girl*, were turned into Hollywood films by others) suggests a wariness that perhaps was only overcome by his need to put the stage version of *Night Music* on Broadway. Brenman-Gibson relates Odets' increasing frustration at Hollywood interference as he was writing the screenplay: "Odets was dismayed by [Lewin's] clichéd ideas, as he was by Lewin's suggestion to change the title from *Night Music* to *Mating Call*" (583). The copy of the *Night Music* screenplay housed at the Lincoln Center Theatre Collections of the New York Public Library indicates how drastically the script changed when transferred from stage to screen. Everything in the screenplay is more romantic, less oriented towards an examination of the problems Odets saw in American society. For example, ethnic differences, important in the play, in the screenplay are elided: the Greek-American Steve
Takis becomes Steve Edwards, while A. L. Rosenberger becomes Detective Tobin. There is a great deal more time and attention spent on developing the romance between the two lead characters at the beginning of the screenplay, as well as much more time setting up the entire business with the trained monkeys that Steve is supposed to watch. The fact that *Night Music* was never produced as a film underscores the difficulties that Odets, at first enthusiastic about the screen possibilities, had in accepting these changes.

In two articles written for the *New York Times* about his work in Hollywood—the first titled "Writer Tells Why He Left Hollywood" (July 25, 1948) and the second titled "In Praise of a Maturing Industry" (November 6, 1955)—we get perhaps the clearest encapsulation of Odets' vacillation toward the medium of popular film. The first article attempts to explain his leaving for Hollywood in 1943 as a reaction to the poor reception of *Night Music* and *Clash by Night*, as well as an inability to aid in the war effort due to a charge of "premature anti-fascism" (a euphemism for "Communism"). He speaks of his pleasure and education during his work writing and directing *None But the Lonely Heart* (RKO, 1944), but suggests that further attempts to make another "human motion picture" were rebuffed because "none of it fitted into recognizable Hollywood schemata." Odets sharply criticizes the Hollywood mentality that "desire[s] to make every movie as accessible as chewing gum, for which no more human maturity of audience is needed than a primitive pair of jaws and a bovine philosophy;" nevertheless, he is ultimately unwilling to forego entirely the "dream of a Renaissance to come."

Still concerned with the idea of "how our American cultural world is to move on with human health," Odets places his "hope and wonder" once more in the theatre, which despite "its share of hot-eyed business men . . . the search for the reality of the age (whatever that is!) may
still be spread upon our stage." There is in the 1948 article, then, the same sort of criticism of popular culture that appears in *Clash by Night* and *The Big Knife*, as well as in the larger debates throughout American intellectual circles. Hollywood is damned, not because of technology in itself, but because technology has been adopted by commodity capitalism and has lost its human connection. What could have been democratic has become fascistic. As Charlie says in *The Big Knife*: "Don't you see them pushing man off the earth and putting the customer in his place?" (18).

However, the production of three more Broadway plays (plus revivals of *Night Music* and *Golden Boy*, the latter of which Odets directed), in the years between 1947 and 1955, added to the trauma of testifying in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952, makes it a different Odets who writes in 1955. Coming after years of theatrical work, his 1955 article (written after Odets had seen the film version of *The Big Knife*, which he liked very much) can't be quickly dismissed as self-justification for being in Hollywood. In the article, he argues that "American film-makers are turning more and more to screen subjects of realism and importance. . . . Moviemakers are aware of the problems of the world and its people." Odets suggested in a later interview that this was because the large studios had broken up after the war, allowing independent producers to work on more interesting projects: "Hollywood has become decentralized . . . there are many advantages, or many advantageous possibilities, in terms of making pictures and approaching how you will make them today that simply were not true fifteen or twenty years ago" (Mendelsohn, "Center Stage," 28).

At least by the evidence of his next screenplay, *Sweet Smell of Success*, there is some truth to his assertion that Hollywood had opened itself to issues of importance in American life. Indeed, though the screenplays are not the primary concern of this study, they nevertheless
deserve consideration on their own, especially *Sweet Smell of Success* and *None But the Lonely Heart*. *Sweet Smell of Success* concerns a grasping publicity man who will do anything to achieve fame and wealth. He becomes involved with a powerful columnist in an plot to break up the romance of the columnist's sister and a young jazz musician. Set in the seamy nighttime world of New York clubs and bars, *Sweet Smell of Success* captures as well as any Odets play the desperation of a man denatured by an inordinate desire for the kind of popular success depicted in movies and measured by material goods. Sharp dialogue—"watch me run a fifty yard dash with my legs cut off," and "my left hand hasn't seen my right hand in twenty years" are two memorable lines in a screenplay in which they come thick and fast—combines with a tense, slightly melodramatic situation to show the effects of a world in which being seen and talked about is as important as actually accomplishing something. In some ways, then, *Sweet Smell of Success* hearkens back to *Golden Boy* in its theme of the mad race for money and recognition, though without the suggestion of redemption inherent in the stage play. Odets could never really leave the idea of a culture of abundance behind.

*Sweet Smell of Success* is probably the best known of Odets' films, and is generally recognized to be one of the better screenplays of the 1950's. For example, critic Pauline Kael commented: "Clifford Odets never came through more pungently as a screenwriter; his distinctively idiomatic dialogue generally seems like bad poetry when it's spoken from the screen, but here it's harshly expressive and taut" (*5001 Nights*, 736). And to an extent, Kael's criticism of other Odets screenplays is valid. Of the seven titles that bear his name, only *Sweet Smell of Success, None But the Lonely Heart*, and to a lesser extent, *Humoresque* and *Deadline at Dawn* are memorable, though there are sparks of quality in most of the films he worked on. Odets,
however, was wary of putting his name on films he wasn't happy with or that he felt were tampered with, and claimed that he had worked on "close to twenty films," including Hitchcock's *Notorious* and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (Mendelsohn, "Center Stage," 29; Peary, 62). His film work only on occasion measures up to his better stage plays and therefore has not really been examined in detail. Still, there are indications that Odets' feeling that good work in Hollywood was possible is borne out by his own experience.

*None But the Lonely Heart*, the first film that Odets directed as well as wrote the screenplay for, is generally applauded as a good film. Kael praised the "complicated texture" of the film, saying of Odets that "He gave the material the rich melancholy of his best plays. . . . Odets brought off some hard-earned effects that recalled Orson Welles' first movies. . . . it was an extraordinary début film, and it is an indication of the movie industry's attitude towards talent that Odets only got one other chance to direct—fifteen years later" (*When the Lights Go Down*, 23). Jean Renoir called *None But the Lonely Heart* "a masterpiece" (261). One thing is certain: *None But the Lonely Heart* is clearly recognizable as Odets. Based on a story by Richard Llewellyn, *None But the Lonely Heart* traces the path of Ernie Mott, who, as the opening narration of the film says "quarreled, hungered and loved . . . who searched for a free, a beautiful and noble life in the second quarter of the twentieth century" (*None But the Lonely Heart*, 263). Mott is a wanderer, a man who tries to live outside the marketplace, who refuses to get caught up in what he calls "the business of sweating pennies out of devils poorer than myself" (277). But when his mother falls ill, he is forced to try to make enough money to take care of her, eventually turning to a life of crime in order to make sure she will have enough. At the same time, his mother takes to selling stolen goods in her consignment shop to provide for Ernie after she is gone. The
pressures on the characters to find "the good life" is constant in the film; they spend their days trying to scrape together the material goods promised by a culture of abundance. One of the happiest moments he spends with his mother is when they purchase a new electric refrigerator and show it to the envious neighbors. Still, their participation in the culture of abundance is incomplete, and dependent on selling their ideals. The struggle continues. As Ernie tells his friend at the end, "I'm dreamin', Dad... dreaming the better man. What a go—what a rum go it is. Where's the decent human life the books tell us about? When's the world coming out of its midnight? When's the human soul getting off its knees?" (329). Ernie's struggle is that of Keller, Ralph Berger, Leo Gordon, Joe Bonaparte, and a number of Odets characters: the struggle for a full human life amid petty conditions.

There is thus in the screenplay a continuation of the ambivalence about the culture of abundance that began in Odets' stage plays, where the poor struggle to make ends meet, yet are continually haunted by the spectre of material goods. Because his plays are so concerned with popular culture, and because in Odets' mind and career the theatre was so closely connected to the film industry, any understanding of Odets' work must consider integral the time he spent in Hollywood. In his plays, Odets attempted time and again to elucidate a connection between popular culture and American life. He tried to show how popular forms—including songs, sports, and film—both embodied the American Dream and betrayed it, how the democratic ideal of a people's art was problematized by a commodity capitalism that measured everything in terms of financial success.
Conclusion: "A Perturbation of the Soul": Odets' Legacy

Criticism of Odets is often as concerned with the plays he never wrote as with the plays (and screenplays) he did. Granted, there is a certain decline in his output for the stage after the extremely productive period he spent with the Group Theatre in the 1930's. Though there would be other successes, never again would Odets rise to the popular heights he had reached in the years 1935-1937, from Waiting for Lefty to Golden Boy. In fact, by the time he died from cancer in 1963, Odets had not produced a play on Broadway in almost ten years, had most recently written a screenplay for pop idol Elvis Presley (Wild in the Country [1961]), and was working as a writer for television's The Richard Boone Show. He justified this final work choice in an interview in Time in 1962, asserting that "all the really great artists are professional craftsmen who write everything. But there is this idea in the U.S. that there's something nasty, unsavory, or immoral about doing professional craftsmanship" ("Credo," December 1962).

In spite of Odets' arguments, the "white hope" of the American theatre in the 1930's had three decades later become for many a symbol of an entire generation's loss of commitment, their failure of idealism and capitulation to the forces of capital and conformity. Margaret Brenman-Gibson gives a general overview of Odets' obituaries as "adopt[ing] a variety of tones, some casually contemptuous, some faintly accusatory" and summarizes them thus: "A man of great early promise, having ridden a wave of social consciousness in the thirties, had sold out to the fleshpots of Hollywood" (13). Such facile characterizations have continued in later assessments of Odets' career. For example, Gerald Rabkin, in his otherwise generally excellent book Drama and Commitment, reduces all of Odets' work after Night Music to expressions more or less
devoid of any political commitment. He characterizes The Flowering Peach as indicating that "the rebel in Odets had come to accept the futility of the radical gesture: there is sufficient idealism in the fact of survival" (211). Rabkin is correct in noting that The Flowering Peach is far less radical than Waiting for Lefty. Odets was well aware of the tone of his play; it captured the mood Odets felt was appropriate to the time and themes of Noah's story. But to dismiss it for its lack of leftist ideology indicates a preconceived idea of what Odets should have written. It is, in essence, to place the kind of demands on a writer that Odets struggled with throughout his career, from the Group's demands for a hit to the pressures of the Hollywood studios to create a commercial success. It is to make of Odets' jumbled, contradictory career a cautionary tale, a melodrama that etches sharp lines between the morally (and artistically) acceptable and the unacceptable.

To ignore what Odets did produce—including a number of plays (and at least two screenplays) of indisputable quality—and concentrate on the "failed" promise, then, is to wish away the paradoxes and contradictions in Odets' work. Furthermore, the complexity of Odets' own career and the deep ambivalence revealed in his plays about the promises and failures of American culture point to the pivotal position Odets holds as a mirror of the times in which he lived. To ignore his uncanny understanding of American life, then, is to risk a partial misunderstanding of the era itself. He is a playwright centered in the Depression, and his plays are a response to the cultural developments he saw around him. From his work with the Group onward, his intuitive feeling for the main currents of American life was always informed by a deep sympathy with ordinary people, and a desire to tell their stories. As he wrote in his notes, "In America all we hear about is the heaven of opportunity of success. No one seems ready or willing
to talk of the hell of failures and perhaps lovingly comment on those who people that hell. Those blistered, lacerated and roasted" (Lincoln Center Archives, no date).

But even if Odets is a mirror of his times, it nevertheless becomes necessary to understand his important place in American theatre history as well as the influence of his work on the writers who followed him. While the influence of the Group acting style can readily be assessed by following the omnipresent graduates of schools set up by Group members Robert Lewis, Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner or the directing work of Elia Kazan, for writers, as Gerald Weales says, "the charting of influences is, at best, a chancy endeavor" ("Clifford's Children," 261). Weales goes on to suggest that Tennessee Williams (in The Glass Menagerie, at least: he sees Amanda Wingfield as a Southern Bessie Berger) and Arthur Miller, as well as others, were influenced by Odets to various degrees. As Weales argues, Odets' influence on Miller is more readily apparent than on other playwrights, especially in the similarities of syntax, the Jewish protagonists, and the overtly political plots. It does not seem much of a stretch to see the premise of Miller's Death of a Salesman as a reflection of Frenchy's characterization of modern American life in Rocket to the Moon: "In this day of stresses I don't see much normal life, myself included. The woman's not a wife. She's the dependent of a salesman who can't make sales and is ashamed to tell her so" (404). In the same way, Miller's Biff is a different version of Ben Gordon in Paradise Lost, the Olympic athlete who can't fit into the marketplace in a productive way.

Odets' distinctive and important contribution to American theatre does not lie primarily in his influence on other playwrights, however. It rests, rather, in the considerable achievement of his eleven produced plays, written over twenty years. Weales identifies—correctly, I think—the soaring dialogue Odets wrote as his most profound gift to the theatre; his is among the most
memorable of all American playwrights. Odets was, from the beginning to the end of his career, a verbal volcano. Dialogue delineates the desires and needs of his characters through "extraordinarily rich and allusive language" (Cantor, 151). It is what carries Odets' plays, and sometimes what fails them. Every critic has a favourite line or two, and one or two they cite as an appalling lack of restraint, an inability to tame the gift to the task at hand. Nevertheless, Joseph Mersand identifies in Odets a natural gift for expression, for putting the right word—be it sharp, shocking, or tender—in the right mouth at the right time, and suggests that "Odets' language merits special attention. It is unlike that of any other dramatist in America" (46). Harold Cantor gives the best and most thorough examination of Odets' dialogic structures, identifying the elements of hyperbole, wisecrack, Whitmanesque lyricism, and most importantly, of Yiddish English, that work in combination to give it its unique texture and power.

As Cantor suggests, the Jewish content and rhythms of Odets' dialogue are hard to ignore. They were readily apparent to those who saw his shows in the 1930's, familiar to the Jewish audiences who came to see themselves portrayed on stage. Alfred Kazin, for example, characterized *Awake and Sing!* as containing "a lyric uplifting of blunt Jewish speech, boiling over and explosive . . . brilliantly authentic, like no other theater speech on Broadway" (80-1). The idea that he was unable to write anything other than Yiddish English followed Odets his whole life, an indication of how difficult it is to overestimate the importance of Odets' Jewish background to his work. In fact, Odets' career really began when he recognized that his personal experience as a first generation Russian-Jewish American could be transmuted into art. As he wrote in his journal in 1932 while working on an early play, "here I am writing the Beethoven play—when it's finished it may not be about Beethoven. What I should do is write a play about
the Greenberg family, something I know better and is closer to me" (Lincoln Center Archives, dated July 8). This suggestion to himself eventually became *Awake and Sing!*, a play almost uncanny in its feeling for the struggles of the Depression, rooted in a Jewish milieu, and yet deeply poetic. Beth Wenger has noted that the Depression was particularly difficult for Jews in America: "From unemployed husbands who felt powerless to support and control their families, to youth who became frustrated by the lack of job opportunities, to households plagued by bickering and conflict, the Depression had the potential to destabilize Jewish family life" (49). Her description could be of *Awake and Sing!* itself.

Odets’ Jewish background, therefore, serves as his starting point. It colours his entire worldview. There are numerous Biblical references, some humorous (much of *The Flowering Peach*, for example), some angry (Jacob’s line in *Awake and Sing!* "In this boy’s life a Red Sea will happen again!"), some tender (Georgie’s admonition to Bernie at the end of *The Country Girl* to "wrestle . . . you may win a blessing"). There are also frequent Yiddish expression woven seamlessly into his dialogue, as well as references to traditional Jewish food and holidays throughout the plays. His characters never stray far from their origins. In fact, the entire Edenic impulse of Odets’ optimism is a curious amalgam of Jewish-American experience, American romanticism, the social impulses of the Group Theatre, the economic theories of Marxism, and the powerful seductions of commodity capitalism and popular culture. He seeks throughout his work to arrive at the epiphanic moment when illusion, despair, frustration, and suffering are thrown off to reveal the true human possibilities. This is what motivates the happy endings in the early plays, and remains as a foundation of idealism beneath even the more sombre late plays.

As I have argued throughout, Odets’ immersion in the marketplace makes the economic
and artistic pressures placed on him as a writer a necessary part of any study of the work he produced. His continuing ambivalence towards the culture of consumption and the world of popular culture surfaces in every corner of his plays, from the Caruso records in *Awake and Sing!* to the platinum cigarette case upon which the plot turns in *None But the Lonely Heart*, from the dark and menacing Hollywood of *The Big Knife* to the unreal wonder of the World's Fair in *Night Music*. Like Odets himself, his characters are trapped, fascinated, bullied, beguiled, rewarded, and punished by the marketplace. They can never, however, remain indifferent to it. Jean-Christophe Agnew has suggested that "to demand a 'thick' rather than 'thin' description of the world of goods is to open up vistas of interpretation that are almost vertiginous in their potential complexity" (69). Surely plays—like consumer goods—are not the simple things we often take them to be, nor are critical responses to them. My examination of Odets' ambivalence towards the culture of abundance, then, thickens traditional interpretations of the plays in the same way as Agnew's examination of the world of goods. The complexity of my interpretations of the plays recognizes the importance of the world of goods in Odets' work. It acknowledges and delineates Odets' complex attitudes towards material progress, his fascination with and deep distrust of the marketplace. Always among the most perceptive readers of Odets' work, Harold Clurman noted in the 1970's that the fierce power of Odets' work comes from "a perturbation of the soul which arises from the conflict between native idealism and a worshipful materialism" (Preface, *Six Plays*, x). This conflict, central to Odets career and work, is also undeniably central to American thought and culture, especially from the 1930's onward. Thus Odets, whom Clurman calls "literally a popular playwright, one close to the people, the most ordinary people" (x) lovingly captures for his audiences the difficult tension of a "life printed on dollar bills."
Notes to the Introduction

1. Brenman-Gibson’s biography of Odets, *Clifford Odets, American Playwright*, covers the life and career of Odets from 1906 until the commercial failure of the last play produced by the Group, *Night Music*, in 1940. Brenman-Gibson’s work is a psychoanalytical reading of the works within the larger context of the life. Not strictly the kind of correlation between work and life that Miller and Weales see, but rather the exploration of the private rather than the public Odets. Her analysis is nevertheless extremely useful and detailed, and indispensable for any student of Odets or the Group. Brenman-Gibson notes, too, that there is no direct biography of Odets in his plays, but that his characters, like that of any other writer, are formed from his experiences but transmuted along the way.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Odets himself commented later that he was so astounded by the audience response during the initial performance that he almost forgot his cue as one of the audience plants. His characterization of the night would seem more self-serving were it not supported by virtually every other account of the first production of Waiting for Lefty: "What had happened was you were seeing theatre at its most primitive. You were seeing it at its grandest and most meaningful. . . the audience became the actors on the stage and the actors on the stage became the audience. . . There have been many great opening nights in the American theatre, but not where the opening and the performing of the play were a cultural fact. . . psychologically and emotionally. the proscenium arch dissolved away" (in Brennan-Gibson, 315-16).

2. Stephen J. Baskerville and Ralph Willett remark that there was a steady decline in membership from a high of about $5 million in 1920 to a low of 2.9 million in 1933. They note that unions did not regain their 1920 strength until 1937, when the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organizations boosted union membership to 7.2 million (214).

3. Szostak argues otherwise, that in fact one of the key problems of the Depression was not that consumers couldn't purchase the products, but that there were no new technologies to drive the economy until television began to appear in the 1930's. Odets' awareness of the new technology is reflected in Gus' line in Paradise Lost, when he urges Leo to invest in television: "television's comin' in. sure as death . . . Dealers who's prepared, they'll reap a harvest on this television proposition" (161). Of course, television didn't really become popular until after the war. While the lack of technological innovation may have been a chief cause of the Depression, it is necessary to note that for Odets, the causes of the Depression were not nearly as important as the effects on the people in his plays. Thus for characters like Ralph and Jake in Awake and Sing!, it is not necessary that their economic theory is sound as much as it is essential that they feel oppressed by the economic conditions of their lives. Economics "comes down like a ton of coal on the head" (71).

4. Malcolm Cowley notes that Clurman was wrong for another reason, namely, that no other similar dramas followed Waiting for Lefty: "the mood of the left wing writers had begun to change. Already their dream of uniting with the workers to fight for a new society on American soil was giving way to fears of a new world war that Hitler might win" (61). Thus, while Odets' play indicates a popularization of a radical form of theatre, marking a shift parallel to that of Marxist ideas from the left to the mainstream, it also serves as a gateway into the more mainstream theatre which characterized the Popular Front.

5. Adding greatly to the general distrust of business' ability to provide economic leadership in the Depression were the revelations made by a number of top banking and business leaders in testimony before the Senate Banking and Currency committee in January, 1933, that they had consistently and deliberately violated federal banking and finance laws: "Day after day, [counsel Ferdinand] Pecora elicited . . . testimony that damned them in the public mind as liars, cheats, and swindlers on a grand scale" (Davis, 1.441). Coupled with evidence given in February at an inquiry into the causes of the Depression, where leaders of the steel, railroad, insurance, and banking industries claimed mystification at what had happened but remained staunchly unwilling to change anything to improve the economy, the Pecora hearings made it clear that federal support of the big business plan (to wait out the Depression) was not the best way to alleviate the sufferings of millions of unemployed workers. Rather, the government would intercede directly on behalf of the workers, who would certainly spend money made available to them.

6. In early 1933, Edward O'Neal, president of the Farm Bureau Federation, had testified before a Senate committee that "unless something is done for the American farmer we will have revolution in the countryside within twelve months" (Davis, 1.71)

7. Reuel Denney has noted that the perception city as a self-contained culture was a relatively recent shift in attitude; he argues that it was not until the art of the Ashcan School in the 1910's, that the city began to think of itself as a cultural as well as an economic entity, that popular art began to emerge distinctively from high culture and almost immediately be blended back into it. Odets, too, was very much aware of the city and the popular culture with which it was associated. His plays are about the city, and are filled with references to popular songs, films, cartoons and other forms of popular
culture. The city was a place where individuals tried to find community, to carve out a home in the bustling confusion. In a *New York Times* article written in 1940, Odets acknowledged both the beauty and the horror of the city, noting in typically ambivalent Odets fashion that New York was full of "quick nervous vitality" but that it "hasn't grown up" and keeps its own citizens "insecure and homeless" (*New York Times*, March 31, 1940).

8. Throughout *The Fervent Years*, the idea of a theatrical community is often couched in language of religious belief. Theatre for Clurman is a "communion," it "make[s] men more truly alive." At one point he even speaks of his desire to be a "fanatic" and cites with approval Edward Gordon Craig's statement that the theatre is not a bar, "but a famous temple" (11). Perhaps the messianic purpose of the Group, as it saw itself in the beginning, is best summed up by American writer Waldo Frank. Frank's belief in the Group was based on the fact that "I am primarily interested in what I might call the creation of a new world" (Clurman. 73). Thus the group was set apart from as well as being enmeshed in the community, an existence which reflects the paradoxical nature of their commercial and artistic goals.

9. Wendy Smith notes other, darker reasons for Odets' departure: "He was divided. Too discouraged by the obtuse reception the critics had given his best play to be very eager about getting down to work on the next one. wondering ruefully whether he'd been a fool to turn down all those lucrative movie offers in the first flush of fame." Odets needed to get away from New York. from the theatre. from the Group . . . he needed to sin . . . It was all for a good cause, he told himself. He would cut a quick deal, make a couple of fast bucks, send money to the Group, and be home in a few short weeks" (250).

10. Weales gives as evidence of Odets' disingenuous relationship with Hollywood the fact that the first interview Odets gave condemning the fraudulence of the film industry was part of the 1936 publicity campaign for his first film, *The General Died at Dawn*. Nevertheless, like many other critics. Weales chooses to work primarily in terms of the either-or dichotomy that places Odets either in Hollywood or on Broadway, and refuses to examine the complicated and often symbiotic nature of the relationship between the two (Weales. 110).

11. With the establishment of the Actor's Lab in California in the early 1940's, the Actor's Studio in New York in 1947 (which Strasberg joined in 1951), and schools run by other Group veterans such as Stella Adler. Sanford Meisner, and Robert Lewis, a huge number of actors, including Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Shirley MacLaine, Karl Malden. Eli Wallach, Maureen Stapleton, Uta Hagen, and Patricia Neal, were exposed to the Group's acting methods, and passed them down in turn to another generation of actors and directors (Al Pacino and Robert De Niro, for example). The influence of Odets has been noted as well. most recently in Henry Jaglom's 1995 film *Last Summer in the Hamptons*, where a family of theatre actors named Axelrod (after the character in *Awake and Sing!*) speak fondly of having the chance to act in an Odets play. Ironically. in light of Odets' career, it is a visit by a film actor to the family house which initiates the conflict in the film, as the outsider from world of commercial art invades the sanctity of the theatrical world.

12. Goldstein remarks that this theme embodied the Group's "general admonition against moral compromise" (75), but notes that "most of the Group's playwrights were content to stop with the admonition rather than preach the Marxist doctrine that under capitalism the 'sellout' is inevitable; with the exception of Odets, the Group's few plays offering that variation on the theme were failures" (82).

13. While admittedly almost paranoid in its hatred of Communism, Himelstein's book remains probably the best source of information about the small leftish theatres of the 1930's, as Goldstein's *The Political Stage* is about leftist theatre in general. Himelstein argues that the sole purpose of these theatres was to "indoctrinate a new audience" and asserts that the importance of the social drama in American theatre has been seriously overestimated. Significantly, Himelstein points to the Guild as an example of a theatre that retained "a healthy skepticism towards the theatre of the left" (125). According to Himelstein, the Guild "understood that entertainment was as important as didacticism, even in an unsteady decade, and also that the theatre was supposed to teach an understanding of the human heart as well as the social mood" (152).
14. Clurman, Wendy Smith, and Odets all relate the same story in which Strasberg, approached by Bess Eitingon with a gift of $50,000 for the Group, simply stared at the would be donor in disbelief, so that she finally took her gift elsewhere. Odets recalled him saying at the time, "I honestly couldn't think what we could use 50,000 dollars for." This sort of financial naiveté persisted throughout the history of the Group. In late 1938, the Group discovered that the theatre manager of the Windsor and Belasco theatres had misappropriated $17,000 of Group money. Kermit Bloomgardten, the Group's business manager, was too busy with his outside work for Herman Shumlin to notice, and the other office workers too inexperienced to realize what was happening until it was too late. These examples are typical of the Group's almost schizophrenic relationship to money. It was necessary, but something they had no desire or skill to handle.

15. They cite La Boheme and Wedekind's Der Schnellmaler: oder Kunst und Mammon as examples of a literature that helps to perpetuate the notion of starving artists, remarking archly that "when in 1906 Wedekind gained public recognition and financial success, he stopped writing about the perversion of art through the marketplace" (137). It is important to note that Frey and Pommerehne, as economists, answer the question 'What is art?'.... "by reference to what people want. A distinction between 'popular' and 'serious' art is mistaken from this point of view" (8), and go on to demonstrate, somewhat disingenuously, that artists can have large incomes by citing a number of examples (Shakespeare, Goethe, Da Vinci, etc.) of artists who were able to support themselves through their art alone. This idea that art is what sells, so contrary to accepted (they would say "romantic") notions of art, leads to the cultural debate in which Odets was deeply involved, both in the themes and ideas his plays addressed, and in the contradictions and developments of his career. In this simplistic dichotomy, Hollywood and Broadway represent the opposing forces of low and high culture, the twin uses of Odets' talent for money and for art.

16. Odets' belief that the Group actors were better equipped to handle his plays than other actors began to erode as he grew more disenchanted with Clurman's artistic direction. In one blowup, Odets exploded that he was "bored" with the Group actors and would prefer to write a play for Jimmy Cagney. But even then, he admitted to the Group that "I can't write plays in a void. I must write because you need my plays. If you don't need my plays I would never have written them." Whatever this says about Odets' ambivalent relation to the Group, it underscores the fact that he was always aware of writing for actors who would perform his plays. Odets always wrote from a theatrical core, imagining the words spoken on stage.

17. Moore notes that pressure placed upon them by their co-workers in the theatre is a common source of irritation for playwrights: in a survey of theatre writers done in the 1960's, almost half of the playwrights surveyed "were disheartened with the Broadway productions of their work: directors were incompetent, actors, unskilled, and producers 'stupid'" (38). Moore also notes that in the 1950's and 1960's, playwrights had earned a greater control over the production of their own scripts, including choice about actors, directors, and script changes. Some even went so far as to direct and produce their own scripts (something Odets would do with his later, non-Group plays).

18. While most commodities can be mass produced, at least in part, by machine, the play on stage remains a highly labor intensive activity. Frey and Pommerehne note that art cannot be set apart from the market, because, like the commodities such as furniture and cars, it is subject to the economic principle of scarcity. That is, when labor and capital are used for theatre, they are unavailable at the same time for other purposes, and so by its very existence, theatre participates in the marketplace, becomes a commodity, in effect, in competition with other commodities for limited resources. Likewise, within the arts themselves, resources are scarce: the same writer or actor cannot be doing two things at once, and competition arises for the services of those workers.

19. Heilbrun and Gray are working from information gathered by two pioneering economists of the performing arts. William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen. Baumol and Bowen compared average costs for the 1771-72 season at Drury Lane theatre in London with costs for the 1963-64 season of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, finding that cost per performance increased 13.6 times in that span while the general price increase was only 6.2 times. Furthermore, they note that their findings in other performing arts in a number of countries led them to conclude that "the structural problem of production in the live performing arts is one 'that knows no national boundaries'" (Heilbrun and Gray. 132).
20. The one exception to the Group's practice of selling tickets at standard Broadway prices was the twin bill of Waiting for Lefty and Till the Day I Die, which moved uptown to the Longacre Theatre in March of 1935, but kept ticket prices ranging from $0.40 to $1.50. They wanted to do this to continue to draw their audience and could afford the low prices because the shows cost almost nothing to produce.

21. According to Heilbrun and Gray, another possibility for the financial solvency of theatres is to increase the number of performances per season, so that the average cost per performance declines. Theaters can break even under these conditions, they argue, and even could conceivably turn a profit. This is sound economic theory, of course, from the standpoint of an economist, but to create a theatre that can give 210 performances a year, year after year, requires that there be a steady and committed audience base, which in addition to other factors, ultimately requires that there are scripts and performances that audiences desire to see. The whole controversy within Group about producing Men in White, then, underscores the ambivalence the Group felt towards the methods needed to try to reach something approaching an economy of scale. The Group was dependent on popular plays that would appeal not only to their ideal audience, but to a large Broadway-price paying audience as well. The irony of their agreement to do "popular" melodramas like Men in White primarily as a money-maker is that as Jack Poggi has noted, whenever the Group had a successful play, "it was so heavily committed to outside backers that it could not reap much profit" (152).

22. Moore cites the Census of Manufactures to show the astonishingly rapid replacement of the silent film with the "talkie." Of the 1,347 films produced in 1927, the year the first sound motion picture, The Jazz Singer, was made, only a few were "talkies." Two years later, a full 78 percent of the 1,204 films produced were pictures with sound (13). Naturally, these films needed people who could write dialogue, and soon offers poured in to Broadway for anyone who might be able to write for the movies.

23. This derogation was common practice among workers in the theatre: screenwriter Leonard Speigelglass remarked in 1960, "those of us who write for the screen are all too aware of the epithets that have been hurled against us... Over the years we have been called hacks, high priced secretaries, creatures of the director or producer, pulp writers, craftsmen, sell-outs, cop-outs, mechanical robots (Brady, 15).

24. The list of writers who at one time wrote for films includes Nobel Prize winners such as William Faulkner, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Ernest Hemingway, successful Broadway playwrights like Elmer Rice, Philip Barry, Irwin Shaw, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, S. N. Behrman, Charles MacArthur, Sidney Howard, Ben Hecht, and Lillian Hellman, and a host of other famous names, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Bertolt Brecht, Dorothy Parker, Dashiell Hammett, Nathanael West, Theodore Dreiser, and Aldous Huxley. The only prominent name missing from the list of American theatre writers in Hollywood is that of O'Neill.

25. The average price paid for a script—and between 15 and 20 percent of Broadway productions were purchased each year by the movies—had escalated from 30,000 dollars to 60,000 dollars in the years 1929-1940. Clearly, financially strapped theatres like the Group and playwrights like Odets couldn't really afford to ignore such a large sum of money.

26. Some of the titles Living Newspaper productions give a good indication of how enmeshed in the social and political issue of the day the FTP was. Power was an expose of the electricity monopolies and their holding corporations; Triple A Plowed Under was a documentary about the plight of drought stricken farmers on the Plains, and One Third of a Nation exposed the horrendous conditions of tenement living. But certainly the most controversial of all the Living Newspaper productions was one that was only performed once. Ethiopia, a condemnatory analysis of Mussolini's invasion of the African nation, came under fire from the State Department, causing a furor over which Elmer Rice, disgusted with censorship by government officials, eventually resigned as head of the FTP in New York.

27. There is strong evidence that many producers became increasingly leery in the 1930's of scripts that did not have the potential for sales to Hollywood. Robert McLaughlin notes that the Dramatist's Guild was extremely wary of Hollywood's investment in production, arguing that too great a dependence on film money would, as Guild president Sidney Howard, put it, mean "the virtual elimination of all plays which do not, on the face of things, offer promising picture material." Though McLaughlin agrees with Howard's assessment, he remarks that compromise was at that point...
project their freedom for investigation. In the notice, the call for "trade union mass action" as the most effective way to protect the workers.

In honor of the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution, the mass rallies held in various parts of the country received widespread attention from the media.

28. The need for these actions is highlighted as the back of an event in the US.

Inexplicable: the absence of the degree to which plays were produced or written under the influence of a possible movie.
Notes to Chapter 2

1. Carnegie's essays written between 1886 and 1899 were collected in an edition titled *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*, first published in 1900. They exemplify the ideology that people like Carnegie represented and indeed perpetuated, an ideology based ostensibly on a belief in equality of all (he notes in "An Employer's View of Labor" that "the poorest laborer in America or in England, or indeed throughout the civilized world, who can handle a pick or shovel, stands upon equal terms with the purchaser of his labor" [93]). Though it is important to note that Carnegie is somewhat anomalous because of his vast charitable contributions and his belief that "the amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry" (xvi). he nevertheless believed that a "most intense Individualism" would lead to "an ideal State" (23) by virtue of the benevolence of the wealthy. It is a belief in social Darwinism that motivates Carnegie's self-history: "while the law [of competition] may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it ensures the survival of the fittest in every department" (16). His story of raising himself from spinner in a factory to command a huge steel empire is written as inspirational literature—the Gospel of Wealth—but Carnegie himself noted the social problems inherent in industrial productivity. He recognized that "the price we pay for this salutary change is. no doubt, great. We assemble thousands of operatives in the factory, and in the mine, of whom the employer can know little, and to whom he is little better than a myth... The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also far greater still than its cost—for it is to this law that we own our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train" (16). Early on, then, the consumer good becomes the reward for the workers: alienation is mediated by the commodity, class conflict assuaged by the purchase and enjoyment of material goods.

2. Alun Munslow has argued that Carnegie's rhetorical strategies gradually developed into ones which attempted to assimilate and therefore render harmless conflicting elements in the industrial order; thus, he wrote favorably of trade unions in a "language of patronising complaisance, to produce a pliant, business oriented unionism... this language... was a rejection of the agrarian, individualistic democracy inspired by Carnegie's reading of Jefferson, in favour of a new corporatism essential to the authority of the new order" (218). In the same way, he recast poverty as the necessary precondition for wealth: "the true hero was the poor boy, who through the pursuit of the Gospel of Success, was able to achieve wealth" (218). Munslow argues that these rhetorical moves served to help cement in place the developing industrial order by envisioning society as an organic whole of which all members were working towards the same end. Conflict of a political or class nature, then, was seen not as a fight within the society, but as an insurrection against the already established society. The culture of industrial production and consumption was cast as an unquestionable good: "What Carnegie was about was the identification of his readership with a preferred ideological position based on his appraisal of what constituted orderly, acceptable social change and the true administration of wealth for his class" (223).

3. Odets claimed to have been influenced by Lawson, mostly through the production of *Success Story*, for which he served as the understudy to Luther Adler in the lead. Lawson was an influential dramatist for many aspiring left-wing writers, having penned a book on dramatic theory in the mid 1930's. Lawson's *Theory and Technique of Playwriting* attempted a rigorous Marxist critique of drama, arguing that a realistic, unsentimental, and accurate depiction of the inevitable clash of economic forces is essential to good drama.

4. Odets' fascination with the poetry of Walt Whitman indicates more than a passing interest in the development of the American frontier. Whitman was the poet of mid-19th century American democracy, a poet, who in his expansive, encompassing, and shamelessly self-referential work, attempted to record the breadth of experience and language suggested by the huge land and its peoples. Whitman's was an effort that Odets very much admired, for it was in keeping with his own promise to "reveal America to itself." Odets' brand of Whitmanesque idealism manifests itself throughout his work (in the sort of dialogue that Whitman characterized as "the slang or local song of the Manhattan, Boston, Philadelphia or Baltimore mechanic"), as well as in the hope he held for a national, popular culture. The possibility of greatness he saw in America is mirrored in his decision to name his only son Walt Whitman Odets.
5. Lasch describes some of the backlash against the rise of industrial technology, noting that by the end of the 19th century, some historians, notably Henry George in his *Progress and Poverty* and Brooks Adams in *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, correctly foresaw a growing concentration of wealth in the hands of bankers and the impoverishment of the small farmer at the hands of the industrialists, as well as a rising cult of success. Lasch notes that in the hyper-imperialistic mood of that era, their cries fell unheard, and argues that this was because "the idea of democracy came to be associated more and more with the prospect of universal abundance. America came to be seen as a nation not of citizens but of consumers" (68. emphasis mine).

6. A good example of Barton’s conflation of business rhetoric with the story of Jesus is contained in the chapter of *The Man Nobody Knows* titled "The Leader." Arguing that Jesus was a rags to (other-worldly) riches story to be emulated, Barton characterizes him as "a poor boy, growing up in a peasant family, working in a carpenter shop, gradually feeling His powers expanding, beginning to have an influence over his neighbors, recruiting a few followers, suffering disappointments, reverses and finally death. Yet building so solidly that death was only the beginning of His influence! Stripped of all dogma, this is the grandest achievement story of all!" (19).

7. It is not hard to hear in Lear’s argument an echo of Henry Adams’ discussion of the shift from a religious worldview to a technological one. In the chapter of his *Education of Henry Adams* (1918) titled "The Dynamo and the Virgin," inspired by Adams’ visit to the hall of technology at the 1900 Paris Exposition, he remarks, in his typically self-mocking tone, "to Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the cross." Adams goes on to claim that "everyone, even among Puritans, knew that neither Diana of the Ephesians nor any of the oriental goddesses was worshipped for her beauty. She was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction—the greatest and most mysterious of all energies: all she needed was to be fecund" (365). Adams is here contrasting the European, ancient sense of power encapsulated in the cathedral and the symbol of the Virgin with the American symbol of power, which translated the dynamo from merely a machine to an entire worldview of mechanical productivity. Still, Adams does not make the next move, from the productivity of the dynamo to the reception of the goods it produced.

8. Brennan-Gibson points to a letter that Odets had written in 1939, while financing for *Night Music* was still shaky, to a newspaper, applying for the position of an "ad-man." She notes that Odets’ secretary, Herman Kobland, thought that Odets "wanted to see... whether his writing ability could land him a job writing advertising copy" (581). The fact that Odets was writing a letter like this at the same time he was rewriting the delicate, whimsical (and uncommercial) *Night Music* indicates how conflicted Odets was about the rise of modern consumer culture. Since by that time, Odets was already a very well known and respected playwright, as well as a moderately successful film writer, his interest in advertising must have gone beyond the merely mercenary.

9. The trend towards consumer homogenization in urban centres is mirrored by the standardization of products and the development of national brand names. Marquis asserts that the quick acceptance of brand-names demonstrates the immediate and widespread impact of advertising on consumer habits, its ability to direct as well as inspire consumption: "by 1930, brand names accounted for 70 percent of coffee sales in Milwaukee. 74 percent for macaroni. 78 percent for soap flakes, and 81 percent for butter" (121).

10. There are a number of reasons for the measured increase in the "standard of living," though it must be remembered that for millions of unemployed or underemployed, there would have been no discernable improvement in their way of life. Still, the standardization of electricity and rural electrification plans, for example, were able to improve the lots of many people too poor to buy consumer products. It should be noted as well that refrigerator sales were almost eight times as great in 1935 as they had been in 1929 (Marquis, 120), marking an immediate acceptance of a time saving device. Food sales remained relatively steady throughout the Depression, though it can be argued that because prices dropped, better value for the dollar was possible. Still, we should be careful to note, with Jean-Christophe Agnew, that "standard of living" measurements are an indication that "historians have taken the world of goods for granted... commodities have become the gauge by which allegedly more important historical developments are to be assessed." Lewis Mumford in the 1930's suggested that a focus on commodities came at the expense of other measures of progress:
"the higher the vital standard, the less can it be expressed adequately in terms of money: the more it must be expressed in terms of leisure, and health, and biological activity, and esthetic pleasure, and the more, therefore, will it tend to be expressed in terms of goods and environmental improvements that lie outside of machine production" (398-9, emphasis his).

11. Mumford's book, written in 1932, is a fascinating account of the historical development of technology from a sociological and scientific perspective. Throughout the book, he argues that the failures of technology are manifest in the comparatively useless ends to which the harnessing of natural energy is put. Mumford vacillates between a condemnation of the contemporary system and a utopian argument for a planned system of technology which will eventually free people from labor. It is significant that he ends the book with the forward-looking vision: "However far modern science and techniques have fallen short of their inherent possibilities, they have taught mankind at least one lesson: nothing is impossible" (435). Thus, the final note of Technics and Civilization marks the return to a utopian vision of the future in which the mechanical world, which had begun to destroy the natural world in an attempt to subdue it, would function in harmony with it. Technology thus becomes not the enemy of Eden, but its servant.

12. Cohen notes that "rather than being unconscious victims of large cultural processes like 'mass consumption,' workers were trying to grapple with the contradictions of the consumer society in which they saw themselves steadily becoming entrenched" (160). This sense of consumers being conscious of the contradictions inherent in the developing consumer culture is mirrors in Odets' plays. His characters understand the power that consumerism holds in the culture and attempt to find a personal way to participate in that culture.

13. One can hear in something like Henry Ford's famous line "They can have any color [of car] they want, as long as it's black" a nod toward an ideal of equality of consumption. But there is also in Ford's idea a measure of control over the consumer that Lear's argues was part of the dual nature that advertising attitudes soon took towards consumers: "contempt and uplift". Businesses understood that they were dependent on consumers for their livelihoods, and so alternately attempted to bully and to curry favor in order to create needs and desires for their products: "an apparently emancipatory psychology was harnessed to hierarchical purposes" (Fables of Abundance. 224). Lear's argues that the widespread use of the installment plan and the creation of the practice of planned obsolescence—the periodic changing of styles and models—became "two cornerstones of consumer culture" and helped to promote the culture of consumption.

14. Campbell traces the historical development of what he calls "the Other Protestant Ethic" through the eighteenth century cult of sensibility and the development of the culture of "taste," through the Romantic conflation of "feeling" with freedom and imagination, to the Bohemian exultation of pleasure. He notes that the difference between utility and fantasy is the basis of the split between the Calvinist Protestant ethic and the Augustinian: "The former was identified as a preoccupation with sensory experience, with 'pleasures' regarded as discrete and standardized events, and in the pursuit of which there is a natural tendency for the hedonist to seek despotically powers. Modern hedonism is marked, in contrast, by a preoccupation of 'pleasure,' envisaged as a potential quality of all experience. In order to extract this from life, however, the individual has to substitute illogical for real stimuli" (203).

15. Gassner noted that "Odets has been a writer of allegories in all his work except the underground drama Till the Day I Die. This has probably passed comparatively unnoticed because allegory is no longer a popular form of writing, and its terms generally too vague today when there is no common belief " ("Long Journey." 26). Brennan-Gibson argues instead that Odets' tendency to pursue allegory is turned inward, and the characters he depicts are part of his internal "gallery" of identities. Still, she is speaking more of characters as allegorical rather than the repeated use of significant images, which she recognizes throughout Odets' work. Perhaps the strongest rejection of Odets' attempts at allegory was made by Thornton Wilder, who commented about Rocket to the Moon that "I am not interested in such ephemeral subjects as the adulteries of dentists" ("People." 38). Wilder, who wrote almost entirely in universals in plays like The Skin of Our Teeth and even Our Town, did not recognize Odets' attempts to allegorize the daily trials of his characters. Far more than Wilder's, Odets' characters straddle the real and the allegorical.
16. It is interesting to note—without making too much of the parallel—Odets' personal experience of consumption following the sale of the rights to I Got the Blues in 1933. As he remarked in an interview with Arthur Wagner, almost the first thing Odets did following the receipt of his advance money was to spend it on consumer goods:

I had always wondered what real liquor tasted like. Prohibition was over, and all I ever had was bathtub gin and very phony whiskey. I went into a liquor store and bought two cases of mixed liquor—two bottles of everything—Scotch, gin and rye, applejack, sherry, red port, and something called white port which I have not seen again to this day. And I and my particular chums in the Group Theatre . . . went to town on all that stuff ("How a Playwright Triumphs." 67).

Of course, it is not unusual for someone having finally achieved a long-hoped-for success to celebrate, but the significance lies in Odets' identification of success with the ability to buy a certain kind of good, in this case, "real" liquor. The expenditure on commodities (as he was to do all his life, especially with records and cars) marks Odets' own sense of fulfillment in the social world as intimately tied up with the possession of commodities not only for use, but as an indication of success.

17. Cabell Phillips figures that "between 1933 and 1940, the WPA, with its forerunners and collateral derivatives, became part of the life of every county, hamlet, and city in the nation. It put nearly $20 billion worth of wages and relief payments in the pockets of the needy. How many people were its beneficiaries will never be known, but they ran to tens of millions. . . . Stories about the program were rarely missing, in one guise or another, in the newspapers" (256). The economic power of government relief programs is matched only by the publicity they generated.

18. Lewis Mumford remarks that the tendency to conflate happiness with the possession of consumer goods is reflected in the culture at large, and is in fact endemic to consumer capitalism: "The dogma of increasing wants . . . and the description of the economic process as leading to the universalizing of more expensive standards of consumption in terms of machine made goods—all these beliefs have been largely taken for granted, even by many of those who have opposed the outright injustices and the more flagrant inequalities of the capitalist economic system" (393).

19. This idea of social comparison lies Veblen's theory in with the practice of modern advertising. The "creation" of desires within the consumer is predicated upon a socially accepted mode of living. Consumer compare themselves to others, real or idealized, find themselves lacking, and seek a commodity that will somehow alleviate that lack. For Fayette, the deepest desires of "Mrs. Consumer" are his bread and butter; her envy of the movie stars gives him a way to sell his products, to open up new markets. Note, too, that the emphasis on competition and markets indicates the shift has become selling the product rather than producing it, as Odets was well aware.

20. Cabell Phillips remarks that even in the winter of 1932-33 (when unemployment was estimated at 25 percent), "there were eight pages of travel advertisements in the Times, including a sixteen-day Caribbean cruise by the Italian line for $205" (97). Odets, who was working on a draft of I Got the Blues at the time, wove the great cultural contrasts into the play, so that at the end of the play, Moe and Hennie leave on a cruise while Bessie bemoans the eviction of "a fine old woman with gray hair" (43) in their neighborhood.

21. The absence of "The Young Actor" scene in the Modern Library (1939) edition of Odets' first six produced plays, though it did appear in his Three Plays (Victor Gollancz, 1936), has been noted by a number of commentators. Odets himself told Michael Mendelson that it was dropped from the later edition because it was "too untypical." Weales comments that it had probably been withdrawn by the time it reopened on Broadway in 1935 because it "is the most unequivocal statement of the play's Communist position" (54); Gabriel Miller suggests that perhaps "the artist in him was more than a little embarrassed by the woodenness of its expression" (175); Shuman suggests that it was a matter of the play's structure—for him, the later version has a "more dramatic and contrasting effect" (52). Whatever the reason it was dropped, it seems to be in its use of symbols very much of a piece with the rest of the scenes, and so I refer to it in my analysis of Odets' utopian imagery.

22. Waiting for Lefty does not ignore the significant historical events of mid-thirties America in favor of metaphorical examinations of the culture of abundance, but weaves together the factual and the theoretical. As a number of characters in the play mention, the threat of war was real and omnipresent, as Hitler reared Germany and fascism rose
in Italy. In the same sense, battles for union recognition were being fought all across the country. There were, 1,856 strikes in 1934 alone, 4,740 in 1937, and in total over 10,000 in the five-year period from 1933 to 1937 (Phillips, 516, 522).

23. The Silent Partner. Odets' other (unproduced) labor play, grew more and more to take on allegorical implications. Working outward from a core plot about a strike. Odets described it as moving beyond an "anti-fascist ode to the working class" to something "broader and deeper, a far bigger thing... like the celebration of the good life, a very poetic play" (Brennan-Gibson, 569). Odets' interest in "the good life" as a central theme is completely in keeping with the examination of the culture of abundance he had undertaken in his early plays. Indeed, he often remarked that this play "in terms of inner and outer progression it belongs among the first six" (568). And as Brennan-Gibson has emphasized, Odets recognized that one important aspect of The Silent Partner was an examination of individuals as workers within the class struggle. The good life is one that concerns individual lives, as it does in Waiting for Leify, the consumer culture constituted in terms of personal transformation.
Notes to Chapter 3

1. Edward Murray questions, for example, "how will Hennie's irresponsible behavior usher in the new world? What of her child?" (41). Odets, however, in a letter to Mendelsohn, commented that he believed that "what critics seem to carp at is the cultural (or ethical) meanings of the insights arrived at" (Clifford Odets. 30). This seems to suggest that Odets believed that Moe and Hennie's action is the practical result of Jacob's exhortation to "abolish such families." Nevertheless, a number of analyses of Odets' work see the hopeful endings to these two plays as merely tacked on. For example, John Howard Lawson commented that the ending of Awake and Sing! "is an act of faith. It is not conflict, but the denial of conflict" (252). Murray argues that Jacob's death "does not make Hennie's flight with Moe 'inevitable'... the dramatic question seems unrealistic" (41-2), and R. Baird Shuman concludes that "the audience is left with a very faint hope and with the thought that the play's title must be ironic" (65). About Paradise Lost, Michael Mendelsohn calls the ending "perhaps the most preposterous thing Odets ever wrote... it requires an impossible [suspension of disbelief] to accept it from Leo Gordon" (Clifford Odets. 38). Gabriel Miller is kinder, remarking that Leo's final speech "is no call to political action, but an ode to a more glorious future, not one drawn from any specific dogma or philosophy, but a New Jerusalem that Leo's sees in his mind's eye" (Clifford Odets. 59), and argues that the ending is in keeping with Leo's character if not an accurate reflection of possibility. Odets was open to the possibility that the endings to some of his early plays were "tacked on," though he commented that he still believed in the ending of Awake and Sing!, that "young people can go through an experience and have their eyes opened, and determine from it to live in a different way... I do believe that, as the daughter of the family does, she can make a break with the grounding lies of her life, and try to find happiness by walking off with a man who is not her husband" (Mendelsohn. "Center Stage." 17). Odets remarks, on the other hand, that the ending of Waiting for Lefty was naively hopeful: perhaps he would have characterized Paradise Lost in that light as well.

2. Leiss states the problem a bit differently, suggesting that "the individual's dilemma consists not in falling victim to false or artificial wants, but in determining the suitability of produced objects for the requirements of needs." Indeed, for Leiss, the "principal feature of this response [high-intensity market setting] is its tendency toward a complete identification of needs and commodities" (85). In this sense, the need takes on a physical form. it becomes a concrete object, invested with properties that may have little to do with its actual physical attributes. To realize a utopia on any human level, as Odets suggests, implies a physical dimension that in his plays becomes inextricably wrapped up in the functioning of the marketplace.

3. Richard Wrightman Fox has argued that the sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, who were vocal opponents of consumer society, may have in fact contributed to its rise by attacking it vociferously in the two Middletown books they wrote. Fox remarks that the tendency of critics of consumerism to see people as consumers whose interests needed to be protected helped people more readily to see themselves as consumers, ironically confirming the very ideology they were trying to discredit. Fox notes that "whatever their conscious alienation from big business, the social experts of the 'professional-managerial class' did not constitute a distinct stratum between labor and capital. They were active contributors to the long-term expansion of the capitalist marketplace into the whole of everyday life, and therefore the witting or unwitting servants of 'capital' broadly conceived" (104).

4. Baudrillard's argument compares favorite objects to household pets, something that is both personalized and yet quantifiable. separate, safe: "in the plural, objects are the only entities in existence that can genuinely coexist, because the differences between them do not set them against one another, as happens in the case of living beings: instead they all converge submissively upon me and accumulate with the greatest of ease in my consciousness" (System of Objects. 89). Jacob is himself objectified by Bessie and Morty as a sort of household pet in an attempt to undercut his critiques of the capitalist society in which they so fervently believe. In the play, Jacob is both part of the family and excluded; he is on the margins. He is the caretaker of the dog Tootsie, and one of his final lines makes the connection between himself and the family pet explicit: "Bessie, new lessons—not for an old dog" (85). In this sense, the material object Jacob, as object of the household, is also a possessor of objects in which his idealism is invested. He is both a commodity in the system and an owner of commodities.
5. Pike's characterization of the difficult life of the fruit picker is borne out by the violent, exploitative history of the citrus industry in California. Fruit picking by its nature is a highly labor-intensive industry, dependent on large populations of migrant workers. In California in the early part of the twentieth century, these workers were mostly Mexican: more than 750,000 Mexican workers flooded the California labor market in the years 1910-1930 (Gonzalez, 7). Wages were low and conditions hard, and they remained so even while the industry boomed in the 1930's. Indeed, citrus shipments more than tripled in the 20 years between 1921-22 and 1941-42. Gilbert Gonzalez has gone so far to suggest that the growth of the citrus industry, aided vastly by the development of the transcontinental railroad changed "the diet and nutritional emphasis of the nation" (6). Utilizing a powerful nationwide advertising program, the citrus growers—concentrated to the point where 3.4 percent of growers owned 40.8 percent of the arable land—had made fruit big business. In fact, by the 1930's, citrus had become California's principal agricultural product. As Gonzalez has noted, "not even the Depression could pull down the booming economic edifice" (20). Of course, this fruit, while suggesting Edenic plenty to someone like Edna in *Waiting for Lefty*, was nevertheless a commodity produced by poor workers for a specific marketplace. As I have argued was generally the case with commodities in the 1930's, Gonzalez suggests that the focus in the citrus industry had shifted from emphasis on production to emphasis on consumption: "the orange became a symbol of health, vitamins, and nutrition, and as it did, year-round production increased, while improved marketing and distribution effectively placed the commodity within the main population centers across the nation (20). Edna's increased awareness of citrus can thus be seen as mirroring a national trend. Built on the backs of thousands of poor workers in difficult conditions and aided by the subjugation of the frontier to reliable transportation technology, the citrus industry became, as Odets sensed, a "success story." but one that emphasized not only the possibilities but the strong dangers of an American consumerism that assumed production was easy and effortless. Problems in this Eden became clear when a June, 1936 strike by the workers was violently suppressed by the grower's association. Fruit, for Odets the symbol of a natural abundance, was clearly implicated in a capitalism that aimed at profit for the few while promising plenty for all.

6. This exchange is an echo of one a moment earlier in the play when Prince delineates what he thinks Cleo's needs are: "A man of maturity and experience in everything—love, what to eat, where, what to wear and where to buy it—money to buy it—an eye turned out to the world!" (414). For Prince, love is a business deal, a contract with certain tangible rewards for both participants. For Cleo, however, such a view destroys the idealism she has invested in material goods as well as in her body. If she conceives that everything is a commodity, she loses her sense of identity completely.

7. The thirty dollars Cooper gets for selling his blood also suggests the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas for surrendering Jesus to the authorities. On the secular level, though, Cooper is both the betrayer and the betrayed, a view in keeping with a reading of what a consumer culture asks people to do in order to participate. It is also significant to note that while Cooper talks about living in the park and eating grass if Ben doesn't allow him to postpone payment of the rent, and talks of the plain diet of onions and bread, as soon as Ben says he will wait until the end of the summer, Cooper leaves for a shave in the barbershop downstairs. Consumerist pleasures are hard to escape, even in hard times.

8. Brenman-Gibson's analysis of Odets' attitude towards women recognizes over and over the nurturing possibilities he saw in the various women in his life. He looked to them, figuratively, to feed him, noting at one point in his life that the world was "like a baby] blindly reaching out for a mother's swollen breast" and then transferring this image to his own preference for women with large breasts, whom he identified with "Cybele with her plenitude" (Brenman-Gibson, 180). This sort of straightforward identification of nurturance with women's breasts finds its way into even his earliest plays, such as the moment in *Awake and Sing* when Moe remarks to Hennie that when she gets married, she'll "get fat, big in the tangerines" (57). Moe's crude comment thus marks another connection between the nurturing fruit images that pervade the play, the productivity of the female body which characterizes a number of his plays, and the commodification of the human body which almost always accompanies images of paradise, especially in the later plays. This image also ties in, of course, to Pike's image of Pearl sucking at her own breast in *Paradise Lost*, underscoring the ambivalence of the nurturing breast in Odets' plays—and, as Brenman-Gibson notes, his life as well. She remarks that Bette Grayson, Odets' second wife, whom he characterized as having breasts "like great juicy melons" reminded him instantly of Cleo Singer, and she suggests that "Odets was relieved by this eager, admiring, and grateful child spectacularly adorned with the anatomy of a nursing mother" (592-93). His fetishization of the female breast in his personal life would be easier to dismiss as an anomaly if it were not such a powerful cultural image and also if it were
not so inextricably bound up within his plays. The juxtaposition of the hungry child and the mother who offers plenty hearkens back to images of abundance used in advertising in the first three decades of the 1900's as well as to the common mythology of the plenty of "Mother" Nature.

9. The homoeroticism between Ben and Kewpie is certainly not the only instance in Oedas, and often it is emphasized by other characters. Thus Libby's acid question when Ben and Kewpie reconcile after an argument, "what's this, a love duet?" (178), indicates that Oedas was aware of the relationship between the two men. Other obvious instances of homoeroticism in Oedas are found in the characters of Fuseli and Roxy Gottlieb in Golden Boy, but perhaps most notably in The Big Knife, where terms of feminine endearment are in common usage among the men in the play, who call each other "sweetheart," "boyfriend" and "Ella" throughout. It is interesting to note that often these homoerotic connections are based upon parasitism, as in the case of Kewpie and Ben and Fuseli and Joe Bonsparte, suggesting that by virtue of providing—being the source of nourishment—the "host" becomes feminized, a commodity. Thus Fuseli, called elsewhere in the play "a queer" (292), can speak of buying "a piece" of Joe and Tokio, his trainer, tells everyone that "If you want the goods delivered you have to treat him delicate, gentle—like a girl" (255).
Notes to Chapter 4

1. In 1937, during rehearsals for *Golden Boy*, Odets told the Communist *Daily Worker* that "social theatre isn't dying. It never really lived. . . I don't think the left theatre belongs on Broadway . . . it belongs all over the country in the Federal Theatre, in union halls, in the hinterland. What's the sense in writing plays for a few bourgeois intellectuals on Broadway at $3.30 a head?" (Brenman-Gibson, 482)

2. I have been using the term "popular" culture, as opposed to "mass" culture, though I am aware of the debate surrounding these terms from the beginning. Critics such as Theodor Adorno and Greenberg, who saw the development of popular forms of culture as a system of control which fostered a largely unthinking audience, often referred to these forms as "mass" culture. Others tended to refer to popular forms as merely "popular" culture, emphasizing the democratic aspect of art which was not produced for or by an elite ruling class. David Manning White, for example, argues that popular culture is a form of culture that allows large audiences access to high culture. For White, it is not the technology, but how it is used, that is important. In Odets' case, his ambivalence towards popular culture and his frequently expressed hopes that it could, as White argues, reach large audiences with worthwhile art, undercuts the narcotizing effect of popular culture he describes some plays.

3. Andrew Ross remarks that "the picture of mass culture as a profitable opiate, synthetically prepared for consumption for a society of automations, won favor among the anti-Stalinist, and mostly Trotskyist intellectuals . . . and emerged, in the postwar period, as a primary, conceptual object of intellectual attention" (50). This sense of popular culture as a means of political control is central to many discussions of the period, and helps to explain the paranoia surrounding the HUAC hearings on the influence of film as a tool of Communist control.

4. Odets' HUAC testimony is itself filled with contradictions and ambivalence. George L. Groman calls his case "both typical and unusual." arguing that Odets' decision to name names but take a stance critical towards the Committee "is consistent with Odets' continuing vacillation, his espousal of leftist causes and his oft-expressed fear of the personal cost of such commitment" (66, 73). Groman details Odets' testimony, in which he identifies himself as a liberal and yet distances himself from Communism:

I have spoken out on what I thought were certain moral issues of the day, and I found myself frequently on the platform with Communists that I did not know about then but evidently are now known Communists. Many of these people have some very good tunes. They have picked up some of our most solemn and sacred American tunes and they sing them (75).

In his personal files stored at the Lincoln Center Library, there is a copy of a speech which was apparently prepared—but never delivered—by Odets for the Committee. In it he declares

Not poor myself. I am convinced by every feeling, the experience & thoughts of my not-especially-endowed life, that capitalism must in the name of everything human & sacred be replaced by socialism. . . . the great struggle in the world today, so painful & tormenting, so confusing, is about this one subject: shall human values make the economics or shall economics make the values? I am proud, even defiant against where I do. This is my statement.

The fact that Odets never delivered this statement underscores the economic and political pressures placed on writers to cooperate with the Committee, as well as Odets' personal insecurities. As an outcast, Odets would never be able to reach the people he wanted to reach, but he was unwilling as well to cooperate fully with the Committee.

5. The effects of the "blacklist" and the "graylist" against those in Hollywood who refused to cooperate with the committee are documented by Larry Cepair and Steven Enlund in their book *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960*. They note the power of the Committee to both find and punish suspected Communists was enormous, and suggest that while "virtually no Communists or former Communists escaped exposure, the lives and careers of the frequently named artists were even more lastingly blighted" (372). Groman suggests, however, that even those witnesses who did cooperate suffered "loss of reputation and ability to make a living" (65).
6. Odets himself was a notoriously bad driver, involved in a number of near-fatal accidents. Brenman-Gibson details three separate accidents that took place over the course of a year or so, remarking that "it was alarming to composer Hanns Eisler . . . as well as to others . . . that Odets was steadily being reckless with his life" (555). The parallels that newspaper reviewers made between Odets and Joe Bonaparte when Golden Boy opened are invited once again. Clearly Odets was conscious of the freedom that speed offered. As he noted once in his journal, driving allowed him to feel unencumbered by pressures: "the car is powerful and easy to handle. I am always impressed by the fact that even if one is going seventy or eighty miles an hour the mind is able to keep relaxed and thoughtful" (Time is Ripe, 81).

7. Wendy Smith notes in Real Life Drama that it wasn't just Odets' imagination that saw the finances of the Group largely as his responsibility. She cites an unsigned paper generated within the Group as evidence of financial pressures on Odets. The paper, titled "An Analysis of the Problems" viewed, as Smith says, "Odets once more as the Group's potential savior." She goes on to quote the paper directly: "The present burning problem is the production of Night Music in the most efficient and effective way. . . . The successful production of Night Music opens the opportunity of reorganizing the Group to ensure its future existence as a Group" (394).

8. Given its close ties to the film world, the history of Night Music is important to consider in any examination of the way it uses popular forms. As Margaret Brenman-Gibson relates, Odets, frustrated with the lack of financing raised by the Group, received a request from the Hollywood producer Al Lewin for a copy of the playscript:

Odets immediately sent one off to California. Within four days he had received a long telegram from Lewin saying that "the play is beautiful. Excited about its screen possibilities." Moreover, Lewin adds, "I hate the idea of another writer tying synthetic dialogue to your breathing characters." . . . Before the week was out, Odets had agreed, in exchange for a substantial and immediate chunk of his play's backing on Broadway ($20,000), to write the screenplay for the new producing firm of Loew-Lewin, in which Odets had earlier refused partnership. It is clear that had he not agreed to do this, there would have been no production of Night Music. Even with this advance from Lewin, Odets had to provide most of the remainder—$21,000—from his dwindling bank account (582).

9. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have argued that, like consumer capitalism, the very idea of a World's Fair is predicated upon the idea of abundance, in fact, of "discardability" ("Culture Industry", 120). It appears and disappears, changes shape, molds itself to consumer expectations and ideals. The visit of Fay and Steve to the Fair acknowledges this fact: "In a few days they'll close it all . . . the season's over" (160). It is this built-in evanescence that makes the Fair such a fitting backdrop for the most important scene of Odets play. The entire play is about wandering, loneliness, homelessness: the lead character carries a suitcase around with him throughout the entire play, going so far as to refer to himself as "Suitcase Steve." In addition, there are 8 different settings in the 12 scenes of the play, some outside, some in public spaces like a restaurant or a police station. It is important that none of them occur in a home; the closest they get to a home, in fact, are the run-down rooms of the Hotel Algiers.

10. This irony is furthered in the scene at the Fair itself, when Steve sees Roy again, searching for the exit: "Now that I got in here. I can't find my way out" (172). Roy is seemingly trapped by the spectacle that lured him.

11. It is, of course, significant that Rosenberger's first names are Abraham Lincoln, the President who guided the Union through the Civil War and who freed the slaves. In his journal in 1958, Odets wrote, "Lincoln did some tricky and sly things but I doubt, from my reading, if he ever did an inhuman one. He is human, strangely human. And it is true, I think, that he showed me the folly of the extreme left position. It is a place for goading but not for construction" (Lincoln Center Archives, dated February 12, 1958). Odets' admiration for Lincoln is reflected in Night Music by the beneficent offices of Rosenberger, whose moderate urging of Steve and Fay towards a constructive future is far less leftist than characters like Jacob or Keller in his earlier plays. What is also important is Odets' use of populist political sentiment in the play to connect national myths with his argument for a better life. Like Lincoln, George Washington occupies a central place in American ideology, as the "Father of the Country." In the play, a huge statue on Constitution Mall at the Fair reminds the characters of the idealistic beginnings of the Republic. Washington promised "bread and apples for every man, a flower for his girl" (179), but Odets delineates the discrepancy between idealism and realism when Steve says "The world of the future! I'd like to meet this Mr. Whiskers. He don't know I'm living, Uncle Sam"
(178). At the end of the play, Rosenberger quotes Washington's "the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty . . . is in the hands of the people" as a call to arms. He tells Steve, "you are the people. Whatever you want to say, say it! Whatever has to be changed, change it!" (235) Rosenberger's populist appeal for change asserts the power of the people while being undercut by the dubious offerings of "The People's Fair."

12. Harold Cantor emphasizes the influence of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* in this scene (in the character of a drunken man who has been paid to ignore his wife's affair and who wanders through the scene from time to time muttering "fat o' the land," Lennie and George's catch phrase in the Steinbeck novella) [118], and Gabriel Miller takes the analogy further, identifying Jerry as a sort of Lennie. "A strong. sweet. childlike man" (140). All this seems in keeping with Odets' assertion that "Personally I am of the opinion that Steinbeck and myself are the two young American writers who see clearly what must be done and are doing it. each in our way" *(Time is Ripe*, 15).

13. In a letter written to Milly Hayden in which he talked about the difficulties he was encountering writing *The Flowering Peach*, Odets examined his own work in terms of this line of the Angel to Jacob. "It is one of my favorite lines. 'wrestle and you may win a blessing. In my life I don't 'wrestle' enough. Perhaps an ease of expression or a fluid emotion of simply a fear of losing others' affection if I persisted and pushed, or somewhere in my hulk a faint heart and a deep sense of unworthiness . . . perhaps these are some of the things with make me avoid the grapple. the grasping . . . of a matter until it is done with" *(Lincoln Center Archives, July 21. 1953)*. Giving this line to Georgie at the end of the play makes even stronger the connections implied by Odets' setting his play in the theatre, that art is a struggle against strong forces, of which the desire for acceptance or affection is one of the most powerful.

14. Even the development of the Motion Picture Code in 1930 was a direct outgrowth of the belief that film had an effect on those who watched it. It attempts to control political and aesthetic responses to film by controlling content: It has often been argued that art in itself is immoral. neither good nor bad. This is perhaps true of the *thing* which is music, painting, poetry, etc. But the thing is the *product* of some person's mind. and that mind was either good or bad when it produced the thing. And the thing has its *effect* on those who come into contact with it. In both these ways, as a product and the cause of definite effects. it has a deep moral significance and an unmistakable moral quality. . . In the case of the motion pictures. this effect may be particularly emphasized because no art has so quick and so widespread an appeal to the masses. It has become in an incredibly short period. the art of the multitudes (in Mast. 322). It is interesting to note here that the responsibility of effect is placed upon the "good or bad" mind of the individual who creates rather than the viewer of the movie. The movie code is thus a institutionalization of the old critique of mass culture as an irresistible force. The self-policing of the studios therefore takes on moral and political cast. and as it would in the McCarthy era. censorship becomes a protection of the masses. Art is what is morally acceptable. and socially comfortable. It is the popular by negation.
Selected Bibliography


