

*Bildung* and Class Consciousness in Narratives of Political Formation in France and Germany,  
1890-1938

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To quote Franz Rehbein at the end of his forced military service:

Nun stoßen wir, Vivat, die Gläser  
die traurige Zeit ist vorbei!

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the centrality of the concept *Bildung* in the portrayal of the development of class consciousness in novels and autobiographical texts written by socialist and communist authors in France and Germany from 1890 to 1938. These texts follow Lukàcs' typology for the *Bildungsroman* laid out in *The Theory of the Novel*, but significantly modify the reconciliation Lukàcs imagines for the problematic individual by deferring it to a post-revolutionary future. Class consciousness emerges out of these developmental paths, which include a negation of initial *Bildung* and a second-order, political *Bildung* that discloses the identity of the individual and the class through a recognition of shared material determinants. The first chapter examines the relationship between *Bildung*, associative life, and the early literary politics of the Socialist Party of Germany (SPD) and shows the importance attributed to *Bildung* by the German workers' movement in an effort to reconsider the merits of these workers' mediations and their relationship to the reproduction of capital at this particular historical moment. The second chapter reads the autobiographical life-writings of the Adelheid Popp, Wenzel Holec, Franz Rehbein, Theodore William Bromme, and Otto Krille as *Arbeiterbildungsromane* and argues that these texts show class consciousness to be inextricable from high levels of industrial employment. The third and fourth chapters examine the work of the French communist novelist, journalist, and philosopher Paul Nizan. Chapter three argues that Nizan's concept of alienation as alienation from *l'homme* informs his portrayal of the development of political consciousness by allowing him to see the alienation of intellectuals as analogous to the alienation experienced by workers in capitalist production. Chapter four argues that Nizan's *Antoine Bloyé* and *La conspiration* suggest that political consciousness is unlikely to develop without its material determinants.

**Keywords:** workers' movement, class consciousness, Lukàcs, *Bildungsroman*,

*Arbeiterbewegung*, Paul Nizan, communism, Marxism, novel, Program Era, *Bildung*, alienation

## Introduction

This dissertation analyzes largely autobiographical narratives that portray the development of political consciousness by organized German-speaking socialists before World War I and the French communist novelist Paul Nizan, because Nizan and certain worker-writers of Wilhelmine Germany had a particular interest in the relationship between consciousness and political action that allows the ephemeral phenomenon of class consciousness to become legible in their literary production. I treat these narratives as case studies demonstrating the existence and development of class consciousness and tease out their relationship to philosophical treatments of *Bildung* (formation) in order to demonstrate that these authors portray class consciousness, intentionally or not, following a predictable pattern mediated by a radicalized Hegelian concept of *Bildung* that fits the revolutionary aims of the organized proletariat as a class within a larger process that Eckhard Dittrich has called *Arbeiterbildung* (workers' formation). The first chapter examines the relationship between *Bildung*, associative life, and the early literary politics of the *Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands* (Socialist Party of Germany, SPD) and shows the importance attributed to *Bildung* by political discourse in the German workers' movement. I argue against the commonplace assertion of the critical literature, especially from the former West Germany, that the SPD's early literary politics and the importance attributed to *Bildung* by its leaders demonstrate the *embourgeoisement* of the Party because of the bourgeois sympathies and preoccupations of its leadership. I show, first, that associational life and the *Bildungs*-initiatives of the SPD from 1890-1914 contributed to the development of the proletariat as a class-for-itself; and, second, that real concern with the possibilities of proletarian culture and a serious re-evaluation of the bourgeois cultural inheritance anticipated later trends in socialist and communist literary theory and self-

consciously engaged German Idealism and contemporary literary trends as part of a larger process of class formation. I show that these developments are linked to the material conditions of the project of class formation in what I call, following Jacques Camatte, Gilles Dauvé, and the collective authors of *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes*, the Program Era of the workers' movement.<sup>1</sup> This periodization allows for a more accurate account of this period than the versions of the *embourgeoisement* thesis traded by critics of working-class literature.

In the second chapter, I show through close readings of the autobiographical life-writings of the organized workers Adelheid Popp, Wenzel Holec, Franz Rehbein, Theodore William Bromme, and Otto Krille that these writers all portray the formation of class consciousness according to the same model; this narrative structure follows a modified version of Lukács' typology of the *Bildungsroman* (BR) from *The Theory of the Novel*. The protagonist begins a developmental trajectory by experiencing a first-order *Bildung* that presents their immiseration as a reified *Gottes Fügung* (Adelheid Popp); the experience of suffering, however, alienates them from the would-be universal at the heart of this first-order *Bildung* and problematizes their individuality. After exposure to socialist ideas, the narrators complete a negation of their initial *Bildung* and begin a second-order *Bildung* that turns them into class-conscious socialists in the successful resolution of their alienation from *Sittlichkeit*. This reconciliation, however, differs importantly from the Lukácsian typology by refusing a reconciliation with the world and finding instead a return to *Sittlichkeit* in the new universal of the workers' movement. Class consciousness is clearly portrayed in these works as arising as a result of exploitation in the labor process and out of the material possibilities of cooperation—that is to say, as a result of the

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the concept, see *Théorie Communiste*, "Much Ado About Nothing," in *Endnotes 1*, pp. 154-206, 2008.

particular form of the organization of labor in the peak industrial period of capitalism. These narratives also importantly present this developmental journey as a possibility latent in every worker, abandoning the abstract universal subject of the traditional *BR* in favor of an iterable proletarian subject whose emancipation is identical with human emancipation, which approximately follows the model proposed by Benjamin Kohlmann for the socialist *BR*.

The third and fourth chapters examine the work of the French communist novelist, journalist, and philosopher Paul Nizan. His work is essential to the project of this dissertation for two reasons: firstly, because he is one of the only communist writers in France or Germany from the interwar period to have portrayed the *development* of class consciousness in both essayistic and novelistic texts before the Second World War; secondly, because his depiction of that development in intellectuals and a latent workerism, the idea that workers themselves are their only reliable allies—which, I argue, inheres in the material conditions for what we call class consciousness—also gestures in its failure towards possibilities for solidarity after the Program Era. Successful completion of a political formation for Nizan’s protagonists is always highly contingent because their development lacks the necessary material foundation outlined in the first chapter.

### **I. *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman***

The *Bildungsroman* is one of the most-discussed genres in Western literary criticism. While the heuristic value of the term is widely debated, especially within German Studies, it nevertheless “remains at once one of the most successful and one of the most vexed contributions that German letters have made to the international vocabulary of literary studies” (Boes, 230). Franco M\*\*\*\*\*i,<sup>2</sup> whose monograph *The Way of the World* is probably the most

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<sup>2</sup> I have opted for this rather inelegant method of citing this author as a gesture of solidarity with the women he allegedly sexually assaulted throughout his career.



recent, widely-read critical account of the genre's own development in Western Europe up to the beginning of the First World War, believes the term has "hypertrophied" in the critical vocabulary because "we seek to indicate with it one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma coterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*" (15). While the term has been largely criticized as an ahistorical heuristic, particularly by Jeffrey Sammons, his insistence that it is a uniquely German form is untenable. Sammons' claim relies on a discredited interpretation of German history as a *Sonderweg* taken up uncritically from Dilthey's definition of the genre in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, and his limited engagement with the genealogy of the term *Bildung* limits the number of texts that may fruitfully be read as *BR*, in his account, to two. For Sammons, only *Wilhelm Meister* and Stifter's *Der Nachsommer* are *Bildungsromane*. Yet this does not exhaust, as M\*\*\*\*\*i's *The Way of the World* compellingly demonstrates, the texts for whose character "the term itself, with its rather elaborate and heavily charged connotations" has "some relevance" (Sammons, 230). As Rolf Selbmann writes in his monograph on the German *Bildungsroman*, the "Begriff *Bildung* ist ein unübersetzbares Wort, die Sache nicht" (1). Important to retain, however, from Sammons' intervention is that only the centrality of *Bildung* to both the form and the content of a text justifies reading it as a *Bildungsroman*.<sup>3</sup>

Selbmann locates the full secularization of the concept of *Bildung* at the beginning of the eighteenth century, where it begins to refer to a potential immanent in human beings, often in a metaphoric of organic growth. The term becomes synonymous with upbringing and development and slowly comes to refer to the development of the rational capacities of the

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent overview of the debate between Germanists and other literary scholars, especially in North America, see Boes, "Modernist Studies and the Bildungsroman: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends."

human being in the middle of the century (2). From this period on, it is difficult to overstate the importance of *Bildung* to discourses on citizenship, reason, and the state. In the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, for example, individual *Bildung* is an end-in-itself precisely because it is through *Bildung* that society can become a harmonious totality. As Lars Thade Ulrich argues of Humboldt's conception of *Bildung*, Humboldt "hing [...] der Leibnizschen Lehre von der prästabilierten Harmonie insofern an, als er meinte, dass bereits eine solche Bildung des Einzelnen die Bildung des gesellschaftlichen Ganzen und damit eine Beförderung des Allgemeinwohls unausweichlich zur Folge habe" (2). The organic unfolding of the individual in Humboldt is somehow *causally* implicated in the betterment of the state. A similar understanding of *Bildung*, and especially the importance of aesthetic *Bildung*, underlies Schiller's *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. Schiller turns inward and attempts to solve what he perceives as the horrors of modernity and the French Revolution with an interiorization of the political; his idea of *Bildung* shares with Humboldt's the tendency to see *Bildung* as a mediating agent between individual self-actualization and social harmony, despite the latter's much more obvious relationship to concrete political reform. Selbmann says of this shift towards interiority at the turn of the century: "Hieraus erwuchs ein antirevolutionäres Bildungsverständnis, hier wurde die Bildungsidee der Aufklärung zum Kampfbegriff gegen jede soziale Veränderung umgebogen und zur Verhinderung unerwünschter politischer Entwicklungen benutzt" (4). As this gloss makes clear, as early as its idealist treatment, the alleged universality of *Bildung* is not without a certain discomfort and the tinge of ideology, whether as a guise for reactionary politics or a cohabitant with racist and sexist views opposed to such egalitarian discourses. As countless scholars have pointed out since the late 1980s and 1990s, the universalizing discourses of the Enlightenment often went hand-in-hand with a racist worldview without this contradiction

presenting itself to proponents.<sup>4</sup> This drive towards (repressed or occluded) differentiation despite the universal subject of *Bildung* becomes increasingly important throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century for developments in the BR, all while failing to diminish the importance of *Bildung* in philosophical discourse. Hegel's philosophy puts, if possible, even more importance on *Bildung* than Schiller's utopian account of aesthetic *Bildung*. In Hegel, *Bildung* has the task of sublating particularity and becomes an essential category not merely for the individual, but—arguably—the *form* of the organic unfolding of the world. And in Hegel, too, the movement of *Bildung* is intimately entwined with the overcoming of contradiction, as I discuss in more detail below.

This interpretation of *Bildung* as somehow deeply implicated in contradiction lies at the root of M\*\*\*\*i's claim that the BR is “the symbolic form of modernity” (5). A symbolic form whose utility arises out of its capacity to contain multitudes, to have a structure that “will of necessity be *intrinsically contradictory*” (*idem*). Two other facets of the BR deserve mention here, all derived from Lukàcs' insightful reading of *Wilhelm Meister* in *The Theory of the Novel*: first, “daß die Versöhnung von Innerlichkeit und Welt problematisch aber möglich ist; daß sie in schweren Kämpfen und Irrfahrten gesucht werden muß, aber doch gefunden werden kann” (117). This *Versöhnung* is experienced as real, a genuine experience of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) in which interiority is not contemplative but rather something that “sich handelnd, auf die Wirklichkeit einwirkend [...] ausleben will” (118). Lukàcs continues:

Diese Gemeinschaft ist ein gegenseitiges Sichabschleifen und Aneinandergewöhnen von früher einsamen und eigensinnig auf sich beschränkten Persönlichkeiten; die Frucht einer reichen und bereichernden Resignation, die Krönung eines Erziehungsprozesses, eine

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the scholarships and some trends in this debate, see: Hund et al., *Racisms Made in Germany*. LIT-Verlag, 2011, Zürich and Valls, et al., *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*. Cornell UP, 2005, Ithaca.

errungene und erkämpfte Reife. Der Inhalt dieser Reife ist ein Ideal der freien Menschlichkeit, die alle Gebilde des gesellschaftlichen Lebens als notwendige Formen menschlicher Gemeinschaft begreift und bejaht, zugleich jedoch in ihnen nur die Veranlassung zum Auswirken dieser wesentlichen Substanz des Lebens erblickt, sie also nicht in ihrem staatlich-rechtlichen, starren Fürsichsein, sondern als notwendige Instrumente über sie hinausgehender Ziele sich aneignet. (118-119)

The maturity at the end of the process of formation is thus nothing short of the reconciliation of universal and particular, of freedom and necessity. Joshua Clover stresses the problematic nature of this individual, drawing attention to the fact that this reconciliation “must be an overcoming – always temporary, necessarily individual – of the dissonance of modern society, a structural dissonance which is nothing but the constitutive contradiction of capital’s relations of production” (112). I have cause to return to this constitutive contradiction and its relationship to *Bildung* below, but wish now to stress the individual and temporary nature of this overcoming that nevertheless must remain a possibility open to all. While such a theoretical foundation may at best provide only a general outline for the diverse projects of the nineteenth century English and French novels M\*\*\*\*\*i analyzes, this conception of the BR underlies his entire analysis and captures the imagined solution offered by novels of apprenticeship that manage to achieve a harmonious resolution. The reconciliation of universal and particular is thus both possible and desirable for the problematic individual and for the community in which they exist; both are able to find a home in a process of organic self-realization that implicates both interiority and world as mutually constitutive subjects and objects. This reconciliation of universal and particular in an “Ideal der freien Menschlichkeit” is at the heart of Hegel’s account of *Bildung*, and arguably at

the heart of Hegel's *Phenomenology* itself.<sup>5</sup>

Hans Georg Gadamer glosses Hegelian *Bildung* in *Wahrheit und Methode* as precisely the combination of active participation and resignation that Lukács finds in *Wilhelm Meister*, claiming that “Bildung als Erhebung zur Allgemeinheit” is a “menschliche Aufgabe” (18). For Gadamer, the crux of Hegelian *Bildung* can be found in the dialectic of universal and particular; it is the ability inhibit the spontaneity of desire in order to achieve the universal. According to Gadamer, in Hegel it is the “allgemeine Wesen der menschlichen Bildung, sich zu einem allgemeinen geistigen Wesen zu machen. Wer sich der Partikularität überläßt, ist ungebildet” (18). What Lukács proposes as a typology for certain novels is, in Hegel and Gadamer, human freedom *tout court*. But the nefarious side of *Bildung* also becomes clear in Gadamer's analysis, in which the class character of this utopian *Bildungsideal* discloses itself in *Bildung*'s relationship to servitude and work in his reading of the famous dialectic of master and servant.

*Bildung*:

verlangt Aufopferung der Besonderheit für das Allgemeine. Aufopferung der Besonderheit heißt aber negativ: Hemmung der Begierde und damit Freiheit vom Gegenstand derselben und Freiheit für seine Gegenständlichkeit. [...] In der ‚Phänomenologie des Geistes‘ entwickelt Hegel die Genese eines wirklich ‚an und für sich‘ freien Selbstbewußtseins und zeigt, daß es das Wesen der Arbeit ist, das Ding zu bilden, statt es zu verzehren. Das arbeitende Bewußtsein findet in dem selbständigen Bestehen, das die Arbeit dem Ding gibt, sich selber als ein selbständiges Bewußtsein wieder. Die Arbeit ist gehemmte Begierde. Indem es den Gegenstand formiert, also selbstlos tätig ist und ein Allgemeines besorgt, erhebt sich das arbeitende Bewußtsein

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<sup>5</sup> Hegel's own remarks on the BR are well-known, but the importance of his own *Bildungsbegriff* for his thoughts on the novel are less well-discussed. See Selbmann, pp. 11-15.

über die Unmittelbarkeit seines Daseins zur Allgemeinheit - oder, wie Hegel sich ausdrückt: indem es das Ding bildet, bildet es sich selbst. Was er meint, ist dies: indem der Mensch ein ‚Können‘, eine Geschicklichkeit erwirbt, gewinnt er darin ein eigenes Selbstgefühl. Was ihm in der Selbstlosigkeit des Dienens versagt schien, sofern er sich ganz einem fremden Sinne unterwarf, wird ihm zuteil, sofern er arbeitendes Bewußtsein ist. Als solches findet er in sich einen eigenen Sinn, und es ist ganz richtig, von der Arbeit zu sagen: sie bildet. Das Selbstgefühl des arbeitenden Bewußtseins enthält alle Momente dessen, was praktische Bildung ausmacht: Abstandnahme vom Unmittelbaren der Begierde, des persönlichen Bedürfnisses und privaten Interesses und die Zumutung eines Allgemeinen. (19)

The subject as particular can free itself of its own object-character and determinateness only insofar as it inhibits desire and lifts itself up to the level of the universal. This is also Lukàcs' hero in the *Bildungsroman*, who works on the world as he is worked on by it to the form-giving benefit of both. The mechanism proposed is a consciousness-at-work, which—rising above its own particularity in the exercise of a general consciousness—sublates immediacy and allows for the harmonious existence, to speak with Lukàcs, of interiority and world. Hence, also, the emphasis on interiority in Hegel and Schiller in response to the practical problems of freedom. Through this kind of work, both the subjective excesses of interiority and the overreach of the state tamper and correct one another. The foundation laid provides a theoretical expression for the dream of an organically unfolding personal and political emancipation, just as M\*\*\*\*\*i sees the *Bildungsroman* as its formal expression.

For Hegel, the kind of *Arbeit* that Gadamer discusses is part of the negative moment in *Bildung*. Hegel makes this point explicit in a speech from his time as a teacher and rector at the

*Egidiengymnasium* in Nürnberg. He describes the centrality of alienation and return for *Bildung*, what Gadamer describes as the “Abstandnahme vom Unmittelbaren der Begierde, des persönlichen Bedürfnisses und privaten Interesses und die Zumutung eines Allgemeinen.” Hegel writes that “die Substanz der Natur und des Geistes uns gegenübergetreten sein [muß], sie muß die Gestalt von etwas Fremdartigem erhalten haben” (321) in order to become an object (Gegenstand) of consciousness. For Hegel, this initial moment, our becoming-conscious of an object requires a form of alienation, a separation that is a condition for theoretical *Bildung*:

sich mit einem Nicht-Unmittelbaren, einem Fremdartigen, mit etwas der Erinnerung, dem Gedächtnisse und dem Denken Angehörigen zu beschäftigen. Diese Forderung der Trennung aber ist so notwendig, daß sie sich als ein allgemeiner und bekannter Trieb in uns äußert. Das Fremdartige, das Ferne führt das anziehende Interesse mit sich, das uns zur Beschäftigung und Bemühung lockt, und das Begehrtenwerte steht im umgekehrten Verhältnisse mit der Nähe, in der es steht und gemein mit uns ist. Die Jugend stellt es sich als ein Glück vor, aus dem Einheimischen wegzukommen und mit Robinson eine ferne Insel zu bewohnen. Es ist eine notwendige Täuschung, das Tiefe zuerst in der Gestalt der Entfernung suchen zu müssen; aber die Tiefe und Kraft, die wir erlangen, kann nur durch die Weite gemessen werden, in die wir von dem Mittelpunkte hinwegflohen, in welchen wir uns zuerst versenkt befanden und dem wir wieder zustreben. (321)

This is also the educational value he sees in the classics – the study of ancient languages forces such an alienation from the self. “Das arbeitende Bewusstsein” is free because it has overcome immediacy; work is the mediating category that Hegel glosses, in the passage above, as “mit etwas der Erinnerung, dem Gedächtnisse und dem Denken Angehörigen.” Alienation is then the

form of this mediation.

Hegel's poetic formulation of the way the work of *Bildung* alienates the thinking subject from itself in order to transcend its own limited particularity obviously inspired the Lukàcsian typology of the *Bildungsroman*. The immature youth takes the movement of *Bildung* too literally and seeks intellectual distance in the physical "Ferne;" he then finds depth and strength in this distancing from the self and ultimate return, the reconciliation promised by the successful completion of the journey of formation. This movement is the movement of Spirit's becoming conscious of itself in Hegel, and thus the movement of reason in all its forms and of all thinking subjects and therefore imbued, like the *BR*, with a universal validity—it is imaginable, indeed in Hegel must inhere as a potential in all thought. As Lukàcs writes, the reconciliation of interiority and world at issue in the movement of *Bildung* and in the *BR* may be problematic, but it "muß für *alle*, wenigstens der Möglichkeit nach, offenstehen" (121 – my emphasis).

The universal pretense of this form of work-as-*Bildung*, however, is hard to uphold for both the *Bildungsroman* as a genre and the concept of *Bildung*, with its ambitions of human freedom, outside of the realm of ideas. Elided in this account is the contradiction between the proposed general validity for the thinking subject and the implicit class-character of this conception of work. Clover is right to stress the peculiarity of this overcoming, the changeability of content with a static form, which covers over a contradiction in the universal validity of a highly particularized overcoming. As noted above, M\*\*\*\*\*i argues that the ability to symbolically resolve or live with contradiction explains the salience of the *BR* for Western culture:

When we remember that the *Bildungsroman* – the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialization – is also the *most contradictory*



of modern symbolic forms, we realize that in our world socialization itself consists first of all in the *interiorization of contradiction*. The next step being not to 'solve' the contradiction, but rather to learn to live with it, and even transform it into a tool for survival. (10)

While this is a plausible explanation for the staying power of the BR as a symbolic form and the resilience of the link between *Bildung* and political emancipation, this rhetoric obfuscates the historical embeddedness that accompanies the possibility and ultimate aesthetic failure of such an interiorization of contradiction. M\*\*\*\*\*i rightly locates the BR in the history of forms as belonging to the pre-history and rise of bourgeois society, but fails to account for the period in which it becomes clear that the form's pretension to universality could not hold. The idea of "learning to live with" contradiction that we see pushed to absurdity in Gadamer's gloss of Hegel, in the idea of work-as-freedom, relies on the freedom to act without external compulsion. M\*\*\*\*\*i is sensitive to this point and discusses it in his reading of *Wilhelm Meister*:

work is fundamental in *Meister*: as noncapitalistic work, as reproduction of a 'closed circle'. It is an unequalled instrument of social cohesion, producing not commodities but 'harmonious objects', 'connections'. It gives a homeland to the individual. It reinforces the links between man and nature, man and other men, man and himself. It is always *concrete* work. It does not require a producer who is 'average,' 'abstract', denatured, but is addressed to a specific individual, and to the end of emphasizing his peculiarities. (10)

There is a genealogy here that connects, *Bildung*, the enlightenment project of political emancipation with the Marxist project of human emancipation. This genealogy goes beyond mere textual affinity and shares the trajectory of the BR as a genre in its tendency to limit the

universality of its claims. The final important element of this genealogy is Feuerbach's concept of *Gattungswesen* and its appropriation by Marx in the *Parisian Manuscripts*.

*Gattungswesen* is related to similar functions in Feuerbach's philosophy as *Bildung* in Hegel's by its involvement in mediating between universal and particular as part of an emancipatory project. As Zawar Hanfi has argued, Feuerbach's argument about the anthropological basis of theology and speculative philosophy "contains a categorical imperative" for man to "take back into himself all the richness of content" attributed to God and speculative philosophy in the name of a "practical-emancipatory" project whose goal is the "elevation" of man "from a morally and socio-politically degraded, impoverished, unfree being into a free and dignified being" (35). That man as *Gattungswesen* played an important part in this practical-emancipatory project since Feuerbach's doctoral dissertation has been argued by Trân và Toàn. Feuerbach sees the *Gattungswesen* of man not in work but in thought, noting that the thinking subject attains a universal object in the act of thought and becomes oneself the universal through it (*idem*), in a formally analogous movement to the work of Hegel's bondsman. The gesture towards the enclosure of the subject comes in Feuerbach from its separation from the divine, a gesture towards a materialism that remains incomplete in Feuerbach but nevertheless abandons Hegelian *Geist* and its transcendental trappings and returns life, nature, and all their predicates to the material plane (Hanfi 40-41).<sup>6</sup> Toàn also claims – in line with Zawar Hanfi's argument in his introduction to his translation of Feuerbach – that Marx "reprend la pensée de Feuerbach en même temps qu'il la dépasse" by "identifiant le *Gattungswesen* avec le travailleur conscient"

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<sup>6</sup> Habermas has an excellent gloss of Hegel's detranscendentalizing transcendentalism – comparing Hegel's moral philosophy to Kant's, he says: "[Hegel] entdeckt in Gesellschaft, Kultur und Geschichte den Eigensinn der symbolischen Gestalten des objektiven Geistes. Diese Sphäre der Sittlichkeit untersucht er in einer Rechtsphilosophie, die die Theorie der Gesellschaft und die Staatstheorie einschließt. Damit holt er einerseits die kantische Welt des Intelligiblen aus dem Jenseits von Raum und Zeit zurück in die historische Zeit und den sozialen Raum; aber im spekulativen Gegenzug zu dieser „Detranszendentalisierung“ lässt er andererseits die *symbolisch verkörperte* Vernunft auch wieder in der Dynamik der Selbstbewegung eines „absoluten“ Geistes aufgehen." (732)

(530).

What is unique in Marx's contribution to this line of thought in the *Parisian Manuscripts* is his refusal to take labor as a given, abstract category in the manner of Hegel and his attempts to provide a material basis for Feuerbach's alienation. This gesture continues the differentiating thrust already apparent in Feuerbach's epistemological break and classifies work as a function of a certain social class, a moment in the movement of history. The class position implicit in the Hegelian generalization of the subject of *Bildung* comes to the fore in Marx's discussion of the alienating character of labor. Like Feuerbach, Marx here seems to use species-essence or species-being (*Gattungswesen*) as a mediating term between universal and particular; yet the particular is, in the specific form of labor in the process of production, alienated from the universal rather than joined to it as species-being. This alienation results from the conditions of production that obtain for the formerly abstract, ideal category of work. Man is a *Gattungswesen* for Marx not only insofar as he:

praktisch und theoretisch die Gattung, sowohl seine eigene als die der übrigen Dinge zu seinem Gegenstand macht, sondern [...] auch indem er sich zu sich selbst als der gegenwärtigen, lebendigen Gattung verhält, indem er sich zu sich als einem *universellen*, darum freien Wesen verhält. (61)

Alienated labor prevents this process by alienating the producer from the product of labor and the production process, work or activity itself, from the free activity Marx associates with *Gattungsleben*. Any labor that occurs in a relation of servitude (*Knechtschaftsverhältnisse*) is therefore alienated because it appears only as the means to an end for another; the basic condition for the kind of reconciliation found in the *Bildungsroman* and in Hegelian *Bildung* is foreclosed under conditions of private property. This leads Marx to propose communism as the

practical solution to the problem of alienation, since the highest phase of communism would mean “die wahrhafte Auflösung des Widerstreits des Menschen mit der Natur und mit d[em] Menschen, die wahre Auflösung des Streits zwischen Existenz und Wesen, zwischen Vergegenständlichung und Selbstbestätigung, zwischen Freiheit und Notwendigkeit, zwischen Individuum und Gattung” (87).

It is possible, in this light, to read the communist project of human emancipation as a kind of *Bildungsroman* or at least as a narrative for which, to use the Sammons-test, the term has some relevance. But this would be a different kind of BR altogether; one for which no reconciliation with the world is possible, and in which such a reconciliation could never provide a home or offer a return to *Sittlichkeit* for the protagonists. Instead, the abolition of all relations of bondage would become a prerequisite for *Bildung* or any other form of the concrete universal, for reconciliation between interiority and world; the particular overcoming of the problematic individual would have to be rejected as a sign of the exclusion of the overwhelming majority in an empty gesture of a merely formal freedom. At the least, this genealogy discloses the class limitations of the concept of *Bildung*; the kind of intellectual work that could allow the protagonist to make “seine Lebenstätigkeit selbst zum Gegenstand seines Wollens und seines Bewußtseins” (PM, 62) requires a freedom from compulsion that is inimical to the situation of the worker. In the words of Paul Nizan, “il faut des loisirs pour être un homme” (AA, 112). As Lukàcs writes in his essay “Class consciousness,” written approximately five years after *The Theory of the Novel*, this is the dialectical-tragic in the origin story of the bourgeoisie: “ihre politische Erscheinungsform war, daß die Bekämpfung der ständischen Organisation der Gesellschaft im Namen einer ‘Freiheit’ geleistet wurde, die im Moment des Sieges zu einer neuen Unterdrückung verwandelt werden mußte” (236). The dialectic of master and servant, of

*Bildung* and *Arbeiterbildung*, labor as conscious activity and alienated labor, all the contradictions behind this genealogy are “nur ein Widerschein der tiefstgehenden Widersprüche des Kapitalismus selbst” (*idem*).

According to M\*\*\*\*\*, the BR is brought to its “natural conclusion” (214) with the publication of *Middlemarch* in 1871. Of course, it would be wrong to take this date literally, as if *Middlemarch* were the last work that one could plausibly read as a BR. But the claim does, I think, get at something crucial about what happens, particularly after the First World War, to narratives with affinities to the genre. With the death of the bourgeois universal, which I am tempted to place historically in the same year, none too far from the Midlands, in *Père Lachaise* on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, the BR lost its ability to express the yearning for the self-realization as a harmonious possibility of culture that (partially) explain its staying power. While M\*\*\*\*\*'s argument has multiple thrusts, the most compelling aspect of his account of the end of the genre arises from his discussion of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and *Felix Holt*: “with Daniel and Felix vocation no longer has anything universalistic about it: it originates from an ethnic or social partiality which it tries to *preserve and even accentuate as such*” (emphasis in original; 226). M\*\*\*\*\* describes here, seemingly without knowing it, the afterlife of the genre; the BR becomes increasingly particular, as scholarly publications on the genre since the 1970s show. The feminist, the colonial, the post-colonial, and the political BR are some of the forms that paradoxically attempt to take this universal—in Fredric Jameson's words, this “natural form”—and use it service of an alternate kind of *Bildung* wedded to an alternate and paradoxically exclusive universal. But what might explain the tendency towards limited validity, the prevalence of other sociological factors in identity and community formation in the period beginning around the 1870s? What can account for this genealogy of *Bildung* that slowly but

steadily undermines its own universal subject? While an account of the causes of modern subjectivity are far beyond the scope of this introduction, the difference that initially and most saliently presents itself as a *class* distinction has relatively clear material determinants. The specific quality of labor that leads to Marx's insight – labor for capital in a relationship of bondage – wears its parentage on its sleeve.

## II. *Bildung and Klassenbewusstsein: The Bildungsroman in the Program Era*

In the same speech cited above, Hegel mentions a form of alienation more radical than that required by the movement of *Bildung* – an alienation from *Sittlichkeit*:

Unglücklich der, dem seine unmittelbare Welt der Gefühle entfremdet wird; denn dies heißt nichts anderes, als daß die individuellen Bande, die das Gemüt und den Gedanken heilig mit dem Leben befreunden, Glauben, Liebe und Vertrauen, ihm zerrissen wird!  
(321).

The alienation of the hero that begins the “schwere Kämpfe und Irrfahrten” (TdR, XX) and makes up the content of the rich and enriching process of maturity at the heart of the classical BR does not demand this kind of “sittlichen Schmerz” (Hegel, *idem*), but rather guards against it. If, however, precisely these ties that “das Gemüt und den Gedanken heilig mit dem Leben befreunden” need be severed to begin a more radical process of formation, then a return to *Sittlichkeit* also requires a new universal, something that can help the problematic individual overcome this “sittlichen Schmerz” in order to act. The new universal proposed by the texts examined in this dissertation is the workers' movement; the development of class consciousness portrayed in them is unthinkable without it.

The narratives and historical mediations in the form of workers initiatives I investigate in this dissertation are products of the time period certain theorists, including Jacques Camatte,

Gilles Dauvé, and the collective authors of *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes* have referred to as the Program Era. This period, spanning from roughly 1850 to the 1970s,<sup>7</sup> saw the establishment, rapid growth, and final disintegration of the organized labor movement. In leftist discourse, the history of this period is often understood in terms of failure and betrayal, as a long history of the *embourgeoisement* of labor parties, the betrayal of global revolution by the USSR, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the trade unions, etc. According to this narrative, prevalent in criticisms of German working-class culture and the cultural politics of the SPD, the German working class's combined failure to develop an authentic proletarian culture and reliance on bourgeois models is taken as *post facto* proof that the bourgeois tendencies of the party leadership led necessarily to betrayal. This eschatological reading of the history of the labor movement is not merely uninteresting, but has also exercised a destructive influence on various political tendencies of our own time. If the issue were merely that Trotsky should have prevailed over Stalin, that the syndicalists should have been supported over the communists in Spain, or that Friedrich Ebert smelled of reaction, then the task for politics in the present moment becomes to found a Trotskyist workers' party, to resist hierarchical organization, to avoid parliamentarism, etc., as if the movement of history were a fixed set of scholarly lessons to be applied and the struggle for human emancipation a simple question of the morally correct interpretation and application of these lessons. Such an account invites anachronistic lessons and remains trapped in tautology – the revolution did not occur because the bad men did not want it; the bad men did not want a revolution and thus it did not occur — and falls short of giving a

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<sup>7</sup> This periodization fluctuates depending on the theorist from which it is taken and the causal nexus provided as its origin story, but most accounts start after the upheavals of 1848 and immediate reaction to them and end around 1975, pointing to the Great Recession, the abandonment of Bretton Woods, and the end of the wave of radical upheaval in Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I prefer the longer periodization as a compromise to accurately reflect the intensity of urbanization and industrialization on average including Great Britain. Dauvé also, to my knowledge, never used the term (see Clover & Benanev, “BRICs”).

materialist account of the form of struggle between wage-labor and capital that conditions the failure of both actually existing socialism and workers' mediations to abolish the value relation.

Theorizations of the Program Era attempt to confront this narrative with a more dialectical approach to the constitution of the working class and a more plastic understanding of class struggle. In this reading, the failure of the working class to complete its historic mission and abolish capitalism results from its contradictory position in capitalist social relations rather than some arbitrary, non-systemic error. In this account, “[p]roletarian self-affirmation can never beget proletarian self-negation and the negation of capital; thus — in this phase — the communist revolution was impossible, or rather the communist revolution as affirmation/liberation of labour carried within it the counter-revolution” (*Endnotes 2*, HIS).

Despite the level of abstraction of the formulation, this periodization of the capital/wage-labor relation is grounded in the consequences of capital's need for labor in increasing quantities with increasing population densities, and the other organizational possibilities this causes to emerge, in the Anglo-European sphere across the long nineteenth century. In the words of Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav:

industrialization indexes the growing strength of the class in movement and the party's capacity to present class interests in an organic fashion. Hence also the metaphors of the party likened unto a machine, or the class as a machine put to work by the party. It is a class homogenized and trained by the motions of the machine, in the factory, to act in concert, not only economically but also politically. These metaphors are not incidental. Hence also the vanishing of this party form's possibility along with the end of programmatism in the core, indexed by the limit of industrialization. (751)

There are, for my purposes, two important elements to take into consideration in this



periodization. Firstly, that the forms of life imposed upon labor by capital, its material determinants, determine the forms of appearance of political struggle. Specifically, capital's need for massive amounts of labor concentrated in specific areas and the reproduction of that labor are the material basis out of which the workers' movement and its mediations arise. This periodization insists on the being *in capital* of that movement, of its being determined by capital. The movement of capital creates the material conditions for proletarian organization by uprooting a large substrate of the population and radically altering their conditions of reproduction and binding them to the circuits of reproduction of capital. Cooperation as understood by Marx thus provides the initial material basis for possible forms of workers' organization and creates a set of possible mediations, of which the party form and unions are but the most prominent examples; but these forms of organization depend on capital's demands for labor in industrial centers. As economic history can tell us, "the decisive factor for the course of urbanization and the growth of large cities was large-scale industry" (Köllmann 63); the decisive factor for the proletarianization of various European peasantries and artisans into a class was capital. Secondly, as a periodization, the program era has a beginning and an end. The party form, notions of *Bildung* pertaining to the class, and class consciousness form part of this period and slowly evaporate with it—at different rates in different places, surely, but they dissipate nonetheless. My conclusion suggests some consequences of that disappearance, but here it need only be kept in mind that the forms of consciousness and experience made legible through these authors belong to a moment that is not our own.

There are practical and methodological reasons for focusing on these two particular moments, interwar France and late Imperial Germany. The period under study in the chapters that follow is of particular interest because of the extremely high level of development and

organization of the German proletariat; it thus makes an excellent case study, and the historical period works 1890-1914 offers a less adulterated sample because it antedates the split of the Second International. The relative unity of German mediations in comparison to France or Italy, for example, also makes the form of appearance of the proletarian universal predictable. In addition, the publishing apparatus and historiography of the period make it possible to identify these narratives and likely that they survived, while simultaneously calling for a re-evaluation of the dated and politicized conclusions of much of that scholarship. As I argue in greater detail in chapters three and four, Paul Nizan is a particular case, and because of the implications suggested by his work for political possibilities in the present.

Beyond perhaps being more accurate, this way of reading the history of the labor movement has two primary advantages in the context of this study: first, in grasping the determinants of *embourgeoisement*, we are able to dismiss the need to find the moment where history was betrayed by the leadership of the proletariat and can pose other questions about cultural mediations. For this dissertation, that means examining workers' engagements with *Bildung* and their determinants in order to historicize class consciousness as a particular, historically contingent mediation between theory and praxis that arises out of the organization of labor in the high period of industrial capitalism, as a privileged thought-form in the workers' movement that was able to survive the decline of its bourgeois equivalent. The projects for cultural and political *Bildung*, forms of associational life, and autobiographical texts of the first two chapters make proletarian *Sittlichkeit*, its material basis, and the concrete manner in which workers came to feel and act as a class legible. This is also one of the primary reasons for examining the period 1890 to 1914 in Germany; Imperial Germany had, in the SPD, "the first million-strong social democratic party, indeed the first truly mass-based political party in the

world” (Bonnell, 1). There are practical and methodological reasons for focusing on these two particular moments, interwar France and late Imperial Germany. The period under study in the chapters that follow is of particular interest because of the extremely high level of development and organization of the German proletariat; it thus makes an excellent case study, and the historical period works 1890-1914 offers a less adulterated sample because it antedates the split of the Second International. The relative unity of German mediations in comparison to France or Italy, for example, also makes the form of appearance of the proletarian universal predictable. In addition, the publishing apparatus and historiography of the period make it possible to identify these narratives and likely that they survived, while simultaneously calling for a re-evaluation of the dated and politicized conclusions of much of that scholarship. As I argue in greater detail in chapters three and four, Paul Nizan is a particular case, and because of the implications suggested by his work for political possibilities in the present.

The second strength of this periodization is that it serves as a helpful reminder of Fredric Jameson’s remark “that the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code” (84). I believe that the staying power of *Bildung* is a result of its privileged position within this shared code. It gives form to the contradiction between interiority and world, and a place in which the antinomies associated with ideologies of *Bildung* can come to the fore and be polemicized as part of the ideological struggle. The genealogy of *Bildung* and alienation traced above suggests that the utopian hope of *Bildung* lost nothing of its force, but that such a hope could not be justified against the obvious contradiction of a concept of labor as self-fulfillment and the material reality of alienated labor in the factory. The development of the BR and the staying-power of *Bildung* in antagonistic political discourse, as the parliamentary debate discussed in the first chapter shows, trace the

ways in which capital creates alternative universals through its necessary instrumentalization of processes of differentiation. These processes are by no means limited to the creation of a working class, but underpin and help drive the creation of national, ethnic, and other identities. As sociologist Virdee Satnam writes, “capitalist rule advanced through a process of differentiation and hierarchical re-ordering of the global proletariat, including within Europe itself” (22). This hierarchical re-ordering and the processes of community formation that arise from it shape the afterlife of the *Bildungsroman* by restructuring and reordering the contradiction between interiority and world, by creating new opportunities for socially symbolic acts based in alternative modes of *Sittlichkeit*.

As Eric Hobsbawm writes of the double revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the existence of certain forms of thought antedates the historical moments with which we connect them; but we must nevertheless “safeguard against the temptation to overlook the novelty” (3) of change. M\*\*\*\*\*i claims that, after Flaubert and Eliot, “the historical and cultural configuration which had made the *Bildungsroman* possible and necessary had come to an end” (226). Yet the dissolution of the form itself, a form intimately linked to the project of political emancipation and to the project of human emancipation that supersedes it in the mediations of the workers’ movement, if the genealogy suggested above can be taken seriously, became, for at least some authors, an adequate form to express a contradiction that has only increased with the spread of capitalism and the proliferation of identities over the course of the twentieth century. This is evident in the titles of recent scholarly anthologies on the *BR* that reflect shifting interests and intersectional identities, from *American Women of Color* to *Black British Literature* to

investigations of the BR as a genre in (post-)colonial space.<sup>8</sup> A 2019 collected volume edited by Sarah Graham on the history of the genre includes chapters reflecting an emphasis on the national character of the genre as well as chapters on the female, the postcolonial, and the lesbian, gay, and trans BR. Whether we understand this use as anachronistic or as a result of, following the Warwick Research Center, a kind of combined and uneven development on the literary plane, the appropriation of this form after its expected historical expiration date is not without interest for the history of culture and not without a basis in material processes of exploitation and differentiation perpetuated by the circuits of reproduction of capital and those who benefit from such hierarchical differences.

To return to the periodization underlying the choice of texts for this dissertation, the contradictory nature of proletarian class formation becomes especially clear upon examination of debates around the bourgeois cultural heritage and the potential of proletarian art as part of an effort to go from the class in itself to the class for itself. Lukàcs writes of the contradiction between the *Endziel*, the historical final goal of the proletariat, and the everyday political struggle for rights and increased wages within capital. This contradictory form of organization, as *Endnotes* has argued, always contained within it the counter-revolution:

From anarcho-syndicalists to Stalinists, the broad swathe of this movement put their hopes for the overcoming of capitalism and class society in general in the rising power of the working class within capitalism. At a certain point this workers' power was expected to seize the means of production, ushering in a "period of transition" to communism or

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<sup>8</sup> Some other examples include: Treagus, Mandy. *Empire Girls: The Colonial Heroine Comes of Age*. University of Adelaide Press, 2014; Stein, Mark. *Black British Literature : Novels of Transformation*. Ohio State University, 2004. Bolaki, Stella. *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction*, BRILL, 2011. Nyatetū-Waigwa, Wangari wa. *The Liminal Novel : Studies in the Francophone-African Novel as Bildungsroman*. Peter Lang, 1996.

anarchism, a period which would witness not the abolition of the situation of the working class, but its generalisation. Thus the final end of the elimination of class society coexisted with a whole gamut of revolutionary means which were premised on its perpetuation. (EN1, 6)

This is a theoretical articulation of the reality of the history of German Social Democracy in this period. Andrew Bonnell explains the same contradiction with concrete reference to the German labor movement as follows:

[T]he German Social Democratic Party was successful in mobilising its mainly working-class base precisely through the combination of addressing the real concerns of workers in the present, in a society that was experienced as highly stratified by class, and offering a radical, transformative perspective, that promised a qualitatively different kind of social order. This combination of addressing real problems in the present along with a promise of radical change in the future led to the well-known theoretical tensions between the revisionist and reformist right wing of the party and the more revolutionary left wing. But the party's ability to address workers on both of these levels, a capacity which was perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the long-term party leader August Bebel, contributed powerfully to its success in mobilising its mass following. (7)

This necessary embeddedness in capital also accounts, along with *Bildung*'s relationship to the contradiction of capital itself, and its relationship to processes of differentiation rooted in capital, for the complex interplay between bourgeois and proletarian culture and ideology in the literary texts and workers' organizations studied in this dissertation.

I understand class in an orthodox Marxist sense as a social relation of production; a proletarian is someone who is "frei in dem Doppelsinn, daß er als freie Person über seine

Arbeitskraft als seine Ware verfügt, daß er andererseits andre Waren nicht zu verkaufen hat, los und ledig, frei ist von allen zur Verwirklichung seiner Arbeitskraft nötigen Sachen” (Kapital I, 183).<sup>9</sup> In Lukàcs’ account of class consciousness, there is a tension between an attempt to give a dialectical account of how the truth-content of proletarian consciousness will reveal itself through “eine permanente Krise” (KB 243) to be superior to that of the bourgeoisie; that “die Wahrheit” is a “siegbringende Waffe” (*idem*) for the proletariat, and an extreme investment in the theory that would create the consciousness allegedly generated by the historical dialectic and crisis itself. In some respects, the narratives studied in this dissertation provide an important complement to this account. Consciousness of class appears in these narratives as the mediating term between theory and praxis; it is the means by which the class in itself, as factum, becomes a class for itself as collective agent. And it is, as Lukàcs suggests, related to crisis in the narratives, but only insofar as capitalist crises provide one of the many significant experiences of exploitation that drive what I call, after Eckhard Dittrich, *Arbeiterbildung* (workers’ formation).

These workers’ life-writings and the rare autobiographical novels of the peak in the German workers’ movement, from roughly 1890-1914, show formal similarities that recall the structure Lukàcs proposes for the *BR*. A worker experiences a first-order *Bildung* in the family, church, and military, but becomes *problematic* through experiences of alienation that lead to the negation of this initial formation. Rather than a special relationship to crisis, this negation of initial *Bildung* has a broader material base in exploitation or experiences of abjection which would necessarily be amplified in times of crisis as laborers are expelled from the wage. Class consciousness in these narratives is the form of appearance in thought and deed for the

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<sup>9</sup> The Fowkes translation is: “this worker must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization [Verwirklichung] of his labour-power” (272-3).

revolutionary rejection of their own abject condition as members of their class. To speak with GM Tamàs, the “moral motive for such a self-abolition [of the proletariat] is the intolerable, abject condition of the proletariat” (2). Yet this abject condition is only one condition of possibility of class consciousness as presented in these narratives; the other is the material existence of a proletarian universal, a social milieu or *Gegenöffentlichkeit* that makes the sublation of particularity possible. In other words, not just abjection but, paradoxically, the workers’ mediations of the program era, precisely those mediations that, according to *Endnotes*, prevented the kind of self-abolition for which the proletariat was destined.

Unlike in the Lukàcsean novel of romantic disillusionment, this negation leads not to the loss of the relationship between family and class or a flight into the innermost parts of the soul (TDR, 99), but rather to a second *Bildung*; this second-order *Bildung*, which begins in all cases with exposure to socialist ideas and literature, leads to a revolutionary standpoint that allows the author to return to *Sittlichkeit* as a member of the class while postponing reconciliation between world and interiority to a post-revolutionary future. The movement itself, then, allows the return to *Sittlichkeit* and maintains the class validity of alienation from the world. While the number of works that portray this formation is slight, they are important for a number of reasons. First, because they make legible the otherwise invisible phenomenon of class consciousness, whose historical existence has either been contested or treated as something akin to a platonic idea, and allow us to situate it historically in the Program Era. All of the novels considered in this dissertation are at least loosely based on the lived experiences of their authors and demonstrate meticulously the development of class consciousness, the manner in which the authors came to be for the class, and its complete *unthinkability* outside of the material determinants and mediations available to this historical period and more or less absent in our own. The second



chapter explores this point in detail and argues that class consciousness really did exist, that it was portrayed as a possible form of consciousness for all members of the proletariat, and that it could function as a new universal for workers in the Program Era in spite of the very real threats to their persons, families, and chances to eat that accompanied being-for-the-class. Ironically, this embeddedness in the workers' movement suggests, as I consider briefly in the conclusion, that one of the motors frequently invoked for revolutionary political change is intimately linked to forms of struggle that are no longer supported by the material structure of society and inextricable from the historical impossibility of the proletariat to abolish itself when it was still on the menu.

The second half of this dissertation explores some of the complications that can arise, in the mediations of one particular author, when the material basis for the development of this class consciousness is not forthcoming or the mediations of the workers' movement are not sufficiently developed to offer an alternate universal. Paul Nizan's literary texts portray the development of class consciousness for intellectuals and, in the case of *Antoine Bloyé*, a missed opportunity for class belonging as a result of separation from the determinants of proletarian experience and the immaturity of the workers' movement. His BR are intimately linked to the Program Era and several of its important mediations, especially organized party life and workerist determinism that appears in his works as the economically determined existence of the proletariat. More importantly, however, is that Nizan's focus on the development of intellectuals eliminates the material basis for worker solidarity that made the Program Era possible. Instead, his abstraction of alienation from the production process makes abjection the basis for resistance to capital in a way that formally undermines his novels but perhaps gestures to the possibilities of radical political commitment in the present, in which the mediations of the program era are

neither possible nor, perhaps, desirable forms of struggle. It is possible to read in Nizan the beginning of the end of class consciousness, and the conclusion gestures, hopefully, to speak with Nizan, in a manner that's *humble, mais utile*, to why we needn't miss it.

## Chapter One

### *Bildung, Arbeiterbildung, and the Literary Politics of the German Workers Movement, 1890-1914*

This chapter uses the suggestion of the collective authors of *Théorie Communiste* that workers' mediations in the Program Era were necessarily limited by their paradoxical existence in capital to reconsider traditional debates regarding the *embourgeoisement* thesis and its many variants. Class consciousness appears in light of this reconsideration as an historically specific form of class struggle. If workers' mediations are determined by their paradoxical relationship to capital – an idea supported by the practices explored in this chapter - then it becomes possible to read these mediations as contributing to the class consciousness of workers in the Program Era without the need to hypothesize alternative practices that would have avoided the historical failure of the proletarian revolution. In this way, I hope to contribute to the re-evaluation of the Social Democratic Party of Germany Andrew Bonnell has called for (2-3), in order to consider the way this contradictory existence in capital played out in the cultural practices of the Party and how workers nevertheless came to consider the Party as the carrier of their revolutionary aspirations. Many of the theoretical interventions by socialist thinkers explicitly worked against the theories of their bourgeois counterparts, and this chapter seeks to help restore, without pretense to a revolutionary content, lesson, or secret, the fullness of proletarian engagements with bourgeois culture, its relationship to the development of class consciousness, and to consider the material basis of those engagements. I argue that *Bildung* and *Arbeiterbildung* have such salience because they are important forms of appearance of the dialectical contradiction of capital itself, in accordance with Lukàcs' theory of class consciousness, whose becoming-conscious had high stakes for participants in this particular moment of class struggle, rather than

the result of a debt to German idealism or of the bourgeois intellectual preoccupations of socialist theoreticians.

## I. **Bildung, Class, and Class Consciousness**

The history of the German Workers' Movement is intimately linked to the history of projects to expose the German proletariat to *Bildung*, initially in the form of religious or liberal philanthropic associations whose aim was to civilize the lower classes and ameliorate conditions in response to the "social question" from above without contesting the expanding structural basis of proletarian exploitation. It is difficult to overestimate the discursive and ideological importance of *Bildung* and its closely related synonym *Kultur* in Germany from the Humanist to the Nazi period. In a book analyzing what he calls the "semantic special path" of the two terms in Germany, Georg Bollenbeck claims that *Bildung* and *Kultur* represent a (semantically) uniquely German phenomenon, an interpretive pattern (*Deutungsmuster*) used and contested by political actors, thinkers, and educators of all persuasions. Bollenbeck begins his book-length study of the terms by citing a debate on reforms to voters' rights in the Prussian house of representatives in 1910. He notes that all members of the Prussian legislature rely on the same semantic schema to justify their positions:

Es handelt sich ja nicht darum, die Mängel und Vorzüge der 'Bildung' oder der 'Kultur' zu erwägen. Die Begriffe werden selbst zum höchsten Maßstab. Wer sie wem zu- und abspricht, das bleibt zu zeigen [...] Diese Hochschätzung als unbestreitbarer Wert schließt programmatische Unterschiede nicht aus. (18)

Bollenbeck identifies here the key elements for a nuanced understanding of German socialism's engagement with *Bildung*: the esteem (*Hochschätzung*) in which the concept is held made it a possible channel for political struggle, and the ubiquity of its value necessitated that the concept

carry radically different meanings for different classes of speaker. Additionally, many workers, functionaries, social welfare advocates, and party intellectuals viewed *Arbeiterbildung* as one of the greatest aims of socialist revolution and as a necessary practical step towards a socialist world. To recall Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach: "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself" (172).<sup>10</sup> In the cultural context of Wilhelmine Germany, the workers' movement's effort "to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class" (Marx MKP, 259) forced a confrontation in a field in which the contradiction between the promises of *Bildung* and its impossibility for workers could promote the development of class consciousness in workers by exposing the exploitative logic of capital and bourgeois ideology. While Bollenbeck is certainly correct to insist that "[d]as Bildungsbürgertum ist die eigentliche Trägerschicht des Deutungsmusters" (25), *Arbeiterbildung* is not identical to *Bildung*; the concepts behind these terms are precisely what is being contested in the "programmatic differences" underpinning their mobilization.

*Arbeiterbildung* is not identical to *Bildung*, as the historic self-perception of the workers' movement, the writings of the movement's theorists and policy makers, and practical attempts to develop institutions to promote the emancipation of the working class all amply demonstrate. *Arbeiterbildung* arose in opposition to an Enlightenment theory of the perfectability of the subject and the imagined harmony of citizen and state to contest fundamental aspects of bourgeois ideology. Eckhard Dittrich details multiple distinctions between *Bildung* and *Arbeiterbildung*, the most fundamental of which is that *Bildung* seeks to liberate the individual

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<sup>10</sup> "Educator" and "educated" here translate the German "Erzieher" and "erzogen" – no formal relationship to *Bildung*, related to the English "to raise" and the French *élever*. The German is: "Die materialistische Lehre von der Veränderung der Umstände und der Erziehung vergißt, daß die Umstände von den Menschen verändert und der Erzieher selbst erzogen werden muß" (MEW B3, 5).

through cultivation, whereas *Arbeiterbildung* seeks the liberation of the proletariat through the cultivation of class consciousness. For Dittrich, there are two crucial facets of *Arbeiterbildung* that must be heeded for an adequate understanding of it as a practice as it develops within the workers' movement. Firstly, *Arbeiterbildung* requires that workers understand themselves and their labor as producers and reproducers of not merely commodities but of social relations, which it is up to them to change; secondly, and as a corollary, that the "intended self-liberation is only possible as part of the collective" (6).<sup>11</sup> *Arbeiterbildung*, in this formulation, thus comprises a wide range of possible actions and activities (whether viewed traditionally as parts of *Bildung* and *Kultur* or not) which promote both awareness of the role of wage-labor in the production process and the sense of belonging to and living or falling with a specific class. In the next chapter, I show that this also belonged in the self-perception of workers' and their own depictions of the development of class consciousness. Dittrich's definition of *Arbeiterbildung* as a kind of collective political praxis allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role of *Bildung* in the workers' movement and its points of overlap with and, especially, distinction vis-à-vis, bourgeois educational initiatives and theories, even where these disparate projects deploy similar or identical terms. Dittrich's definition furthermore avoids the pitfalls that arise from considering *Arbeiterbildung* and, by extension, *Arbeiterbildungsromane* as mere variations on their bourgeois cognates.

*Arbeiterbildung* includes both the explicit educational initiatives spearheaded by the workers' organizations that grow to form the core of the Socialist Party of Germany

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<sup>11</sup> "Die Einsicht der Arbeiter, die Verhältnisse mit zu produzieren, unter denen sie leiden, und die Einsicht, daß es folglich auch von ihnen selbst abhängt, ob sich diese Verhältnisse ändern, ist die zentrale Voraussetzung für diese politische Praxis. [...] Der leitende Anspruch der proletarischen Emanzipationsbewegung, der diesem Selbstverständnis Ausdruck verlieh, daß nämlich die Befreiung der Arbeiter durch die Arbeiter selbst zu geschehen habe, implizierte neben dem politischen Produzentenbewußtsein immer die Vorstellung, daß die intendierte Selbstbefreiung nur im Kollektiv möglich sei" (6).

(Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands, *SPD*) after 1890 and the union movement to educate workers in reading, writing, the classics, and political economy that will be discussed in more detail below, as well as the lived experience of workers within the factory, as part of workers' clubs and other organizations, and in moments of concrete political struggle (strikes, walk-outs, etc.), all of which fall under the heading of workers' mediations. Dittrich, following Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, calls the former "intentional" and the second "functional" learning. This distinction will prove important for both the discussion below of the various institutions responsible for intentional *Arbeiterbildung* and for my analysis of the *Arbeiterbildungsromane* (ABR) of the next chapter, whose portrayals of the development of class consciousness lend validity to the framework Dittrich establishes in his analysis of *Arbeiterbildung* as a qualitatively different form of *Bildung*. For Dittrich, a central problem of *Arbeiterbildung* is the way intentional and functional learning can transform workers' (conscious and unconscious) experiences into behavior and attitudes appropriate to their class or the emancipation of their class (52). *Arbeiterbildung* is "the political socialization of adult wage-laborers" understood as "the conscious and unconscious learning processes through which human beings arrive at political orientations and behavior" (63). The translation of this learning and socialization into political engagement on behalf of the class is class consciousness, while *Arbeiterbildung* is the set of practices through which wage-laborers arrive at class consciousness.

Although the theoretical aims of workers' education are first formally articulated in party organs and at party plenums between 1904 and 1910, the effort "to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class" is one of the organizational keystones of the workers' movement, with origins in Lassalle's associational concept and the self-help-centered model of Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch. This took different forms and had different justifications at different times.

But before delving into the breadth of associations and initiatives devoted to *Arbeiterbildung*, understood as those formative processes whose aim is the organization and emancipation of the proletariat as a class, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of how class in general and the proletariat in particular are to be understood in the context of this dissertation. As E.P. Thompson argues in the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, class is “an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness” (9). In Thompson’s account, class is not a structure or category merely for the retrospective organizational benefit of the historian, but is rather “something which in fact happens (and can be shown to happen) in human relationships” (*id.*). He continues:

And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. (9-10)

While I want to insist upon this definition of class as “something which in fact happens” over against understandings of class or the proletariat as an affective structure, a moment in the history of ideas, or a heuristic to benefit of the researcher, Thompson’s understanding of class is incomplete. In Marxist theory, class “in fact happens” and “some men, as a result of their common experiences, feel and articulate the identity of their interests” as a result of their position in production. The proletariat’s relation to production is that of the seller of wage-labor on the market; a proletarian is “free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for



sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization [Verwirklichung] of his labour-power” (CAP 272-3). This dubious double-freedom forces the seller of labor-power onto the market in order to survive. Capital, by bringing together labor-power in pursuit of surplus value, creates the conditions of possibility under which proletarians can “feel and articulate the identity of their interests.” The workers’ mediations of the Program Era arise out of determinations inherent in the movement of capital in the industrial period, which brought large numbers of working men, women, and children together in a similar situation of abjection. The identity of interests and feelings arises out of this proximity, these shared determinants, and this shared abjection. In the words of Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav, the party form and working-class organization was “supported by the tendency of reality itself” (750).

For Thompson, class consciousness “is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms” (10). This definition follows the general logic of what G.M. Tamás has called the Rousseauian socialism of Thompson’s work; in its desire to re-evaluate working-class cultures as intrinsically valuable, class consciousness is not a set of political but a set of cultural practices. In other Marxist accounts, particularly in the work of Georg Lukàcs, who has the most sophisticated and best-known account, class consciousness is the mediating term between the class in itself, as a class in a particular relation of production, and the class for itself as the historical force that will abolish class society. Lukàcs’ best-known treatment of class consciousness deals heavily with the concept of reification and the centrality of overcoming it through “constant struggle, disruption, and the proletariat becoming conscious of the development of capital” (Einarsdottir, 21); but this conceptualization of class consciousness, whose sophistication develops out of Lukàcs’ contention, formulated in his essay “Class Consciousness,” that proletarian class consciousness

is no less than the determining factor in the fate of mankind. For Lukàcs, the inability to see through reification will condemn the proletariat and the rest of humankind to a state of eternal crisis in which the “blinden Kräfte” of capitalism “mit ständig wachsender, scheinbar unwiderstehlicher Gewalt zum Abgrund dahintreiben.” The only thing that can protect humankind “vor einer Katastrophe” is “der bewußte Wille des Proletariats” (245). The function of class consciousness, what the early workers’ movement referred to as idealism, in worker conceptions of *Arbeiterbildung* and in the depictions of socialist authors, is much less determinant for world history, although it does share certain elements with Lukàcs’ descriptive account of proletarian class consciousness from the essay cited above.

The essay “Class Consciousness” is concerned with the relationship between class consciousness, history, and class struggle. Lukàcs claims, in line with Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*, that capitalism is the first mode of production in which classes correspond to historical reality itself, because “das ökonomische Klasseninteresse als Bewegter der Geschichte erst im Kapitalismus in seiner nackten Reinheit hervorgetreten ist” (232). This makes capitalism the first historical period in which “das Klassenbewußtsein in das Stadium des *Bewußtwerdenkönnens* getreten [ist]” (233). A correct class consciousness is, for Lukàcs, the becoming conscious of the real economic interests of the class. This is a problem for the proletariat not merely because of reification, a theme not particularly prevalent in this essay, but also because the proletariat has two temporally distinct and contradictory class interests, the immediate economic interests and the *Endziel* of self-abolition. This dialectical contradiction in proletarian consciousness is extremely important for Lukàcs, and part of his polemic in the essay against vulgar Marxism, which he sees as a major risk because of its promotion of immediate economic interests at the expense of the real historical interests of the proletarian *Endziel*, its

self-abolition and abolition of class society. Without becoming conscious of this *Endziel*, there will be no avoiding the catastrophe mentioned above. The contradiction in proletarian interests identified in this essay seems analogous to the contradictory nature of the proletarian movement identified by *Théorie Communiste* in their periodization of the Program Era, as outlined in the essay “Much Ado About Nothing”:

The revolutionary process of the affirmation of the class is two-fold. It is on the one hand conceived of as the rising strength of the proletariat in the capitalist mode of production and, on the other hand, its affirmation as a particular class and thus the preservation of its autonomy. In the necessity of its own mediations (parties, unions, cooperatives, societies, parliaments), the revolution as autonomous affirmation of the class (as a particular existence for itself in relation to capital) loses its way, not so much in relation to revolution per se, but in relation to this very affirmation. The proletariat's rising strength is confused with the development of capital, and comes to contradict that which was nevertheless its own specific purpose: its autonomous affirmation. (156)

The immediate interests of the proletarian struggle demand specific forms of organization that lead, concretely, to a rising strength in capital and the mediations of capital like the nation-state. Andrew Bonnell argues that the success of the SPD comes precisely from this contradiction, on the one hand offering the promise of “a qualitatively different kind of social order” and “addressing real concerns of workers in the present” (7). The rising strength of the class in capital, in its own mediations which “grow into” (Sebastian Haffner) or negatively integrate (Guenther Roth) into capital and the state are paradoxically linked to the attempt at autonomous affirmation, which makes the latter impossible. Lukàcs was sensitive to this danger, which partially explains the crucial role he attributes to class consciousness in the movement of history

and the complexity of his concept; but the kind of class consciousness at issue here is of a humbler kind, which did not, as we know, allow for the autonomous self-affirmation of the proletariat and its abolition, but did lead workers to political engagement as members of their class.

In *The Mass Strike*, Rosa Luxemburg describes this form of class consciousness under the heading of mass idealism:

At the moment that a real, earnest period of mass strikes begins, all these “calculations” of “cost” become merely projects for exhausting the ocean with a tumbler. And it is a veritable ocean of frightful privations and sufferings that is brought by every revolution to the proletarian masses. And the solution that a revolutionary period makes of this apparently invincible difficulty consists, under the circumstances, of such an immense volume of mass idealism being simultaneously released that the masses are insensible to the bitterest sufferings. [...] in the storm of the revolutionary period even the proletarian is transformed from a provident paterfamilias demanding support into a “revolutionary romanticist,” for whom even the highest good, life itself, to say nothing of material well-being, possesses but little in comparison with the ideals of the struggle. (149)<sup>12</sup>

Luxemburg sees in the mass strike a revolutionary possibility to transform members of the proletariat into revolutionaries who are prepared to sacrifice themselves for the “ideals of the struggle.” The ideals of the struggle, in this revolutionary context, cause the revolutionary

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<sup>12</sup> The German is: “Mit dem Augenblick, wo eine wirkliche, ernste Massenstreikperiode beginnt, verwandeln sich alle „Kostenberechnungen“ in das Vorhaben, den Ozean mit einem Wasserglas auszuschöpfen. Es ist nämlich ein Ozean furchtbarer Entbehrungen und Leiden, durch den jede Revolution für die Proletariermasse erkaufte wird. Und die Lösung, die eine revolutionäre Periode dieser scheinbar unüberwindlichen Schwierigkeit gibt, besteht darin, daß sie zugleich eine so gewaltige Summe von Massenidealismus auslöst, bei der die Masse gegen die schärfsten Leiden unempfindlich wird [...] im Sturm der revolutionären Periode verwandelt sich eben der Proletarier aus einem Unterstützung heischenden vorsorglichen Familienvater in einen „Revolutionsromantiker“, für den sogar das höchste Gut, nämlich das Leben, geschweige das materielle Wohlsein im Vergleich mit den Kampfidealen geringen Wert besitzt.” From: <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/luxemburg/1906/mapage/kap4.htm>

subject to overcome its own particularity to the point of its own material *Aufhebung* in revolutionary praxis. Class consciousness so defined is important to the project of this dissertation, as a specific historical form of revolutionary motive in which proletarian subjects were willing to sacrifice their particular interests for the interests of the collective, because the narratives of political formation explored in the following chapters show class consciousness to arise as the result of *Arbeiterbildung* in its intentional and functional forms. Methodologically, this understanding of class and class consciousness also has the advantage of making the significant differences between proletarian and bourgeois consciousness, the meaningful “programmatic differences” that hide beneath similar monikers, visible. The problem with a purely discursive approach, as I will argue below with regard to Sabine Hake’s work, is that it equates class with the discursive forms of appearance of class consciousness and reduces an actually existing social relation of production and revolutionary movement to the terms and dynamics of its utterances and utterances about it. One could say it considers *paroles* and confuses them for *langue*. While such analyses allow for a compelling elucidation of the affective structures that may be at work in a particular text, image, or tendency, they do so in a way that divorces the matter from its historical context, the lived experience of members of the workers’ movement, and the social relations that conditioned that experience, and thus rob the concept of class of political consequence regardless of the intended effect. This definition of class consciousness and its relationship to *Arbeiterbildung* and the paradoxical relationship of the proletariat to capital in the Program Era also argues for a periodization of class consciousness in the peak of industrial capitalism, as a thought-form of the program to be realized by the industrial proletariat, and thus as a consequence of material determinants that no longer obtain.

## II. *Arbeiterbildung* and Associative Life

One indicator of the centrality of *Arbeiterbildung* in the workers' movement is the prevalence of party- and union-affiliated organizations devoted to it. These organizations undertook, in various ways and with varying levels of success, the task of building class consciousness through forms of intentional learning. East German historian Gerhard Beier called Workers' Education (*Arbeiterbildung*) the common and unifying principle of the international labor movement (45), and the enormous growth in workers' organizations of all kinds from the 1840s to the 1900s shows the significance of cultural and educational work within it. Hilde Reisig, in one of the first studies of proletarian *Bildung* from the early 1930s, explains that workers education associations were crucial because they first brought together the combination of popular scientific education with radical politics that would result in the odd coupling of "scientific socialism." It was also in and through these associations that the proletariat first began to organize politically as a class (16).

However, as noted by many researchers, only with difficulty is it possible to reconstruct to what extent this educational work served to bolster or build the class consciousness of its members. In the initial phase of these workers education associations, ideas and claims taken from the Enlightenment tradition and the bourgeois revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries justified and motivated their founding. Although the emphasis of all of these organizations, including those with a bourgeois-philanthropic tint (mostly religiously affiliated), was on improving the situation of the working class, given the above understanding of *Arbeiterbildung* as various processes of learning which contribute to the development of class consciousness, the means through which this improvement was to be reached plays a significant role in determining the relative success of these organizations. For the period before 1848,

capitalism in Germany had not yet developed to a point that facilitated the development of solidarity amongst wage-workers as a collective against capital—the structural determinants of mass urbanization and factory production had not yet taken hold in the various German kingdoms. The underdevelopment of industry and the remnants of feudalism in the guild system and the wish of many artisans to maintain or return to the privileges of the feudal estates made a general union of all laborers highly unlikely (Birker 10-16). Early workers' education clubs were founded either by members of the bourgeoisie and joined by workers, or by artisans – although both the former and latter were often subject to state repression regardless of the origins of their founders.<sup>13</sup> What was clear for the early clubs was that *Bildung* “sollte [...] die soziale Lage der Arbeiter verbessern. Für das Bewußtsein der Vereinsmitglieder verschmolz die Verbesserung ihrer sozialen Lage, der Erwerb politischer Rechte und Bildungsfortschritt für die von Bildung ausgeschlossenen Volksschichten zu einer Einheit” (141). These top-down initiatives were heterogenous, varying from well-meaning humanism to admittedly reactionary ends, and the ways the social position of the worker was to be improved, and to what end, varied accordingly. Of organizations devoted to *Arbeiterbildung* up to the 1860s, Horst Groschopp writes:

Noch bis in die sechziger Jahre hinein hatte die bürgerliche Vereinsbewegung in Deutschland dominiert. Es gab eine direkte Anbindung der Arbeiter (meist noch der Handwerker) an die Arbeiterbildungsvereine bürgerlichen Musters. Kulturarbeiter in den bürgerlichen Vereinen waren meist humanistisch gesinnte, an bürgerlichen Reformen interessierten Akademiker, Lehrer, Meister und Fabrikanten. Sie boten den Arbeitern beruflichen Aufstieg und Geselligkeit – bei Akzeptierung ihrer bürgerlichen ‘Sittlichkeit.’

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<sup>13</sup> See Dittrich, 137-147.

The large growth of workers clubs as a whole in the subsequent decades, whether devoted to leisure activities or *Bildung*, can be understood as an attempt to work against bourgeois efforts to pacify the increasing numbers of industrial workers by incorporating them into a liberal, bourgeois cultural sphere. Anke Hoffsten summarizes the self-interested role of these organizations well: “Die Revolutionsfurcht der Eliten mündete in eine breite Reformbewegung, deren Hauptaugenmerk auf eine »Versöhnung der Stände« gerichtet war. Reformer und Philanthropen schufen allerorten Einrichtungen zur sozialen und kulturellen »Veredelung« der Arbeiterschaft” (22). This cultural work did not always result from humanist principles, but was rather seen by both sides as a significant part of the political struggle (84). Liberal, Catholic, and other philanthropic organizations were – at least occasionally – founded with the explicit goal of preventing workers from radicalizing—the Catholic organizations remained, in certain parts of Germany, successful from preventing their integration into Social Democracy (Bonell 30). In agreement with Dittrich, Groschopp writes that much of the early organizational work was “bourgeois cultural work,” whose goal was “a ‘factory community,’ family, clubs, and educational work [*Bildungsarbeit*]” (19). Its goal was to avoid the threat to the existing social order posed by a radicalized working class who found the possibility of its emancipation only in the seizure of state power and a revolutionary restructuring of society. Much in this spirit, liberal thinker and national economist Viktor Böhmert published recommendations to factory owners regarding ways to increase worker ties to the factory, advising “factory celebrations for anniversaries and production successes. There should be factory balls and family milestones of both good workers and industrialists should be acknowledged in an appropriate form” (Cited in Groschopp 23). Böhmert also advised “the organization of Christmas parties, performances, lectures, and entertainment evenings, trips, vacations, and exposition visits” (*idem*).



These recommendations were followed by many of the era's large industrial firms (Groschopp, 22). The later *Bildungsvereine* of the workers' movement, formed by workers in response to these attempts at social integration and reform in the name of the propertied classes, responded to external compulsion with their own organizations as part of a larger strategy to shape the proletariat as a class for itself. While, from our own historical moment, it may seem absurdly misguided to believe that staging a performance of Schiller, as *Arbeiterbildungsvereine* frequently did, abets the organization of a revolution, we should follow the lead of early industrialists and remember that honest bourgeois cultural work looks like measures to decrease the likelihood of worker interference in the reproduction of capital. The frequent dismissal of these cultural efforts as 'bourgeois' in West German critiques of the cultural politics of the pre-war SPD from the left fails to account for the historical contingency of culture, preferring a superficial moral criticism to an understanding of the forces in play in service of a narrative of betrayal only thinkable in retrospect. These arguments – from Stieg and Witte's version of the *embourgeoisement* thesis, in germinal form already present in internal party debates prior to the First World War, to Dieter Groh's "revolutionärer Attentismus," all take as their point of departure a horizon of historical possibility in which the working class could have transcended both its immediate organizational needs to generate working class support and its immediate determinants.

Social Democracy's voluntary associations share characteristics with their engagement with *Bildung* as described in my introduction in that they took an extant legal and social framework and attempted to reshape it in the service of a movement that was, at least according to its own rhetoric, incompatible with the conditions under which these associations originated. Such institutional *Umfunktionierung* was a structural necessity of organization, at least in the

form it appeared in German Social Democracy; without using these institutions, it could not grow. Proletarian associational culture developed partly as a response to attempts by industrialists, philanthropists, and bourgeois intellectuals and reformers to defang the socialist movement by promising workers social integration. These initiatives and groups then continued to change in response to the political struggles and cultural exigencies of the moment, as cover for political organization under the Anti-Socialist Laws, or by developing new organizations or cross-organizational affiliations in response to new cultural trends.<sup>14</sup> What is clear is that proletarian cultural organizations developed in opposition to those of other social groups, partially out of political and economic necessity because only collectively could workers – although better off at the end of the nineteenth century than in the decades before (Groschopp, 79) – collect the funds required to participate in leisure activities like bicycle riding, gymnastics, or sailing and partially because they were seen as crucial vehicles for spreading the socialist message and widening the membership base. That they were successfully incorporated into the larger organizational structure of social democracy by the early 1900s is also clear, but this incorporation was accompanied by their slow and steady depoliticization (Groschopp 182-4). They were also important centers of political agitation and organization, especially before 1890, where they functioned as cover organizations for outlawed political activity. They were also, at least in terms of membership, relatively successful. Groschopp estimates that approximately half a million workers were active in such associations around 1913/14, at a time when party membership was around one million, ninety percent of whom were workers and fifteen percent of whom were women (Kuhn, 110-111). Membership in the free unions (those affiliated with social democracy) had skyrocketed by 1912/1913 to around two and a half million, while in 1893

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<sup>14</sup> For example, a central committee for sport and hygiene was created in response to the growing popularity of the *Lebensreformbewegung* (Groschopp, 44 – see page 80-81 for further examples).

it was a mere 223,500 (Schönhoven 225-227). How this organizational life may or may not have contributed to *Arbeiterbildung* through either functional or intentional learning remains, however, difficult to determine.

These workers' clubs and voluntary associations can be broken up into two categories: leisure associations in which union members and socialists came together for ostensibly apolitical activities, and associations specifically devoted to *Arbeiterbildung* which attempted to bolster the position of the proletariat through explicit instruction or exposure to *Bildung*. West German critics like Dieter Schwarzenau, Peter von Rügen, Gerald Witte, Bernd Stieg, and H.J. Schulz, despite extreme differences in other ways, have historically overemphasized the idealist or, where they deign to cite a specific representative of the idealism they impute to the workers' movement, Humboldtian tendencies of these initiatives in two ways. Firstly, especially in the case of leisure organizations, by failing to acknowledge the possibilities of functional learning presented by their organizational structure. Groschopp highlights the political nature of associational life in social democracy at the turn of the century by pointing out that "der Eintritt in einen proletarischen Verein war immer eine Form sozialen Protests" (81). He justifies this claim with reference to the precarious situation of even better-off workers around 1900, and points to the *Zahlabend*, the mandatory monthly meeting where membership dues were paid, as an important space to discuss all aspects of political and social life in a community of the likeminded. Such moments are the concrete forms of appearance of proletarian *Sittlichkeit* and point to the existence of class consciousness among workers, since membership in socialist organizations could incur repression from employers and the state. While Kuhn stresses the tenuous affiliation many of these associations had to the party (108), even suspicion of a link to the SPD brought with it the possibility of losing employment, severing familial and religious ties,

more precarious living conditions because of membership dues, and police harassment (Groschopp 80). As Kuhn says of Social Democracy in Imperial Germany it was “politisch geduldet” but “gesellschaftlich geächtet” (109). As I show in the following chapter, this experience of community is portrayed by workers as a condition of possibility for class consciousness, for political activity at all. Demands were articulated, political problems discussed, personal and social problems voiced and perhaps resolved, and a sense of shared interest and collective identity developed (81-82). The possibilities offered by associational life for functional learning, for workers to “feel and articulate the identity of their interests,” should not be overlooked.

The title of Groschopp’s monograph, *Zwischen Bierabend und Bildungsverein*,<sup>15</sup> echoed by the title of a recent work in English, Andrew Bonnell’s *Red Banners and Beer Mugs*, highlights the continuity between leisure and allegedly more serious or politically relevant activities. While the pub was an important meeting place for the early party and for many of its associations – August Bebel and other major leaders of the workers’ movement spent years tending bar as part of their agitational work – the affiliation with alcohol consumption came to be disparaged in later years by functionaries, especially those involved directly with *Bildung*. This enmity towards enjoyment – Groschopp terms it *Vergnügungsfeindlichkeit*, hostility towards enjoyment, perhaps the greatest word in the German language – became institutionalized in the educational associations, where it was encouraged not to serve alcohol while the speaker was talking or, better, not to serve it at all during lectures or at events related to *Bildung* or at Party celebrations (146). At the Party Conference of 1910, the 1909/1910 yearly report from the Central Committee for Education (*Zentralbildungsausschuss*, ZBA) expresses a similar

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<sup>15</sup> *Between Beer Night and Educational Association*

skepticism towards entertainment, disparaging a local education committee for having included a variety show in the realm of party-sponsored artistic performances (PPT 1910, 52). The increasing emphasis on the separation between serious, political or educational work and enjoyment had the unintended but predictable result that lectures and artistic performances were often poorly attended. The yearly report for 1910 covered responses from local education committees to a survey sent out by the ZBA. The report summarizes responses to a question asking about local needs and complaints as follows:

Die Beantworter haben hierbei vorzugsweise den Klagen über die Hemmnisse der lokalen Bildungsarbeit Ausdruck gegeben. Ziemlich häufig kehrt die Klage über mangelhafte Beteiligung der breiten Massen an den Bildungsveranstaltungen wieder; in einer großen Stadt (Magdeburg) will der Bildungsausschuss aus diesem Grunde sogar seine Tätigkeit für ein Jahr einstellen, was uns allerdings das ungeeignetste Mittel zur Besiegung der Indifferenz zu sein scheint; in anderen Orten wird über die Vereinsmeierei geklagt, die der ernstesten Bildungsarbeit im Wege steht; wieder andere Orte leiden unter einem Mangel an geeigneten Lokalen. (PP 1910, 53)

The primary complaint – that participation was low – demonstrates the ultimate result of antipathy to enjoyment in those educational initiatives where intentional learning was prioritized: the driving out of all those except for enthusiasts (Groschopp 146). Groschopp justifies this as a necessity of increasingly complex organizational and parliamentary life, but it could also be seen as the result of an overemphasis on organization. The increasing formality and seriousness of the *Bildungsvereine* proved unable to appeal to a wider base, and also internalized the strict separation of work and leisure time inherent to life in capitalism – the work of serious organization, linked to serious *Bildung*, is incompatible with the spontaneity of the public house

and the *Zahlabend*, not to mention workers' bicycle trips or sporting events. The assumption that Bildung needed to become more formalized and strictly intentional dismisses the role of functional learning in the development of class consciousness while reifying the capitalist split of the proletarian subject into worker and private person and avoided occasions for the spontaneous development of class consciousness theorized by Rosa Luxemburg above.

An anecdote from Luxemburg in a letter to Leon Jogiches from October 1905 illustrates well the way spontaneity and organization and their educational correlates, functional and intentional learning, can productively co-exist:

Stell dir vor, Karol [Karl Kautsky] hielt auf Bitten der Friedenauer *Genossen* einen Vortrag über [. . .] >Marx' ökonomische Lehre< - [sic] rate mal wo? – in dieser obskuren Kneipe Ecke Menzel- und Beckerstraße, wo diese zwei hübschen Hündchen sind, die wie Tiger aussehen, und die >eine Hochburg< der hiesigen Sozialdemokratie ist, wie sich herausstellt. Natürlich ging ich mit; wir gingen in ein durch und durch verräuchertes Zimmerchen, wo in großem Gedränge und in geistiger Andacht an die 25 *Mann* saßen. Nachdem Karolus sich geräuspert hatte, began er vorzutragen, was *Wert und Tauschwert* ist – übrigens so wenig allgemeinverständlich, daß ich mich direkt gewundert habe. Und so etwa ein Stundchen lang. Die Armen bekämpften krampfhaft Gähnen und Schlummer. Danach began die Diskussion; ich habe mich eingeschaltet und gleich entstand große Belebung, die Leuten baten wiederholt, ich sollte öfter kommen, es war sehr *gemütlich*, und wir unterhielten uns schließlich sehr gut. Karolus rieb sich die Augen vor Verwunderung: *woher Du alle diese Tatsachen weißt* (die verschiedenen Praktiken mit *Tarifverträgen* usw.) *und woher verstehst Du so mit den Leuten umzugehen* usw. (in von Rüden 74)

I have quoted the anecdote in full because it demonstrates on a small scale the entire problematic presented by the dialectic of spontaneity and organization in political *Bildungsarbeit*. The tendency to separate acceptable from unacceptable forms of enjoyment reduced the likelihood of such successful instances, and also denies and undermines the potential of functional learning. One of the leading theoreticians of the party gives a flat lecture in a smokey bar; it falls on deaf ears because of the speaker's inability to craft a message appropriate to his audience. Then someone who was not asked to present is able to save the lecture and add explanation in the discussion, a moment that is literally spontaneous in Luxemburg's description (*einschalten*), and the moment is rescued as a presumably successful instance of *Arbeiterbildung*. Even Luxemburg's style calls into question the basic premises of a separation between the seriousness of the subject, an organized lecture on key concepts of Marx's economic theory, by repeatedly using the diminutive form of nouns, painting a humorous picture of Kautsky in front of an audience fighting sleep, and lightly mocking Kautsky's surprise at the end of the lecture. Similar scenes that might promote functional learning and, as a result, political engagement on behalf of the proletariat are imaginable in the various sport associations or cooperative businesses (*Konsumgenossenschaften*). These associations tried to take "das Prinzip der Gemeinschaft" and pit it against capitalist individualism and individuation. There were no competitions in the gymnastics clubs, team sports were preferred, and the cooperative businesses shared what would have been profit for a business with their members. As Groschopp summarizes:

So waren die Vereine Versuche der Arbeiterklasse, das Profitprinzip für bestimmte Bereiche auszuschalten, das Klasseninteresse zu formulieren, und in Ansätzen das Prinzip des Sozialismus, der Verständigung und der Vereinbarung über die Arbeitsaufgaben und die Bedürfnisse, einzuführen und zu erproben (82).

The contradictory nature of such attempts to avoid the “Profitprinzip” are excellent examples of the way in which the proletariat’s existence in capital and role in its reproduction always informed attempts at proletarian organization, which becomes especially—and unintentionally—clear in Groschopp’s gloss of associations as a place to articulate class interests. Obviously, these initiatives did not result in the autonomous self-affirmation of the proletariat—the number of socialist bike rides it might take to abolish the value form is incalculable; but they did contribute to *Arbeiterbildung* and collective forms of expression and experience essential to the formation of a class as a class contradictorily for itself.

The second way critics have overemphasized the similarities between *Bildung* and *Arbeiterbildung* is by failing to differentiate between collective thought-forms and their material determinants and the idealist, universalist interiority of idealist theories of *Bildung*. Marx and Engels are sensitive to these differences and explicitly decry the class-character of *Bildung* in the *Communist Manifesto* when they point out that the *Bildung* communists wish to destroy is “Klassenbildung” – not in the sense of class formation, but rather as *Bildung* with a class character. In a well-known 1870s speech by Wilhelm Liebknecht to the Leipzig *Arbeiterbildungsverein*, he stresses the relationship between class society and education and the fruitlessness of pursuing purely educational goals for the liberation of workers:

Wissen ist Macht! Bildung macht frei! [. . .] Ja, im Munde unserer Gegner, und gegen uns angewandt, zur Wiederlegung des von uns, von der Sozialdemokratie verfochtenen Satzes, daß die Haupttätigkeit des Arbeiters sich auf die Umgestaltung der staatlichen und gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse zu richten habe, und daß die ausschließliche Verfolgung von Bildungszwecken für den Arbeiter nichts sei als eine Zeitraubende Spielerei, welche weder dem Einzelnen noch dem Ganzen zum Vorteil gereicht wird.



(133)

Liebknrecht clearly denies the possibility of achieving emancipation for individual or collective workers through *Bildung* here, insisting instead that workers can only benefit from a transformation of social and governmental relations. Importantly, he also evokes the inherited nature of discourses about *Bildung*, recognizing that discourses surrounding *Bildung* are turned against workers for the benefit of the ruling classes. He goes on to point out the class-dependent nature of education, and then criticizes the school system as an institutionalized method of ensuring the reproduction of existing power relations (134-135), carefully searching out examples from history to demonstrate the importance of class relations for understanding the function of education at a given historical moment. This historically conditioned understanding of *Bildung* – and Liebknrecht’s sensitivity to its class character – makes it clear that there was no simple adoption of a bourgeois *Bildungsideal* that is generalizable for the workers’ movement.

In stark contrast to W. Liebknrecht, Wilhelm von Humboldt, like his younger contemporary Schiller, dreamt of a pattern or formula for the individual that might allow for the creation of a utopian society, but did not see this possibility as in any way linked to extant social structures or dependent on a certain level of historical development. Humboldt begins “Theory on the Education of Mankind” (*Theorie der Bildung des Menschen*), an unpublished fragment from 1793 that contains *in nuce* many of the aims of his later educational program, with this observation:

Es wäre ein großes und treffliches Werk zu liefern, wenn jemand die eigentümlichen Fähigkeiten zu schildern unternähme, welche die verschiedenen Fächer der menschlichen Erkenntnis zu ihrer glücklichen Erweiterung voraussetzen; den echten Geist, in dem sie einzeln bearbeitet, und die Verbindung, in die sie alle mit einander gesetzt werden

müssen, um die Ausbildung der Menschheit, als ein Ganzes, zu vollenden. (5)

Here Humboldt dreams of a utopian project that would lead to the organic perfection of humanity through *Bildung* and *Erkenntnis*, but in the undifferentiated and depoliticized vocabulary of Enlightenment thought; this project and the possibility of the fully accomplished *Ausbildung* of humankind seems to exist outside of time and material causes. *Bildung* and the *Ausbildung der Menschheit* are an abstract potential that seems to inhere in the cognitive processes associated with the different field of human learning. Such an ahistorical and ideal—in the epistemological sense as knowable without a ground in the material world—premise, however, is repeatedly rejected by party theoreticians up until the First World War – in line with Marx and Engel’s remarks on education in the *Manifesto*.<sup>16</sup> Liebknecht’s awareness of the class character of ideas and awareness of the power relations traversing formal education and its instrumentalization against the lower classes issue from a fundamentally different point of departure. Not only do proponents of *Arbeiterbildung* not take up Humboldt’s vision of *Bildung*, of individual emancipation through a correct understanding and “Streben, den Kreis seiner Erkenntnisse und seiner Wirksamkeit zu erweitern” (6), they explicitly criticize the individuation that results from it. For Humboldt, the “letzte Aufgabe unseres Daseins” is “dem Begriff der Menschheit in unserer Person [. . .] einen so großen Inhalt, als möglich, zu verschaffen” (7). The reason Humboldt can be accurately described as an idealist is clear in this passage. We have here the idea of humanity within us, and the content of this idea provides the ethical ground for us to give it the largest possible contents. It is not a polemical or disparaging category but a question of the metaphysical foundation for being and knowledge implicit in this important “Aufgabe

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<sup>16</sup> That is not to say, however, that the SDP had a nuanced understanding of the historical dialectic. The general view of the party to 1914 is characterized by scientism and the Lassalleian enthusiasm for science, as well as a pseudo-religious certainty about the nature of the revolution. See Dieter Groh, “Marx, Engels, and Darwin: Naturgesetzliche Entwicklung oder Revolution?” in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* Vol. 8, No. 4. December 1967

unseres Daseins.” The pursuit of *Bildung*—widening one’s sphere of experience as far as possible in pursuit of knowledge—is a moral obligation arising out of the content of the idea itself. Presumably, as in Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, the universal application or recognition of this need in man to escape “innre Unruhe” in pursuit of “Verbesserung” and “Veredelung” (6) contains the germ of the future, perfect society. The schema is universalist and should apply to every human being, because it is the idea or concept itself that generates the content; we could look to the critical idealism of Kant, for example, whose moral philosophy functions on similar premises.<sup>17</sup> While party theoreticians undoubtedly thought workers might gain something from exposure to culture, this is a project, even in the conservative factions of the party, to improve the worker’s quality of life and state of mind in order to better pursue the revolutionary aims of the Party, not to achieve self-actualization in the realization of a transcendental idea. Liebknecht likely had liberal-affiliated associations with a Humboldtian conception of *Bildung* in mind when he speaks of the “opponents” (*Gegner*) of Social Democracy, since he rejects the Humboldtian position explicitly.<sup>18</sup>

This rejection is no less explicit in 1906. Heinrich Schulz and Clara Zetkin, the chief party theoreticians of *Bildung*, make similar arguments to Liebknecht’s in favor of the creation of a Central Education Committee and local commissions to oversee educational work

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<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, extremely schematic and reductive; but I wanted to ground my rejection and perplexity at the constant reference in the critical literature to a debt to idealism in an actual discussion of an idealist text, and this should be sufficient for my rhetorical purpose here.

<sup>18</sup> Andreas Daum summarizes the spirit of the liberal *Arbeitervereine*: “Die Idee der Humboldt-Vereine erwuchs aus der zeitgenössischen Diskussion um die gesellschaftliche Relevanz des Bildungsgedankens. Bildung als Schlüssel zu individueller Emanzipation und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt zu begreifen, war ein genuines Anliegen des Liberalismus in Deutschland. Bildung bedeute Selbstaufklärung des Menschen, Anleitung zu vernunftorientiertem Handeln und Einsicht in das freie Zusammenspiel aller Kräfte. Neben der praktischen, d.h. gewerblichen und technischen, Ausbildung kam der allgemeinen Bildung unter dem Leitwert der Humanität zentrale Bedeutung zu. [...] Und neben den Leitgedanken von genossenschaftlicher Organisation und Selbsthilfe, die vor allem Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch vertrat, wurde die so verstandene Bildung zum Kern liberaler Arbeiterpolitik. Der politische Liberalismus zielte darauf, die Arbeiterschaft in die bürgerliche Gesellschaft zu integrieren.” (154) As mentioned above, the *Arbeiterbildungsvereine* are explicit reactions against this trend.

(*Bildungsarbeit*). Schulz and Zetkin stress the historical variation and relativity of education (PPT 1906, 119) and continue to emphasize the necessity of eliminating a “Klassenerziehung” (120), a class-based education, which would only be possible after the elimination of class society. What Social Democracy does, however, share with Humboldt’s theory of *Bildung* is the utopian wish to see a world in which everyone is free to pursue their faculties to the fullest. In the proletarian child, write Schulz and Zetkin:

Der Sozialismus sieht [...] nicht den zukünftigen Lohnsklaven und rechtlosen Proletarier, sondern er würdigt in ihm das werdende Glied der sozialen Gemeinschaft freier Arbeiter, bei dem in seinem eigenen und zugleich im gesellschaftlichen Interesse alle geistigen und körperlichen Fähigkeiten zu möglichst hoher Vollendung zu entwickeln sind. Die öffentliche Erziehung wird dadurch zu einer der wichtigsten sozialen Aufgaben, für die die besten geistigen und materiellen Mittel der Gesellschaft nutzbar zu machen sind.

(120)

As argued in the introduction, there is a relationship between *Bildung* and the Marxist goal of human emancipation because the contradiction in bourgeois society between political emancipation and the *Knechtschaftsverhältnisse*, or conditions of bondage, which bourgeois society simultaneously creates for the proletariat, makes it a place where the contradictions in capital are able to become conscious; this, according to Lukàcs, explains why such ideological terrain becomes an important site of class struggle, a party of Jameson’s “shared code” where class struggle takes place. In this passage from Schulz and Zetkin, this link is made explicit – *Bildung* appears here as the full realization of the individual and social potential of the individual, but its possibility is deferred until a post-revolutionary moment because of the class character education necessarily has in bourgeois society. The parallels to Humboldt’s thought are

clear, but so is the incompatibility of the two standpoints. The imagined harmony of the socialist world, in which the interests of the individual and the community will be the same, recalls the liberal fantasy of effecting such a harmony of interests through the educated citizen and the rational state that appears in various forms in Kant, Humboldt, Schiller, Hegel. More specifically, these latter thinkers share with Marx, Schulz, and Zetkin the utopian wish at the heart of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman* to reconcile interiority and world, universal and particular, but the Marxist tradition understands that capitalism precludes the possibility of such *Bildung*.

Given the extent and scope of the proletarian cultural sphere in Imperial Germany, I cannot agree that emerging proletarian culture at the turn of the century was “imagined” (155), as Sabine Hake insists. Instead, it was a contested and emerging space that self-consciously and critically engaged with the forms of cultural life available to the movement in Imperial Germany and enjoyed mass support despite the great personal risks to participants. The above outline of initiatives related to shaping cultural life is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to demonstrate the importance cultural work and engagements with *Bildung* played in the period of the expansion of German Social Democracy before 1914 in support of my contention that *Bildung* was an important part of struggle for reasons that have nothing to do with the taste of the people involved. Hake claims that an “extraordinary significance [was] attributed to making idealist aesthetics compatible with historical materialism and enlisting bourgeois notions of culture and education for the goals of the socialist movement” (157). Hake sees this “appropriation” of bourgeois values but fails to demonstrate – like many West German critics before reunification – of what precisely this desired compatibility consists. Indeed, in the chapters of *The Proletarian Dream* that deal explicitly with the German cultural heritage and the development of a prewar

proletarian culture, Hake's argument seems torn between two poles. On the one hand, the primacy of *Bildung* as an operative category for the movement implies that German Social Democracy uncritically inherited a bourgeois ideology of culture and made that the crux of its revolutionary "dream":

It was in the Humboldtian sense of *Bildung* (education, formation) as the full realization of human potential that these qualities were called upon to transform the working class into the revolutionary class. It was through recourse to idealist aesthetics and German classicism that socialism – or Social Democracy, with both terms still used synonymously – promised to complete the emancipatory project started by the bourgeoisie through the development of *Kultur* (culture, cultivation) as an entire way of life. (155)

In this reading, Social Democracy uncritically constructs its mission on the basis of a ready-made bourgeois ideology in order to bring about "the full realization of human potential" *through* cultural work. This account is not only patently false, as demonstrated above on the basis of the longstanding critical tradition beginning with Marx to differentiate between bourgeois *Bildung* and its impossibility under capitalism, but also fails to propose any kind of causal mechanism for Social Democracy's engagement with bourgeois ideas. This reading understands class as a complex of individual emotional investments and fits with the author's emphasis on the primacy of emotions to political movements<sup>19</sup> and her contention that "the

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<sup>19</sup> The claim is made quite boldly at the beginning of the introduction: "Social movements are based on, and sustained by, emotions – emotions that, simply by being evoked in the name of politics, become political emotions" (1). The sentence already shows a causal chain, of emotions as the originary drivers of action, rather than as consequences or in dialectical tension with an outside world. It is this understanding, which has a strong affinity with the discursive turn, that allows Hake to make the claim that the proletariat never existed, without even bothering to address the structural reality of a social class with nothing to sell but its labor-power. The claim also encourages an easy slippage into tautology-because movements create texts or cultural artefacts with an emotional charge, emotions charge movements. It seems quite ambitious to presume to know the relationship between social

proletariat [...] never existed” (14). This argumentative frame fails to account for the consistent emphasis in the early workers’ movement that cultural work was always secondary to political practice and ignores the consistent debates and tactical discussions about this cultural heritage, of which Hake is clearly aware without seeing in it cause to modify her thesis and without demonstrating on the basis of historical fact or textual evidence why it should be so easily dismissed. My purpose here is not to belittle Hake’s ambitious, synthesizing work but rather to flesh out the contours of Social Democracy’s engagement with *Bildung* in a way that pays special attention to difference and to the material conditions in which it arises. Additionally, Hake’s stance is a recent version of a critical tendency to lump together these two standpoints in a way that does not do justice to the cultural productions and historical context. In Gerald Stieg, Bernd Witte, H.J. Schulz, and Ursula Münchow, very different critics with very different lenses, the shared emphasis on the ‘bourgeois’ or ‘idealist’ heritage of the *Bildungsroman* leads to a dismissal of the novels analyzed in the next chapter and a failure to recognize the significant differences between bourgeois and proletarian form. This inconsistency in Hake’s argument stems from two areas the first section of this chapter has sought to address: a failure to demonstrate, on the basis of specific texts, what exactly the German proletariat borrows from idealist aesthetics or a Humboldtian conception of *Bildung*; and the failure to explain why the workers’ movement appropriates and repurposes *Bildung* and *Kultur* in service of a significantly different political imagination and praxis that are incompatible with their origins.

This is a longstanding thread in the secondary literature from East and West Germany about the cultural mediations of the pre-war SPD. Hans Joachim Schulz has an excellent gloss of these tendencies:

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psychology, the brain, history, etc. and to center the beginning of the great bang of human activity in as contextually-dependent a concept as emotions.

In the GDR, the history of the early movement is rewritten to create a pre-history of the Socialist Unity Party and to legitimate its revolutionary language, to teleologize the GDR present and to recover the Marxist assurance of a future classless society. Among West German socialists, the critique of a Social-Democratic Party seen as a pillar of modern capitalist society is deepened by tracing its history as a history of *embourgeoisement*. (41)

East German critics aligning to this tendency include Gunther Dahlke,<sup>20</sup> Ursula Münchow, and Norbert Roth. In West Germany, the reliance on bourgeois models was seen as a symptom of revisionism,<sup>21</sup> often despite the fact that party revisionists and those with the greatest debt to and most sophisticated theorization of the German cultural heritage (Lassalle, Mehring, Zetkin, Schulz,<sup>22</sup> K. Kautsky, and – in this case more accurate– Ebert, Bernstein, E. David, M. Maurenbrecher) were often not the same actors. As Peter von Rügen notes in his introduction to a cultural history of the German workers’ movement, superficial observations relating to the way concepts from humanism and the Enlightenment, like *Bildung*, appear in these discourses should not be read as evidence of a general or latent sympathy for or acceptance of bourgeois values within the working class (von Rügen, 14-15). As Fredric Jameson points out, “the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code” (84). The contradiction inherent in this form of thought between the simultaneous

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<sup>20</sup> A particularly egregious case of doing what critics since Lukács have accused Mehring of, uncritically adopting universal ideals read into Schiller as a hero of freedom, appears in the introduction to Dahlke’s *Der Menschheit Würde*, a collection of documents relating to the perception of Schiller in the workers’ movement. Dahlke, Günther. *Der Menschheit Würde: Dokumente zum Schiller-Bild der deutschen Arbeiterklasse*. Weimar: Arion-Verlag, 1959.

<sup>21</sup> This is true of both historiography of the movement generally and literary criticism; for the former, Georg Füllberth’s work is a representative example, see especially *Die Wandlung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie vom Erfurter Parteitag 1891 bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*. Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1974. The title anticipates the content. For a similar approach to literature, see Stieg, Gerald, and Bernd Witte. *Abriss einer Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterliteratur*. Stuttgart: Klett, 1977.

<sup>22</sup> The case of Schulz is particularly interesting. He moved from the left-wing of the Party to a moderate position and became something of a war-hawk and good friend of his former internal enemy Friedrich Ebert with regard to the place of the cultural heritage and cooperation with bourgeois organizations.



propagation of an abstract, universal freedom and the lived experience of this freedom by workers as the freedom to starve forces *Bildung* into class conflict; the contradiction pierces the veil of bourgeois ideology and encourages the development of proletarian class consciousness. Such operations determine the moment of the negation of initial *Bildung*, a structurally important component of the *Arbeiterbildungsromane* I consider in the next chapter. This is not a novel position; Marx and Engels provide a similar account of proletarian engagement in the *Manifesto*. They situate the conditions of possibility of such ideological struggle in the constant innovation and upheaval brought about by capitalist competition, which forces constant revolution in production and other relationships and compels man “to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (248).<sup>23</sup> The recognition of the social character of these relations combined with the abjection of proletarian life are the breeding ground of revolutionary change. *Bildung*, as a utopian fantasy of bourgeois society, is a site of disclosure for these contradictions in which it becomes possible, as the genealogy from my introduction and the remarks of the ZBA above suggest, to disclose a contradiction of bourgeois society. I find this explanation of its discursive weight much more compelling than attributing its genesis to the dreams of a self-imagined proletariat.

### **III. Towards a Social Democratic Theory of Literature: The Debates, 1890-1914**

German Social Democracy did not have a comprehensive and general theory of literature or culture before the First World War. Any critical attempt to synthesize the various strains of theoretical and practical interventions in the cultural sphere into a relatively homogenous discourse can succeed, especially for the period after 1890, only by allowing the importance of

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<sup>23</sup> The whole passage – poetic but incorrect in its standard rendering – also refers to the dissolution of feudal estates in the German: “Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft, alles Heilige wird entweiht, und die Menschen sind endlich gezwungen, ihre Lebensstellung, ihre gegenseitigen Beziehungen mit nüchternen Augen anzusehen.”

certain actors to eclipse that of their detractors.<sup>24</sup> Three literary debates did, however, arise between 1891 and 1912 which sparked heated discussion within the SPD and whose terms and limitations prefigure later discourses about the role of culture in the political struggle of the interwar period. The naturalism debate of the 1890s considered the relationship between the revolutionary workers' movement and contemporary artistic tendencies, schools, and movements; the so-called Schiller debate of 1905, provoked by the centennial of Schiller's death, pivoted on the relationship between the proletariat and the (German) cultural heritage; finally, the Tendenz-Kunst Debatte (the tendentious art debate) raised important questions about the relationship between art and politics, although most of these questions had been previously addressed in the first two debates, which discouraged participation by key thinkers like Mehring and Bernstein.

The secondary literature engaging with these debates is often dated and tends to suffer from the limitations of its own political tendency. My purpose here is to engage in targeted close-reading to attempt to reconstruct the contributions to a Marxist theory of literature provided by certain participants in these debates, especially Paul Lafargue, Franz Mehring, and Eduard Bernstein. In addition, I challenge the characterization of the literary politics of pre-war social democracy as a "Marxist appropriation of idealist aesthetics" and want to complicate the idea that the multiple and contradictory positions articulated in these early literary debates represent anything close to a unified position that could be accurately characterized as owing a

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<sup>24</sup> H.J. Schulz admirably outlines this problem: "This segregation [in East and West German accounts of the workers' movement] of "proper" and "improper" ideological strains on the basis of a fixed theoretical standard, and their reification under such labels as revolutionary, class-conscious or bourgeois, opportunistic, revisionist, etc., tends to limit an understanding of the historical totality of the movement as a system of interdependent organizational spheres, of cultural forms of political life and of the symbiotic relationship of diverse ideological strains and their vocabularies" (41-2). This chapter hopes, with Schulz, to contribute to a view of the heterogeneity of the movement and to recover for an English-speaking readership something of the complexity of both the uneven power relations in which these discourses arose and the multiple and contradictory views of its theoreticians, with the full knowledge that my own biases likely work, at times, against this purpose.

“debt” (Hake, 155) to idealism. Instead, several of the leading theoreticians of German Social Democracy made a concerted effort to determine the role of art and literature in the political struggle, to contribute to a viable definition of realism, and to combat anachronistic and nationalist interpretations of the German cultural heritage they attributed to idealism.

The so-called Naturalism debate erupted in the early 1890s in the context of party efforts to eliminate strains of left-radical internal opposition (Rothe, XIII). It was complicated by the lack of a specific theory of literature that might have allowed party theoreticians to better mediate between liberal, socially-critical literature, the daily requirements of an agitational press and cultural campaign, and their own desire for an art that would contribute to the emancipation of the proletariat as a class.<sup>25</sup> It culminates in a lengthy debate at the 1896 Party Conference in Gotha about the pro-naturalism stance taken by Edgar Steiger, the new editor of *Die Neue Zeit*, the most important theoretical journal of the SPD before the First World War and the venue for many of the early articles that scholars have included in the early phase of the debate (from 1891-2). While most of the articles from the SPD camp that aspire to more than polemics are ambivalent about the final evaluation naturalism deserves, and thus only tentatively can one speak of a conclusion to the debate, Steiger left his post less than two years after the party conference and ceased all official editorial actions within Social Democracy (Rothe XLIII-V). Since his position was most aligned with a pro-naturalist stance, it stands to reason that skepticism towards contemporary avant-garde currents carried the day. By the time the meaning of contemporary literature was taken up by the party again, in the *Tendenz-Kunst Debatte* of the 1910s, the leadership of Social Democracy ceased listening or had accepted the position that real socialist or proletarian art could only exist after the abolition of capitalism, at least as far as

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<sup>25</sup> See Schultz, especially Chapter 4

critical consensus was concerned.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, there remained little space to debate the role contemporary literature might play in the movement. The naturalism debate demonstrates (often negatively) what many in the party believed contemporary literature needed to do. As we will see below, Paul Lafargue and Mehring's contributions to this debate define realism as the intimate and philosophically mediated portrayal of the conditions of capitalist exploitation, and, crucial for both Mehring and Lafargue's critique of naturalism, a recognition of the revolutionary forces at work within capitalism. This provides a theoretical basis for later leftist judgments of realism and is in line with the esteem Marx and Engels held for realist authors like Balzac.

As a complement to the naturalism debate, a subsequent major literary disagreement within Social Democracy occasioned by the 1905 centennial of the death of Friedrich Schiller allows us to understand the aporias surrounding the attempts by early German socialist authors to write political *Bildungsromane* and the critical responses to these attempts. The Schiller debate centers on the meaning, function, and potential uses of the German cultural heritage, embodied here by Schiller, for the workers' movement. It is especially important because the role accorded to tradition and traditional forms could be expected to impact writers of early socialist *Bildungsromane*, and perhaps to explain in what ways a formal conservatism could be married to radical intentions or expectations. The most striking thing about the texts of the naturalism debate beyond the important anticipation of later articulations of realism is the subtlety of some of the expressed positions, especially when one compares this complexity of ideas with the caricatures found in much of the secondary literature. Working in the tradition of cultural studies,

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<sup>26</sup> This is covered briefly in Norbert Rothe's and Tanja Bürgel's collection of primary sources from the debates, *Naturalismus-Debatte 1891-1896* and *Tendenz-Kunst Debatte 1910-1912*, respectively, as well as in H.J. Schultz, esp. Chapter 3; and by Fritz Raddatz in a concise article entitled *Verräter am Sozialismus oder an der Bourgeoisie?*, *Die Zeit*, nr. 44 1974, <https://www.zeit.de/1974/44/verraeter-am-sozialismus-an-der-bourgeoisie/komplettansicht?print>, whose content is as nuanced as the title's false dichotomy suggests.

Sabine Hake and H.J. Schulz both emphasize the inability of party theoreticians to encourage and appreciate the emerging proletarian cultural sphere and place responsibility for this failure on an uncritical appropriation of Schiller's "idealist aesthetics" and Herder's nationalism (Hake) or on the remnants of bourgeois ideology (Schulz), as when Schulz writes:

As was indicated in the first chapter, during the first phase of German Social Democracy, the core of the classical bourgeois literary canon was appropriated and certain perceptions of the social location and functions of literature were canonized. Despite later attempts to problematize this canonical structure, it exhibited a remarkable resistance to the socio-political changes of subsequent decades. The argument seems historically supportable that both the socialist and bourgeois canons converge, at least partially, in the recognition of timeless values manifest in great literature, an argument advanced by Marxist and non-Marxist critics alike. A study of early socialist theorizing about literature (Mehring's and others') shows an additional motivation for the retention of a bourgeois canon of texts and functions: *the need to posit a realm outside historical change, to isolate artistic and esthetic practice from a changing social praxis (or one to be changed), to depoliticize the esthetic sphere, and to preserve it as a refuge for a kind of Kantian, disinterested mimesis and contemplation undisturbed by political desire, and, finally, a need for an ideological space in which assured ethical and esthetic values could be claimed, celebrated and protected without revolutionary struggle.* [emphasis added] (Schulz, 62)

Should this thesis prove correct, the neglect of the novel as a form by socialist writers, and especially socialist critics, before the First World could be easily explained as the result of proletarian writers' inability to compete with the legends of the classical heritage and the tactical

decision to concentrate all efforts on the political struggle.<sup>27</sup> The transcendental aesthetic category linked by critics to idealism, Schulz's Kantian refuge, would thus function as a kind of innate conservatism that holds the artistic products of the past up as an unattainable standard for contemporary literature. While this view is attributed to Mehring in particular by Schulz, Peter von Rügen, and Hake, a closer investigation of Mehring's work leads to a much more ambiguous relationship to both contemporary literature and the classical tradition. Edgar Steiger, whose defense of naturalism and fondness for publishing the texts of naturalist authors launched the second phase of the debate, comes much closer to this position than his opponents. Mehring, for his part, explicitly critiques this ahistorical and idealist view of art in his monograph on Schiller.

I argue here that the several aspects of Marxist criticism that emerged after the war – a concept of realism contra naturalism as the portrayal of social totality, a historical-materialist account of aesthetic appreciation, and even an early dialectical formulation of the autonomy of the work of art – are first formulated by the pre-war SPD. This is by no means a formally articulated unified literary theory, but it does differentiate the pre-war SPD from other critical currents, and the thought of Mehring, Paul Lafargue, Bernstein, and, to a lesser extent, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin from other recognizably idealist strains of aesthetic theory and practice in the party. While the party failed to promote proletarian alternatives to mainstream culture, this cannot be explained solely as a consequence of idealism, which its greatest theorists explicitly criticized. Instead, I argue that a skepticism to mass culture arising out of a theory of literature that linked difficult works to political *Bildung*, and a curious amalgamation of the nineteenth century cult of genius and a handicraft view of literature as a learned and practiced skill all contributed to the lack of faith in the proletarian novel, and, more generally, proletarian

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Liebknecht's famous speeches "Zu Schutz und Trutz" and "Wissen ist Macht – Macht ist Wissen" in W. Liebknecht, *Kleine politische Schriften*, Röderberg: Frankfurt, 1976.

art.

Paul Lafargue, Franz Mehring, and Eduard Bernstein articulate shared expectations for what socialist art should do in the early 1890s. They criticize naturalism for its failed realism; for its claim to photographic, objective reproduction of reality; for its inability to positively portray the growing labor movement, laborers, and socialists as part of a larger critique of general ignorance; and, finally, for its consequent inability to promote the emancipation of the proletariat as a class. Paul Lafargue's reading of Zola is illuminating particularly with regard to the failed realism of naturalism. Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, was a respected fellow-traveler of the German workers' movement and an important thinker and activist in his own right, and his two-part essay "*Das Geld von Zola*" was the first of a string of articles published in *Die Neue Zeit* taking on Zola directly, rather than naturalism as a vaguely defined current or German writers associated with naturalism. For Lafargue, Zola's novels fail to offer a realistic portrayal of the world for three reasons: the physiological fatalism of Zola's experimental novel, which makes him unable to adequately account for the impact of the social milieu he tries to depict; his ignorance, especially in *L'argent*, of the situations portrayed; and because of naturalism's aversion to philosophy, which could have allowed the novelist to uncover the relationships between the events depicted. For Lafargue:

Die Gestalten, die Zola uns im Rahmen seiner Romane vorführt, werden von ihm in physiologischer Beziehung als erblich belastet dargestellt und das geschieht in der Absicht, dadurch eine Erklärung für ihr gesamtes Tun und Lassen zu liefern [...] Die Ereignisse seiner Romane sind nur zu dem Zweck gruppiert und klassifiziert, um die Entwicklung dieses krankhaften Phänomens zu ermöglichen.

Die pathologische Notwendigkeit, der Zolas Gestalten unterworfen sind, bestimmt nicht

nur deren Charakter und Handlungen, sondern beeinflusst den Verfasser selbst. Sie macht ihn blind und hindert ihn zu sehen, wie sich die Dinge im wirklichen Leben zutragen und wie selbst die am tiefsten eingewurzelten erblichen Eigenschaften beständig durch das Milieu, in dem sich das Individuum entwickelt, verändert werden. (70-71)

While a privileging of the value of art does at times seem to underlie certain of Lafargue's statements, the thrust of his criticism is firmly placed on the inability of Zola's method to account for what later Marxist critics would call totality. The emphasis early socialist literary criticism is supposed to have placed on idealism is entirely absent from Lafargue's essay and method. He explicitly criticizes Zola, Flaubert, and the brothers Goncourt for having a "große Darstellungskunst" (75) but not knowing how and when judiciously to use it. Their artistic virtuosity, for Lafargue, is a "zweckloses Beiwerk" if it cannot contribute to the successful (realistic, complete) depiction of the chosen subject matter [*behandelten Gegenstand*] (idem):

Allein wenn das Gehirn, das die Rolle einer photographischen [sic] Platte spielt, nicht sehr empfänglich und vielseitig ist, so läuft man Gefahr, nur ein unvollkommenes, unvollständiges Bild zu erhalten, das von der Wirklichkeit weiter entfernt ist als das Gemälde, das die zügelloseste Phantasie von ihr entwirft. (105)

The goal of literary representation appears in Lafargue as, at least potentially, the complete and realistic depiction of the matter at hand through the philosophical mediation of a thinker whose abilities are equal to the task, as opposed to a mechanically mimetic art. Without mediation (in Lafargue's critical vocabulary, it would be philosophizing, *philosophieren*) it fails at the purpose Lafargue sets for realist literature. The contingent and political thrust of Lafargue's criticism is clear; he attacks not Zola's inability to reach a transcendental aesthetic standard, but the inadequate mirror of capitalist reality and failure to mediate between the subject matter and the



novelistic form. The lack of theoretical insight hinders the author's analysis and makes of him a "Handwerker" instead of a "Schriftsteller" (105). This register from artisanal work, however, should not be taken as a classist criticism of the artisan (*Handwerker*) against the writer. Both aspects are crucial for Lafargue's conception of realism – both the talent and learned ability of the writer's craft and the ability and willingness to engage in philosophical thought. But the mere photographic reproduction of reality can never, for Lafargue, achieve sufficient realism. In the spirit of Marx, Engels, and later Marxist critics, most famously Lukács, Lafargue favorably contrasts Balzac, the "tiefer Denker" (106), to Zola on the basis of the superiority of Balzac's analysis of society and closeness to *Wirklichkeit*. The last crucial demand Lafargue makes of the realist author is intimate knowledge of the milieu portrayed, which also underlies his belief – shared with Mehring – that a great proletarian novel would be unlikely before the revolution.

Allein der Roman dieses Schlags [conforming to his definition of realism and portraying a proletarian milieu] stellt dem Verfasser eine bei weitem schwierigere Aufgabe als die Liebes- und Ehebruchsgeschichten, welche die Tagesliteraten erzählen, die wohl vollendete Stilisten sind, sich dagegen durch eine ganz phänomenale Unkenntnis der Erscheinungen und Vorgänge des täglichen Lebens, das sie zu schildern behaupten, auszeichnen: Abgesehen von ihrer Grammatik, ihrem Wörterbuch, etlichen Klatschgeschichten, die auf den großen Boulevards oder von Salon zu Salon kolportiert werden, [...] wissen und kennen sie so wenig, dass man meinen sollte, sie wären soeben vom Monde gefallen. Um einen Roman der erwähnten Art so zu schreiben, wie er geschrieben sein sollte, müßte sein Verfasser in nächster Nähe eines dieser ökonomischen Ungeheuer [like the coal mines in *Germinal*] gelebt, er müßte seine Natur, sein innerstes Wesen erfaßt und durchdrungen, er müßte in seinem eigenen Fleisch des Ungetüms

Klauen und Zähne gefühlt, er müßte vor Zorn über die Greuel, deren Erheber es ist, gezittert haben. Ein derartiger Autor ist bis jetzt noch nicht aufgetreten, ja es scheint uns unmöglich, daß er auftritt. Die Menschen, welche dem Räderwerk, den Produktionsmechanismen einverleibt werden, sind durch Überarbeit und Elend auf eine so niedere Stufe gesunken, so stumpfsinnig geworden, daß sie nur noch die Kraft besitzen, zu leiden, aber nicht die Fähigkeit, ihre Leiden zu erzählen [...] Dem zu einem Anhängsel des großindustriellen Produktionsmechanismus verkommenen Proletarier ist die glänzende Gabe des poetischen Darstellungsvermögens abhanden gekommen. (80-81)

Lafargue combines a critique of trivial literature with the expectations of his definition of realism and the proletariat's own conditions of reproduction to come to the conclusion that the modern proletariat is structurally unlikely to produce their own literature. While Schulz rightly uses the realities of proletarian life to criticize the unrealistic expectation that workers would leave a ten-hour shift and then spend hours reading Goethe or Marx at a library (82-3), he fails to account for the role that the acknowledgment of such realities might play in reticence to promote proletarian novels. The danger of an inversion of the model criticized here, in which a purely proletarian milieu is portrayed without philosophical analysis or a deeper understanding of the relationship between the whole and the part, is equally present, and the demanding *Gestaltungsfähigkeit* required by Lafargue's conception of realism has no room to grow in the muck of proletarian exploitation.

Mehring's reasons for dismissing contemporary art are fourfold: its pessimism that ignores the reality of proletarian class-formation; its ignorance of the subject-matter and milieu; its lack of "künstlerische Gestaltungsfähigkeit" (255); and, finally, art's limited efficacy in the proletarian emancipatory struggle. This last point, Mehring's conviction that it was important not

to overstate “die Bedeutung der Kunst für den Emanzipationskampf des Proletariats” (258)—a view consistent with Mehring’s analysis of German classicism as a kind of substitutionary satisfaction for the political impotence of the German bourgeoisie—is often the only explicitly cited reason for Mehring’s resistance to contemporary literature, with the implication that this continuous line of anti-artistic thought (the oft-cited phrase from Liebknecht in the 1870s is “unter den Waffen schweigen die Musen”) is almost single-handedly responsible for Social Democracy’s failure to encourage the creation of an alternative proletarian culture. Not even this line of argumentation is taken seriously, however, because it is assumed that this agitational position served merely to bolster the classics over contemporary or proletarian art in consequence of Mehring and others’ conservative, classist, and “idealist” artistic taste.<sup>28</sup>

Yet Mehring expresses himself unambiguously on this point in his final contribution to the Naturalism Debate, where he rejects the concept of pure art [*reine Kunst*] as “recht parteiisch” (257), especially where it claims not to be (see “Kunst & Proletariat,” 1896). This places him in line with later theorists of ideology and anticipates Paul Nizan’s attack on bourgeois thought’s false pretense to purity and neutrality. The historical determinateness of this portrayal and its critique of the ideology of aesthetic production are fundamentally opposed to idealist aesthetics.

Bernstein articulates similar expectations for a realist art in his contribution to the early phase of the debate, “Etwas Erzählungsliteratur,” which brings together critiques of four separate contemporary works. He finds fault with Gustav Landauer’s *Der Todesprediger* and Gustav Heinrich Schneideck’s *Im Osten Berlins* for the authors’ “total[e] Unfähigkeit, die moderne Arbeiterbewegung zu begreifen” (134).<sup>29</sup> Bernstein sees in Schneideck’s novel a completely

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<sup>28</sup> The most nuanced example, and for that all the more striking, is in Schulz 61-70, which also contains an excellent summary of East and West German critical literature on Mehring through the late 1980s.

inexcusable ignorance of socialism<sup>30</sup> and in his allegedly socialist characters mere caricatures of the working class. He even unfavorably compares him to Zola, remarking that Schneideck's book completely lacks the sharp "Analyse des Elends" (*idem*) Zola brings to his portrayal of the working class. The rest of his criticism of the book are general remarks about the lack of literary quality, by which he seems to mean flat, predictable characters, a dearth of humor, and an overwhelmingly superficial level of analysis Bernstein finds completely unsuited to a social *Zeitroman* (135). Like Lafargue and Marx with regard to Balzac, Bernstein is capable of separating the political possibilities of the novels he criticizes from their specific *Tendenz* and from the political affiliations of the author, but Bernstein's critique of Landauer's novel problematizes more the lack of interest of the characters, the missing "künstlerische Gestaltungsfähigkeit," to use Mehring's phrase. These seem to be strictly practical concerns, with an emphasis on the organic demands of the genre and the criteria suggested by the work itself, rather than an abstract concern with literary quality or identifiable transhistorical categories. Bernstein even says of Landauer's novel, which he spends much time criticizing for its intellectual naivety and improbability, that a tendentious work should be judged based on its depiction of the tendency in question, rather than dismissing it. It is surprising that in these early party texts on contemporary literature the only claim for literary quality articulated by the sole self-avowed Kantian in the party seems to be based on the relatively banal expectation, as Engels formulates it in his famous and much-anthologized letter to Minna Kautsky about *Die Alten und die Neuen* [The Old and the New], that the characters should not be personifications of ideas and that the reader is better served with a compelling depiction of reality than a pedantic and

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<sup>30</sup> This criticism antedates the *Reformismusstreit* by several years, but Bernstein's mode of literary criticism does not seem to have been overly impacted by his reformism. He was also a proponent of Lafargue and spoke at his funeral.

infantilizing moralism.<sup>31</sup> The contemporary work Bernstein singles out for praise, a collection of short stories from the naturalist writer Anna Croissant-Rust, he lauds for being “frei von Deklamation” and “ohne Tendenziöse Reflexionen” (144), but the stories are not for that reason without a recognizable political tendency. “Da wird nicht gepredigt und nicht polemisiert,” writes Bernstein, “da wird keine überlegene Miene aufgesetzt und theoretisiert – da wird nur gezeigt” (idem). For Bernstein, as for Mehring and Lafargue, the task of the realist writer is to disclose the relationship of proletarian abjection to the capitalist mode of production, not to pedantically explain how one is to interpret them. If there is a meaningful trace of idealism in pre-war Social Democracy’s view of art, it is encapsulated in the way we interpret this assertion by Bernstein. If we abstract from the vaguely positivist assumption partially at the root of this assertion – should an accurate depiction of reality exist, it would necessarily follow that a rational or informed observer could identify the inherent link between capitalism and the immiseration that in Croissant-Rust is “nur gezeigt” without unnecessary, pedantic, and tendentious ballast – what remains is the implicit belief that consuming a realist novel can or even necessarily must produce the kind of experience of learning that contributes to political *Bildung*, in a way that artistically sloppy, pedantic, or tendentious works would not. Bernstein’s criticism of tendency hinges on the word *predigen*, to preach, which is not inimical to art *per se* but inimical to *thought*, to *Bildung* in the way he conceives of it. Yet *Bildung* here is always understood as *Arbeiterbildung*, as a contribution to the class consciousness of proletarians that will contribute to the abolition of bourgeois society. At stake here is the establishment of aesthetic criteria that want to judge works according to their meaning for political praxis as

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<sup>31</sup> Engels complains that Kautsky’s Arnold, even more than her other characters, is a failed character because “the personality merges [...] in the principle.” See Engels to Minna Kautsky, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1885. Marxists Internet Archive: [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885/letters/85\\_11\\_26.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885/letters/85_11_26.htm)

opposed to according to standards of the beautiful and the sublime; it is a fundamentally practical orientation that removes the aesthetic sphere from the realm of reason and eliminates the possibility of ahistorical categories from idealist aesthetics.

The three critics also agree that naturalist portrayals tend to overemphasize the squalor of proletarian life without recognizing the germ of the coming society within it – what Mehring and Lafargue hint at when they write of philosophizing or depicting a specific *Denkweise*, way of thinking. The only general criticism Bernstein levels at Croissant-Rust’s short-story collection and naturalism, “Zola’s school,” (146) is that it is “einseitig” (145), that it fails to capture anything of proletarian life but immiseration. Unlike Mehring, however, Bernstein takes time to consider the very real existence of proletarian milieus like the one that appears in Croissant-Rust’s stories, albeit one-sidedly; he claims that the unorganized proletariat is a “staatserhaltende Kraft” (idem) and that they “betrachten die heutige Ordnung der Dinge als unumstößlich” (145-6). It is thus not just the failed realism and at least implicit anti-socialist tendency of such one-sided portrayals that Bernstein, Mehring, and Lafargue criticize, but rather the idea that such a portrayal helps the world to appear unchangeable and predetermined. Bernstein’s criticism, then, is that such literary portrayals can hardly be expected to contribute to the class consciousness of the proletariat and even anticipates arguments about reified portrayals of the social totality in post-war Marxist literary criticism, as in Lukàcs’ later essay comparing Kafka to Thomas Mann. In Mehring’s contributions to both phases of the Naturalism Debate, he describes this as the optimism of the proletariat. Quite far from being “idealist” in a technical, philosophical sense, Mehring and Bernstein differently emphasize the historical changeability of social relations and by extension the contingency of forms and their suitability for contributing to *Arbeiterbildung*.

A comment from Karl Kautsky’s essay on alcoholism and the dangers of the temperance

movement for the party summarizes well the critique that Bernstein, Lafargue, and Mehring make of naturalism's inability to depict the proletariat in a positive or true-to-life [*naturgetreu*] way:

[Gerhard Hauptmann's play *Vor Sonnenaufgang*] klagt die moderne Gesellschaft an, indem es ihre Fäulnis bloßlegt, so naturgetreu bloßlegt, daß einem der Verwesungsgeruch beim Lesen förmlich in die Nase steigt. Aber [. . .] man bekommt nur die absterbende Gesellschaft zu sehen, nicht aber die Keime der Kommenden. (35)

This insistence on an accurate portrayal of at least the possibilities of socialism and the organized part of the proletariat echoes repeatedly in the discussions and evaluations of contemporary literature of pre-war Social Democrats. It also offers an alternative explanatory model to the *Verbürgerlichung* thesis that, when applied to literature, takes Social Democracy's reticence vis-à-vis modern literature as proof of the bourgeois tastes of the party leadership and the failings of worker-intellectuals to appreciate popular culture. While such bourgeois tastes could undeniably be found among leading party members,<sup>32</sup> a failure to understand the realist aesthetic present in germinal form in pre-war Social Democracy and its possible relationship to *Arbeiterbildung* likely contributed to an overvaluation of this explanatory model in the highly politicized critical literature.

Sabine Hake singles out Mehring's biography of Friedrich Schiller as exemplary of

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the party-internal tendency to overvalue Schiller as a figure is taken up explicitly by Rosa Luxemburg in her review of Mehring's *Schiller: Ein Lebensbild für deutsche Arbeiter*, where she says the following of the party's own internal Schiller-cult: "Es ist allerdings viel bequemer, Schiller nach abgebrauchtem Schema als den großen, von der Bourgeoisie verleugneten Apostel der bürgerlichen Revolution für das Proletariat in Anspruch zu nehmen, was jedoch höchstens auf eine gleichmäßige Verständnislosigkeit für den historischen Gehalt der Märzrevolution wie der Schillerschen Dichtung deutet" (163. Luxemburg praises Mehring for referring to such unmediated attempts to appropriate Schiller as "gewaltsame Konstruktionen" where one seeks without understanding "das einigende Grundelement [von Schillers] Dramen in den verschiedensten Erscheinungsformen der geschichtlichen Revolution" (164). Schulz reads Mehring as if he did exactly what Luxemburg's contemporary review of the book praises him for not doing (see esp. pp. 64-65).

Social Democracy's debt to idealism.<sup>33</sup> Mehring, however, explicitly critiques the idealism of Schiller and Kant in parts of the biography. He also goes further – contrary to Schulz's assertion that Mehring's criticism was historical materialist but not dialectical (Schulz 64), certain hallmarks of interwar and post-war dialectical aesthetics appear in Mehring's book, including the traces of a theorization of the autonomy of the work of art. In the section on *Wallenstein*, which Mehring clearly sees as the apex of Schiller's artistic production, he writes:

Alle Ästhetik hat nur eine bedingte Geltung, da auch sie dem historischen Wandel unterliegt, und im Grunde schafft sich jedes schöpferische Kunstwerk seine eigene Ästhetik. So verkehrt es ist, die Shakespeare, Goethe, und Hebbel mit dem Maßstabe Schillers zu messen, so verkehrt ist es auch, Schiller auf der Waage der Shakespeare, Goethe und Hebbel als zu leicht zu befinden. Dies meinte Goethe, wenn er sagte, Schillers *Wallenstein* sei so groß, daß ihm nichts an die Seite gesetzt werden könne. Das wäre übertrieben, wenn damit gesagt sein sollte, *Wallenstein* sei die überragende Krone der dramatischen Weltliteratur, aber es ist vollkommen richtig in dem Sinne, daß jede echte und ursprüngliche Schöpfung der Kunst an sich unvergleichlich sei. (141)

The notion that aesthetic categories have a historically conditioned and limited validity is incompatible with fundamental tenants of every idealism. There are similarities in the requirement that a work of art create a whole, "seine eigene Ästhetik," which also makes

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<sup>33</sup> In the section of *The Proletarian Dream* where Mehring's Schiller biography is briefly discussed, Hake writes that "Schiller's status as a *Freiheitsdichter* (poet of liberation) and his aura of *Volkstümlichkeit* (folksiness) had made him ideally suited for socialist popularizations and appropriations" (169), without ever directly acknowledging that Mehring's book continuously disputes both attributions, although she remarks that it was left to Mehring "to present the poet's passion for freedom and democracy as an [sic] model for the socialist movement but, at the same time, criticize his aesthetic theory as an expression of political resignation" (170). While the latter part of the sentence is certainly true, Schiller is hardly held up as a model for the Socialist movement by Mehring. If Mehring attributes to him a spirit of freedom, it is that of the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848, although he does end his biography with the poetic sentence that the working class could hear in Schiller's poetic production, in success and in failure, the root note of "Hoheit der Gesinnung, die sich siegreich erhebt über alle Sklaverei" (168). The idealism here seems harmonic with the militant, quotidian meaning the word had in early Social Democratic discourse.



Mehring's parallel to Goethe here possible and recalls the emphasis on organic completeness (*Vollkommenheit*) in the aesthetics of German Idealism, but with completely different philosophical underpinnings and political consequences. It is not that works of art enter a timeless sphere of autonomy accessible only to art, but rather that every work of art creates its own historically contingent aesthetic that is incomparable (*unvergleichbar*) with others precisely because they are historically determined. If we can take Kant and his disciple Schiller as a model for an idealist system,<sup>34</sup> then the dualism that would allow for a world of ideas or a realm of freedom carved out through aesthetic education is incompatible with Mehring's basic categories of thought. Historically conditioned *noumena* are a contradiction in terms, because their condition of possibility is freedom from spatio-temporal determination.

Schiller also presents his cherished notion of freedom as an abstract ideal in his epistolary foray into philosophy, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. It is unattainable in reality, but the ideal exists in the realm of ideas as something to strive for through the complex relationship between art and play elaborated in the later letters. This incompatibility is also stressed by Mehring, who sees Kant's historical significance in the ability to translate religious dualism from a feudal to a bourgeois era (167). The last lines of the Mehring passage above could certainly be read as a contradiction of the initial assertion of the historical contingency of aesthetics if we take them to imply that what constitutes an "echte und ursprüngliche Schöpfung der Kunst" is actually the would-be transhistorical judgement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but

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<sup>34</sup> Fritz J. Raddatz, a famous West German publicist, journalist, essayist, and longtime leader of the Rowohlt Verlag, claims that Mehring's work is a synthesis of Kant and Schiller: "[Mehrings Kunstbegriff] ist die Verbindung aus Kant und Schiller. Und eingebunden in all die Kunstdebatten liegt eben Mehrings Begriff der 'Aufklärung', also einer Oben-Unten-Dialektik. Konzept und Interpretation der Schillerschen Ästhetik sind Zentrum von Mehrings Kategoriensystem." In *Die Zeit*, n.44 1974. "Verräter am Sozialismus oder an der Bourgeoisie?" It seems that the image one has of Mehring is highly dependent on both the preconceptions one brings to his work and on which period or texts are given the most weight – though the most popular approach seems to be to read as little of his work as possible.

this does not seem to be his intent. While it is possible to read Mehring, and Social Democratic literary theory by extension, along such lines, this interpretation gives Mehring less credit than he deserves. This passage and others like it in Mehring should, in light of the strong claim of its first sentence, be taken to mean that if all categories of thought, philosophy, taste, etc. are subject to processes of historical change and mediated by class struggle. If that is the case, then a genuine and original work of art cannot pretend to exist outside of history any more than could its concept. Rather, as demonstrated above on the basis of Bernstein and Lafargue's critical method, the organic *Vollkommenheit* is created by the work itself, and this creation and the question of a taste that could recognize it as such must equally be historically conditioned. While the contrary position, an idealist position, certainly had a following in the pre-war SPD (in the writings of Friedrich Ebert and the short-lived Social Democrat and editor of *Die Neue Zeit* Edgar Steiger, among others), it cannot be called dominant on the basis of contributions to any of the three literary debates.

The resistance to investment in proletarian culture also grew out of the particular political task imagined for a proletarian or properly socialist literature, which had to be realist, had to contribute to a proletarian "idealism" in the sense of willingness to endure suffering as part of the struggle and belief in the inevitable victory of the class, and a never-fully articulated but implicit theoretical assumption about the relationship between successful realist works and *Bildung*. This relationship is the subtext of Mehring's *Schiller*, which opts for a linear, chronological treatment of Schiller's life that resembles the structure of a *Bildungsroman* and also has political-educative ambitions that reveal an important but neglected facet of pre-war socialist literary theory: the way in which literature was meant to contribute to proletarian class formation [*Klassenbildung*], to the emancipation of the proletariat as a class. In her review of Mehring's book, Luxemburg

explicitly thematizes this relationship:

Die Mehringsche Arbeit wird deshalb gerade den wichtigsten Dienst dem Lesepublikum erweisen, auf den es jetzt in der Parteiliteratur vor allem ankommt: sie wird auf Schritt und Tritt zum Nachdenken und zum weiteren Lernen lebhaft anregen. Und dadurch bringt Mehring, indem er den Leser vor kritiklosem Nachbeten und vor jeglichem Kultus Schiller gegenüber bewahrt, zugleich die wirkliche erhabene Schönheit seines großen Lebenswerks der deutschen Arbeiterschaft nur um so plastischer vor die Augen. (165)

For Luxemburg, the ultimate aim of Social Democracy's literary endeavors is to provoke thought and provide an impetus to further learning, which echoes Bernstein's aversion to unsuccessful tendentiousness in art. Mehring's own purpose in *Schiller* has similar educational goals; he wants to work against the bourgeois cult of Schiller taught in public schools<sup>35</sup> and, as Luxemburg states, to attack the cult around Schiller to save what Mehring sees as his artistic achievement from the "Vergewaltigung der historischen Tatsachen" that made Schiller into the "Herold des nationalen Einheitsgedanken" (166) after his death, as well as to work against a blind appropriation of Schiller as a revolutionary poet within Social Democracy itself. While the connection is obvious, it is worth underscoring—in order to reinterpret—the faith in the power of *Bildung* and aesthetic *Bildung* such a position possesses. Mehring's criteria for realism and critical intervention in the reception of German classicism, as well as Luxemburg's review of the latter, reveal an unerring belief in the power of *Arbeiterbildung* to lead directly to political action. While this has often been interpreted, as noted repeatedly above, as a sign of Social

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<sup>35</sup> The cult of Schiller in popular culture in the Kaiserreich is described in Eduard David's contribution to the Schiller *Festschrift* of 1905, in a piece entitled "Schiller und die Schule." For a discussion of the Schillerfeier of 1859 with some psychoanalytic insight into the cult of Schiller, see Noltenius, Rainer, "Zur Sozialpsychologie der Rezeption von Literatur. Schiller 1859 in Deutschland: Der Dichter als Führer und Heiland," in *Psyche* Juli 1985, 39. Jahrgang, Heft 7, pp 592-616.

Democracy's bourgeois, "idealist" aesthetics, the cause is perhaps better sought in the lingering scientism of the party's Darwinian-tinged Marxism.<sup>36</sup> A legacy of both Lassalle and Engels, this view holds that truth and its dissemination in the proletariat necessarily leads to, or at least plays a crucial role in, the formation of class consciousness.

The relationship of truth to class consciousness is also taken up by Lukàcs in his essay "Class Consciousness." Lukàcs provides an account for the necessity of proletarian engagement with bourgeois culture as a necessity of class struggle. He takes this up as the dialectical-tragic position of the bourgeoisie, whose

politische Erscheinungsform war, daß die Bekämpfung der ständischen Organisation der Gesellschaft im Namen einer "Freiheit" geleistet wurde, die im Moment des Sieges zu einer neuen Unterdrückung verwandelt werden mußte [...] ideologisch betrachtet, erblicken wir denselben Zwiespalt, wenn die Entfaltung der Bourgeoisie einerseits der Individualität eine früher nie dagewesene Bedeutung verleiht, andererseits aber durch die ökonomischen Bedingungen dieses Individualismus, durch die Verdinglichung, welche die Warenproduktion schafft, jede Individualität aufhebt. (235-6)

In this view, the reason *Bildung* and *Arbeiterbildung* become a site of class struggle is because of the paramount importance that the bourgeoisie not become conscious of these contradictions, whose dialectical character is, for Lukàcs, one of the many forms of appearance of the "tiefstgehenden Widersprüche des Kapitalismus selbst" (236). Far from an obsession with bourgeois culture, then, one account of proletarian engagement with *Bildung* would be the attempt to hit capital where it hurts most. This view also questions the causality of narratives that

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<sup>36</sup> For more on this relationship, see Lucas, Erhard: "Marx' und Engels' Auseinandersetzung mit Darwin, Zur Differenz zwischen Marx und Engels," in: *International Review of Social History* IX, 1964, S. 433; and Dieter Groh, "Marx, Engels, and Darwin: Naturgesetzliche Entwicklung oder Revolution?" in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* Vol. 8, No. 4. December 1967.

would impute to the proletarian imaginary the choice of an ideological conflict, implying instead that the logic of this contradiction between the promises of *Bildung* and the reality of proletarian exploitation arises out of the contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat itself. This is, of course, not a compelling argument for anyone who believes the proletariat never existed, but – as I will show in the next chapter – *Bildung* was a site of ideological conflict in which Lukàcs’s idea seems to have been shared by proletarian writers.

## Chapter Two

### *Arbeiterbildung and Arbeiterbildungsroman*

“Alles, was vom Mund mir geht  
Ist ein Fluch, und ein Gebet.”

Otto Krille, “Der Weber”  
1904

According to the definition of the *Arbeiterbildungsroman* used in this dissertation, a novel of this genre must contain the following characteristics:

- 1) An initial *Bildung* that fails to incorporate the problematic individual into existing society
- 2) A secondary educational process that negates this initial *Bildung*
- 3) Adherence to a proletarian political movement that seeks to change the world rather than become reconciled to it
- 4) A depiction of the events portrayed as having general validity for members of the class

The number of texts published in Germany by socialists from the turn of the century to the First World War which fit these criteria is quite small.<sup>37</sup> There are, however, a novelized autobiography by proletarian journalist and poet Otto Krille published by the SPD press, the autobiography of the Austrian activist Adelheid Popp, and four important autobiographies written by workers that do. Though these latter works have largely been treated as historical documents<sup>38</sup> rather than novels, the liminal space they occupy between history and the novel is what interests me here.<sup>39</sup> Beyond their cultural and historical interest for their depiction of the conditions of

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<sup>37</sup> This chapter includes only those works published in Germany before the First World War and authored by organized workers; while this choice overlooks works that are certainly relevant for a cultural history of proletarian life, the works not included here do not differ greatly in their scope or in the events recounted, had, on average, only a single, small print-run, but do contain a perspective complicated by the experience of WWI. For a complete account of autobiographical writings by workers covering the period to 1914, see: Ursula Münchow, *Arbeiter über Ihr Leben*. Berlin, Dietz: 1976, and *Arbeiterbewegung und Literatur 1860-1914*. Berlin, Aufbau: 1981.

<sup>38</sup> See Schwarzenau, 169-221, especially 169-172.

<sup>39</sup> I do not see any meaningful distinction between the factually true memoir and the autobiographical novel beyond the fact that the author asserts the former to be wholly true and the author of the latter can hide truths behind the pretense of falsehood. For interesting discussions about autobiographical modes and their relationship to the novel,

factory and agricultural workers in Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, these life-writings, like the novels, offer a unique point of entry into the realm of class consciousness. As argued in the last chapter, class consciousness, as the state of consciousness achieved through *Arbeiterbildung* that leads to political engagement on behalf of the class, remains largely illegible in the historical record. The focus on formal *Bildungs*-initiatives in critical accounts of proletarian culture and cultural practice in Imperial Germany can only with difficulty account for the ephemeral nature of consciousness and the diverse and overdetermined category Jasper Bernes has called “revolutionary motives.” While the shortcomings of socialist efforts to organize the working class have been well-documented from many critical angles as demonstrated in the last chapter, these accounts nevertheless leave largely unexplained the mass support garnered by Social Democracy and organized labor unions in the period before the First World War. Life-writing and novelized autobiography depict, however, precisely the sort of interiority that remains illegible and in the context of formal institutions and politically organized social life, as well as in both the experience of exploitation and the fight against it. There are thus considerable theoretical stakes in exploring this aspect of political *Bildung*.

Attempts to assess the impact of functional learning—the moments in lived experience that contribute to the development of class consciousness—risk committing a form of intentional fallacy when interpreting the historical record. We can see that workers acted on behalf of their class in unions, labor-actions, and through the SPD, often at great personal risk, but we cannot allege why they did so without imputing motives to them to which we have no immediate access. The life-writings that are the focus of this chapter, however, do provide a window into

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see Marlene Kader’s introduction to *Essays on Life Writing*; Laura Di Summa-Knoop, “Critical autobiography: a new genre?”; Schmitt, Arnaud: *The Phenomenology of Autobiography: Making it Real*; and H. Porter Abbott “Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories.”

consciousness and its relationship to political action. It is thus not for their importance in the history of the German Workers' Movement or for their literary qualities that I wish to read them, but because I want to better understand the possibilities, limits, and determinations of proletarian class consciousness in the Program Era. While it is plausible, as Hegel claims in the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*,<sup>40</sup> that no historical moment can learn from the past because the determinations of every moment arise out of a unique historical dialectic, there are political and historical stakes in examining the relationship of political action to both pedagogy and consciousness in a period which shared some, though certainly not all, of the salient material determinations of the present.<sup>41</sup> This chapter thus seeks to understand both the shared material determinants of the “rich and enriching” journeys to class consciousness portrayed by the various authors and represented as universal for their class, as well as the relationship between formal and intentional learning in the development of political consciousness. It furthermore seeks to account for the different outcomes experienced by the authors of these works in order to answer the question: under what conditions, according to these narratives, is class consciousness possible?

While the idiosyncrasies of individual subjectivity might argue against the choice to treat these works as representative of more than a particular worker-writer, all of the works treated in this chapter repeatedly emphasize their general validity for the proletariat as a class. Adelheid Popp formulates this explicitly in the foreword to the fourth edition of her *Jugendgeschichte*

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<sup>40</sup> “Was die Erfahrung aber und die Geschichte lehren, ist dieses, daß Völker und Regierungen niemals etwas aus der Geschichte gelernt und nach Lehren, die aus derselben zu ziehen gewesen wären, gehandelt haben. Jede Zeit hat so eigentümliche Umstände, ist ein so individueller Zustand, daß in ihm aus ihm selbst entschieden werden muß und allein entschieden werden kann. Im Gedränge der Weltbegebenheiten hilft nicht ein allgemeiner Grundsatz, nicht das Erinnern an ähnliche Verhältnisse, denn so etwas wie eine fahle Erinnerung hat keine Kraft gegen die Lebendigkeit und Freiheit der Gegenwart.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke, Band 12*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989. (17)

<sup>41</sup> I consider this relationship in the Concluding Remarks to this dissertation.



*einer Arbeiterin* (1909, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1922) with reference to her reticence to write down and publish her story.<sup>42</sup>

[Ich weiß,] daß das Schicksal der Proletarierinnen um die Zeit, in der meine ‘Jugendgeschichte’ spielt, ein fast allgemeines war. Tausende könnten dasselbe erzählen, was ich erzählt habe, soweit Leiden und Dulden in Betracht kommen. Wenn ich mich dennoch überzeugen ließ, daß das Niederschreiben meiner Erlebnisse nützlich sein würde, so deshalb, weil zwar Unzählige andere gleich mir leiden mußten, daß aber nur wenige den Weg zur Erhebung und zum Aufstieg aus seiner bedrückten und versklavten Jugend fanden. Diesen Weg und die Kämpfe zu zeigen, die er erfordert, aber auch die Möglichkeit eines siegreichen Gelingens rechtfertigte für mich den Schritt, von mir selbst zu reden. (23)

With her choice of *Proletarierinnen*, Popp voices an important caveat to her claim regarding her narrative’s general validity – her experience is generalizable as the experience of proletarian *women*, a difference that, as we will see, all the writers here recognize in different ways. While the end of the above quotation might suggest a kind of Horatio Alger story at work, Popp states clearly in the same foreword that the *Weg* and its *Kämpfe* she describes here are those that led her to the workers’ movement. Letters from working women across the world proved to Popp “daß viele Frauen erst durch die Jugendgeschichte auf die Arbeiterbewegung aufmerksam gemacht und für sie gewonnen wurden,” Popp’s explicit “Ziel” (*idem*) when she wrote it. As I alluded to in the previous chapter, Popp’s remarks also clarify that objective economic conditions, the relationship of the wage-laborer to capital, determine the “Schicksal” of proletarian women. Her *Jugendgeschichte* plays a role in the realization of the potential for

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<sup>42</sup> Published in English by F.G. Browne, Chicago, 1914 as *The autobiography of a working woman*.

political action in proletarian *Sittlichkeit*, but the situation of the proletarian woman – far from being imagined in any important sense – is “ein fast allgemeines,” a result not of choice, feelings, dreams, or culture but of determined and determining economic structures that render her particular experience near-universal for members of her gender and class. While Sabine Hake wants to attribute to “the power of emotions in social movements [...] their formative, if not transformative functions – namely, to provide identities, create communities, and sustain identifications and commitments” (1), Popp attributes to the economic situation of *Arbeiterinnen*.

Franz Rehbein’s *Das Leben eines Landarbeiters* consistently emphasizes the situation of the agricultural worker and the general fate demonstrated in the particularities of the author’s life. When comparing and contrasting the benefits of working as a day-laborer for a fluctuating weekly wage to the indentured life of domestic servants [*Gesindedienst*] who work on longer contracts and thus appear to have more security, the author explains in collective terms why most workers opt for the former despite the dangers of unemployment.

In jedem Falle aber – mag man es nun mit einer guten oder einer schlechten Herrschaft zu tun haben – haftet für den, der älter und reifer wird, dem Gesindedienst, wie er jetzt in der Regel besteht, etwas Niederdrückendes, ja man kann sagen: ein Stück Sklaventum an, das auch durch eine verhältnismäßig anständige Behandlung niemals völlig aufgehoben wird. Es ist, als ob man stets in einer unsichtbaren Zwangsjacke stecke, die nur je nach dem Charakter der Dienstherrschaft bald straff, bald locker angezogen wird. Hat man daher erst das Mündigkeitsalter überschritten und die Kommißjahre hinter sich, dann bekommt man das “Dienen” nach und nach satt und zieht die Tagelohnarbeit dem Gesindedienst vor. So auch ich. (242)

In this passage, the limitations of particular situations are unable to alter the objective situation of

the collective laboring subject. The developmental trajectory is presented as representative for all workers. Once one has arrived at maturity and finished military service, contracted domestic service takes on the aspect of slavery that cannot be overcome by a “verhältnismäßig anständige Behandlung” – in other words, that cannot be resolved subjectively. Rehbein’s comparison to wearing an invisible straightjacket that may be tighter or looser but still promises immobility is also apt on multiple levels. The straightjacket’s purpose – in this case, the capitalist production of surplus value through the exploitation of the land and labor – is still served whether it is tighter or looser,<sup>43</sup> and the image also encapsulates the objective constraints of the proletariat by drawing a line to the systemic nature of the exploitation of labor: a straightjacket is unthinkable without a state monopoly on violence and normative standards of psychological health and criminality. The final laconic remark underscores the arbitrariness of individual difference – Rehbein’s particular decision is circumscribed by the general situation of agricultural labor, in which his own subjectivity and that of his employer, like the straightjacket of indentured servitude to landowners, can be “niemals völlig aufgehoben.” The author goes on to stress the objective determinacy of agricultural workers’ lot, refusing throughout the narrative to allow superficial distinctions like place of origin or temperament to distract from the thrust of the narrative, from its eloquent and sustained cry for a different social world. We will see below that this tendency to generalize from the incidents of individual life constantly recurs in the works of Rehbein, Holek, and Popp. This aspect helps distinguish these narratives from the traditional *Bildungsroman*, where – to speak very schematically – the pretense to universal validity depends on the form of the process of *Bildung* but does not concern itself with the shared determinants

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<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Rehbein points out elsewhere [FIND PASSAGE ABOUT BAD FOOD AND DRESCHMASCHINE] that better treatment is beneficial to farmer and landowner; negative treatment should rationally be perceived as counterproductive and irrational even from the perspective of the ruling classes.

that allow these texts to claim general validity for all (hu)mankind. This aspect has been overlooked in the post-war scholarship on these narratives, which often compares them to the *Bildungsroman* and tends to see them as symptoms of the failure of the SPD, as noted in the previous chapter.<sup>44</sup>

### I. Paul Göhre, Workers' Autobiographies and Literary Reformism

Despite the fact that these narratives all tell similar stories of political *Bildung*, few of them can claim the reach and longevity of Popp's *Jugendgeschichte*. While her novel appeared serialized in periodicals internationally and in inexpensive, widely available<sup>45</sup> print versions in Germany and Austria, the publication history of early workers' life-writings speaks to the difficulty the SPD had of pursuing a cohesive literary politics before the First World War, and to the entwinement of political and literary differences in the party. The first ground-breaking and commercially successful autobiography of a worker was published at the behest of Paul Göhre, a Christian theologian and latecomer to Social Democracy, by a bourgeois press for a bourgeois public with a sale price of over five marks, an exorbitant sum for most workers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> Göhre's role in the publication of four early workers' autobiographies is partially responsible for the lack of support and dissemination these works enjoyed among workers and within the party. Not only could workers not afford the books, they primarily consumed

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<sup>44</sup> Bernd Witte, for example, in a chapter which tellingly puts the "socialist" in "socialist prose" in scare quotes, writes that "[worker autobiographies] nähern sich im Aufbau dem Bildungsroman, nur daß hier am Ende nicht der allseitig gebildete Mensch, sondern der klassenbewußte Sozialist als Ideal erscheint. In dieser Rückwendung zur bürgerlichen Form [...] spiegeln sich das Abgehen der Arbeiterbewegung von ihrem revolutionären Klassenstandpunkt wider, ehe sich das noch im Inhalt dieser Werke zeigen kann" (63).

<sup>45</sup> The book cost only one mark (still a significant sum for most workers in 1900), reached a circulation of 15000 copies and *three* editions within the first year, and had six German editions in print by 1930 (Münchow 548; Schwarzenau 183).

<sup>46</sup> Mehring reports that Wenzel Holek earned 15 to 17 marks a week to maintain a family of five in 1909, which would have made the cost of his own autobiography slightly less than 1% of his gross annual income, had there been a rare year in which he was fully employed.

serialized literature in daily and weekly periodicals from both the bourgeois and socialist press.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Göhre belonged firmly to the non-Marxist wing of the party and had a tense relationship with both the left wing of the party and the Marxist center. Dieter Schwarzenau writes of Göhre that he “war Sozialdemokrat, ohne Marxist zu sein [...] Er wollte Integration, nicht Revolution, Aufklärung statt Agitation [...] Die Autobiographien verstand er nicht als Kampfschriften der proletarischen Bewegung, sondern als Kulturdokumente, als Materialien für eine Volkskunde” (173). Before becoming a party member, Göhre spent three months as a factory worker in the early 1890s and published a report of his experiences that drew much public attention from various sectors of society, including bourgeois conservative and nationalist quarters. This “sensationelles Aufsehen” (Schwarzenau 170) conformed perfectly to Göhre’s revisionist goals, and Göhre’s target audience for this work as well as the autobiographies he would publish between 1903 and 1911 was “das Bürgertum, die Junker, die Sozialpolitiker” (174). August Bebel even attacked Göhre specifically at the Dresden Party Plenum in 1903 as a threat to socialism, which resulted in the latter not taking up his seat in the Reichstag until 1910 (Bollenbeck 245, Schwarzenau 174-6).<sup>48</sup> The first of these works published by Eugen Diedrichs at Göhre’s behest, Carl Fischer’s *Denkwürdigkeiten und Erinnerung eines Arbeiters*, even had an explicit political tendency contrary to that of Social Democracy. Fischer was a nationalist and monarchist, which served Göhre’s purposes well but alienated the entire project from the rest of the movement as much as the bourgeois publisher he selected. Diedrichs was explicitly hostile to socialism and attached to a hybridization of folkish-national preoccupations and the mystical-

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<sup>47</sup> On the reading habits of workers, see: Hans-Josef Steinberg, “Lesegewohnheiten deutscher Arbeiter,” in *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 1848-1918*, pp. 263-280. Ed. Peter von Rügen. Büchergilde: Frankfurt am Main, 1981.

<sup>48</sup> Schwarzenau makes this claim – Münchow and Bollenbeck seem to believe Göhre to be a representative in the Reichstag from 1903.

nationalist *Lebensphilosophie* of Wilhelm Dilthey (Bollenbeck 244-5). Though Ursula Münchow claims that “für die Sozialdemokratischen Selbstdarsteller [war] Fischer durchaus einer der Ihren” (531), she offers no evidence to support this claim beyond an implied solidarity born of shared fate. The claim is also dubious on account of Fischer’s nationalist militarism and open hostility to Social Democracy. As we shall see below, military service acts much more as a catalyst for political opposition in the other writers. Fischer’s work is not treated here for that reason, since it does not portray the development of consciousness nor any relationship to intentional and functional forms of *Arbeiterbildung*.

In total, Göhre edited and published four workers’ autobiographies intended to supplement his ethnographic journey into the heart of the working class, as he characterized his empirical work (Schwarzenau 172). In addition to Carl Fischer’s 1903 work, there were three works by organized Social Democrats: Moritz William Theodore Bromme, *Lebensgeschichte eines modernen Fabrikarbeiters* (1905), Wenzel Holek’s *Lebensgang eines deutsch-tsechischen Handarbeiters* (1909), and Franz Rehbein’s *Das Leben eines Landarbeiters* (1911). The only one of these volumes to receive critical attention within the movement was Holek’s book, which Mehring reviewed in the *Neue Zeit* on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1909. While he expresses respect and praise for Holek’s book as a “sehr dankenswerter Beitrag zur Geschichte der modernen Arbeiterklasse” (764), the bulk of his review is an attack on Göhre, his choice of publisher, and the preface this “priest” wrote for Holek’s *Lebenserinnerung*.

Wenn wir das Buch gleichwohl mit einem gewissen Gefühl der Missstimmung aus der Hand gelegt haben, so trifft die Schuld daran nicht den Verfasser. Vielmehr wurde dies Gefühl zunächst durch den rein äußerlichen Umstand ausgelöst, dass wir noch unter dem frischen Eindruck der „Lebensgeschichte einer Arbeiterin“ standen, die die Genossin

Adelheid Popp herausgegeben hat. Und der Vergleich zwischen beiden Veröffentlichungen knüpfte zunächst wieder an den rein äußerlichen Umstand an, dass die Schrift der Genossin Popp noch nicht hundert Seiten umfasst und eine Mark kostet, während das Buch Holeks den mehr als dreifachen Umfang hat und mehr als dreimal soviel kostet. Mit anderen Worten: den Erinnerungen der Genossin Popp ist der Weg in die Arbeiterklasse geöffnet, den Erinnerungen Holeks aber versperrt. Sie sind ein Buch für die Bourgeoisie, und damit hängt denn auch zusammen, was wir an ihnen auszusetzen haben, oder genauer an ihrer literarischen Aufmachung. (763)

Whether or not Mehring is correct in his assessment of Göhre's role and intentions, it is certainly true that Göhre's target audience is at odds with the goals Popp expresses in her introduction.

The possibility of a political literature that leads workers to the labor movement through the solidarity of a recognized, shared experience, the positive moment where the experience and reality of exploitation become the experience and reality of the class struggle to end it, is foreclosed by the choice of publisher and the cost of the book. The revolutionary possibility of literature is not abetted by Göhre's introduction, editing choices (he openly downplays the Social Democratic element wherever possible), or choice of publisher. His goal is to make social democracy, or at least its existence, tolerable to a bourgeois readership interested in the social question. The political convictions of his authors he describes as a necessary consequence of their exploitation, but, consistent with his politics, this necessity works as a plea to enact reform. However one chooses to evaluate the validity of Göhre's position, publishing the book in a forum where workers could not and would not encounter it foreclosed the possibility of an agitational literature that would function as a germ for *Klassenbildung* as imagined by early Socialist theorists of realism and as described by Popp in connection with her *Lebensgeschichte*.

Yet despite the empirical reality of a bourgeois readership, it would be difficult to demonstrate on the basis of textual content that these narratives lack the agitational elements of Popp's work. Rehbein, Holek, and Popp all describe a second-order *Bildung* that requires them to negate the standpoint of their initial, formal and informal education at home, at work, and at school; they all agitate in the name of their class, even where, in Rehbein, this agitation is implied in the narrative but not explicitly stated; they all write, although not always, as members of a class; and finally, all the works portray class consciousness as the culmination of their developmental arc.

Bromme's process of formation occupies a unique space and is worth considering here because it provides a useful counterpoint to the other narratives. While the negation of the initial formation is an essential aspect of Holek, Rehbein, and Popp's political development, Bromme is the son of a Social Democrat and born into the movement. His portrayal of the experiences of his life, the development of his thought, and the *Bildungsideal* he strives for owe more to the classical and humanist tradition than that of any of the other writers, although none are free or even particularly critical of the allegedly bourgeois origins of their autodidacticism. To speak with the couplet that begins this chapter, we can imagine these works, including Krille's *Künstlerroman*, as occupying a spectrum between *Fluch*, which aligns with the complete negation of the protagonists' initial formation, and *Gebet*, a prayer or entreaty based on universal, humanist values. In Bromme's work, prayer has the upper hand. The recognition demanded of the reader is the shared humanity of the author, rather than a shared experience of exploitation; the tone is philistine; it is apologia, not accusation. But the comparison usefully demonstrates the complexity of political formation and the political stakes of the other texts emerge best when compared with Bromme's. Bromme's work – while it comfortably aligns with the reformist critique leveled at all these novels by Bernd Witte – is unable to transcend the



individual, subjective standpoint because it is unable to finish the movement generated by the negative moment that begins the process of political development. Without a “reevaluation of values” (Clara Zetkin via Nietzsche) that would align the narrative with a new, proletarian universal, its perspective is not rooted in the shared exploitation of the proletariat, in class. In the other narratives, however, this negation and the concomitant recognition of a shared, class-determined fate allow the authors to complete the dialectical reversal, since this movement paves the way to the positive moment of class consciousness.

## II. Reading as Political *Bildung*

*Wenn mir ein Kind starb, fühlte ich mich nicht so schmerzlich betroffen, als damals, wo ich die Bücher aus dem Hause tragen mußte.* (Holek, 324)

These texts all pay great attention to intentional learning, especially in the form of the consumption and production of texts. As we will see below, formal, institutional learning is mostly characterized by an absence; the focus of narration, especially in the case of Holek and Popp, is what they did not know because they were prevented from attending school by the need to work. While Rehbein and Bromme, who attended school longer, include detailed information about the things they learned in school, they, too, place special emphasis on the books they continued to read after. Both Bromme and Holek stress the knowledge they would have had if economic necessity had not cut short their education. The reading habits acquired in childhood and continued in adult life are particularly noteworthy for the authors. There are lists of works read, small reviews of books deemed useful or not useful, specific mentions of newspapers and their political affiliations and contents, details of correspondence courses (Holek) or tutoring (Popp) in adult life, fond memories of the first books read on one’s own (Rehbein), or attempts to impress upon the readership the cultivated taste of the author (Bromme). What is particularly interesting, however, is the intense desire of all these authors to challenge their minds and the

libidinal attachment to the book as an object. The trope of “geistige Kost,” spiritual or mental nourishment, appears in all the authors – an especially compelling and urgent metaphor for writers who are, by contemporary standards, unusually well acquainted with hunger. Holec’s observation above comparing the loss of his personal library – he was forced to sell his books to buy food for his family during a long period of unemployment – and the loss of a child is understandable in its context: workers’ life-writings abound with examples of mothers and fathers wishing they had no children or that more of their children had died young because of the difficulties involved in supporting them. The burden of proletarian parenthood is easier to grasp, however, than the importance of books. As argued in the previous chapter, the understanding of *Bildung* as a site of class struggle that can disclose contradictions in bourgeois society detrimental to the ideological justifications of capitalism is operative in these narratives, which accounts for the great importance placed on the consumption of texts by the authors.

The question posed in the last chapter as to how the consumption of literature was expected to lead to political action and class development is succinctly answered by Popp’s foreword. Through a self-recognition in the portrayed experience, such a realist and proletarian literature discloses the identity of the proletarian with the proletariat and the promise of freedom from capitalist exploitation in socialism, as well as the path ‘zur Erhebung und zum Aufstieg’ in the class struggle embodied by the movement. Further, Rehbein, Popp, Holec, and, to a lesser extent, Bromme emphasize the connection between appropriate spiritual nourishment (*geistige Kost*) and ripeness for class consciousness, to achieve a state of mind to fight for the proletarian cause and survive the negation of initial *Bildung* that, without the proletarian universal, would end in isolation. However politically counterintuitive this may be, the critical tradition that decries the way in which bourgeois literary models were adopted by the working class fails to

recognize the way reading and study, at least according to these narratives, plays an important role in the formation of class consciousness.

Franz Rehbein describes his initial experience of reading socialist literature as following the same schema outlined by Popp. In a programmatic text written for Paul Göhre, Rehbein explains how he became a Social Democrat in much greater detail than in his *Leben*, which downplays – perhaps at the behest of Göhre – his political engagement. I will have cause to return to his remarks below but wish to note one crucial aspect here, namely his exposure to Social Democratic periodicals. While this is not literature in a narrow sense, although fictional texts were sometimes published in Socialist dailies, Rehbein nevertheless describes the act of reading and its impact on him following precisely the schema outlined above:

Donnerwetter, war das eine Tonart in diesen Dingern [in the socialist newspapers]! Da wurden die Regierung und die gesellschaftlichen Einrichtungen ja in einem ganz anderen Lichte gezeigt, als wie ich es sonst immer gelesen hatte. Und wie warm das Blatt für die Arbeiter schrieb! Da wurde das Arbeiterelend und die Abhängigkeit der Arbeiter von Kapitalisten und Grundbesitzern mit einer Lebendigkeit und Naturtreue geschildert, daß ich ganz verblüfft wurde. [...] Teufel noch einmal, das war ja *wahr* [emphasis in original], was in diesen Blättern stand; mein ganzes bisheriges Leben war ein Beweis dafür. Konnten die Leute, die so etwas schrieben, schlecht sein? Unmöglich. (289)

Rehbein goes on to describe how he began agitational work around the elections in the winter following being introduced to socialist ideas, still in the period before the socialist laws lapsed in 1890; the exposure to socialist publications thus led almost directly to political action. The first word quoted above, the exclamatory interjection *Donnerwetter*, indicates both excitement and surprise at a new way of seeing the world described in public discourse. What follows is

identification mediated by realism, Rehbein's discovery of a true-to-nature [*naturtreue*] depiction of social relations that affirms Rehbein, the subject of this identification, and his life experience (his *ganzes bisheriges Leben*) through its warm description of workers and their situation. Rehbein's identification leads to a *remise-en-cause* of his initial *Bildungsgang* and a moral restructuring of his world according to a proletarian universal, before ultimately inspiring political engagement on behalf of the class, which is demonstrated through the repeated reference to collective subjects in terms like *Arbeiterelend, die Arbeiter, Abhängigkeit der Arbeiter, Kapitalisten, and Grundbesitzern*. Such a scene is certainly unimaginable without the long years of thought and experience of Rehbein's second *Bildungsgang*, but the author describes this particular moment as an epiphany with good reason.

The positive possibility of political *Bildung* hinges on such an identification with the party or political organization in its capacity to play a definitive role or to act as final instance. Another way to think the differences between the traditional *Bildungsroman* (BR) and the *Arbeiterbildungsroman* (ABR, novel of workers' formation) is the vast difference in the protagonist's relationship to the social whole. In the traditional BR, the protagonist is found wanting and their journey is characterized by the pursuit of wholeness, by seeking reconciliation as "die Frucht einer reichen und bereichernden Resignation" (118). In the ABR, as in the Lukàcs type of the novel of romantic disillusionment, the world is found wanting. A successful journey of formation in this context thus depends on fundamentally different moments. The individual cannot successfully reintegrate into society because no compromise can be found between the competing demands, to speak with Franco M\*\*\*\*\*i, of socialization and self-determination. Class consciousness offers the possibility to renegotiate both sets of demands, to restructure those demands according to the historical mission of the class so that the necessity to overcome

the contradiction between interiority and world can be deferred to a post-revolutionary period. Here, unlike in M\*\*\*\*\*i's view of the BR, there is no other possibility, because the antithesis between the demands of socialization and self-determination fully coincides with the antithesis between freedom and coercion (52-3). The omnipresence of necessity impedes the dialogic quality of the BR, its ability to live with and ultimately *resolve* contradiction, which M\*\*\*\*\*i sees as one of the great strengths of its classical form.<sup>49</sup> The protagonist of the ABR, like his class, has to consciously deny socialization for the sake of the new universal, proletarian *Sittlichkeit*. The role of a political organization, of the workers' mediations of the Program Era, is paramount in this context because it discloses, as shown above in the case of exposure to socialist literature, the identity of individual and class and allows the deferral of the reconciliation between problematic individual and world. I return to this theme below with regard to Wenzel Holec's work, but the ABR of the Program Era shows a paradox at the root of class consciousness related to ideological aspects of class struggle. A problem similar to that of Kierkegaard's Abraham presents itself: the denial of socialization, the negation of initial *Bildung* causes a series of problemata that resemble those Kierkegaard sees in God's command that Abraham murder Isaac. The particular has to negate the validity of the universal in its negation of initial *Bildung*. This negation alienates the subject from "seine unmittelbare Welt der Gefühle" and cuts the ties that "das Gemüt und den Gedanken heilig mit dem Leben befreunden" while tearing away "Glauben, Liebe und Vertrauen" (Hegel 321), as discussed in the introduction. The initial truth of their first education has been shown through experience to be an untruth, but in

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<sup>49</sup> "For Schiller and Goethe [...] happiness is the *opposite* of freedom, the *end* of becoming. Its appearance marks the end of all tension between the individual and his world; all desire for further metamorphosis is extinguished" (23). While the comment is grossly general to ever fairly apply to the relatively complex relationship between happiness and *Bildung* in the work and thought of Goethe or Schiller, it seems apt to describe certain processes of the BR – I assume Moretti was aware of that when he wrote it.

order to return to *Sittlichkeit*, a new orientation is required, a second-order *Bildung* that replaces the first. Bromme's text demonstrates this negatively, because he never negates the bourgeois universal, while Holec's moments of despair demonstrate the pitfalls of the absence of a new universal. The workers' movement is the only instance that can function as a new truth. The result is not a teleological suspension of the ethical, but rather the negation of bourgeois ideology and its replacement by proletarian class consciousness. This is not merely a theoretical construct; the lone, problematic proletarian cannot resist capital. As Lukàcs' remarks with regard to class consciousness, the purely economic interests that determine the class consciousness of the proletariat gain their ideological strength from a quantitative aspect; they are the interests of the overwhelming majority.

Rehbein's choice of words to describe the social democratic newspapers' relationship to truth in the passage above aligns with both the socialist theory of literary realism extrapolated from the party literary criticism I discussed in the first chapter and Popp's claims about the purpose and impact of her text. While Rehbein's venue of publication is distant from the socialist press of Popp's introduction, his narrative invites similar moments of identification. The portrayal of *Arbeiterbildung* in *Das Leben eines Landarbeiters* shows intentional learning in schools and from books he receives from various employers and acquaintances throughout his life as contributing to his own personal intellectual development and contributing to his self-confidence, even as this learning explicitly fails to provide workers the means to improve their own class situation. Pace Witte's claim that these narratives resemble a simple adoption of bourgeois values, what they adopt from dominant discourse is the value of knowledge. However – as I argued about certain aspects of the proletarian engagement with the idealist *Bildungsideal* in the previous chapter – this knowledge benefits workers, here, in Popp and in Holec, only by

empowering them to join the workers' movement or engage in collective labor struggles and resistance. Intentional learning – notably through its encouraged absence from the life of workers – punctures the veil of Imperial German class ideology and helps these authors develop a critique of social reality. This critique is, however, unthinkable without elements provided by the experience of exploitation in capitalism. Reading functions as a catalyst to begin the second-order political *Bildung*, but only because intentional learning is embedded in the context of functional learning that undermines ideology.

In *Das Leben eines Landarbeiters*, the narrator's initial portrayal of formal education focuses both on his aptitude for it and on its class character in Wilhelmine Germany. One of his first small side jobs as a child while he must legally attend school is polishing boots and cleaning overcoats at the home of the local pastor, who boards six students from the local *Gymnasium*, in exchange for morning coffee and a salary of two marks per month – about half the cost of his future memoirs. For Rehbein, however, this job was advantageous for his “geistige Entwicklung” (20) because he learns to speak High German through his exposure to the family and their boarders and is taken on by some of the boarders as a sort of pet-project, despite the tensions that normally reigned between the students of the free public school and the *Gymnasium*.

Von den jüngeren ‘meiner’ Gymnasiasten wurde ich nämlich nach der Schulzeit des Nachmittags häufig zum Spielen eingeladen, was mir bei meinen nachbarlichen Spielgenossen aus der Volksschule freilich manch hämisches Wort der Mißbilligung eintrug. Denn seit jeher bestand nämlich zwischen Volksschülern und Gymnasiasten eine arge Schülerfehde, die nicht selten zu offenem Krieg ausartete [. . .] Diese Gegensätze waren zwischen mir und den Gymnasiasten der Pastorenfamilie in kurzer Zeit so gut wie ausgeglichen [...] Durch diesen Umgang eignete ich mir ebenfalls eine gewisse

Gewandtheit in der Ausdrucksweise an, meine Manieren wurden etwas geschliffener. Auch auf meine Schularbeiten war dieser Umgang von nicht zu verkennendem Einfluß. Einem jungen Tertianer machte es geradezu Vergnügen, mir Schulhilfe zu leisten und sich hierdurch gewissermaßen als meinen Privatlehrer zu betätigen. Auch ein 17-jähriger Sekundaner korrigierte gerne in meinem deutschen Aufsatz herum und stellte mir die verschiedenartigsten Aufgaben. Selbst der Herr Pastor erkundigte sich zuweilen wohlwollend nach meinen Schulaufgaben; lobte, wenn sie richtig waren, und tadelte leise, wenn er Holprigkeiten und Fehler entdeckte. Regelmäßig bekam ich hier lehrreiche Bücher zum Lesen, und ebenso regelmäßig wurde ich abgefragt, was ich mir aus dem Inhalt derselben eingeprägt hatte. So las ich Reisebeschreibungen von Forschern über Fremde Länder und Erdteile, Biographien und Werke unserer Dichter. Ebenfalls wurde ich hier erst mit der alten Geschichte bekannt, aus der wir in der Schule ja so gut wie gar nichts zu hören bekamen. (20)

The above passage gives an account of the class character of education, undermines the relationship between education and merit, and shows the fluid boundaries between functional and intentional learning. The “Krieg” between public school and gymnasium students as well as marked differences in ways of speaking attest to the performative aspects capitalist modes of differentiation. While Rehbein insists elsewhere that teachers and other authority figures, including the police, often attempted to put a stop to the hostilities between the two groups of schoolchildren, the mockery of his own classmates confirms the reflection of these differences in consciousness. Laws regarding compulsory public school education at the time reinforce these class distinctions by placing the onus of providing for education on the father of a family and framing the need to attend public school as failure and incompetence which the state is forced to



remedy.<sup>50</sup> The ease with which these superficial distinctions are “ausgeglichen” between Rehbein and the boarders at the pastor’s home, and the former’s own aptitude and curiosity for learning as well as his ability to begin to speak like these landowners’ sons provide a lived basis for a critique of bourgeois ideology. However, while these and other accidents afford Rehbein some access to cultural capital not normally available to someone of his class, he is careful to couch these experiences as just that – accidental events that speak to his own proclivities but have no objective impact; it in no way pushes him to disregard politics in favor of the organic realization of his human potential. On the following page, Rehbein tells how both the pastor and his teachers at school told him and his mother that he would make a good educator, news which initially makes her “ganz glücklich” (21). But the author is quick to disillusion the reader of any hopes for class mobility won through bourgeois *Bildung*. His mother is forced to ask: “Doch wo sollte sie als Waschfrau die Mittel dazu hernehmen? Je länger sie hierüber nachdachte, desto aussichtsloser erschien ihr die Verwirklichung jenes Gedankens, bis sie ihn schließlich vollends aufgab” (21). This banal observation serves to confirm the irrelevance of potential and choice in the determination of an individual workers’ life. His chances of receiving an education beyond the legally mandated minimum are *aussichtslos* because his mother is a washer-woman, which is sufficient to lead her to completely give up on this possibility. Interestingly, the author never attributes such a wish to himself – in marked contrast, as we will see below, to Bromme – as if he had always known it to be in vain, despite the ease with which he passes amongst the

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<sup>50</sup> “Man muss hier von ‘Unterrichtspflicht’ sprechen, weil es in der Pflicht des ‘Hausvaters’ stand, für den Unterricht zu sorgen, und zwar ‘in seinem Hause’. Erst wenn er das nicht ‘selbst besorgen kann oder will’, entstand die Pflicht, die Kinder zur Schule zu schicken. Doch selbst dann bestand noch kein Zwang zum Besuch einer staatlichen Schule. So schickten die Wohlhabenden ihre Kinder selbstverständlich auf Privatschulen, vor allem in der Zeit vor dem Übergang in die höheren Schulen, die in kommunaler, kirchlicher oder staatlicher Hand lagen. Vor diesem Hintergrund war für die Kinder der unteren Schichten der Schulbesuch also nicht nur eine soziale Errungenschaft, sondern zugleich ein Indiz gesellschaftlicher Diskriminierung.” See Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, “Kurze Geschichte der allgemeinen Schulpflicht,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Dossier Bildung: <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/zukunft-bildung/185878/geschichte-der-allgemeinen-schulpflicht>

*Gymnasiasten*. Rehbein's narrative, in complete opposition to Bromme's, spends little time on wishes or possibilities. From a young age, then, Rehbein begins to realize that bourgeois *Bildung* can be a source of personal strength and nourishment, but also that it has no impact on the objective determinants of proletarian life. The experience of intentional and functional learning in a bourgeois context establishes class firmly as the most salient determinant of workers' experience, yet the pains the author takes to include every element of intentional learning speaks to the importance it has for his development. The only other things so extensively and repeatedly thematized in the memoir are food and the details of working conditions in the various agricultural sectors in which he finds employment.

The fourth chapter of the novel recounts the author's working life as a shepherd in Holstein in his early teens, during which time he is often asked by the farmer he works for to read aloud from the newspaper for him and his wife. He also receives reading material from a veteran of the 1848 revolution. The narrator describes the joy he feels when his employer, who gladly gives him copies of the newspaper and asks him to read aloud at night, compliments his reading, and the even "größeren Freude" (80) he experiences when the old revolutionary also shows him signs of respect and recognition (*Anerkennung*) for his readiness to learn. The "Achtundvierziger" Steffen Thies "interessierte sich" for young Franz because he had fought together with people from his region against the Danish Army in the revolutions of 1848. Rehbein mentions that Thies would often bring him books, and describes his relationships to the texts as follows:

Er [Steffen Thies] empfand dann stets eine große Genugtuung, wenn ich ihm sicher und fließend den Inhalt der Bücher wiederzuerzählen vermochte. Mir aber brachten die Bücher nicht nur eine angenehme Abwechslung, sondern auch mancherlei Belehrung.

Wurde ich doch hier zum ersten Mal auch mit Fritz Reuters Werken bekannt, von dem ich bis dahin nur den Namen gehört hatte. Auch die Aufzeichnungen des holsteinischen Chronisten Neokorus fesselten mich ungemein.

So durfte ich also für meine Person gar nicht klagen; ein günstiger Zufall hatte dafür gesorgt, daß es mir an Lesestoff nur verhältnismäßig selten mangelte.

Wie stand es aber mit den anderen Hütejungen? (80-81)

This passage and its depiction of the relationship between class and *Bildung*, and the way the fortunate accident (*Zufall*) of Rehbein's own exposure to literature serves only to introduce a description of its absence in his class, contains *in nuce* the movement of the relationship the text portrays between reading, bourgeois *Bildung*, and *Arbeiterbildung*. In a similar way to the passage regarding his time with the landowners' children at the house of the village pastor, this passage situates *Bildung* – here the consumption of historical and folk-literary texts<sup>51</sup> – firmly in the realm of subjective pleasure irrelevant for the fate of workers, although one can also detect a certain pride in the way Rehbein describes his youthful curiosity and attempts to learn. However, these joys are introduced only to highlight their absence in the other boys, who are not given books to read and are left to the “geisttötende Einsamkeit” (82) “ohne geistige Anregung” (83) of minding the flocks. The author also emphasizes the incompatibility of the work they do with any kind of formal education – they are so tired that they fall asleep in class and view school with only “heimlichen Grauen” (81). The subjective recompense is for Rehbein only worth evoking in

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<sup>51</sup> Fritz Reuter was famous as a writer of Low German texts – this is the same dialect that Rehbein would have grown up speaking. Reuter was sentenced to death for *lèse-majesté* in his youth for the alleged political character of his fraternity meetings, though this was commuted to a seven-year sentence and he played no major role in the uprisings of 1848. Neocorus was a chronicler of the Dithmarschen, an area between Hamburg and Flensburg on the West Coast between northern Germany and the Danish border, where Rehbein spent the vast majority of his life as an agricultural worker.

order to give the lie to the bourgeois pretense of the necessarily edifying nature of *Bildung*.<sup>52</sup>

While all manner of reading represents a positive experience for Rehbein, this positive possibility serves to more pointedly demonstrate, with the laconic question of the last sentence, its structural foreclosure. Yet while Rehbein's text seems to successfully apply this strategy to emphasize the class-dependency of experiences of education, the weight the narrative lends to the author's own *Bildung* and the confidence he gains from it should also be taken seriously as contributing to his class consciousness.

Other moments in the novel better demonstrate the way reading and intentional learning contribute to the negation of initial *Bildung*. In Rehbein's account of his next position as a servant at a nobleman's estate, he explains the long-term effects of such servitude on the temperament of the workers who choose to stay there for a long period of time. The world outside the estate becomes "gleichgültig" for them, who "lebten in einer Welt für sich, bedürfnislos, wortkarg, apathisch" (94). He compares them to the "starkknochig-kaltschlägiger Ackergäule" the estate raises, and then remarks:

Oberflächliche Beobachter, die sich auf ihre psychologische Beurteilung von Volkseigentümlichkeiten häufig etwas zugute tun, lassen sich durch diese 'Kaltblütigkeit' immer sehr imponieren. Jene dösig-e Maulfaulheit scheint ihnen als rühmenswürdiger Lakonismus, in hölzerner Unbeholfenheit erblicken sie den Ausfluß ruhigen Selbstvertrauens, und die gutmütige Beschränktheit schreiben sie als 'nordisches Phlegma' den abkühlenden nervenstärkenden Einwirkungen der 'Waterkant' aufs Konto. Nun sollen zwar die klimatischen Einflüsse auf das Volksnaturell durchaus nicht von mir in Abrede gestellt werden. Wer aber die Dinge aus eigener Erfahrung heraus kennen

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<sup>52</sup> On this point, see Georg Bollenbeck's reading of Rehbein in Bollenbeck, Georg. *Zur Theorie und Geschichte der frühen Arbeiterlebenserinnerungen*. Kronberg/Ts, 1976.

gelernt hat, der schiebt nicht alles aufs Klima. Er findet bald einen ganz gewaltigen Unterschied in dem ‘nordischen Phlegma’ der besitzenden und der nichtbesitzenden Klassen. Bei letzteren [...] handelte es sich in dieser Beziehung in der Hauptsache um nichts anderes, als um die natürlichen Folgen einer unablässigen schweren Arbeit und überlangen Arbeitszeit, verbunden mit der abstumpfenden Einförmigkeit des Gutsdienstes. Geistige Anregung, die den Menschen auf ein höheres intellektuelles Niveau hebt, fehlte [...] völlig [...] Die immerwährende grobe Knochenarbeit und der gänzliche Mangel an erfrischender geistiger Kost machen eben den Menschen seelisch und körperlich vor der Zeit stumpf und steif. So wird er seiner Menschenwürde nach und nach fast völlig entkleidet und schließlich nur noch zu einer Art Arbeitstier herabkultiviert. (95)

This passage demonstrates important differences between a bourgeois and a working-class *Bildungsideal*. A crucial distinction is the tendency towards the collective subjective; the mention of a generalizable difference that would apply to all human beings [*den Menschen*] more completely conveys its absence. He lexically highlights the completeness of this absence through collocations like “immerwährende grobe” and “gänzliche Mangel,” and the repetition of *Mensch* in the penultimate sentence emphasizes the systematic and intentional degradation of people from human to animal status. The proletarian appropriation of bourgeois culture accepts – in the tradition of Lassalle and Marx – the alleged value of “geistige Anregung” in a relatively uncomplicated manner, but only as part of its effort to challenge other hallmarks of bourgeois valuation. *Bildung* and its absence are prized here as key factors in the political potential of individuals. Workers who exist only as exploited animals as a result of the inhuman conditions of their exploitation have no hope of fighting to better their situation; they are “seelisch und

körperlich vor der Zeit stumpf und steif.” In Bromme and Holek, similar observations can lead to a facile critique of these workers as *Lumpenproletarier* rather than placing the emphasis, as Rehbein does, on the “unablässigen schweren Arbeit und überlangen Arbeitszeit” that creates them. The opening lines of the passage ironically question the objectivity of *Volkskunde*, and variable outcomes for different people are revealed to be a consequence not of temperament but of property relations. But it is Rehbein’s own drive to learn, his need and the *accidental* availability, at various moments in his life, of “erfrischende geistige Kost” that make the critique possible. In other words, the power of mental nourishment for these authors is crucial for a successful negation of initial *Bildung*.

A final passage from Rehbein’s not-so-sentimental education demonstrates the necessary connection in the narrative between political action and his proclivity for *Bildung*. The narrator describes the last post he occupies on a farm before beginning mandatory military service. He asks the son of the landlord to borrow a newspaper to read in his free time. The following scene unfolds when the farmer finds him reading:

Langen Schrittes stetzte er da auf mich zu und kollerte: Dafür halte er keine Blätter, daß ich darin lesen solle; übrigens sei es besser für uns, das Lesen überhaupt zu unterlassen; er verlange nur, daß wir bei der Arbeit unserer Knochen “drödige” gebrauchten, eine Anstrengung des Kopfes könnten wir uns getrost ersparen, die verlange er gar nicht. Das letztere sollte wohl offenbar noch eine Art Witz vorstellen; ich faßte die dummprotzige Bemerkung jedoch als das auf, was sie war; wortlos sah ich dem Bauern nur einige Sekunden ins Auge, dann faltete ich die Blätter zusammen und gab sie seinem Sohn wieder zurück. Hoffentlich hatte [der Bauer . . .] doch aus meinem Blick gelesen, was ich in diesem Moment über ihn dachte. (164-5)

The class character of *Bildung* comes starkly to light in this passage. In the previous pages, Rehbein describes how devoted his employer is to agricultural technology and investment. He spares no expense in pursuit of knowledge to that end, but forbids his workers from reading the newspaper. It seems he is also aware of the dangers posed by education and the confidence it instills in workers. Herein lies the important distinction—one that parallels the one I drew in the first chapter between *Bildung* and *Arbeiterbildung*—between Rehbein’s desire to learn and an enlightenment ideology about the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. In Rehbein’s case, the pursuit of knowledge brings with it the confidence and insight to challenge extant power structures and eventually results in commitment to the socialist cause. The logic of the narrative makes it no surprise that, immediately following this scene, Rehbein describes the first of many instances of targeted disobedience, a germinal form of labor struggle, in the narrative: he refuses to ask the farmer permission to leave the farm on his days off.

Wenzel Holek’s *Lebensgang eines Deutsch-Tschechischen Handarbeiters* describes a similar process of wonder and identification at his first exposure to a socialist journal, but his hunger for learning is complicated by an almost neurotic desire born of his father’s unfulfilled wish for Holek to spend more time in school and learn to read and write properly. Despite these individual variations, Holek’s description of his initial exposure to socialist ideas and the relationship he portrays between his desire to read and educate himself further support the argument I am advancing about the relationship between the personal, subjective *Bildung* of an individual worker and *Arbeiterbildung*. However, Holek’s narrative – written in a different political situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire – also shows that more is required for class consciousness than a confidence brought by books. While the narrator’s convictions do not waiver after his initial encounter with socialist ideas, much of the agitational and organizational

work he does for both the Czech and German-speaking workers in Bohemia ends in disappointment. His initial exposure comes in the form of a flyer that the socialist party has illegally handed out and is read aloud by one of Holek's brick-factory coworkers before work. After describing the content, which tried to explain to workers their conditions in the state and the basic principles of capitalist exploitation, and ended with a call to arms, Holek describes the mood of the listeners:

Fast atemlos hörten wir dem Vorleser zu. Eine lange Weile standen wir sprachlos da und blickten einander stumpf an, als er mit dem Lesen zu Ende war. Denn so etwas, und in solchem Tone, hatten wohl die meisten von uns noch nie gehört. Das erlaubte man sich ja nicht einmal zu denken, geschweige zu reden (198).

As in Rehbein's account, the workers are speechless and experience a eureka moment similar to the former's "*Donnerwetter!*"—but the risks are greater. This first small exposure to socialist ideas leads Holek to stop reading bourgeois newspapers and to seek out a socialist mentor, who loans him books and the only Czech-language socialist newspaper published in Austria at the time. During his first nights of reading socialist texts, the narrator describes the same kind of experience of identification through shared experience and trust as Rehbein, almost as a kind of revelation:

Ich stutzte, der Mund blieb mir fast offenstehen, verwundert saß ich da und blickte immer wieder hin, wo das geschrieben war, als wenn ich meinen Augen nicht recht trauen täte [...] Es ging freilich noch über meinen Verstand, was ich da las, denn wie sollte so etwas möglich sein? Und doch, war es nicht etwas höchst Gerechtes, diese Forderung: Gleiche Pflichten, gleiche Rechte? Ja, so sollte es sein, so soll es sein! Diese und ähnliche Gedanken kreuzten sich in meinem Gehirn und steigerten mein Gerechtigkeitsempfinden



immer mehr [...] Jede Zeile, die ich da las, schien mir wahr zu sein. Denn solche Beschwerden [on the misuse of workers, poor conditions, illegally withheld pay, etc.] hatte ich ja selbst genug im Vorrat und war täglich Zeuge, wie auch anderen Arbeitern Unrecht geschah [...] Endlich hatte ich nun also erreicht, wonach ich mich so lange gesehnt! Der noch dunkle Schleier fiel mit einem Male von meinen Augen. Die Begeisterung wandte sich mit einem Sprunge [...] dem *Duch Tafu* [Cz, spirit of the times – the Socialist newspaper] zu, und der Idee, die er lehrte und vertrat: dem Sozialismus! (202-3).

This passage develops a nearly identical complex of ideas and emotions around perceived truth, shared life experience, a kind of revelation, and the relationship between knowledge and the confidence to act that emerges from the passages from Rehbein's text analyzed above. Holek overcomes the mistrust of Socialists bred into him by his surroundings when he recognizes his own life experience in the published grievances of workers from around the country. He experiences a kind of elation and excitement for the ideas and feels as if a veil has been removed from his eyes. The register and the excessive use of exclamation points captures the affective weight of the event as the narrator falls into an almost religious state and professes his dedication to socialism. This narrative, too, establishes a causal link between reading socialist texts and the desire to act politically. The next forty pages of the book recount Holek's ceaseless efforts to study difficult socialist texts (206), to found or take over a Verein (218), to make up for missed education and ignorance of spelling via a correspondence course so he could better contribute to party periodicals and life in the Verein (221), and to give his first talk for the one-year anniversary of its founding (231). Holek highlights the necessary connection between "geistige Kost" (231) and political action even more explicitly than Rehbein.

Yet if the connection is necessary, it is certainly not sufficient for the development of class consciousness, for sustained political action. In Göhre's introduction to Holek's work, he claims that the proletarian struggle cost Holek the basic conditions for a bare minimum existence and led him to no longer participate, as far as Göhre knew, in politics.<sup>53</sup> Mehring takes twofold issue with this: he contends, firstly, that the narrative in no way justifies the claim that Holek removed himself from political life—rather the contrary; and, secondly, that even if it were true, the repressive actions taken by or on behalf of the capitalist class to starve Holek and his family are not Social Democracy's fault but rather that of the exploiting class. Nevertheless, Holek's story delivers a contrasting narrative to the triumphant end we will see in Popp. After his attempt to start a *Konsumverein*, a kind of workers' cooperative grocery store, a period of joblessness hits the region and he loses the store and his deposit (257). The *Arbeiterverein* begins to fall apart, and every factory turns him away for his political activities. He is forced to return to Saxony to survive, but doesn't find the job market there any more hospitable. In this period, he stops participating in politics because he is at the mercy of necessity. M\*\*\*\*\*i, in his later preface to *The Way of the World* (which, coincidentally, bears the same title as the last page of Holek's autobiography – “Twenty Years Later”), calls the proletariat a “youth *without the right to dream*,” claiming that this makes the working-class BR “incomparable to *Wilhelm Meister* or *Père Goriot*” (x). This should not be taken too literally – of course, M\*\*\*\*\*i is not ignorant of nineteenth century popular culture or the alleged dreams of the disenfranchised. It is rather that the dreams of a full stomach, a comfortable bed, a job with some modest free-time that doesn't destroy the body and numb the mind, and freedom from need—the dreams most commonly

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<sup>53</sup> Göhre: “die Sozialdemokratie, die ihm [Holek] alles Höchste im Leben [he describes this *alles Höchste* on the previous page as: Licht, Bildung, Kameraden, Selbstbewußtsein, Selbstständigkeit, Freiheit und Kampf] gab, raubte ihm zugleich alles Notwendige” (in Holek, V).

espoused in these works—are incompatible with dreams of a society of the tower or the conquest of Parisian high society. This has consequences for *Arbeiterbildung*, in that whatever convictions might be gained, however much insight is attained by struggle and effort, the fruits of this maturity are always tenuous, fragile; one cannot eat convictions. Luckily, *Arbeiterbildung* and the ABR are not contingent on individuals or their dreams but seek to abolish and replace the framework in which social mobility serves as a structuring category of the imagination. Holec's novel demonstrates this symbolically in the final section in which the author is a mere observer of a Socialist parade through his old hometown of Aussig, which Göhre must have either ignored or been unable to read as a political act. While Holec is often frustrated by circumstances and seems no longer to share some aspects of his youthful militancy, the final page of his memoir takes a clear stance on the workers' movement and his role in it:

Von allen Seiten kamen da die Arbeiterbataillonen anmarschiert und stellten sich in der langen Gasse in die Reihen. Musikklänge schallten von allen Seiten. An der Spitze des Zuges standen kleine fünf-bis-achtjährige, weiß-gekleidete Mädchen, hinter denen kamen die größeren. Dann kamen die Jungen in demselben Alter. Hinter den Jungen stand ein Wagen der Arbeiterbäckerei, auf dem die Göttin der Freiheit stand, die sich bei jeder Bewegung des Wagens nach links und rechts beugte, als lüde sie die umstehenden Zuschauer ein, mit in die Reihen einzutreten. Dann kamen die Erwachsenen Männer und Frauen von Aussig, Bodenbach und allen Orten: ihre Gesichter strahlten vor Freuden. Ich stand da wie versteinert und sah tief bewegt zu, wie sie triumphierend vorüberzogen. Ich mußte mich bezwingen, um nicht laut aufzuweinen; aber die Tränen standen mir in den Augen.

“Achtzehntausend sind es!” sagte ein Ordner, als die letzte Reihe vorbei war. Er hatte die

Reihen gezählt.

Ich stand unten und schaute dem Zuge nach.

Dann setzte ich mich stumm auf mein Rad und fuhr nach Hause, und dachte über den Unterschied zwischen der Arbeiterbewegung von jetzt und vor zwanzig Jahren. (327)

This choice of ending reinforces the political consciousness developed throughout the narrative and emphasizes the importance of the collective over the individual subject. Even if Göhre were correct in his conjecture that Holek no longer actively participated in politics, the author structures the end of his narrative as a changing of the guard. His tears – one of the rare moments in the narrative where they signify joy – and deeply emotional reaction to the event function as a redemptive moment for his own life. With or without his individual participation, the efforts of his early years come to fruition as the town in which he was among the first organized workers now welcomes a parade of 18,000 Social Democrats. The silence of the ride back to Dresden is juxtaposed to the loudness of the procession, but it is not a silence of impotence but rather of success – Holek has seen at least a part of his proletarian dream come to fruition, and the movement, like this march, can continue whether or not he is able to be part of it, because his struggle was not for individual emancipation but for the emancipation of his class.

This is also the paradox of class consciousness I try to describe with the idea of proletarian *Sittlichkeit*. According to these narratives, workers cannot arrive at class consciousness and act politically without several specific mediations of the working class – a minimum is a compelling literature or oratory that discloses their identity with members of their class and points towards the revolutionary solution, and also an organization that is strong enough support a belief in the possibility of revolution. Luxemburg's gesture in *The Mass Strike* to the dialectical relationship between the revolution and the development of class consciousness

or collective idealism implies a similar relationship of mutual determinacy between the possibility of a revolutionary proletariat and the strength of workers' mediations, as suggested in the last chapter. While the spontaneity associated with the mass strike often has the upper hand in her account, her differentiation between the anarchist mass strike and the mass strikes of the Russian Revolution of 1905 also assumes a certain level of organization to make the form of struggle possible. Yet the "rising strength of the proletariat in the capitalist mode of production" also leads "the revolution as autonomous affirmation of the class" to get lost "in the development of capital" (TC 156). The stronger the class becomes, the easier it is for an *Arbeiterin* to come to class consciousness through the identification with the collective she finds in Popp's text, the more the proletariat is implicated in and dependent on the circuits of reproduction of capital; its autonomous self-affirmation as self-abolition disappears into the distance. These narratives lend additional support to the idea that the revolutionary horizon of the Program Era always contained the reaction, because the dialectic of class organization in the peak industrial period that allowed workers to develop class consciousness are paradoxically premised on the increasing strength of the class in capital.

A workers' journal also serves as Adelheid Popp's introduction to the movement. I want to stress that none of the figures in these narratives come upon socialist literature on their own but rather through worker sociability; there is an organized talk, a meeting, or simply a sharing of grievances and opinions before work. In Popp's case, she meets a worker whom she finds "besonders intelligent" (72), who begins to explain to her certain aspects of socialism, and brings her a socialist newspaper. Her relationship to this newspaper in turn inaugurates her political activism:

Von diesem Arbeiter erhielt ich das erste Sozialdemokratische Parteiblatt [...] Die

theoretischen Abhandlungen konnte ich nicht sofort verstehen, was aber über die Leiden der Arbeiterschaft geschrieben wurde, das verstand und begriff ich und daran lernte ich erst mein eigenes Schicksal verstehen und beurteilen. Ich lernte einsehen, daß alles, was ich erduldet hatte, keine göttliche Fügung, sondern von den ungerechten Gesellschaftseinrichtungen bedingt war. Mit grenzenloser Empörung erfüllten mich die Schilderungen von der willkürlichen Handhabung der Gesetze gegen die Arbeiter. (73)

This passage encapsulates the essential moments of AB. Exposure to a socialist standpoint engenders an affirmation of the truth of one's own lived experience and enables an identification that transcends the individual subjectivity of the worker by making them see themselves as a member of an exploited class. This often epiphanic experience leads to a rejection of the initial *Bildung* – not just the rejection of reification in the denial of a God-made social order, but also, further down the page, in a rejection of her mother's ideas about the role of women and femininity as she begins to seek out party members and attend organized talks and meetings. The passage goes on to describe the steady transformation in Popp's own *habitus* as a result of her encounter with this paper and the first organized workers she comes to know. She becomes "eine andere" (idem) at the factory and begins agitational work, the first instance of which is encouraging her colleagues to subscribe to Socialist periodicals. This identification results almost instantly in political engagement.

Popp's reading habits, especially her exposure to the classics, also play an important role in the narrative and support her class consciousness and political activity. Throughout the work, she names explicitly the authors and books she reads, from early childhood escapist reading to political literature (79) and the German classics (91). Her study of the classics even seems to empower her, like Holek, in the political struggle. According to Popp, her supervisor at the

factory speaks to her one day and asks for a handwriting sample in the hopes of changing Popp's position and getting her off the factory floor. She is concerned about her poor penmanship but chooses confidently a provocative verse from Goethe's *Prometheus* (91),<sup>54</sup> further demonstrating how socialist engagement with literature is understood as part of class struggle. Her relationship to socialist texts and the German classics contributes, if not equally, to the development of her class consciousness and her engagement.

Bromme's literary development is the most explicitly thematized, but also the least related to any discernable form of development. Bromme nevertheless merits discussion here because a critique of the form and content of his narrative provides a better framework for understanding the generic composition of these ABR. The narrative resembles those of Holek and Rehbein, in that it chronologically recounts the exploitation and personal hardships Bromme and his family experienced with the intent to render the dire plight of workers and their families more legible—and Social Democracy more palatable—to that public. What it fails to do, however, is plot a journey of political education. Ironically, Bromme's book is the one most obviously – for Schwarzenau, even comically – concerned with *Bildung* and its markers, but this *Bildungsideal* fails repeatedly to escape the confines of private subjectivity. It is more prayer than curse, and the narrative thrust is moral rather than political, a wish for recognition of shared humanity instead of shared experiences of exploitation. Bromme's socialist convictions and involvement seem more to reinforce the individual rather than sublimate him into a type of the class. Although Bromme is the only born Social Democrat amongst the authors, this may have been more hindrance than help. As mentioned above, a political journey cannot take place because there is no negation of initial *Bildung*. Instead, Bromme narrates an accumulation of

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<sup>54</sup> Sabine Hake devotes a chapter to the working-class use of Prometheus – a motif well-suited to the narrative of the German and Austrian Workers' Movement. See *The Proletarian Dream*, pp. 100-119.

knowledge and highlights contradictions between the status of workers in Imperial Germany and their humanity. There is no room in such a humanist framework for *Arbeiterbildung* or class consciousness.

The two most striking differences between Bromme's life and those of Popp, Holek, and Rehbein are 1) that he grew up better off and attended school until middle school before his family fortunes took a turn for the worse, and 2) his constant focus on personal relationships to the countless side figures that suddenly appear and equally suddenly disappear over the course of the nearly 400 pages of his memoir. His father had been a *Bahnbeamter* (railway official), but the latter's periods of invalidity, a lost court case, which Bromme sees as retribution for his father's membership in the SPD, and the death of Bromme's mother conspire to reverse the family's fortunes and place Bromme into the same need and poverty as the other authors. His formative years were spent in modest comfort, and his greatest complaint is that this comfort and the intellectual pursuits it allowed him were taken away. The text reads more like a gossip column than a memoir, notwithstanding Bromme's claim that reading Lassalle was a life-changing experience (116). Rhetorically, such claims serve to separate the author from his schoolmates who read *Schundromane*, yet little "novelistic" development is discernible except the quiet but strong self-confidence Bromme acquires through his uprightness and socialist convictions. He devotes as many pages to chastising loose women and heavy drinkers as he does to critiquing landowners, and Bromme has difficulty seeing a class position at odds with his moral position. When he is mistreated during his training as a waiter, he says "[during this bad treatment] war ich schon 17 Jahre alt, und hatte schon Sozialdemokratische Versammlungen besucht" (141). He is the sole author to believe that entitles him to better treatment.

Bromme makes no connection between his lifelong love of reading and any kind of



development beyond developing a passion for new segments of bourgeois culture. He lists his reading habits as if they were the appendix to a resume. Ursula Münchow praises Bromme's "große Lesefreudigkeit und vielseitige Belesenheit" (14) but echoes in the same introduction clichés of East German criticism, uncritically praising Bromme's desire for knowledge without asking what sort of knowledge and to what end, accepting it instead as something "natürlich" (*idem*). An example will make this clearer. Bromme has a colleague with whom, although he only works with him a short time, he maintains a correspondence. In his autobiography he shares excerpts of letters from this man, of whom he was particularly fond because of his love of literature. The two converse at length when his friend is fired from the factory.

Er nahm herzlich Abschied von mir, begleitete mich noch am Abend bis zum Bahnhof und beteuerte mir, nie wieder in Zukunft das Geld in die Wirtschaften zu tragen. Die Gastwirte seien die eigentlichen Aussauger der Arbeiter. Er würde versuchen, Abstinenz zu üben und nie wieder sollte ihn der Alkohol in die finstere Nacht der Denkfaulheit zurückwerfen. Allerdings sei es schwierig; aber er würde es tun. Wir sprachen noch über Tolstoj und Zola [...] Er seinerseits versprach, oft zu schreiben, und hat das Versprechen redlich gehalten. Die Leser werden gestatten, daß ich nur einige seiner zahlreichen Briefe nachstehend im Auszug anführe. Sie zeigen, daß auf der Landstraße mancher denkende und tief empfindende Vagabund herumläuft, der, wenn er in der Wahl seiner Eltern vorsichtiger gewesen wäre, wohl eine glänzende Stellung im Leben eingenommen hätte. Ein jeder wird, wenn er seinen Klassenstandpunkt vergisst, mir zugeben, daß in diesen Briefen Stellen vorkommen, die eine wirkliche und starke Kraft und Eigenart haben.

He goes on to assure the "geschätzte[n] Leser" (34) that the circumstances surrounding the dismissal of his friend were proven false when the overseer was fired for other unethical

decisions a week later. Here we see the limits of Bromme's narrative in relation to the others. Alcohol and not the capitalist class is presented, albeit in indirect discourse, as the true enemy of the worker. If it weren't for numerous other places where Bromme expresses similar opinions (with, gods bless him, the exception of beer), reported speech might suggest distance. But the crux of the passage, beyond the passing mention of Tolstoy and Zola, who serve to elevate his friend in the eyes of the educated reader, is the moment where Bromme decries the plight of his friend on the basis of merit. It is unjust that he is a vagabond not because of the social order, but because the social order is losing thinking and deeply feeling members of its own ranks to the unjust conditions of working-class life. It is a critique of the bourgeoisie's failure to live up to its own values, not of the ideological character of those values. None of this is meant as criticism of Bromme – it merely shows how fraught the path to political consciousness appears in these narratives. Missing the negative moment, Bromme must negotiate society's failure to live up to its own values, which he upholds with a rigorous integrity that often makes his life more difficult than it may have been otherwise. In the other authors, the negation of their initial *Bildung* paves the way for a more absolute and depersonalized critique of the social world they occupy and a return to *Sittlichkeit*, if no reprieve from exploitation, in class consciousness.

### **III. “Und wieder fiel ein Teil meiner früheren Anschauung in Trümmer”:**

#### **Functional Learning and Negation as *Bildung***

As noted in my introduction, Lukács sees one of the defining characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* is that “Menschentypus und Handlungsstruktur sind also hier von der formalen Notwendigkeit bedingt, daß die Versöhnung von Innerlichkeit und Welt problematisch aber möglich ist” (117). This reconciliation, however, is necessarily foreclosed in a political *Bildungsroman*. Instead, the protagonist of such a narrative, as Benjamin Kohlmann argues for

the Socialist BR, has a twofold process of formation. An initial formation which fails to integrate them into extent social structures followed by a negation of this formation that leads to political action. As Kohlmann claims: “[t]he socialist novel of maturation thus involves a second-order *Bildung*, the socialist revision of an earlier mis-*Bildung*” (169). While Kohlmann derives this characteristic from a productive reading of the younger and older Lukács against one another, it is also implicit in the genre itself, as I’ve argued above. Without the negation of the earlier *Bildung*, it would be impossible to achieve a standpoint that would enable both critique and the positive possibility of working communally towards a world in which there could be “eine diesseitig[e] Heimat, die dem [...] Ideal entspricht” (117). This negation or revision, as Kohlmann has it, often takes the form of what I termed functional learning in Chapter One. An experience triggers awareness of a contradiction in capitalist society; these moments of cognitive dissonance implant doubts as to the validity of the bourgeois worldview in the mind of the protagonist that can later be mobilized by socialist ideas, which demonstrates the complex interplay between intentional and functional learning on the path to political action and the importance of both, as Dittrich argues, for *Arbeiterbildung*.

Popp’s *Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin* portrays these moments of negation in exemplary fashion and with a doubled chronology that often didactically represents these moments as she perceived them in the narrative past, and as she would learn to see them in the future. An exhaustive list of such scenes – they are the fundamental logical units of the developmental narrative – is beyond the scope of this argument, so I will focus on two aspects that are crucial to the protagonist’s political development: the failure of institutions, and her gendered experience as an *Arbeiterin*, a female worker. Typical for the schema of mis-formation and revision in the narrative, these events generally include a need for help, an imagined solution

based on the values instilled in her by the environment, and the failure of this imagined solution to materialize. This failure then leads to reflection on the aporia that seems to issue from the dissonance between the beliefs instilled in her and material reality but that is resolved, ultimately and retrospectively, from an acquired socialist standpoint. The problematic individual is sublated into the problematic collective, whose struggle for the possibility of reconciliation defers the latter to a post-revolutionary future while allowing the individual to return to *Sittlichkeit* as a part of that struggle. A particularly poignant example from Popp's *Jugendgeschichte* ties these elements together and demonstrates the way ideology and exploitation combine to control the physical and mental life for workers. After a particularly dire period of unemployment – here as in all workers' life-writings from the period, a recurring experience and a constant threat – Popp finally finds work in a glass- and sandpaper factory, where a certain Herr Berger, a traveling salesman, sends Popp on an errand and then forces a kiss upon her after promising to try and have her wages increased. She sees the kiss as “etwas Schimpfliches” (55), something shameful, and – while she tells her mother of the promise for more wages – is ashamed to speak of it in front of her brother. When she returns to work the following day, she's harassed by her fellow workers and the overseer and decides at day's end to look for another job. When she finally tells her mother what happened, the latter's reaction leads to a period of cognitive dissonance that launches the negation of initial *Bildung*:

Meine Mutter, die immer so bedacht war, mich zu einem anständigen Mädchen zu erziehen, die mir immer Lehren und Ermahnungen gab, mit Männern nicht zu reden, ‚nur von dem, der der Mann würde, dürfe man sich küssen lassen‘, schärfte sie mir ein, war in diesem Falle gegen mich. Ich würde überspannt genannt. Ein Kuß sei nichts Schlechtes, und wenn ich noch dazu mehr Lohn bekommen würde, so wäre es leichtsinnig, die Stelle

aufzugeben. Schließlich wurden wieder meine Bücher für meine ‚Überspanntheit‘ verantwortlich gemacht [...]. (55-6)

The casual fatalism of the otherwise deeply religious and prudish mother provokes cognitive dissonance in Popp that the narrative highlights by juxtaposing her reaction to the situation with her normal behavior. The episode ends by Popp deciding not to return to the factory, to be “leichtsinnig” (careless, reckless) rather than exchange the possibility of a slightly increased starvation wage in exchange for sexual harassment and assault by a colleague. On the following Monday, only a few days before Christmas and thus at a time of year when finding other employment would prove impossible, Popp attempts to go to work but cannot bring herself to cross the gate. “Ich wollte mich überwinden,” she writes, “bis ans Tor kam ich, dann kehrte ich um” (56). She explains her reaction not with a moral or social critique from the temporally distant narrator, but rather as the result of a “namenlose Angst” she has partially understood through gossip on the factory floor and the “so viel von Verführung und gefallener Tugend” (*idem*) she has read in books.

The decision not to return to work, with its dire consequences for both the narrator and her family, is Popp’s first *problematic* act in the novel, although it slightly antedates her exposure to socialism, because she intentionally goes against the structural determinants of her initial *Bildung* for the first time by disobeying her mother and by taking a material risk in response to a deeply felt conviction. The following pages emphasize the protagonist’s helplessness and the inability of any institutional framework to aid her in her time of need. She wanders the streets, afraid to tell her mother that she refused to go to work, and the only person who offers her aid is an “eleganten Herrn” on Christmas Eve who promises her ten gulden if she will only accompany him into his house in one of Vienna’s “vornehmsten Straßen” (58). What

she initially perceives as “sicher Gottes Fügung” (59) turns out to be the threat of rape. Her prayers, as at numerous other points in the first half of the narrative, bear no fruit, emphasizing a further significant institutional failure, and a better-off, “fromme Tante” from whom she seeks aid, “mit frommen Sprüchen versagte [Popp] jede Hilfe” (58). The repetition of “fromm,” pious, and the Christmas holiday further highlight the contradiction, emphasized at other childhood Christmases in the novel, between bourgeois ideology and cold reality of worker experience. The relationship between this episode and her later political understanding and activity is not lost on the narrator, who intercedes in the voice of the mature *Sozialistin* to comment that, while she didn’t know it then, her circumstances were the result of man-made social inequality. While she tells the reader she “hielt alles für eine unabänderliche Einrichtung, die von Gott so verfügt sei” (57) at the time, the failure of existing institutions to protect her is a catalyst for her future engagement and thus marks, but only *nachträglich*, from the vantage point of her later trajectory, an initial step towards socialism. Yet it is worth emphasizing that Popp is here out of *Sittlichkeit*; without the future exposure to socialist ideas, she would have remained trapped in reification and unable to develop class consciousness in the new universal of the workers’ movement.

Another example demonstrates the relationship between the negation of initial *Bildung* and the second-order socialist one. After being exposed to socialist ideas and attending her first political meetings, she describes how socialism slowly superseded religious affiliation in her mental world. Her first party task, as she sees it, is to encourage colleagues to subscribe to the Social Democratic newspaper. When she goes to the office to purchase ever-increasing copies for her and her colleagues, she puts on her “schönstes Kleid, so wie früher, wenn [sie] in die Kirche ging” (75). But this is not a simple exchange of ideas or evidence of a religious socialism, but rather a symbolic representation of the *Umwertung aller Werte* demanded by the negation

and renewal of the self in development:

Obwohl in der sozialdemokratischen Zeitung über Religion wenig geschrieben wurde, so war ich doch von allen religiösen Vorstellungen frei geworden. Es war das nicht mit einem Male gegangen, es hatte sich langsam entwickelt. Ich glaubte nicht mehr an einen Gott und an ein besseres Jenseits, aber es kamen mir doch immer wieder Bedenken, ob es nicht vielleicht doch etwas gebe. An dem gleichen Tag, an dem ich mich bemüht hatte, meinen Kolleginnen zu beweisen, daß die Erschaffung der Welt in sechs Tagen nur ein Märchen sei, daß es einen allmächtigen Gott nicht geben könne, weil dann so viele Menschen nicht so harte Schicksalsschläge erdulden müßten, am Abend desselben Tages faltete ich doch wieder die Hände, wenn ich in meinem Bette lag und hob meine Augen zu dem Marienbild empor. ‚Vielleicht doch‘, dachte ich unwillkürlich immer wieder. Gesagt hätte ich es keinem Menschen, daß mich solche Zweifel quälten. (75)

While Social Democratic convictions do not necessarily, at least not for Popp, require the disavowal of religion, this passage shows a slow but constant displacement of initial religious conviction and God’s “unabänderliche Einrichtung” mentioned above by a different standpoint that exists independently of and in opposition to Catholicism. Importantly, however, the narrator stresses the non-linearity of this process of re-education. Her agitational work is a part of her intellectual development, and her efforts at convincing her colleagues that God cannot exist are aimed at her own doubts. The absence of certainty, and the willingness of the adult narrator to represent it serves the rhetorical purpose of assuaging potential doubts from a reader similarly *gequält* by them, but also lends insight into the author’s theory of education. The claim that she is “frei geworden” from all “religiösen Vorstellungen” only makes sense as a preface to a paragraph about lingering doubt if the doubt and persistence of this *vielleicht doch* are somehow

separate from or unimpeded by that religious imagination or thought-form. In the context of the entire work, this is not a contradiction but rather a demonstration of the interdependency between intentional learning – here the formal study of socialist texts – and their affective weight. In Popp’s text, intellectual and emotional life combine to disclose these experiences as a new, socialist truth – and this particular topic is crucial to overcome reification, which Marx and Engels, Dittrich, and Lukàcs all hold as an essential element in the development of class consciousness.

Rehbein’s reaction to his military service provides another powerful example of the importance of the negative moment in *Arbeiterbildung*. At the beginning of the narrative, he describes the “[a]ufrichtige Bewunderung” he had for “die deutschen Heerführer des siebziger Krieges” (13) when his father’s friends sit in their house and the veterans tell stories. “Kugelregen, Schlachtgetümmel, Reiterattacken schwebten mir vor,” he writes, “ein begeistertes gegenseitiges Morden ‘mit Gott für König und Vaterland’. So ungefähr wurde es uns ja auch in der Schule gelehrt” (*idem*). Because the Prussian Junker class plays such an important role in the state, the young Rehbein also connects these fantasies of a “begeistertes gegenseitiges Morden” with religion (Gott) and the state. When he describes the respect and servile disposition of the townsfolk towards their feudal lords he witnessed as a child, the text shows how the content of his lessons on historical military victories and the veterans’ stories he heard at home contribute to a positive perception of the ruling class and state. He describes how proud the town’s citizens are to greet visiting noblemen, and relays his own reaction as follows:

Wir Kinder aber freuten uns über die feurigen, schnaubenden Pferde, die dampfend und schäumend vor dem adeligen Gefährt prunkten. Ich versäumte zudem nicht, noch regelmäßig nach der Brust der Herren zu spähen, ob dort auch ein farbiges Ordensband



im Knopfloch prangte. Erblickte ich es, so rangierte dessen Besitzer für mich ohne weiteres in der Reihe der tapfersten aller tapferen pommerschen Krieger. Er galt mir als eine Art höheres Wesen. In meinen Augen war er dann nicht nur ein geborener Führer und Offizier der gewöhnlichen Soldaten, sondern auch rechtmäßiger Herr und Gebieter in anderen Dingen, der ein natürliches Anrecht darauf hatte, daß ihm jedermann mit Achtung und Zuvorkommenheit begegnete. So erzählten es uns auch die Lehrer in der Schule und sie ermahnten uns oft, nur immer recht höflich und ehrerbietig gegen jene Herren zu sein, denn diese seien nach Gottes Willen die Obersten des Volkes. Und da mußte es doch stimmen. (14-15)

The protagonist inherits both a respect for Prussian militarism and a model for submission to the social order through a three-pronged coalition of family, school, and the example of the village community in which he grows up. This foundation, however, is destroyed during his own military service, which leads to the complete negation of this initial *Bildung* and opens the door for a critique of the foundations of Prussian society without which Rehbein's political activity would be unthinkable. The constant, senseless *bimsen* (a word that tellingly means both beating and drilling in military vocabulary), the hypocrisy of the church pastor who explains the alleged holiness of the (compulsory) military oath, the pedantry of the NCOs and officers, the arbitrary rules, their arbitrary enforcement, and the physical and psychological abuse (185-9) utterly disabuse Rehbein of the last remainder of his youthful fantasies.

Als bald galt so viel mir ein für allemal als sicher: Niemand sollte mehr kommen und von dem verfeinerten Ehrgefühl des deutschen Soldaten sprechen. Eine größere Lüge habe ich nie kennen gelernt. Im Gegenteil, das natürliche Ehrgefühl des Mannes wird durch eine derartige unwürdige Behandlung planmäßig abgestumpft und ertötet. Tagtäglich

ausgehunzt und ausgeludert, und dazu noch wehrlos den rohesten Mißhandlungen ausgesetzt! Wollte man unter solchen Umständen wirklich Ehrgefühl beweisen, so bliebe nichts anderes übrig, als solchen Schinder von vorgesetzten kurzerhand über den Haufen zu stechen und – so schnell wie möglich Selbstmord zu verüben. Aber die Abstumpfung ist so groß, daß sie zu einer derartigen Verzweiflungstat gar nicht mehr ausreicht. So läßt man sich denn schweigend und grollend zu einem willenlosen Maschinenteil dressieren.

(191)

Rehbein's lived experience of this contradiction – another form of appearance of the contradiction of capital, what we might call the 'tragic' of the marriage between capitalism and militancy in Imperial Germany—undermines the state and supports the development of class consciousness. Here, the concept of honor mobilized by the military as its highest pursuit allows Rehbein to see the gap between ideology and reality while simultaneously underscoring the profound difficulty and danger of the negative moment when not accompanied by an alternate universal. Rehbein's logical conclusion – that the only way to maintain something like the feeling of honor in a corrupt and inhumane institution like the Prussian military, which he sees as full of cowards (189), is by murdering one's superior officers and then committing suicide – shows the futility, fatalism, and inherent danger of negating the initial *Bildung* in the absence of a possibility to change the objective structures whose justification experience and formal education have shown to be false. This is the form of appearance of Hegel's *sittlichen Schmerz*, and its costs are dire in Rehbein's narrative. Many contemporary novels, which the Lukàcsian typology would classify as novels of romantic disillusionment, seek this solution, from the apparent (but uncertain) suicide of Hesse's Hans Giebenrath in *Unterm Rad* to the suicide of Emil Strauß's *Freund Hein*.

In the text written for Göhre about becoming a Social Democrat mentioned above, Rehbein stresses the importance of functional learning for his political engagement. Although he had already become active in the Workers' Movement by handing out leaflets and agitating for the elections of 1887, he says that he was only incompletely a Socialist, that he still felt that Social Democracy was too radical in its disavowal of the existing order:

Zuweilen schien es mir nun zwar, als wenn in den sozialdemokratischen Schriften trotz all ihrer Wahrheitsgemäßen Darstellungen des Volkselends doch ein bißchen zu scharfe Kritik an den herrschenden und besitzenden Klassen geübt würde. Doch von dieser Annahme wurde ich bald gründlich kuriert, und zwar nirgends anders als beim Kommiß. Wenn ich noch nicht ganz Sozialdemokrat gewesen war – dort beim Militär bin ich's geworden. Dort mußte man's ja werden, ganz aus sich selbst heraus, ohne jede Agitation, wenn man sonst seinen gesunden Verstand gebrauchte [...]

Obwohl ich den wissenschaftlichen Untergrund der Sozialdemokratischen Lehren noch keineswegs begriffen hatte – wer sollte mich auch drin einweihen –, so sagte mir doch mein einfacher Instinkt, daß die Sozialdemokratie das Richtige für den Arbeiter wollen müsse. Die schwere Arbeit, die winterliche Arbeitslosigkeit, das kümmerliche Leben von der Hand in den Mund, und dann der Vergleich meines Tagelöhnerdaseins mit den meistens in Überfluß schwelgenden Hofbesitzern – das alles redete eine deutlichere Sprache zu mir, als wie es alle wissenschaftlichen Lehrbücher hätten tun können. (290)

Of note is the way Rehbein uses medical vocabulary to discuss the negation initial *Bildung* and its replacement by Socialist conviction; the former was an illness that had to be “kuriert” by his “gesunden Verstand.” But equally important – and ultimately perhaps tragic for the possibility of political *Bildung* – is that affect and life experience form the basis for his politicization much

more than the intentional learning that follows it. The experience of exploitation and his response to it “redete eine deutlichere Sprache” than all possible forms of intentional learning. Without capitalist exploitation and the workers’ movement, the latter a result of industrialization – one has to ask what one might have become “aus sich selbst heraus” were Social Democracy non-existent – no amount of wishing for a better world could lead to political consciousness. The political consequences of this contention are disconcerting, in that it explicitly links political engagement to material conditions and the givenness within those conditions of a collective agent. In the absence of material determinants, no amount of socialist affect or “gesunden Verstand” could create class consciousness as it is portrayed in these writings.

***“Zwischen Sehnsucht und hartem Zwang”<sup>55</sup> The Socialist Poet Otto Krille: A special case?***

Criticism in East and West Germany has treated the autobiographical novel of Otto Krille as something of a special case in the history of early workers’ autobiographies for its allegedly subjective aspects and heavy borrowings from the bourgeois BR.<sup>56</sup> Ursula Münchow praises Krille’s early poetry and novelized autobiography but claims that his later work never achieved the successful mix of subjective feeling and political engagement of his first book of poetry, 1904’s “Aus engen Gassen” (418-19). The West German critic Bernd Witte singles out Krille’s autobiography as a particularly egregious example amongst many of bad socialist imitation of bourgeois form. While the works published by Göhre can “Anspruch darauf erheben, exemplarisch für das Proletariat als Ganzes zu sein” (64), the workers’ autobiographies that appeared in the years before the outbreak of WWI, including those of Popp and Krille, reflect

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<sup>55</sup> From the last strophe of Krille’s “Die Spulerin” – “Und zwischen Sehnsucht und hartem Zwang / Geht meines Lebens einförmiger Gang, / Und es zieht dem Garn von der Spule nach / Mein Lebensglück und mein Herzensschlag,” quoted in Ursula Münchow, *Arbeiterbewegung und Literatur 1860-1914*.

<sup>56</sup> The most insightful and comprehensive review of this secondary literature is in Hans Joachim Schulz, *German Socialist Literature 1860-1914*, pp. 115-121.

“das Abgehen der Arbeiterbewegung von ihrem revolutionären Klassenstandpunkt” (63). Witte claims Krille’s work is representative of all the negative tendencies he sees in the proletarian adoption of the bourgeois BR, and critiques it scathingly:

Auch er [like Adelheid Popp, au.] schreibt seine Autobiographie mit der Absicht, Zeugnis abzulegen für die emanzipierende Kraft des Sozialismus [...] Die religiöse Metaphorik [...] trägt nicht mehr, wie noch zehn Jahre zuvor bei Fischer, klassenkämpferischen Charakter, sondern indiziert die Verinnerlichung des Sozialismus zu etwas Geistigem, zu einer Glaubenssache. So erscheint es nur folgerichtig, daß Krille am Ende des Buches sein Arbeiterleben als Bildungsgang im idealistischen Sinne interpretiert, dessen Vollendung gerade darin besteht, daß er vom Arbeiter zum Funktionär avanciert [...] Das Arbeiterdasein wird so als niederer Zustand der Seele verstanden, aus dem man sich durch sozialistische Bildung befreien kann. Indem sie aus der rückblickenden Perspektive geschriebene Autobiographie dazu anleiten soll, diese geistige Emanzipation zu vollziehen, lenkt sie den Blick von den sozialen Ursachen der dargestellten Misere ab.

(63)

The summary dismissal of these works as examples of the party’s *embourgeoisement* is typical of the West German reception of prose by socialist authors before WWI, which Schulz characterizes as haunted by an “unresolved dualism between realism and *Kitsch*” (111). According to Schulz, criticism perpetuated this dualism from the 1880s through German reunification. This dualism, however, is predicated on an idea of militancy that has little understanding of the differences between bourgeois and *Arbeiterbildung* and evaluates pre-war texts on the basis of a masculinized militancy that sees a *gefühlbetont* socialism as contrary to authentically proletarian literature. The texts analyzed in this chapter all argue suggest strongly

that the emotional, dramatic, pathetic registers of experience contribute to the formation of class consciousness. Categorizing these works as a form of distraction (*Ablenkung*) from the misery they portray misunderstands, I would argue, the affective facets of class consciousness and its relationship to functional learning as it is portrayed in these texts. These narratives instead argue for the inseparability of affect, which Witte reads as a form of bourgeois individuation and Münchow somewhat uncomfortably classifies as Krille's "emotionale Erlebnisfähigkeit" (419), from the development of class consciousness. The novelized autobiography of Krille's early years fully supports this contention and does not differ significantly from the other texts considered above. It demonstrates the importance of both functional and intentional learning, portrays reading as a privileged activity for the preparation for socialist engagement, and shows the problems of the proletarian narrator as representative for his class.<sup>57</sup> Many critics have preferred, for one reason or another, the perceived socialist realism of Rehbein (Bollenbeck) or even Bromme and the German nationalist Fischer (Witte) to Krille's allegedly overly subjective, Horatio-Alger *Künstlerroman*. The goal of this brief section is to demonstrate that there is little textual basis to differentiate between the form or content of Rehbein and Krille's texts, both of which fit the generic rubric established in this chapter for the ABR.

Otto Krille, whose father died shortly before his birth, grew up in a locally subsidized poor house, attended a preparatory school for NCOs, first in primary school for Veterans' children and then in Marienberg. He was released from the school for lack of aptitude for the status of a non-commissioned officer, which his autobiographical text makes clear was the result of conscious effort. After working in factories in Dresden and completing his military service

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<sup>57</sup> It is important to note that socialist life-writing represents an insignificant quantity of "a veritable avalanche of memoirs and confessions by members of the lower classes (including maid-servants, prostitutes, and vagabonds) published at the time" (Schulz 117).

from 1900 to 1902, he became a Social Democrat, worked for the Social Democratic press, published books of poetry, and was primarily responsible for the growth of SPD-affiliated youth organizations in and around Stuttgart.<sup>58</sup> *Unter dem Joch* is a particularly interesting text for my concern with *Bildung* because the author's interest and experience in pedagogy and child development casts a critical shadow over his portrayal of military education. Indeed, one could counter the charge that it is a *Künstlerroman* by pointing out that the narrative gives approximately equal weight to moments detailing Krille's exposure to literature and artistic development and to his ideas about pedagogy and the pedagogical failure of his state-sponsored military education. The protagonist's formative moments in *Unter dem Joch* share with Popp the importance of reading for his personal and political formation, as well as his loss of religious conviction in the face of lived experience, and with Rehbein the negation of initial *Bildung* through exposure to military ideology and work, as well as an ability to compellingly mediate between subjective registers of experience and their objective determinants.

A complete consideration of all the pedagogical and *Bildungs*-theoretical aspects of Krille's novel is beyond the scope of this chapter. My narrower aim here is instead to demonstrate that *Unter dem Joch* portrays the development of class consciousness following the generic conventions of the ABR, and has scenes that are nearly identical to the other authors discussed above. Krille's initial exposure to social democracy, for example, comes from reading socialist periodicals in his brother's bar. Like Rehbein, the brutality and senselessness of military life – albeit in a different form—make the narrator amenable to socialist ideas: “Eine günstige Aufnahme fand bei mir alles, was eine Kritik am Militär und am militärischen Wesen übte” (48).

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<sup>58</sup> For a detailed description of Krille's life, agitational work with youth, and poetry, see Ursula Münchow, *Arbeiterbewegung und Literatur 1860-1914*, pp. 418-429 and her “Einleitung” to the 1975 edition of *Unter dem Joch*.

This antipathy stems from a variety of incidences that can all be classified under the heading of *Ungerechtigkeit* (injustice), from the senseless corporal punishment of the young men (37-8), especially of one fellow student who receives corporal punishment for making a pass at another student,<sup>59</sup> to the nepotism with which honors were awarded (26-7). Even the metaphor of “geistige[r] Nährstoff” (78) reappears in Krille’s text. The negative moment begins with the recognition that the methods used and the alleged goals of those in positions of authority are not only ineffective but indeed completely counterproductive (45-6, 74, 78, 83, 85), which slowly turns him against militarism and transforms his intuitive antipathy for the tightly constrained life of the military school into “Haß” against the director, which Krille qualifies as “der Haß gegen die Ungerechtigkeit” (45). The moment of identification arises in the anti-militarism of SPD news organs and the satire of militarism he finds in *Der wahre Jakob*, which provides him a point of entry into other issues dear to social democracy even before he ever works in a factory (48-9). Late in the novel, the author also recounts how students opposed to the harshness of the school’s methods adopted socialist songs and repeated agitational slogans they did not understand as a form of passive resistance to military authority (85-6). Finally, he spends a period of time visiting SPD meetings and agitating politically while working in a factory and publishing poems in socialist periodicals before becoming a functionary.

Krille’s text does, however, share an emotional register with Bromme, Popp, and Holek that may have made it unpalatable to critics in search of militant masculinity or scientific certainty. Ursula Münchow remarks that “Krilles Verhältnis zur SPD und zum Marxismus war

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<sup>59</sup> This passage is a good example of Krille’s ability, similar to Rehbein’s, to abstract from the specific details of a situation and reflect on its more general determinants. He writes: “Und da kam mir der Gedanke, ob er denn schuldig sei, ob es überhaupt in seinem Willen gelegen habe, so zu werden. Oder ob er so werden mußte” (45). Even amongst Social Democrats, this would have been a fringe opinion; Bromme, for example, cannot hide his distaste for an allegedly Sapphic couple he encounters, and implicitly links homosexuality with prostitution, masturbation, and immorality.



vorwiegend gefühlsbetont” (419). Indeed, Krille’s relationship to most things appears to the reader of *Unter dem Joch* as “überwiegend gefühlsbetont.” Because Krille takes pains to abstract from his own experience, however subjective it may be, to consider its larger structural causes and implications, however, it seems difficult to justify the claim that his poetic inclinations lead to a standpoint fundamentally less appropriate to proletarian literature than the other authors. However, Krille’s more melodramatic moments (such as when he breaks into aphorisms that are naïve at best) likely found little appreciation among intellectuals of the post-war left in the BRD because they viewed such affective incontinence through the lens of a reductive reflection theory according to which the role of affect in politics ostensibly explained a great deal about the failure of the German labor movement, the rise of National Socialism, and the formation of an uncritical consumer society in the aftermath of WWII. Surprisingly, however, the relationship between socialist conviction and affect is treated explicitly at several places in Krille’s novel but never in the secondary literature. At times, this treatment takes the form of self-critique, where the older Krille regrets a passivity and tendency to day-dream that he retrospectively views as a result of the isolation experienced in military school (48). Towards the end of the novel, however, he offers a critical account of the necessary connection between organized workers and affect. After recounting the first time he attended a political rally, he remarks:

Beinah religiöse Gefühle trug ich von jenem Feste heim. Da war doch ein Ausblick aus der Trostlosigkeit. Aber bald regte sich auch der nüchterne Verstand, und ich fragte mich, ob das nicht alles Täuschung und Vertröstung auf ein Nimmerleinsreich sei. Schließlich war es mit dem Zukunftsstaat wie mit dem Himmelreich der Frommen. In den Zeitungen stand soviel von den Lügen und Hetzereien der Sozialdemokratie, daß man ganz irre werden konnte. Bei allem Widerstreiten fühlte ich aber doch im Innersten, daß der Sieg

schon dem Sozialismus gehöre. Das Herz ist ein merkwürdiges Ding, es überläßt die Krone der Vernunft, regiert aber beinahe unumschränkt, und gar manchmal sind wir stolz auf unsere vernünftigen Taten und merken gar nicht, daß das Herz sie entschieden hat. Ich griff nach dem neuen Evangelium wie ein Verschmachtender nach dem Trunk. Ich mußte glauben können, um das Leben zu ertragen. Und die Millionen, die heute dem Sozialismus anhängen, sind zum geringen Teil wissenschaftlich überzeugte Sozialisten, sondern sie kommen aus grenzenloser innerer und äußerer Öde wie das Volk Israel aus der Wüste. Sie müssen glauben, um nicht zu verzweifeln. Sie sind Sozialisten, weil der Sozialismus ihre Sache ist, materiell und geistig. Er ist dem Arbeiter nötig wie Luft und Brot. Ich bemerkte auch bald, daß die geistig regsameren Arbeiter in der Hauptsache sozialdemokratisch dachten. (96)

This is a clear demonstration of the combination of spontaneous idealism Luxemburg points to in her essay and, according to these narratives, arises out of the lived experience of suffering to form, through functional learning, class consciousness. The “religiöse Metaphorik” emphasizes the level of felt commitment and the importance of belief in the possibility of a better world. It is not the old Evangelium, but a different universal that interests Krille and his class. The religious parallels, here as in Popp, where socialist conviction takes the place of religion in the second-order *Bildung*, is neither accidental nor regrettable for Krille, or *Arbeiterbildung*, and instead appears as the logical consequence of the negation of religion and introduction to socialist thought. What Witte sees as a regrettable and treacherous betrayal of a class standpoint, “die Verinnerlichung des Sozialismus zu etwas Geistigem, zu einer Glaubenssache,” Krille treats as necessary for political engagement and the driving motivation of the overwhelming majority of organized workers. Affect helps Krille to overcome a static and reified view of his situation, and

his case is generalizable to the class as a whole in his account, as in the text studied above.

Unlike in Hake's analysis, however, Krille does not only rely on affect but chooses to emphasize the relationship between objective conditions of the proletariat in "grenzenloser innerer und äußerer Öde," and *Trostlosigkeit*. Class and the proletarian dream of a better world emerges out of these material conditions, without which, to speak both with and against E.P. Thompson, "working people" in Germany could never have come "to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers" (11). This identity, however, lies precisely in proletarian "wretchedness, its total alienation, that makes it see that it has 'nothing to lose but its chains', and that it has 'a world to win'" (Tamàs, 2).

#### **IV. Conclusion: *Arbeiterbildung*, affective cognition, and revolutionary motives**

The early ABR considered in this chapter demonstrate the importance of negation for a second-order *Bildung*, show that functional learning plays at least as important a role as intentional learning in the formation of class consciousness, and argue for the interdependence of *Arbeiterbildung* and *Arbeiterbewegung*. Without the latter, the path to political action is impossible to tread – at least the path sketched out by the authors of these pre-war ABR. They also show that the much-debated question of the appropriation of bourgeois *Bildung*, in the form of the texts of the German and European classics, an appreciation of art and *Kultur* in all its manifestations, are neither mere imitation of bourgeois strategies nor reflections of a revisionist standpoint; instead, the exposure to literary classics and the consumption of difficult texts empowers these authors to act politically, and thus functions – contrary to the belief of dismissive West-German critics, or the glorifying trajectory of East German critics who sought the roots of working class consciousness in an ahistorical continuity between the proletariat and the legends of German classicism – as a catalyst for political engagement. This belief can be

accounted for in that *Bildung* contains within it forms of appearance of the contradiction of capital itself, with which these texts engage to dismantle bourgeois ideology in the development of class consciousness. *Geistige Kost*, spiritual or mental nourishment, functions as a form of unalienated work that complements political praxis by abetting the development of class consciousness and pointing the way towards the reconciliation of interiority and world these texts all firmly place in a post-revolutionary world. Yet perhaps the most important suggestion of these texts is that class consciousness cannot be untangled from the workers' movement and the material conditions of capitalist exploitation that nurture it. The next two chapters examine narratives that begin to uncouple class consciousness from the lived experience of alienated labor and suggest that this form of consciousness cannot long outlive its determinants.

## Chapter Three

### Paul Nizan: Alienation and the Formation of a Communist Intellectual

Paul Nizan is a crucial figure for this study because much of his work as novelist, philosopher, critic, journalist, and party intellectual focused on questions of education and political consciousness. His entire novelistic output confronts questions regarding the formation of political consciousness and life as a militant, and he wrote on the politics of education and what we would today call critical thinking as both communist intellectual and educator. His first significant published work, *Aden Arabie* (1931), deals specifically with the negation of initial education and the positive moment of political engagement which negates that negation in turn in accordance with this dissertation's model for the political BR. In an essay assailing university philosophy and its role in the reproduction of bourgeois social relations, he writes: "Toute poursuite d'une volonté nouvelle débute par une dénégation générale" (153). This tendency towards a *dénégation générale* undergirds much of Nizan's literary output. His first attempt at a novel from his pre-communist period, *Essais à la troisième personne*, written between 1925 and 1927 but published posthumously in 2012, depicts a protagonist struggling to overcome alienated existence in bourgeois society through some form of engagement; but a key piece of the puzzle—dedication to proletarian revolution—comes only later.

The first novel published in Nizan's lifetime, *Antoine Bloyé* (1933), is a fictional portrayal of his father's rise out of the working-class. Able to train as a railway engineer thanks to increased opportunities for highly gifted children of the working-class and peasantry at the end of the Second Empire and beginning of the Third Republic, Bloyé rises to become a high-placed functionary; but the novel's primary preoccupation is the price he pays by abandoning his class. Although the eponymous main character succeeds at "échapper à la misère, aux incertitudes

ouvrières” (LOC 951), a mild scandal for which Antoine is made the scapegoat during WWI nearly costs him everything. The end of the book portrays his slow decline into nothingness, as he begins to fade from the world with his belief in the rightness of his life. The narrator consistently links Antoine’s decline to his alienation from his class, a kind of false consciousness that, once revealed, robs Antoine of the little sense and joy he ever found. Michael Scriven, a critic of Nizan, calls the eponymous protagonist a “symbol of negative apprenticeship” (150) and Susan Suleiman refers to the protagonist’s development as a “negative exemplary apprenticeship” (216). While this novel portrays the development of an alienated bourgeois consciousness rather than the class consciousness of the other narratives discussed in this study, *Antoine Bloyé* illuminates important aspects of other texts and of Nizan’s model for political consciousness. *Antoine Bloyé* is an important corollary to Nizan’s final novel, the novel of political formation *La conspiration* (1938), because the negative exemplary development dramatizes a tension between a deterministic, class-based logic of resistance and belonging always operative in Nizan’s social portraits and the firm conviction that the vast majority of humankind suffers under alienation.

Class also plays an important role in 1938’s *La conspiration*—in which Bloyé’s son appears on the margins—because the bourgeois origins of the protagonists seem to complicate their ability to “sortir de la jeunesse” (301). In contrast to the narratives of political *Bildung* discussed in the last chapter, Nizan’s portrayals apply specifically to young sons of the bourgeoisie. This distinct class position has significant consequences for the development of political consciousness in Nizan’s autobiographical portrayal of his own development, and in *La conspiration*, because it precludes the simple identity of individual and class prevalent in narratives of political development antecedent to the First World War and that still appear on the

margins in Nizan's own portrayals of the working class. The next chapter of this dissertation elaborates an in-depth analysis of these two novels and the ambivalent possibilities surrounding political *Bildung* that pervade them, and argues that Nizan is unable to portray a successful, generalizable political formation because of the missing determination of proletarian exploitation.

The authors of the previous chapter develop class consciousness through a moment of identification with the proletariat as a class that discloses their exploitation by capital and leads to a negation of initial *Bildung* and engagement in the labor movement. Nizan's schema particularizes this model while trying to maintain its political thrust. In Nizan's autobiographical account of his own political formation, *Aden Arabie*, a consciousness of alienation from the human leads to a critique of initial formation and the search for a new universal. After a period of searching reminiscent of the classical *Bildungsroman* (BR), a critique of alienation culminates in an identification with the workers' movement as the motor for its abolition and political engagement on behalf of the proletariat. The negation of the values and economic structures of bourgeois society takes center stage in Nizan's work, but the broadening of the foundations of alienation into something that transcends class also removes the possibility of a simple identity between the experience of alienation—here, importantly, as an intellectual—and the historical motor for its abolition in the proletariat. The proposed solution remains the same—unyielding commitment to the abolition of bourgeois society, not in the name of the workers' movement but in the name of *l'homme*, Nizan's short-hand for human emancipation.<sup>60</sup>

The autobiographical character of Nizan's literary production also aligns him with the worker-authors considered in the previous chapter, although the circumstances of Nizan's life,

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<sup>60</sup> For an analysis of Nizan's use of this term throughout his oeuvre, see Susan Suleiman, "Pour une poétique du roman à thèse: l'exemple de Nizan." *Critique*, 30 (1974), 995-1021. See especially pp. 1001-1003.

his class background, the historical context after the unraveling of the Second International, and his work differ greatly in other respects. A realist author and journalist, a committed party functionary, Nizan derived much of his self-conception from Lenin's theory of the professional revolutionary (Steele, 35) and spent the vast majority of his adult life as a functionary in service to the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français*, PCF) and the Third International. He saw literature, journalism, and critique as essential functions in the struggle against alienation<sup>61</sup> and dedicated the majority of his brief adult life to writing and organizing writers for the revolutionary cause. As his biographer James Steele summarizes, Nizan "s'est dévoué corps et âme à ses activités de militant (littérature engagée incluse)" (25). He was also crucially, if briefly, himself an educator like Otto Krille; in Nizan's account, education is an important site of struggle with an ambivalent status in bourgeois society. On the one hand, *Les chiens de garde* attacks the role institutional philosophy plays in the reproduction of bourgeois social relations. At the same time, however, Nizan thematized in journalistic texts from 1930 to 1935 the latent potential of education as a weapon in the fight against bourgeois society's need to "faire des dupes" (EPN1, TR, 414), in a vein similar to Lukàcs' account of bourgeois' society's particular relationship to ideology mentioned in the last two chapters. His archive at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (BNF) contains a large collection of notes on the French public education system (EPN1, TR, 413). Against this backdrop, it's unsurprising that Nizan returned to the novel of political formation throughout his life.

In this chapter, I present a brief overview of Nizan's life to provide the unfamiliar reader with the necessary context to grasp Nizan's literary output. Then, through a reading of Nizan's

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<sup>61</sup> In *Les Chiens de Garde*, Nizan's polemic against the university philosophy of his day, he qualifies this task as important but only "faute de mieux" (150): "Nous devons aujourd'hui savoir qu'il n'est pas de tâche trop basse si de loin seulement, elle est capable d'apporter un atome d'espoir à la victoire qui viendra. Aucune dénonciation est inutile : tout est à dénoncer" (151).



*Aden Arabie* and reference to *Essais à la troisième personne* and *Les chiens de garde*, I argue that Nizan provides an account of alienation indebted to his reading of the history of philosophy as a site of class struggle that underpins his ambivalent portrayal of political development. This reading situates Nizan at an unlikely juncture between two different moments in Marx's own development, because Nizan maintains the general line first sketched by Marx in "Zur Judenfrage" (1843) and further developed in the first of the *Parisian Manuscripts* (1844) that all human beings (*Menschen*) suffer alienation from their species-being (*Gattungswesen*) as a result of relations of bondage (*Knechtschaftverhältnisse*). While Marx abandons this abstract and generalizing tendency or slippage once he "developed the materialist theory of labor and production that offered a satisfying alternative to the idealist theory of agency he was struggling to overcome" (Rose 177), Nizan insists throughout his oeuvre on the alienation of all human beings in capitalism. He nevertheless ruthlessly differentiates between oppressed and oppressor, but, as a bourgeois thinker, preoccupied himself in his written work with the possibility and necessity of political consciousness beyond economic determinism without, as I argue in the next chapter, being able to overcome the contradictions inherent in such a project. Yet *Aden Arabie* only hints at this later complication; instead, *Bildung* in its Hegelian form and the *Bildungsroman* determine the form of the novel, while its content only gestures at the difficulties inherent in using a form with pretensions of universality to grapple with the particularity of the bourgeois intellectual turned professional revolutionary.

### **I. The formation of a professional revolutionary**

Nizan was born in Tours in 1905, the second and only surviving child of a high-ranking railway engineer and official from a humble day-laborer background in Brittany. His mother was of more solidly bourgeois origins, the daughter of a former mariner who became a railway official. Some of Nizan's biographers make much of the death of Nizan's sister before his birth,

especially Michael Scriven, one of only two English-language biographers, claiming somewhat bombastically that Nizan was “born into a climate of death” (12),<sup>62</sup> although a preoccupation with death seems not at all out of place for the period and likely requires no reductive Freudian explanation for someone whose adolescence took place against the backdrop of the First World War. Whatever the case, anxiety regarding death (which he would later find articulated in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger) was a preoccupation of Nizan’s youth and influenced his romantic relationships, literary production, and politics. Of the tendency of biographers to see this “angoisse” vis-à-vis death as the defining characteristic of Nizan’s writings, Pascal Ory notes that it is “le métier des psychologues que de dire ensuite qu’une telle angoisse peut s’expliquer par une certaine famille, un certain âge. C’est celui des historiens que de rappeler aussi que ladite inquiétude, costumée en obsession de la décadence, était en train de devenir un leitmotiv des générations de l’après-guerre” (58). While I want to resist psychological generalizations, Nizan’s relationship to childhood and adolescence is always ambivalent, replete with competing images of fond attachments to Brittany, to his father, the peasantry, incredible scholastic successes, and relative material comfort—but nonetheless haunted by an ever-increasing sense of anxiety and a propensity for depressive periods for which affected detachment and an appreciation of the absurd could not always compensate. He attended a lycée in province and moved to Paris to finish the *baccalauréat* at Henri IV in 1916. He there met and befriended Jean-Paul Sartre, to whom much of his posthumous fame is due. In 1922, they both

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<sup>62</sup> It is a tragedy of Nizan’s after-life that, of the two monographs in English on his life and work, one is dated and the other undermines its insights by making preposterous claims about Nizan’s inner life. Michael Scriven writes of Nizan’s early life that “what needs to be clearly articulated at this juncture is the *fundamental emotional structure of Nizan’s personality*, the product of his family existence between 1905 and 1916. His family situation led him to the *inescapable* conclusion that the world was a hostile, alien environment in which was concealed the terrible presence of death, and in which the hopes, convictions, and aspirations of men could be dashed by the unforeseeable and irreversible consequences of a malevolent destiny” (15-16, emphasis added).

moved to the Lycée-Louis-le-Grand<sup>63</sup> for the two years of general preparation (khâgne and hypokhâgne) for the entrance exams for the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS), where they would both study philosophy and share a dorm room (*thurne*). They both, however, frequently returned to their former lycée to hear lectures by the philosopher Alain, whom Nizan would later reject but whose famous maxim, “penser, c’est dire non” influenced him and earned Alain a positive mention alongside Duhamel and Bloch in Nizan’s first attempt at a novel (*Essais*, 124). The negativity expressed in the maxim remained a fundamental aspect of Nizan’s worldview, where *le refus* remains the important initial movement of thought, although moving past this moment into action became fundamental to Nizan’s vision of engagement.

By all accounts a precocious intellect, Nizan simultaneously ventures into the worlds of literary criticism, creative writing, and politics from 1923-5. His first publications owe much to surrealism, as their titles indicate – *Hecate, or the sentimental mistake* and *The lament of the med student who dissected his girlfriend while smoking two packs of Marylands*. He wrote his first pieces as a literary critic in this period, on Proust and Paul Morand, and made his first forays into politics at the same time. He even told a scandalized Sartre that he was considering converting to Protestantism in 1924—not because he believed in God, but because “leur morale [lui] plaît” (Sartre 18). Ory refers to his constant search for answers in this period as his years of *désarroi*, evoking the vagaries of the *roman d’apprentissage*, but, for Sartre, Nizan’s actions were consistent in terms of their negative thrust: “Ce qui ne variait pas, c’était son extrémisme : il fallait, en tout cas, ruiner l’ordre établi” (19).

This extremism briefly led Nizan to George Valois’s *Le Faisceau* (an etymological

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<sup>63</sup> According to Ory, likely because while still students at Henri IV Nizan and Sartre got so drunk one evening that, returning to their dorm-rooms in the morning, they vomited on the director’s shoes (31); Nizan’s early period seems to have been more punk rock than communist.

reference to Italian fascism), the first fascist movement in France, to which Nizan belonged for a few months in late 1925 and early 1926. Nizan was likely intrigued by the combination of Valois's radical critique of capitalism and the militance of the movement. As Nizan's most recent French biographer, Yves Buin, points out, many biographers gloss over Nizan's foray into fascism (51), although its character is important, as Buin and Ory indicate, for understanding the way the radical critique of capitalism and decadence in interwar France caused brief periods of overlap in individual lives.<sup>64</sup> French fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, however, had a militant social and syndicalist element that makes Nizan's brief interest seem relatively consistent with the aggressively anti-bourgeois character of his burgeoning politics and his life-long love of provocation. His involvement should not, however, pass unmentioned.

Valois' movement was provocative and aggressive. *Le Faisceau* sought the destruction of bourgeois democracy and popular base in line with what Zeev Sternhell has called the specifically French tradition of fascism – a commingling of nationalist, monarchist, and radical syndicalist strains.<sup>65</sup> The *Faisceau* of Valois “ne doit rien à l'étranger et [...] ne saurait en aucune manière être considérée comme une vague imitation du fascisme italien” (7).<sup>66</sup> Instead, Sternhill claims that Valois' movement reacts to post-war moderatism in France's nationalist leagues, leaving a gap for the younger, more radical and activist elements of those groups that Valois – a long-time syndicalist activist influenced by Georges Sorel and involved with the CGT (*Confédération générale du travail*, one of the first French labor unions) – responded to (8). Valois' movement represented “un effort pour abattre la vieille Europe du XIXe siècle, libérale et bourgeoise, pour annoncer la naissance d'un monde nouveau” (*idem*) for those younger party

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<sup>64</sup> See especially Ory, pp. 53-5.

<sup>65</sup> Recently portrayed quite similarly in Michel Houellebecq's novel *Soumission*.

<sup>66</sup> I should note here that Sternhell does not mean this as a positive characteristic, but wants to stress the existence of home-grown fascism in the build-up to the occupation and Vichy.

members. For Nizan, the militancy seems to have exercised a pull similar to that of the French Communist Party (PCF), but his enthusiasm for the movement was fleeting. Early in 1926, he wrote dismissively in a notebook conserved in his wife's archives that "Valois attache ses vues économique-politiques, sa critique des classes à des imageries d'anciens combattants" (Cited in Ory, 54).<sup>67</sup> In line with a rich Marxist tradition of killing the father, Valois' ideas provided a radicalizing stimulus and a first political orientation for Nizan even though he quickly came to view them with condescension and distaste.

In this period, Nizan also met and befriended some members of the circle *Philosophies*, an important grouping of young intellectuals interested in German Idealism including Henri Lefebvre, with whom Nizan would later collaborate on *La Revue marxiste*. They would also be responsible, with Nizan, for introducing the writings of the young Marx to a French public at the end of the decade, including texts from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. These turbulent years of self-discovery—the period sees Nizan work briefly as a *précepteur* (private tutor/teacher) in an aristocratic milieu, and his letters to his future wife show that the PCF militant in the process of becoming enjoyed, if always with a tinge of irony, horseback rides and salon conversations with the nobility much more than a superficial understanding of his late polemics might suggest—also saw Nizan's first formal exposure to Marxist thought. As Ory notes of him and his friends at the *École Normale*:

On les avait laissés en confrontation avec des paquets de papier, de carton et de colle signés de noms exotiques : Spinoza, Marx, Lénine, Labriola... C'était imprudent.

Derrière la barrière des mots, ils découvraient des réalités qui s'appelaient Révolution

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<sup>67</sup> There is some confusion amongst biographers as to when Nizan joined the Parti communiste, and he may have joined a first time in 1924 before adhering to Valois' movement. See Pascal Ory, *Nizan: Destin d'un révolté*. Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1980, p.50; Sartre also writes this in the *Préface* to *Aden Arabie* (19), but Matthieu maintains the end of 1927 – See Nizan, Paul, *Articles littéraires et politiques*, vol. 1, Ed. Anne Mathieu, "Repères" p.21

(sur ce thème, Nizan épuisa plus d'un cahier), Démocratie, Athéisme, Matérialisme, Lutte des classes. (49)

Not without justification, Ory compares Nizan's life to the *romans d'apprentissage* of the period (58), but the turning point for our young hero, where the *révolte* promised by his years of disarray finds its object after *schweren Kämpfen und Irrfahrten* (Lukács, TDR 117), at least as stylized in hindsight, is his time in Aden.

The defining moment of Nizan's own journey of political development takes place in 1926-27. After hearing from a classmate at the ENS about the possibility to work as a tutor for a wealthy Franco-English colonial trader, he decided to take a year of leave (applied for disingenuously as medical leave) to travel to Aden, then in British Arabia and today the fourth-largest city and temporary capitol of Yemen. Nizan finds during this voyage the two crucial modes that will define his response to bourgeois society and serve as a vehicle for both his "sorte de stendhalisme angoissé" (Ory 55) and his rage: engagement in the PCF and engagement of a similar kind in his relationship to Henriette Alphen. Nizan had met Alphen at the ENS Ball in December of 1924, but it was during his time in Aden that the two developed a project of marriage and shared life through their regular correspondence. For Nizan, both forms of commitment are necessary moments in a viable response to the alienation produced by capitalist social relations. As I show below in my reading of *Aden Arabie* and in the next chapter's analysis of Nizan's novels of formation, maturity for Nizan involves total commitment in private and public life. Romantic love also evoked radical commitment and allowed Nizan to escape from what he would later call "les règles flottantes de l'improvisation" (244) in *La conspiration*.

While *Aden Arabie* portrays the experience of living in Aden as the driver of Nizan's political turn, the reality appears to have been more complicated. Annie Cohen-Solal, an early

biographer of Nizan who worked closely with his widow, writes: “les textes dans lesquels il dénoncera les bourgeois d'affaires et les modalités de la colonisation britannique, il est certain que Nizan les a écrits rétrospectivement [...] on ne peut en aucun cas parler d'une prise de conscience politique à cette occasion” (56). The “en aucun cas,” however, is extremely questionable and is an assessment not shared by most other Nizan specialists. Nizan's surviving correspondence from Aden certainly suggests that the text of *Aden Arabie* portrays the conversion as perhaps more decisive and more linear than it actually was, but numerous moments gesture towards a significant preoccupation with the suffering of workers and indigenous laborers; a critical lens directed at Europe; a growing violence in Nizan's thought; and disgust with the *colons* he meets there. The building-blocks of the text that would come to be *Aden Arabie*, including certain passages from his letters to Henriette that appear in altered form in the essay, make Cohen-Solal's assertion that no political *prise de conscience* took place doubtful if not intentionally disingenuous. While the rhetorical force and violence of *Aden Arabie* appears only in germinal form in Nizan's letters from Aden and Djibouti, it does appear. Before leaving Great Britain, his letters betray sympathy for the plight of mine workers “en guerre” in Nottinghamshire and Lancashire (PNIC 86-7); the poverty he witnesses in Swansea and Scotland's mining districts is juxtaposed with Kent and Surrey, a juxtaposition that leads Nizan to conclude that “tout n'est pas pour le mieux dans le meilleur des royaumes constitutionnels” (PNIC 89); he mentions Marx as part of a critique of the worldview of an Englishman with whom he travels (PNIC 88); he mocks the “admirables idées de canulars” of the Oxbridge-educated English colonists he meets in Cairo; and speaks of the “vanité des voyages” (PNIC, 96), a theme he will take up in more depth in *Aden Arabie*. He writes from Aden in January of a previously unknown “violence” he amasses “par l'effet de la solitude”

(PNIC 100). Indeed, his letters give no reason to doubt the evaluation of Anne Mathieu, the leading scholar of Nizan's journalistic texts, that the letters from Aden "témoignent de ses lectures et de son *éveil* [my emphasis] à la critique du capitalisme et du colonialisme" (Préface 8). The strength of Cohen-Solal's rejection of Nizan's *prise de conscience politique* would, however, remain dubious even if the content of the letters justified her assertion because she fails to address the question of audience. Henriette Alphen was in no way a neutral addressee, and it is lamentable that Nizan's letters to his friends from the ENS from this period have been lost. While the Manichean certainty and violence for which *Aden Arabie* is famous are largely absent from his letters to Henriette, Buin, Mathieu, Sartre, Scriven, and Nizan himself contend that his time in Aden was definitive, and his actions after returning, combined with the affinities outlined above between his letters and his later literary treatment of it, support that contention. He repeatedly highlights injustices witnessed in Europe before he leaves and in Djibouti and Yemen in his letters to Henriette, but still planned on pursuing a career trading pelts and petrol under the patronage of his employer Antonin Bess until at least March of 1927.

In a long letter to Henriette written in January of 1927 that critics often cite as proof that Nizan "vogue vers le communisme" (Mathieu, 9), the author is in fact mostly concerned with Spinoza's *Ethics* and Henriette's reading of it. Nizan writes, after claiming that Spinoza's idea of God is "impensable" and that one sees "ce qu'on veut y trouver" in the first three books of the *Ethics*, that "pour moi, la morale humaine est un pis-aller" (*idem*) and continues:

[D]ans une dizaine d'années quand cela fera quinze que je me serai répété que mon royaume était de ce monde, selon la sagesse arabe, je finirai sans doute par y croire et je dissimulerai comme un vice l'opinion inhumaine que la seule vie honorable est la vie mystique quand on a des dispositions. Peut-être y a-t-il des conciliations. C'est l'opinion



de mon ami Friedmann et généralement de l'Esprit : ils la placent dans la mystique bolchéviste. Cette direction est belle : c'est une de mes directions.<sup>68</sup> (91)

The passage is dense and hardly—especially in the context of an extremely brief account of Spinoza's idea of God—transparent as the revelation of a political vocation. Instead, the “mystique bolchéviste” plays the role of a “conciliation” for the loss of the mystical life, a life that would be, in line with Spinozism as portrayed in the letter and with the text of the Gospel and in opposition to the “sagesse arabe” of Thutmose III, not of this world. Even this reading of *conciliation* as the referent of the direct object pronoun is uncertain; it should be a plural, but the syntactic referent (*opinion*) makes little sense. If Nizan hints here at the possibility of a more praxis-oriented approach to life wedded to the “mystique bolchéviste,” he is still far from taking the Third International as a new universal and dedicating his life to communist militancy.

The inability of Nizan's biographers to account for such nuances has been shown to result from their own political motivations for rediscovering or recovering Nizan. Maurice Arpin and Koenrad Geldof have shown that critics of Nizan too frequently find in him what he claims in the above letter one finds in Spinoza's idea of God: “ce qu'on veut y trouver.” Arpin argues that Nizan's reception is particularly dependent on the political situation in France. He links “le silence” (191) of the post-war period (1945-60) to the PCF's popularity and its desire to present a monolithic image. Sartre's “réurrection” of his erstwhile friend makes Nizan an eternal rebel, and the “commun dénominateur de la réception” in the 1960s is Nizan's alleged dissidence. For Geldof, “Sartre n'a pas lu Nizan. Il l'a réinventé” (71). Nizan becomes an eternal rebel in the manner of Truffaut's *Michel* for those opposed to the Fifth Republic and its continuation of the Algerian War; they found in Nizan an uncompromising critic of all that is and also a salve for

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<sup>68</sup> Esprit is here a proper noun for the group of intellectuals around Lefebvre with whom Nizan will later collaborate on *La Revue marxiste* – see below.

their own political insignificance. The student protests of the late 60s find in his *Chiens de garde* and *Aden Arabie* the words and forms for their own social critique, while Nizan can enjoy a rehabilitation within the PCF in the 1970s due to a climate of increasingly critical militancy. Finally, the 1980s focus on Nizan in either sentimental ways or take him up as a model to be rejected because of his uncompromising Stalinism. For Geldof, this is evidence that no one really *reads* Nizan, instead preferring to play a “jeu de miroirs plus ou moins complexe” (75) with his texts in order to show three things: first, that Nizan was a heterodox communist; second, that he wrote fiction like a heterodox communist; third, that this combination of aesthetic and political heterodoxy create the ideal type of revolutionary literature or *littérature engagée*. Related to the third point is the tendency to oppose literature to ideology, as if the literary were the last sacred refuge of the non-ideological (75).

In light of these tendencies, it is unsurprising that Cohen-Solal privileges the romantic relationship over the political apprenticeship; her book, as the title *Communiste impossible* makes clear, tries absurdly to separate Nizan from any hint of communist orthodoxy. I return briefly to the question of reception in the next chapter, but here it is important to note that Nizan’s political consciousness was as much a work in progress as his relationship to his wife. To use the didactic vocabulary from the previous chapter, Nizan’s time in Aden was a crucial period of functional learning that triggered emotional responses to the lived experience of capitalist exploitation—that Nizan, however, experienced as a witness rather than a victim. Although his letters show that he continued toying with the idea of launching an import-export business with his benefactor, he never portrayed the idea without an ironic cynicism and quickly dropped the project, with a little help from Henriette, after his return to France. Nizan’s developing sense of the necessity of political action is inseparable from a similar kind of

conscious dogmatism in his budding romantic relationship and the same logic fosters both.

After returning from Aden, Nizan completes work on the short novel he later abandons, *Essais à la troisième personne*, marries, and joins the PCF at the end of the year. In 1928 he finishes his formal studies and begins preparation for the *agrégation*, finishing fifth for the year in July 1928 behind his acquaintances Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir; he then completes military service and works throughout the period as a communist journalist. Nizan's first years in the party are important because they demonstrate clearly Nizan's decision, portrayed as self-explanatory in *Aden Arabie*, to subjugate himself to the will of the party. Nizan's Stalinism and support for the USSR throughout the 1930s, I argue, were the necessary consequence of the philosophical framework that brought him to politics in the first place. While Nizan's own development appears much more contingent than its literary portrayal in *Aden Arabie*, he nevertheless adheres rigorously to this model of political consciousness in his first years as an apparatchik. To schematically anticipate my argument about the development of political consciousness in *Aden Arabie* and *Les chiens de garde* below, Nizan's depiction of its development follows the model elaborated in the introduction to this dissertation. To briefly recapitulate, the negation of initial *Bildung* and the certainty that the problematic individual cannot under any circumstances be reconciled to the world demands a new universal. If the fascist solution that briefly appealed to Nizan finds a new universal in a commingling of hypermasculine spiritual, pseudo-historical, and folkish-national community, allowing a virile return to an idealized past and a particular idealization of death, a revolutionary party organization on a Marxist-Leninist model that sought the abolition of bourgeois social relations offered Nizan a competing universal that ultimately proved more appealing. The Party thus becomes the universal ethical instance for Nizan in theory and praxis until Nizan decided to

demission in September of 1939 for reasons that remain at least partially obscure.<sup>69</sup>

Nizan's initial years as a communist hardly promise future importance in the party, whose restructuring and near-constant harassment by the police in the 1920s left little room for the grooming of intellectual cadres. The openly workerist leanings of the PCF also made it highly skeptical of student interlopers (Cohen-Solal, 73-4). According to James Steele, Nizan had "beaucoup à se faire pardonner" by the workerist and revolutionary PCF (27). Instead, the first years of militancy for Nizan were an awkward and painful initiation. The first communist-aligned journalistic endeavor in which Nizan plays a major role, *La Revue marxiste*, ended in scandal, and other forays into the world of publishing houses – undertaken at the behest of the agit-prop section of the party – between 1929 and 1933 ended with mixed results. As Nizan's biographer Cohen-Solal summarizes: "Les premières années de Nizan dans le Parti, au temps du sectarisme : une bande dessinée à épisodes, semi-tragique, semi-bouffonne." Importantly, however, she adds: "Où notre héros, chahuté, bousculé, malmené par une succession d'épreuves implacables, persévère"<sup>70</sup> (74). This perseverance, translated into action, sees Nizan put himself fully at the disposal of the Party and demonstrates that, in life as in the literary portrayal, he saw the Party in accordance with the model presented above – as the sole protagonist in the fight for the future of humanity. As Steele summarizes, Nizan "ne savait que trop que le 'refus' de parlementarisme, de la démocratie, du capitalisme et de l'art, devait aboutir à l'acceptation du totalitarisme, de la révolution prolétarienne, de Staline, de la discipline du parti et de l'activité

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<sup>69</sup> This decision is frequently attributed to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; Nizan's own words before his early death are much less decisive, although his widow insisted on this explanation after his death and it was subsequently repeated by biographers, including Cohen-Solal. Geldof contends plausibly that the date of demission – 21 September 1939, four days after the Soviet Union invaded Poland – makes the invasion of Poland the more likely immediate cause (63). Certain is only that his words on the subject are cryptic at best and a definitive explanation does not exist.

<sup>70</sup> While I believe the phrasing insightful vis-à-vis the importance of a developmental process for Nizan's politics, the phrasing of the sentence also provides a good example of Cohen-Solal's logic – even the years of militancy are depoliticized.

militante, humble mais utile” (25). Geldof shares Steele’s assessment, claiming that “Nizan a joué la partie. Corps et âme, sans arrière-pensées, cartes sur table” (64). The *Revue marxiste* affair deserves attention because it inspired Nizan’s last published novel, *La conspiration*, and because it demonstrates that Nizan was prepared to subjugate his own wishes to the will of the party – indeed, that he saw that as a necessary part of revolutionary activity. This subsumption to the new universal of the workers’ movement is what prevents the slippage into interiority and complete alienation that Lukàcs associates with the novel of romantic disillusionment in *Theory of the Novel* and that Hegel foresees for those alienated from their “unmittelbare Welt der Gefühle” in his 1809 speech.<sup>71</sup>

Historian Fred Bud Burkhard summarizes the development and importance of the *Revue marxiste* as follows:

The *Revue marxiste* was the third undertaking of a small equipe of young intellectuals known as the “Philosophies.” Sufferers of the postwar «crise de l’esprit», «la [sic] mal du siècle», this group formed around the ephemeral avant-garde periodical *Philosophies* (1924-1925) directed by Pierre Morhange and which initially included as key members Henri Lefebvre, Georges Politzer and Norbert Guterman. The “Philosophies” were introduced to politics during the 1925 protests against the Rif conflict [...] Briefly retreating from political commitment, the “Philosophies” pursued an independent and more philosophical path. In early 1926, joined and financed by Georges Friedmann, they launched another short-lived journal, *Esprit* (1926-27). Here a major collective evolution was evident, for while their own theoretical writings remained somewhat confused and tentative, they devoted themselves to the exploration of classical German idealism, in

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<sup>71</sup> See my discussion of Nizan and Hegelian *Bildung* in the next section.

particular the writings of Schelling and Hegel [...] By the summer of 1928 most of the "Philosophies" had joined the Communist Party in the belief that the answer to France's cultural crisis was in a commitment to radical politics. As a result, the "Philosophies" became the first French circle devoted to the serious examination and development of Marxist theory. (142-3)

While Nizan was not formally a member of the group in its initial period, he played an important role in the *Revue marxiste* (Cohen-Solal, 75), introducing the group to Heidegger (76) and developing an important friendship with Politzer that would last until Nizan resigned from the Party in 1939. Unfortunately for the *Revue*, its international popularity and independence, desired by some on the French left, may have been partially responsible for its demise. Burkhard attributes the journal's failure to two related tensions affecting the PCF during the precipitous rise and fall of the journal and its related publishing house. First, increasing harassment by the police and preventative arrests made it so that almost all of the supportive, high-ranking members of the party involved in the journal were in prison and unable to intervene to support it. Resulting chaos within the ranks led to de facto leadership by the workerists André Célor and Henri Barbé, and increasing sectarianism – not all a result of the class-versus-class doctrine coming from Moscow – made the *Revue* an increasing thorn in the eye of the party leadership. James Steele similarly concludes that the PCF “ne pouvait, en pleine période de bolchévisation, se permettre de tolérer une tentative intellectuelle de ce genre qui se situerait en marge de lui” (27). The details of the inglorious end of the journal in 1929 – the last issue is dated August/September (Cohen-Solal, 83) – are not important here, but the result is that Guterman and Morhange were expelled from the party. When confronted with the choice to defend the journal, try to maintain autonomy vis-à-vis the PCF, or acquiesce to its directives, Nizan and

Politzer both chose the latter option out of the belief, expressed by Politzer in a letter to Nizan, that “[n]ous qui sommes inexpérimentés comme militants et comme théoriciens, devons faire confiance au parti. Et fini « l’avant-garde »” (cited in Cohen-Solal 84). This statement by Politzer is revelatory of both his and Nizan’s Leninist leanings; strict adherence to the party line, whatever doubts he may have privately expressed about particular decisions, would continue until shortly before Nizan’s death.

At the end of the *Revue marxiste* affair, Nizan had completed compulsory military service and the *agrégation* and placed himself fully at the disposal of the party. His future years would see him make attempts to infiltrate bourgeois publishers on behalf of the party’s agit-prop efforts; run for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in the legislative elections of 1932; spend a year in Moscow organizing the First Congress of Soviet Writers the *Congrès international des écrivains pour la défense de la culture*<sup>72</sup> in Paris in 1935; co-edit, with Aragon, *L’Humanité*, the official organ of the PCF; translate texts from Heidegger to Dreiser’s *Tragic America*; become a competent diplomatic journalist; and even publish on the historical situation of the journalist. His adult life was largely dedicated to the “humble, mais utile” work of a party intellectual until his resignation in September of 1939. I contend that his resignation follows the same pattern of determination as his years as a militant; what changed was not Nizan, but rather the fitness of the PCF to act as a new universal. In May of the following year, a stray bullet caught him in the neck in the stairwell of a chateau at which his regiment was based in Belgium. The manuscript for his last novel was buried by an English soldier from his division and, despite multiple excavations by family members and scholars, never found.

## II. Essais, Aden and le voyage d’Ulysse

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<sup>72</sup> For more on the Congrès, see *Pour la défense de la culture: les textes du Congrès international des écrivains. Paris, juin 1935*. Ed. Sandra Teroni and Wolfgang Klein. Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2005.

In this section, I show that the development of political consciousness Nizan portrays in his first longer, essayistic work is formally similar to that of the worker-authors in the previous chapter. Alienation brings about the negation of initial *Bildung* from which radical political engagement as a member of French Communist Party results as a necessary consequence. This symbolic gesture delays the possibility of positive resignation to the social whole until after the revolution, but finds a new universal in its service. Importantly, however, Nizan's narrative attempts to account for the development of political consciousness stripped of its material basis in the lived experience of the value relation. In *Aden Arabie*, there is a tension between the form of Hegelian *Bildung* and the attempt to portray the development of class-specific consciousness without the material determinants of the experience of worker-authors. The workers in the previous chapter experience firsthand the alienation of their labor power and alienation from the means of their own reproduction, and these acute economic determinants provide the impetus for the negation of initial *Bildung*; they live and work in spaces where they can be exposed to socialist ideas and thereby find a new universal and return to *Sittlichkeit* as part of the class for itself. For Nizan, all human beings living in bourgeois society are alienated from their own humanity, real life, and human acts. This form of alienation functions in Nizan as an impetus for the negation of initial *Bildung*, the literal journey and return that lead to political commitment, but it removes the class-based foundation of that experience and thereby particularizes it while trying to hold to the universal form of the developmental narrative. While this tension appears only on the margins of *AA* and allows for the successful completion of political formation in contrast to Nizan's first attempt at such a narrative, the posthumously published *Essais à la troisième personne* from his pre-communist period, it nevertheless gestures, against itself, to the contradictory nature of the project that haunts the failed formations of *Antoine Bloyé* and *La*



*conspiration*. As I argue in the next chapter on the basis of these two novels, the separation of political consciousness from its material determinants costs the narratives their pretension to collective validity, leading even the successful developmental narratives in Nizan's work to seem arbitrary.

*Aden Arabie* recounts the alienation, negation of initial *Bildung*, and subsequent political development experienced by its narrator-protagonist<sup>73</sup> on a journey to Aden, a former key colonial trading port in British Arabia. It has been treated as a *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation by critics as diverse as Susan Suleiman, Michael Scriven, Angela Kershaw, Pascal Ory, and Anne Mathieu because of the importance of the theme of development and youth. Mathieu refers to the text as the "démystification" of youth (13), Scriven highlights the importance of the text for Nizan's political development, and Claudia Bouliane emphasizes the prevalence of discursive features relating to adolescence, but no critic has examined the importance of Hegelian *Bildung* for the form of the text. Rather than a demystification of youth and travel literature, the text describes a voyage of alienation and return both in space and in consciousness that sets in motion a political reorientation aligned to a new universal. The essay is, structurally, a model for a political, if not a worker's, *Bildungsroman*: the protagonist begins his journey alienated from his own social world (Paris); he undertakes a journey to a foreign place that further alienates him from his former self; the colonial space works somehow as an intensifier of the place from which he comes, enabling the final negation of initial *Bildung* and the discovery of a new universal in the promise of proletarian revolution. The end of the essay

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<sup>73</sup> The speaking voice in both works is Nizan himself, which is why they are often classified as essays. I contend that, were they published in France today, *Les Chiens de Garde* would be clearly classified as an essay and *Aden Arabie* as a *roman*. The strong differentiation between fiction and non-fiction in Anglo-American literature is less pronounced in France, but I use this language to recall the important distinction between this literary voice and the biographical Nizan whose identity is not always clear.

demonstrates the finality of the formation as the narrator returns to France as a fully-formed and mature figure, no longer subject to the alienation from humanity and youthful vacillations that began the journey in the first place and prepared to defer reconciliation with the world until after the revolution. The narrative is thus a success in terms of political development, but the success of the developmental journey cannot efface two central tensions. The first is a significant difference between Nizan and the worker-authors analyzed in the previous chapter; this journey to Aden is not generalizable, not even for members of a specific class or for a specific subset of alienated young intellectuals. The text is haunted by the particularity of the protagonist's formation. The second tension is related to the first because the particularity of the experience leads to a universalization of alienation as the building block of political consciousness while divorcing alienation from its historical significance in the specific experience of the wage-laborer. Thus *AA* is the only novel of formation Nizan can write in which the protagonist arrives, in Scriven's words about another of Nizan's characters, at "a mature communist vision" (153), for the simple reason that the ending had already been given form by Nizan's own life. In *La conspiration*, as I argue in the next chapter, the desire to provide a more abstract model that might have general validity necessarily ends in failure, because there is no structural determinant for bourgeois intellectuals, however much they suffer from alienation, to develop class consciousness. Because *Les chiens de garde* treats similar problems as *Aden Arabie* and the dates of composition overlap, I will use Nizan's polemic against institutional philosophy to help illuminate the narrator's process of development where necessary.

From the opening pages, the narrator's path follows a pattern of alienation and negation that leads to a total rejection of initial *Bildung* and the society that made that *Bildung* possible. Following this rejection, a new worldview replaces the old and renounces reconciliation with the

world in favor of revolutionary change. The narrator's decision at the end of the essay to return to France and become active in the political struggle arises necessarily out of these developments as an *ethical* decision. Negation of initial *Bildung* sets the process of political development in AA in motion. Analogously to the works analyzed in the previous chapter, the text presents this negation as the result of cognitive dissonance between the promises of bourgeois society – here, particularly, formal education as embodied by institutional philosophy and the ENS, but also militarism, the vacuity of bourgeois values, and the exploitation of workers – and the *malaise* and *malheurs* it produces in Nizan, other members of his generation, and the exploited. He returns to this clash of ideas repeatedly throughout *Aden Arabie*, but the trajectory is perhaps best described at the beginning of the second chapter:

Figurez-vous : nous-voilà lâchés à vingt ans dans un monde inflexible munis de quelques arts d'agrément<sup>74</sup> : le grec, la logique, un vocabulaire étendu qui ne nous donne même pas l'illusion d'y voir clair. Nous sommes perdus dans la galerie des machines de nos pères où tous les coins mal éclairés dissimulent les rencontres sanglantes, guerres aux colonies, terreur blanche aux Balkans, assassinats américains applaudis par toutes les mains françaises : la terrible hypocrisie des hommes au pouvoir n'arrive pas à voiler la présence des malheurs que nous ne comprenons : nous savons seulement qu'ils sont là, qu'il arrive des malheurs quelque part. Ne nous dites pas que c'est pour notre bien. Ne vous contentez pas d'accuser le destin, de faire éternellement le geste de Pilate. (61)

Nizan here pithily discloses all the contradictions that lead him to renounce, in the name of his generation, the legitimating mechanisms of bourgeois power; education is nothing more than some “arts d'agrément,” a kind of gentlemen's hobby that has lost its capacity to divert; a

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<sup>74</sup> This phrase re-appears in *Antoine Bloyé*, where it mocks the upbringing of the daughters of the bourgeoisie.

related critique of language, particularly the language of philosophy, whose verbosity mystifies rather than explains; a critique of reification that begins with the mechanized presentation of the world as the “galerie des machines de nos pères,” where the possessive attribute belies the hypostatization of the world as a machine and ultimately rejects a mechanical characterization of the world as the disingenuous “geste de Pilate;” and finally the claim that violence, “les rencontres sanglantes,” is an integral part of bourgeois society which cannot be explained away or ignored.

The use of “nous” and “notre” in the above passage is also critical because it shows that Nizan describes a collective, historical problem confronting the educated (male) youth of his generation – the double sense of “gens de mon âge”—and not subjective discontent. The “gens de [s]on âge” are “empêchés de reprendre haleine, opprésés comme des victimes à qui on maintient la tête sous l’eau” who “se demandait s’il restait de l’air quelque part” (56). Other descriptions of his generation’s experience of alienation maintain the tone of this metaphor; the mood is of suffocation and strangulation. At another moment in the text, while discussing the allure of travel, he claims that other continents “fournissaient quelques-uns des mondes imaginaires que tous les hommes inventaient dans la nuit pour oublier les vérités de leur purgatoire et décorer d’illusions leur indigence et leur écrasement” (71). Suffocation, purgatory, *écrasement*; flight into *mondes imaginaires*; so many synonyms for even privileged life under capitalism, a state of “perpétuelle absence” (124) that Nizan opposes to his concept of *l’homme*. Indeed, the narrator explicitly anticipates and criticizes the tendency to reduce “tous les désordres du temps” to the “médiocre échelle d’une inquiétude privée,” claiming a general validity for the “divisions, des aliénations, des guerres et des palabres” in “nous,” (61) the (male) members of his generation. This liminal state, a life that feels like death, full of uncertainty and

the fear “de souffrir des mutilations qui nous attendent,” (*idem*), leads to a negation without positive content and both an intellectual and literal alienation from France and the bourgeois universal for which it stands.

It is perhaps telling that his initial title, conserved in a letter to Henriette from his time in Aden, for *Essais à la troisième personne* and, according to Anne Mathieu, initially proposed for the contract with Rieder for *Aden Arabie*, was *Apprentissage, ou Évasion de quelques hommes*.<sup>75</sup> But the purpose of the journey will be precisely to learn that there is no *évasion*. Nizan relates bourgeois ideology and values consistently to chains and relationships of domination throughout the essay. In one passage, after claiming that the First World War led mothers and teachers to neglect the patriotic upbringing of those too young to fight, “[c]omptant sur les misères du temps pour former des cœurs héroïques et l’amour de la vertu,” Nizan writes that “on se met trop tard à nous enfoncer dans la tête les Lois comme des réclames sur la vérole : comment y croire, nous n’y voyons que des chaînes effrayantes pour un homme, des chaînes qui nous entaillent la vie” (63-4). The comparison to an advertisement for syphilis that state institutions try in vain to force into the heads of Nizan’s generation is telling; he consistently uses the language of disease, chains, and terror to depict the condition of those living under capitalism. This is also one of the early occurrences of the initially ill-defined but heavily-used category of *homme* in the text. In these two passages, *l’homme* is associated with freedom from compulsion and freedom from illusions, and these are the two primary categories that Nizan continues to develop throughout AA that, as I argue below, are perhaps essential to both his political commitment and his failure

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<sup>75</sup> I find it difficult to believe that the Nizan signing the contract with Rieder in March of 1930 would opt for this title for the project that would become *Aden Arabie*. The pages he refers to in the letter are much more likely part of *Essais à la troisième personne*, which aligns much better in content with the title than *Aden*, which tries to pose a much more ambitious solution to the problem of alienation from *l’homme* than the escape of a few men would permit. This claim, surprising if true, comes from the section *Repères* (22) in *Paul Nizan: Articles littéraires et politiques*, vol.1.

to reconcile class consciousness with the formations of political consciousness portrayed in his works.

The experience of life-as-death leads to the categorical rejection of initial *Bildung* and its institutional foundations, all in the name of *l'homme*:

Être un homme nous paraît la seule entreprise légitime : nous sommes désespérés en découvrant que tant de beaux devoirs auxquels il fallait nous faire croire dix ans plus tôt ne laissent rien debout dans l'amour de la vie. Aimer la vie qu'ils nous font ? Assemblez des familles provinciales, des prospectus, des examens, des jeunes filles bien élevées, des basses figures d'officiers instructeurs, des putains accoudées sur de faux marbres, des avenues noires, des leçons à trente francs l'heure et la table kantienne des jugements, vous êtes des hommes. Voilà de quoi combler votre jeunesse... Derrière ce déballage d'idéal patriotique qui séduit quelques adolescents de bonne famille s'organisent l'industrie française et la petite guerre civile contre les ouvriers qui ne mangent pas les morts...Faisons quelque chose. Mais quoi ? (64-5)

Alienated by the contradiction between the vacuity of the “beaux devoirs” pushed on them in their upbringing and the desire to love life, the narrator rejects his initial formation as a farce that annihilates the bourgeois universal for the narrator as it annihilates the working class. This apparent *non-sequitur*, in which the caricatured life of a successful bourgeois intellectual is linked to the “guerre civile” between capital and labor, points to Nizan’s particular understanding of alienation, which informs the concept of class struggle in his work and is rooted in his understanding of *l'homme* as a being free from compulsion and illusions. The cold reality of daily life here discloses the grand pretensions of the nation and the mode of production as pedantic, inhumane, and undignified of Nizan’s concept of both life and *l'homme*.

True to the Hegelian model of *Bildung* that seems determinant for the text, this rejection leads at first to impotence and *désœuvrement* that accompany the *sittlichen Schmerz* of negation from the universal in the speech by Hegel discussed in the introduction. Action is literally imperative (*Faisons*), but negation here doesn't yet point in a definitive direction. This alienated generation of young intellectuals knows only that "les hommes ne vivent pas comme les hommes devraient vivre," but are ignorant of "les éléments qui composent cette vie véritable" (62). Nizan goes on to describe debauches, hours at the cinema, and romantic affairs as the actions of an aimless group starved for something "réel à [se] mettre sous la dent" (65). The narrator, however, in a break with his earlier mentor Alain, refuses to stop at this moment where "toutes nos pensées sont négatives," claiming that "seul l'esprit du Mal nie éternellement" (*idem*).<sup>76</sup> The task that arises out of the impasse that opens the essay is to find the positive content that makes up "cette vie véritable" for Nizan's category of *l'homme*. Indeed, "énoncer ce qui est et ce qui n'est pas dans le mot homme" (117) is later revealed to be the point of the journey; but the negation of the negation can only be found during the voyage to Aden. I return to alienation's relationship to negation and *Bildung* in Hegel below, but want to first untangle the relationship between intellectual alienation and this "guerre civile."

The experience of the vacuity and cynicism of bourgeois values demonstrates to the author that his experience of intellectual alienation and the *désœuvrement* of his generation are equivalent to the alienation experienced by workers. What is important to consider at this juncture is how Nizan's form of spiritual or mental alienation, "des aliénations" that make up the

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<sup>76</sup> This is essential to my rationale for treating the essay as a *PBR* and insisting on the relevance of this category. Whatever philological validity the category may lack (see my "Introduction"), the problematic Nizan takes on here has generic affinities with the *Bildungsroman* and attempts to provide an answer to what Franco Moretti sees as one of the problems at the heart of the genre, the tension between autonomy and socialization, in much the same way as his novel, *La conspiration*.

life that is not worth living, enables a rapprochement with the alienation of labor and the laborer in the production process. How, for Nizan, does the spiritual or mental alienation of the intellectual become equivalent to, or allow Nizan to experience an equivalency with, the alienation of industrial proletarians and of the exploited colonial subjects in Aden? The answer to these questions lies in Nizan's mobilization of the concept of *l'homme*. This category performs a particular rhetorical function in *Aden Arabie* and *Les chiens de garde* by representing the possibility of a life free from alienation, which can only be envisioned after the abolition of capitalism. This alienation has significant affinities with Feuerbach and the young Marx's conception of the human being as a *Gattungswesen*, which seems to be the important but never explicitly stated basis for Nizan's conception of *l'homme*. As Bernard Yack has argued of the young Marx, Nizan's critique of bourgeois society has much to do with "his understanding of man's essence as an autonomous, self-realizing being" (258). Bourgeois society must be destroyed because it stands in the way of that self-realization by alienating human beings from their autonomy.

For Nizan, the common denominator between the (organized) working class and the intellectuals of his generation is the feeling of *écrasement*, *désœuvrement*, and the dissatisfaction engendered by these various figures of abjection:

Une classe d'hommes victime de la décrépitude du monde bourgeois comme elle fut victime de sa grandeur se dirige vers un monde qui comporte la ruine du monde présent. Tous les hommes qui ne consentent pas à mourir, qui ne veulent pas être complices, tous ceux qui n'acceptent ni le vide, ni la honte, se mettent dans l'ombre du prolétariat. (LOC 1835).

This passage from *Les chiens de garde* (CdG) demonstrates well the strange rhetorical work



performed by the proletariat in Nizan's account. The proletariat is a victim of the "décrépitude" and "grandeur" of bourgeois society and contains within it "la ruine du monde présent."

Interestingly, Nizan does not link *decrepitude*, a common figure from 1920s and 1930s critiques of the decadence of French society, with the political economic category of crisis. There is a constant tension between an ethical critique of bourgeois society as inhumane, degrading and degraded, etc., and the attempt to use the proletariat as the alleged carrier of revolutionary change to weaponize this primarily ethical critique. The historical necessity of class formation, crisis, and proletarian revolution does not appear as strongly as the anti-*homme*-ness of bourgeois society, although Nizan relies on the proletariat as the motor to bring about that change. This possibility – what I will call the horizon of proletarian *Sittlichkeit* – provides Nizan with a revolutionary horizon, but no motor for the development of revolutionary consciousness in the non-proletarian. His critique, then, of bourgeois intellectuals and intellectual culture borrows its teeth from the proletariat, but provides no material basis that would push the intelligentsia into the proletariat, instead relying on the moral weight of his argument. This is a fundamental difference from Marx and Engels account of the gradual proletarianization of society in the *Manifesto*. The problem for Nizan relates to *Bildung*, to the impossibility of conscious life-activity and its truth content (*une vie véritable* contrasted with *vide*, vitality against *honte*, etc.); while the proletariat may (although somewhat confusedly in AA and CdG, almost as a *fait accompli*) be the force driving the abolition of bourgeois society, the real problem is not so much the instability of capitalist social relations as their opposition to self-actualization, to *l'homme*. This allows the proletarian revolution to function as a new universal, but not on the basis of an identity with that universal. The false promises of bourgeois *Bildung* can only be realized authentically after the abolition of the society that birthed them. At the end of CdG, Nizan claims

that the “besoins humains, les destins humains sont désormais incompatibles avec les valeurs, les vertus, les défenses, les espérances bourgeoises” (LOC 1305). While “destin” likely recalls the historical mission of the proletariat to abolish class society, “les besoins humains” points to Nizan’s general understanding of bourgeois society as inhuman and for that reason unworthy of existence. Indeed, Nizan’s own theory of false consciousness, although he does not use that term, describes it as the inauthentic belief in something other than one’s own lived experience. While Nizan discusses *perception* instead of consciousness, he differentiates between a form of perception that “naquit d’une expérience réelle” or from a “leçon rabâchée par quelque maître étranger à sa vie” (LOC 1560).

Because the final instance relies on this *ethical* critique and not on the economic determinism that makes it possible to put oneself “dans l’ombre du prolétariat,” Nizan’s account of alienation need not meaningfully differentiate between this alienation from conscious activity and the alienation of labor in the production process. Interestingly, Nizan shares this all-encompassing account of alienation with the young Marx of the period from roughly 1842 to 1844, when the proletariat finally becomes the motor for revolutionary change in the *Parisian Manuscripts*. As Sven-Erik Rose remarks, this is a period of Marx’s intellectual development “between idealism and inchoate materialism” where “an abiding preoccupation with abjection” and its relationship to agency that he tries to resolve through the introduction of various figures—the *Volk* of his 1842/3 journalistic writings, the “real Jew” of “Zur Judenfrage,” and, finally, the proletariat (157). Because Marx’s account initially lacks a material basis for revolutionary social change, he “posits the proletariat as the embodiment of ‘universal suffering’—that is, suffering so general and diffuse that it precludes the consolidation of any self-consciousness or class interest” (162). For Marx, this allows a certain rhetorical force and a

first tentative connection between the suffering of the proletariat and the vehicle for revolutionary social change, but Marx fails, according to Rose (*idem*), to flesh out this relationship in “On the Jewish Question.” Nizan avoids this problem by piggy-backing onto the proletariat as the agent of change, but fails to provide a concrete, material determinant that would lead non-proletarians to align with this alternate universal.

The *Communist Manifesto* sees the growth of revolutionary struggle resulting from, primarily, the rapid growth of the working class, as “entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence” (253). Marx has a technical account of the problem: competition among capitalists will drive small producers out of business and into the proletariat while increases in productivity will eliminate differentiation between workers. This is the quantitative side of Marx’s argument about the revolutionary historical mission of the proletariat, at least as contained in the *Manifesto*, which also underlies the logic of the Program Era and its forms of struggle centered primarily in production. The proletarian revolution differentiates itself from all other historical revolutions because it is:

the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air. (254)

The possibility of a class-for-itself that would abolish class society and the wage-relation underpins the expectations of class formation (*Klassenbildung*) and the certainty of the success of the revolution. Nizan’s *Aden Arabie* and *Les chiens de garde* are inhabited by this certainty, but not by the portrayal of its expected mechanism in the political development portrayed AA.

Instead, the mechanism for political engagement in Nizan remains shared alienation from *l'homme*. This identification relies on shared abjection—feeling crushed, fear of mutilation, etc.—rather than a moment of identification in which exposure to a socialist paradigm discloses the identity of the worker and the worker's movement. While this could potentially function as a new and broader avenue for solidarity in contrast to the workerist model operative in narratives of political development from the early German workers' movement, it also frames political consciousness – as my reading of *La conspiration* in the next chapter argues– as fragile and contingent, because it uncouples the result of the developmental process—class consciousness—from its material determinants. In this sense, there is a negative moment of this universal for non-proletarians that is compensated for by the positive moment of the proletariat.

It has, to my knowledge, not been pointed out how indebted Nizan's concept of *l'homme* is to Marx Feuerbachian account of species-being. It is difficult to determine the level of direct influence, but the affinities are clear.<sup>77</sup> For Nizan as for the young Marx, any form of human activity that is not both free and conscious—whether the intellectual labor Nizan refers to in CdG or labor in production—is alienated. The Marx of the first *Parisian Manuscript* begins his discussion of alienation talking specifically about the production process, but then quite quickly abstracts from the particular situation of alienated labor in production in order to generalize the experience of alienation to all human beings in relationships of subjugation (*Knechtschaft*). Marx introduces the concept of species-being (*Gattungswesen*) at the end of the first manuscript as part of an account of the objectivation, externalization, and alienation of labor and the laborer in the

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<sup>77</sup> I imagine Nizan discusses this point, or at least that the level of direct influence becomes clear in his 1934 essay “Marx philosophe,” published in *Morceaux choisis de Marx*, ed. Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Gutermann. Unfortunately and frustratingly for this author, the text has proven impossible to get my hands on in time to include reflections on it here.

production process.<sup>78</sup> In this early formulation, labor is alienated from the worker and objectified (*vergegenständlicht*) in the product of labor. The worker's labor is thereby externalized (*entäußert*), which is both experienced as, and is factually, a loss of the object of labor, which the worker produces for another person, as well as a loss of the self, part of which is consumed in the labor process (58-62). As the productivity of labor increases, so, too, does the world of labor externalized and objectified by the exploitation of workers, and the dependence of the worker on a capitalist (*Kapitalist*) or *Arbeitsherr* – a neologism that signifies the person in charge of the product of another's labor (58). On the basis of this analysis, Marx then claims that this relationship necessarily alienates workers from one another, and, finally, from their *Gattungswesen*, their species-being or species-essence (61). The mechanism for this final phase of alienation is the relation of the laborer to the product of labor; Marx refers to it as *Zwangsarbeit* or *Knechtschaft* (forced labor and bondage, respectively) in opposition to *Selbsttätigkeit* (59-60). As in Marx's critique of alienated labor, in Nizan every action is compromised and inhuman because it necessarily takes the form of "eine fremde, eine erzwungene Tätigkeit" (64) under "der Herrschaft, dem Zwang und dem Joch eines anderen Menschen" (65). What delineates unalienated from alienated human activity is that it is conscious and free—in the dual sense of not externally compelled by social relations and whose result belongs to the acting human being. In Marx's words: "Der Mensch macht seine Lebenstätigkeit selbst zum Gegenstand seines Wollens und seines Bewußtseins. Er hat bewußte Lebenstätigkeit" (62).

Nizan can thus view the activity of young intellectuals as analogous to the activity of workers because they are equally separated from "cette vie véritable" that would correspond to

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<sup>78</sup> For a more complete discussion of *Gattungswesen* and Marx's debt to both Hegel and Feuerbach, see my introduction.

his concept of *l'homme*. This identity is key to understanding how political *Bildung* functions in Nizan, because, once established, this identity provides the rationale for revolutionary struggle and becomes, thanks to the implicit historical mission of the proletariat, the new universal. The goal here is not to elucidate or defend the value of alienation as an analytical category, but rather to show the way that Nizan's broad understanding of alienation as alienation from species-being allows him to establish a homology between the situation of the intellectual and the exploited which informs his concept of *l'homme* and conditions his final commitment to radical politics.<sup>79</sup> While Nizan does not use the term species-being or species-essence, it undoubtedly informs his concept of *homme* and rings through in his occasional use of the phrase *identité d'espèce*. Crucially, the multiplicity of Nizan's concept also turns an ostensibly class-based revolutionary project into a humanist one; no one, regardless of circumstance, can hope to find "quelque chose de réel à [se] mettre sous la dent" until the abolition of bourgeois society and the concomitant forms of appearance of alienation.

For Nizan, this fact suffices to justify revolutionary activity: "On peut comprendre que la Révolution a des raisons plus méthodiques, mais peu de raisons plus persuasives que celle-ci : il faut des loisirs pour être un homme" (AA 112). This is one of the rare moments in which Nizan tries to define what he means by *l'homme* positively, albeit still with an absence; *l'homme* has leisure, has the material capacity to act without compulsion. Nizan's concept of *l'homme* relies on the idea of conscious, life-affirming, uncompelled activity for the whole of society – a form of activity impossible, according to both Nizan's and Marx's logic, for all human beings under capitalism. The Marx of the *Manuscripts* is explicit on this point:

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<sup>79</sup> The reader interested alienation more generally should consult Swain, Dan. "Alienation, or why Capitalism is Bad for Us." In *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx*. Ed. Prew et al. Oxford UP: New York, 2019; Jaeggi, Rahel. *Alienation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; and Sève, Lucien. *Aliénation et Émancipation*. Paris: La Dispute, 2012.

Aus dem Verhältnis der entfremdeten Arbeit zum Privateigentum folgt ferner, daß die Emanzipation der Gesellschaft vom Privateigentum etc., von der Knechtschaft in der politischen Form der Arbeiteremanzipation sich ausspricht, nicht als wenn es sich nur um ihre Emanzipation handelte, sondern weil in ihrer Emanzipation die allgemein menschliche enthalten ist, diese ist aber darin enthalten, weil die ganze menschliche Knechtschaft in dem Verhältnis des Arbeiters zur Produktion involviert ist und alle Knechtschaftsverhältnisse nur Modifikationen und Konsequenzen dieses Verhältnisses sind (68).

For Nizan, the equivalence of workers and the intellectuals of his generation pivots on the idea that all activity in bourgeois society is some form of a *Knechtschaftsverhältnis*, a relationship of bondage. Even the capitalist is precluded from the conscious activity Nizan associates with his concept of the human being. He calls them, after the model of his employer who lies and lies to himself, “de faux hommes d’action” (102). Nizan even describes travel as proof of the impossibility of conscious action. He paints travelers as parting out of fear and the voyage itself as a symptom of the general abjection. Travelers “partaient vers des accidents obscurs, que personne ne prévoyait, plus merveilleux que des comètes, en l’an 1000, et qui ferait d’eux des hommes. Tout ce qu’ils voyaient bien était les manques de leur vite, leur agitation d’ombre en proie à d’horribles mutilations” (75). Again, the constant presence of fear and the threat of violence characterizes existence in bourgeois society, but travel, like the other “échappatoires” that Nizan lists near the beginning of the essay, is just one of many “portes pour n’aller nulle part” (67). The only viable solution to the problem of alienation is proletarian revolution.

Understanding Nizan’s concept of *l’homme* in this light also elucidates two otherwise cryptic elements already mentioned above: the connection between the situation of the

intellectual and the worker as well as the link in Nizan's thought between revolutionary activity and romantic love. The intellectual, too, through his disingenuous defense of the state and bourgeois social relations, performs an activity that Nizan views as a form of more or less conscious servitude. Nizan states this explicitly in the fifth section of *Les Chiens de garde*, where he compares thinkers who "s'accommodent de l'esclavage présent de la plus grande partie de l'humanité" to those who, "n'aimant pas cet esclavage, entreprennent contre ses soutiens une offensive théorique et une offensive pratique, des hommes qui pensent que l'esclavage pose des problèmes réels" (114). His entire project in the pamphlet is, simply put, to show the ways in which institutionalized philosophy and formal education belong to the first camp. Universalizing positions and philosophical thought abstracted from the material world serve the reproduction of the ruling class, and contemporary intellectuals serve the legitimating function left to the clergy in the ancien régime (121). These "grands appareils d'illusions. . . à l'abri desquels la bourgeoisie maintient son impitoyable pouvoir" (109) contribute to the "aliénation matérielle" (108, citing Marx from *The Holy Family*) of not just the working class, but of all human beings. Thus, for Nizan, alienation is a material phenomenon in bourgeois society that produces and reproduces the situation of bondage that can only be ended with the abolition of bourgeois society itself—an abolition that will be carried out by the proletariat. Because intellectuals play a legitimating role in the reproduction of both alienation and the situation of unfreedom it contains, the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois society becomes the necessary vocation not just of workers but of all human beings who seek to escape the suffocation of bourgeois society. As Nizan succinctly states in *Les Chiens de garde*: "Je n'aime pas la Philosophie des écraseurs parce que je me suis senti écrasé" (48). Yet, as shown above, there is a tension inherent in Nizan's generalization of the experience of alienation-as-abjection, potentially an alienation hidden under



illusions, obfuscated by an immediately self-serving ideology, the negative moment of the new universal, and the positive motor for the destruction of capitalist society in the much more materially implicated proletariat. Nizan's inability to provide a material basis for the political engagement of intellectuals necessarily condemns the protagonists of his developmental trajectories to chance. I will have cause below to discuss this passage to illuminate its relationship to Hegelian *Bildung*, but the peak of the developmental journey in AA demonstrates well the arbitrariness of the developmental trajectories portrayed in Nizan's work. After repeatedly questioning the validity of the voyage and dismissing its significance as an *échappatoire*, Nizan nevertheless concludes that first-hand experience of Aden and its condensed, hypertrophied image of bourgeois society was critical to his political engagement. If he had stayed home, he imagines he may have "devenu un traître" or "étouffer" (133). The narrator seems constantly to confound the ethical and material logic, and thus—after spending a hundred pages undermining the validity of the category of the voyage—returns to a strictly idealist account of the voyage's merit, because he is otherwise unable to explain the successful completion of his own developmental trajectory.

This reading of alienation and *l'homme* in Nizan also reveals the logical link between radical political and radical romantic commitment in the author's thought. While it is surely the case that AA portrays the protagonist's political development retrospectively, as emphasized by Cohen-Solal, Ory, Geldof, and Mathieu, viewing sincere romantic love as radical is consistent with Nizan's understanding of alienation and view of revolutionary activity as the attempt to bring about "une vie véritable" (132). His scorn for marriage and bourgeois propriety is not met with an equal scorn for love, but rather by an understanding of it as revolutionary activity because earnest love qualifies for Nizan as a distinctly human act, something that conforms to

the species-being of *l'homme*: “Vous vous croyez innocent si vous dites : j’aime cette femme et je veux conformer mes actes à cet amour, mais vous commencez la révolution [...] revendiquer un acte humain c’est attaquer les forces maîtresses de tous les malheurs” (132). In this hypothetical, the subject would make his love the object of his will and then conform his acts to that will in a paradigmatic example of free activity. Any other such act would also qualify as an “acte humain” for Nizan and thus be imbued with radical potential. The radical potential of love—and also its radical improbability in bourgeois society—is present to differing degrees in all of Nizan’s novels, from the posthumously published first novella *Essais à la troisième personne*, where love becomes the consciousness of a “vocation véritable au bonheur” (53) for the main protagonists, to *La conspiration*, where love is at once a powerful but obfuscating or obfuscated human act and a shortcut to suicide. Regardless, Nizan’s emphasis on the transformative capacity of love relies on his understanding of it as a potential “acte humain,” imbuing it with the same radical capacities as all other actions that confront “les forces maîtresses de tous les malheurs.”

Now we can return to the importance of a Hegelian paradigm of *Bildung* for the form of AA. The voyage to Aden plays the role Hegel envisions for the classics—or, though this appears in Hegel’s account of *Bildungs*-processes as an unnecessary but potentially useful possibility, for travel—it sets the stage for a literal, geographical alienation and return. Nizan, however, importantly modifies – in line with my argument about the worker autobiographies in the previous chapter – the confines of *Bildung* by finding a new universal in revolutionary struggle. Travel and the unique situation available to the narrator as a European in Aden work as a condenser of experience and allow the negation of initial *Bildung* to begin the positive movement the narrator yearns for at the beginning of the text. The resulting political engagement rids the

narrator of his *désœuvrement* and allows him to return to France to begin mature life in a form of activity that develops meaning by virtue of its relation to the new universal, a kind of *Selbsttätigkeit* or, in Nizan's words, "une démarche qui pût aboutir à quelque chose" (124).

Though I have already cited this passage in the introduction, it is worth recalling in detail here to show its specific connection to Nizan. In an early speech of Hegel's given at the end of the 1809 schoolyear while he was a teacher and rector at the *Egidiengymnasium* in Nürnberg, he describes at some length the formal aspects of *Bildung* and the centrality of alienation and return:

Um aber zum Gegenstande zu werden, muß die Substanz der Natur und des Geistes uns gegenübergetreten sein, sie muß die Gestalt von etwas Fremdartigem erhalten haben. - Unglücklich der, dem seine unmittelbare Welt der Gefühle entfremdet wird; denn dies heißt nichts anderes, als daß die individuellen Bande, die das Gemüt und den Gedanken heilig mit dem Leben befreunden, Glauben, Liebe und Vertrauen, ihm zerrissen wird ! - Für die Entfremdung, welche Bedingung der theoretischen Bildung ist, fordert diese nicht diesen sittlichen Schmerz, nicht das Leiden des Herzens, sondern den leichteren Schmerz und Anstrengung der Vorstellung, sich mit einem Nicht-Unmittelbaren, einem Fremdartigen, mit etwas der Erinnerung, dem Gedächtnisse und dem Denken Angehörigen zu beschäftigen. Diese Forderung der Trennung aber ist so notwendig, daß sie sich als ein allgemeiner und bekannter Trieb in uns äußert. Das Fremdartige, das Ferne führt das anziehende Interesse mit sich, das uns zur Beschäftigung und Bemühung lockt, und das Begehrenswerte steht im umgekehrten Verhältnisse mit der Nähe, in der es steht und gemein mit uns ist. Die Jugend stellt es sich als ein Glück vor, aus dem Einheimischen wegzukommen und mit Robinson eine ferne Insel zu bewohnen. Es ist eine notwendige Täuschung, das Tiefe zuerst in der Gestalt der Entfernung suchen zu

müssen; aber die Tiefe und Kraft, die wir erlangen, kann nur durch die Weite gemessen werden, in die wir von dem Mittelpunkte hinwegflohen, in welchen wir uns zuerst versenkt befanden und dem wir wieder zustreben. (321)

Hegel here identifies two degrees of alienation (*Entfremdung*) with different functions. The first is alienation from the “immediate world of feelings” that violently tears the subject out of a conciliatory relationship with the world, separating them from belief, love, and trust. In Hegel, this is clearly catastrophic, a separation from *Sittlichkeit* and for that reason the occasion of *sittlichen Schmerz* that is only formally linked to the kind of alienation that serves as a prerequisite to *Bildung*. In Nizan, however, this experience of radical alienation from initial *Bildung* is fundamental to political development. This violent discontent (*désœuvrement, étouffement, écrasement*) is the point of departure for the negative growth that leads to a consciousness of political engagement as a vocation. Indeed, alienation expresses itself in Nizan as a deeply felt unhappiness, the absence and feelings of suffocation quoted above and poignantly expressed by the famous first line of *Aden Arabie*: “J’avais vingt ans. Je ne laisserai personne dire que c’est le plus bel âge de la vie” (55). As portrayed in AA and Nizan’s other works, precisely this moment of negation and separation from *Sittlichkeit* is fraught; he recounts, as noted above, the threat of alcoholism, misery, and suicide as legitimate possibilities arising out of this separation.

The Hegelian model, predicated on precisely the abstract, universalizing idealism Nizan rejects in *Les Chiens de garde* as self-serving, treats, at least in the above passage, this world in Leibnizian fashion as the best of all possible. Thus Hegel,<sup>80</sup> too, would likely be a *chien de garde*

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<sup>80</sup> Nizan mentions Hegel’s name five times in CdG, generally neutrally, but quotes approvingly several times from Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. I think Nizan respected Hegel as a contributor to Marx’s philosophy, but have been unable to find concrete evidence of a deep engagement with Hegel on Nizan’s part.

for Nizan. Despite this fact, the passage from Hegel quoted above aligns remarkably well with the form of alienation Nizan's narrator experiences in *Aden Arabie*. Political formation in Nizan absolutely “fordert diesen sittlichen Schmerz” and “das Leiden des Herzen” against which Hegel warns, but Nizan is ultimately saved by an alternate, proletarian universal. This extreme form of alienation, a kind of total separation from the world, sets in motion the negation of the negation of initial *Bildung*. It also fills the gap between Hegel and Nizan – alienation from species-being in Marx or alienation from *l'homme* in Nizan is a prerequisite for arriving at a new universal. This political vocation, however, rests on the ability of the workers' movement and specifically, for Nizan, of the PCF to function as one. To recall the words of Nizan's friend Georges Politzer cited in the first section of this chapter, it is the “confiance au parti” that enables the return to *Sittlichkeit* in the service of an alternative, revolutionary universal. The negation of the self and its resolution through dedication to a new universal describes precisely the trajectory that Gadamer sees as essential to Hegelian *Bildung*: Nizan also portrays the “Erhebung zur Allgemeinheit” as a “menschliche Aufgabe” that demands “Aufopferung der Besonderheit für das Allgemeine” (18). This points again to the salience of *Bildung* as a site of class struggle, as I argue in the introduction; despite the radically different aims, the function of this political reorientation is that of a new universal and return to *Sittlichkeit*.

Importantly, however, the second form of alienation, which Hegel describes as a condition of theoretical *Bildung*, is equally important to the political formation we encounter in *Aden Arabie* because it seems implicated in the first. Although Nizan frequently mocks and ironically cites travel literature throughout the narrative, he admits that the physical distance and difference encountered on his journey play an important role in his ability to successfully negate initial *Bildung* and develop his political vocation. While, at the beginning, he sought a cure to the

unease he felt in Paris, he learns that in place of distraction he is confronted with even more of the “désordres” (91) he hoped to escape. In grappling with these problems, he finds himself on arrival in Aden a “poisson entre deux eaux.” He experiences this distance as “des malheurs” that make up the actual “vérité des voyages” (98), but this uncomfortable distance plays a crucial role in freeing the narrator from convention and distancing him from his own thoughts, from the bourgeois universal and initial *Bildung*:

Dans cette absence des dieux et des anges, j'étais dépouillé des symboles de la piété et des lois, des catéchismes, des cultes, des mots d'ordre. Les actes ne me semblaient pas plus moraux que le mouvement des feuilles dans un arbre. Je vivais dans la nature, les hommes, les bêtes, les objets en faisaient partie sans transfiguration. Un vautour était un vautour, une vache était une vache, le drapeau du consulat de France était une étoffe. (98)

The choice of objects used for comparison is significant – he is “dépouillé,” literally skinned of the symbolic and moral order that still seemed meaningful in France. This initial phase contains a negation of all morality, of even the idea of morality, because actions (*actes*) seem as separated from moral judgments as banal, natural phenomena like the movement of leaves in a tree, the existence of cows and vultures. Yet the final phrase hints already at the significance of this “absence des dieux et des anges,” a figure for moral arbiters, as he begins to perceive the French flag as simply another piece of fabric. This is the pure negative moment, where meaning itself seems to disappear.

Slowly, the political thrust becomes more pronounced, more negative with regard to social convention, as the narrator begins to see initial *Bildung* as obfuscating reality:

Quand on essayait de parler des Beaux-Arts et de la question sociale [à Aden], cela sonnait si faux et si vain que toutes les voix se taisaient. On sentait qu'il était inutile de

prendre des déguisements au sérieux, ils paraissaient déplacés comme des obscénités à un repas d'évêques. (113)

This distance – which affects not only the narrator, but all the Europeans in Aden – slowly becomes a critical distance and then negates the reality of bourgeois ideology, whether in the form of *Beaux-Arts* or acceptable public discourse about the social question. The colonial space discloses ideology as ideology, leaving only the naked facts of colonization. This mode of semi-public discourse is out of place, a *déguisement* for which those who have seen Aden and all it implies about the occident have no need. In Aden, “[l]a vie des hommes” is “réduite à son état de pureté extrême,” which is “l’état économique.” Because of this distillation down to its essence, “on ne courait jamais le risque d’être trompé par les miroirs déformants qui la réfléchissent en Europe” (113), which makes it possible to see “les fondations de la vie d’Occident” (114). The colonial space is free of ideology—it has “kein anderes Band zwischen Mensch und Mensch übriggelassen als das nackte Interesse” (*MkP*, 26). The confrontation with “einem Nicht-Unmittelbaren, einem Fremdartigen” in Aden, which, in its mirroring function, shows the “résidu impitoyable, descriptible et sec” (110) of life in Europe, launches the process of development that culminates in political activity. Nizan begins to gain a direction for his critique in trying to “[c]omprendre les lois de cette machinerie, la source de sa force motrice” in order to “entrevoir le but vers lequel il n’appartient qu’aux hommes de marcher” (110). But this process is painful, alienating. He characterizes his developmental process as passage through “étapes mortelles,” and notes that he is in some sense saved by his inability to flee into the illusions of thought or “l’art pour l’art;” instead, he “hai[t] cette vie” and forces himself to “peindre des hommes libres, voulant être réellement et non en songe. . . tout ce qu’il est donné à l’homme de l’être” (130). Finally, he comes to recognize “la puériorité de la peur” that possessed him and his friends in

Paris, leading him to a full denunciation of all that came before, the negation of the negation that brings him to act:

[L]es actions qu'on nous proposait conformément au rang de nos familles, à la civilité puérile et honnête, aux fonctions abstraites du monde bourgeois, étaient tellement absurdes et vaines, que nous pensions que toutes les actions sont éternellement stériles comme les bonnes sœurs qui boivent de la tisane pour faire couler leurs seins, que la nuit noire est l'unique décor où meurent les hommes. (131)

The realization is not sudden, but rather part of a long, multilayered process of alienation and return – but a return to somewhere else, to a transformed and transformative *Sittlichkeit*. The opening *désœuvrement* and suffocation lead to the negation of his initial formation and its ideological roots and finally creates a new possibility for action under the auspices of a new universal in which “actions” are no longer “stériles.”

While the colonial space is important for Nizan and the developmental trajectory, dependent on the reduction of human affairs to their “état économique,” it has this function by separating the Europeans from Europe and by disclosing a level of dejection that had, until that point, existed only abstractly for the narrator. Nizan’s depiction of colonized subjects is consciously undifferentiated, and he views their situation as exploited simply as a further condensation of the alienating and therefore inhuman or anti-human aspects of bourgeois society. The colonized always appear on the margins, in scenes like the following from a short trip to Djibouti:

Impossible de voir des hommes plus en ruine que les sujets du sultan : les ouvriers que j’ai vus sortir des mines de bauxite sur la route d’Aix-en-Provence, couverts de terre rouge, respiraient la force et la joie auprès d’eux. Vingt mille êtres mènent cette vie de



purgatoire pour que ce marquis de Carabas indigène puisse regarder ses prés verdier à l'ombre des avions militaires anglais, puisse se regarder en paix dans ses boules de verre et voyager au Caire, à Londres et à Paris. En allant vers Lahej, on pensait à l'herbe, aux femmes qu'on voudrait renverser sur elle après plusieurs mois de chasteté, mais voici qu'il faut demander à l'herbe les mêmes comptes qu'aux cheminées d'usine de Saint-Ouen. (120)

Nizan explicitly depicts colonized subjects as workers exploited to a greater degree consistent with the PCF line of the 1920s, that colonization is the necessary result of capitalist expansion, but that the exploitation of colonized peoples does not appear as fundamentally different. The comparisons to French workers do not serve to exoticize the workers of Djibouti, but rather to underline the even less humane treatment they receive and to call attention to the fact that not even the landscapes or nature are free from the traces of compulsion. The “vie de purgatoire” is also an image Nizan uses, at the beginning of the text, to qualify the life of his own generation in France, further demonstrating that his understanding of exploitation extended to colonial subjects; but at no point does he attribute a particularly revolutionary capacity to them. Indeed, the implication of this scene is the opposite; they are even more “en ruine” than it would be possible for anyone else to be, which may imply that they are in an even worse position to resist exploitation. To clarify my comment above about the *conscious* lack of differentiation, it is important to understand that Nizan believes that he is in the best position to fight against capitalism in France, because one can only truly hate what one knows (138). He depicts the colonized not as unknowable but as unknowable to him, because it would take ten years to learn their language and to learn of their struggles. One of the other few explicit mentions of colonized subjects in *Aden Arabie* shows a similar kind of sympathy and the reason Nizan refuses to

provide a more concrete depiction of their plight:

Il y avait les Hindous, les Arabes, les Noirs impénétrables. Je n'avais pas dix ans à perdre pour fixer ma vie parmi eux et d'abord les connaître. Tout compté, tout pesé, je vis parmi les Européens. Ce sont les maîtres des hommes qu'il faut combattre et mettre à bas. Les belles connaissances viendront après cette guerre. (108)

Nizan responds to the colonized with solidarity, but patently refuses to make anything other than concrete comparisons related to the exploitation of these “impénétrables” others.<sup>81</sup> In other words, his portrayal of colonized subjects is sympathetic and self-reflective, but stops far short of attributing to them any kind of particular revolutionary potential or subjectivity and arguably privileges, presumably for tactical reasons, the struggle against the bourgeoisie of the colonizing countries over the immediate fight against colonial oppression in the colonies themselves. As Koenrad Geldhof aptly summarizes:

Dans *Aden Arabie*, la problématique coloniale reste périphérique et l'image de l'Afrique passablement conventionnelle : en somme, l'Afrique ne vaut que dans la mesure où ce continent condense et dévoile les structures économiques fondamentales de l'*Europe*. Nizan n'attend au fond rien des Africains et il ne les considère certainement pas comme une sorte d'avant-garde révolutionnaire. (69)

In the final pages of the text, Nizan questions the necessity of his journey to Aden for the development of his political consciousness but insists that it was necessary, precisely because of the space of Aden and its ability to “dévoile les structures économiques fondamentales” of the metropole. While he admits that it may not have been unnecessary for some “d'aller déterrer des

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<sup>81</sup> For an excellent, recent discussion of Nizan's stance vis-à-vis colonialism, see Ravet, David. “Nizan et le voyage aux colonies. Une confrontation entre *Aden Arabie* et des affiches coloniales,” *Revue de littérature comparée*, vol. 333, no. 1, 2010, pp. 57-68.

vérités si ordinaires dans les déserts tropicaux et chercher à Aden les secrets de Paris,” he doubles-down on the importance of *das Ferne* for his own development:

Je ne regrette rien : elles [les vérités si ordinaires] crevaient les yeux, elles se manifestaient dans une lumière si éclatante que je suis assuré de ne jamais les perdre. Je fus trop proche de ma fin, pour les regarder comme des erreurs de jeunesse. Personne ne me fera croire que la croissance explique tout.

Les chances que j’avais de les rencontrer dans les murs du cinquième arrondissement me paraissent encore maigres. On s’apprêtait à jeter sur moi tant de couvertures : j’aurais pu être un traître, j’aurais pu étouffer. (133)

If, for Hegel, the idea of a literal distance is merely a (necessary) self-deception of the young, Nizan, showing in his own development the necessity of a more extreme form of alienation than Hegel thought necessary for formal *Bildung*, counters that the radical distance was necessary to avoid the obfuscating and suffocating “couvertures” he would have experienced at home.<sup>82</sup> The necessity of an alienation from his “unmittelbare Welt der Gefühle” to negate initial *Bildung* and find a new universal for Nizan benefits from this more radical distance. If travel is one such possible liminal experience for Nizan, it has its own share of dangers, as does the radical experience of a near-fatal illness that contains similar potential in *La conspiration*. Yet here again we see the overwhelming particularity of the journey portrayed; to replicate it, one needs to be a student of philosophy who finds on a colonial venture the condensed bankruptcy of European society and a new universal in the fight against it “dans l’ombre du proletariat.” A tour company serving such a niche could hardly hope for bank loans.

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<sup>82</sup> It is also possible to read this as yet another instance where Nizanien development mirrors Hegel’s schema; the narrator is, after all, famously young, and so suffering from a delusion of the young that enables him to eventually call that same delusion into question brings him close to the Hegelian model of growth arising out of negation and return.

In the final analysis, however, Nizan does return to the Hegelian line. The final lesson of the journey is that “[t]out le prix du voyage est dans son dernier jour.” For Nizan, there is but one “espèce valide de voyages,” the “marche vers les hommes.” The distance and the radical alienation which negated his initial formation and led him to a new universal also make clear that the sense of the departure is disclosed only by the return. In Nizan’s words, the only valid journey is the “voyage d’Ulysse,” which “se termine naturellement par le retour” (136), while Hegel insists that “die Tiefe und Kraft, die wir erlangen, kann nur durch die Weite gemessen werden, in die wir von dem Mittelpunkte hinwegflohen, in welchen wir uns zuerst versenkt befanden und dem wir wieder zustreben” (321). Gadamer’s elucidation of *Bildung* also stresses this point: it’s “nicht die Entfremdung als solche, sondern die Heimkehr zu sich, die freilich Entfremdung voraussetzt, [dass] das Wesen der Bildung ausmacht” (20). Yet the apparent harmonious agreement of the two positions is only true of the surface. For Nizan, the return has not just elevated the subject, but he also returns somewhere else, to a different *Sittlichkeit* with an altered political polarization. The real dangers of political development, of “la marche vers les hommes,” come to the fore in *Antoine Bloyé* and *La conspiration*, where “die Weite”—this time, the journey will be metaphorical—is stripped of material determinants and thus fraught with the possibility to “devenir un traître” or “étouffer.”

## Chapter Four

### Indeterminate Formations: Paul Nizan's *Antoine Bloyé* and *La conspiration*

This chapter analyzes the complexity of the development of political consciousness in Paul Nizan's *Antoine Bloyé*, treated by most critics as a wholly negative example of political formation, and *La conspiration*, Nizan's final novel. I argue that *Antoine Bloyé* does in fact provide a positive model for the development of class consciousness in a worker that results in betrayal only because capital's ability to differentiate workers through the wage results in the state support that separates Bloyé from the material determinants of class consciousness. After this point, his descent is assured and he cannot achieve a return to *Sittlichkeit*, because, according to the logic of Nizan's literary world, the only form of genuine ethical community, the only true universal is proletarian, and because Antoine was not exposed to the obfuscating mechanisms of bourgeois culture that might have provided him with an illusory substitute. Antoine's betrayal of his class is the consequence of his separation from the material determinants of class consciousness. In *La conspiration*, the developmental trajectories of intellectuals are contingent and accidental because they lack a material basis to develop political consciousness. Instead, only those with a vocation can become communists through a mystical, non-iterable interpellation.

#### I. *Bildung* as betrayal: the negative formation of *Antoine Bloyé*

*Antoine Bloyé* resembles the traditional BR more than any of Nizan's other published works. Inside a frame story, in which an omniscient narrator<sup>83</sup> describes Pierre Bloyé's experience of the death of his father, we learn of the rise and subsequent slow dissolution of a life in a narrative whose frequent references to larger historical currents present it as a type. This

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<sup>83</sup> Doris Kadish has argued that the narrator is, in fact, Pierre Bloyé addressing his father. That the perspective of Pierre plays an important role in the third-person narration is beyond doubt, but it always remains implicit, a possible reading that resists a decisive univocal interpretation.

“negative exemplary apprenticeship” (Suleiman, 86), however, is only able to function as such because it follows the specific structure I have outlined for the political *Bildungsroman*, even the specific form of the *Arbeiterbildungsroman*; but the rise of the eponymous protagonist continues after the point where he has been proletarianized. He is removed from the determinants of proletarian consciousness through training, marriage, and promotion, which leads to an alienation from “seine unmittelbare Welt der Gefühle” that Hegel associates with alienation from ethical community. This separation from *Sittlichkeit* is explicitly described as a betrayal of his class as he continues to climb the social ladder as a railway engineer, eventually becoming a *chef de dépôt*, a position in the upper echelons of workshop logistics and management. There are moments in the life of Antoine Bloyé where the reader gets glimpses of the life that would have provided a new universal as an organized and revolutionary worker, but this potential cannot be realized after Antoine is separated from the material determinants of proletarian life. Nizan’s *Antoine Bloyé* is a crucial text for the project of this dissertation because it portrays the development of a protagonist who, as an historical type, demonstrates first the proletarianization of a peasant, then the development of class consciousness, and, finally, the rapid dissipation of revolutionary essence into a servile passivity as Antoine goes from machinist to overseer, betrays his class, and suffers the *sittlichen Schmerz* of one ripped from the ties that bind him to the proletarian universal. Because of the insistence, at times explicit and at times generated syntactically, on the general validity of the figure of Antoine as a type, the novel allows a privileged glimpse into Nizan’s understanding of the relationship between the individual, class consciousness, and material determinants which help illuminate the fraught developmental paths of his last novel, *La conspiration*. *Antoine Bloyé* posits class as the primary determinant of political consciousness and the proletariat as the only possibility for *Sittlichkeit*, a life worthy of

*l'homme*, even as it underscores the danger of capital's ability to differentiate through preferential treatment and thereby undermine the revolutionary proletarian project and the humanity of workers implicated in bourgeois repression against their own kind.

Susan Suleiman reads *Antoine Bloyé* as a special type of negative exemplary apprenticeship, in which the hero:

ends up merely with an absence of knowledge, a kind of somnolence. Antoine Bloyé lives his life without ever understanding the system [...] that regulates it. His apprenticeship is a failure, because he does not learn what he should have learned, but what the reader presumably learns in his stead: the horror of the capitalist system and the necessity for class struggle. (88-9)

While this reading is not without its insights, it fails to heed the details of Antoine's development and the role played by material determinants in the text. In this section, I show the way the protagonist develops a consciousness appropriate to his class, which culminates in his support of a strike and his affair with the Parisian service-worker Marcelle. It is only after he is promoted out of a position of solidarity and into the role of an overseer that his consciousness begins to lapse. Only then does the passivity that the text associates with this negative apprenticeship—Suleiman's "somnolence"—become the dominant mode of narration. The slow development of Antoine's self-consciousness and his eventual failure to achieve self-knowledge and to remain with his class is attributed from the start to the rigors of his trajectory, initially seen in the education program at *Arts et Métiers* in Angers, which he begins attending at the age of 18 in 1880. After a description of the strenuous days, the narrator explains that

cet entassement d'actions, le manque d'argent, les roues aux dents vives d'un mécanisme soigneusement serré ne laissent pas à Antoine beaucoup de loisirs pour rêver et apprendre

à se connaître : ces loisirs n'appartiennent qu'aux jeunes gens qui tombent du lycée dans les études ouvertes, libres et lentes des universités : tout le monde ne fait pas son droit.

(LOC 988)

This passage explicitly links Antoine's lack of self-knowledge to the determinants of his life.

The pages preceding the passage outline the function of Arts et Métiers in government efforts to support the second great wave of industrial expansion under the Second Empire and Third Republic in France and connect the possibility of Antoine's formation explicitly to larger historical, material forces. A second implication of the passage reiterates a crucial point from *Aden Arabie*: that self-consciousness in the form described, "se connaître," belongs to those raised in the classical tradition of the humanities, to the true sons of the bourgeoisie. Self-consciousness for Antoine would, of necessity, have a different form of appearance. In the novel, class consciousness offers Antoine his rare moments of insight, as I show below.

While Suleiman's argument is not entirely disproved if Antoine's somnolence arises from larger historical forces, it does appear incomplete. Antoine's formal education, however, also contains an attempt at organized revolt that ends in failure. The description of his state of mind before and in reaction to this failure is telling, because the narrator explicitly links it to the absence of workers' mediations that might disclose Antoine's identity with his class. He has to take a job during the summer holidays to support himself throughout the year, as his father is unable to pay for his upkeep. To this end, he works at a forge in Saint-Nazaire thirteen hours a day:

Toute cette hâte, toute cette besogne ! Ce n'est pas assez de savoir que le temps de pauvreté finira, il se révolte, il sent toutes ces choses en lui sans emploi, tous ces pouvoirs, ces désirs qui voudraient des vacances pour s'épanouir, il devine que des forces



ennemies conspirent contre l'épanouissement des jeunes hommes de sa classe, il connaît la colère, il y a place pour la haine dans cette tête de dix-neuf ans, la haine pour les gardes-chiourme de l'Ecole, pour les ingénieurs des Chantiers. De quel côté est-il placé? Il se sent envahi par les colères ouvrières, mais il est cependant suspendu au bord d'une vie où il sait qu'il commandera des ouvriers : comment s'y reconnaître? (LOC 1029)

Here, the foreshadowing of betrayal and the split in Antoine's own consciousness brought about by the knowledge of his future position is also accompanied by descriptions of an affective nexus impossible to associate with the state of sleep. Instead, Antoine's rage at the treatment of "des jeunes hommes de sa classe" by "des forces ennemies" places him firmly in a mode of collective, revolutionary affect. His call to strike links their "malheur" to the fact "d'être isolés" (*idem*), but his fellow workers do not follow his call. He is let off easily by the director because of his youth and because he "sera peut-être un chef demain" (*idem*), but the narrator ties Antoine's failure to develop germinal class consciousness not to a lack of self-knowledge à la Suleiman but to a lack of knowledge stemming from the absence of workers' mediations:

Antoine a eu cette révolte sans rien savoir, il n'a jamais entendu parler de socialisme, de syndicats : le temps n'est pas encore venu où Pelloutier fondera à Saint-Nazaire la première bourse du travail. Ce discours dans l'usine lui reviendra plus tard, bien des années plus tard, comme un des souvenirs importants de sa vie. Il ne s'explique pas sa colère : c'est que depuis l'âge de quinze ans, il est lancé sur une voie inflexible où il n'y a pas de place pour le relâche du corps et de l'esprit, où il n'y a pas de carrefours, de vagabondages, mais seulement de brefs arrêts. (LOC 1067)

Antoine's failure to develop class consciousness results from a lack of exposure to workers' mediations and relates to the paradoxical nature of programmatism identified in relation to

Wenzel Holec in the second chapter of this dissertation. As my model for the development of class consciousness would predict, a successful second-order *Bildung* has to be accompanied by exposure to socialist ideas and workers' mediations; without the possibility of successful, collective identity and associated struggle, the lone worker is doomed at best to inattention and scorn and at worst to expulsion from the wage and the possibility of self-reproduction. The material determinants of workers' lives do not allow for the leisure of contemplation and thus require the mediations of the class to "parler de socialisme, de syndicats" and provide the collective basis for struggle embodied in the passage by the absent "bourse du travail," an institution in France that combined the syndical movement with workers' education and strike funds, among other things. If this moment remained crucial in Antoine's memory for the rest of his life, it is because it was his first missed chance at discovering his identity with an alternate universal; but his failure does not result from sleepwalking but from the immaturity of the workers' movement and its concomitant inability to function as such. Nizan's portrayal of class consciousness and its relation to workers' *Sittlichkeit* is thus extremely similar in form to that of Bloyé's contemporary Wenzel Holec. The difference in outcomes results from the role of the French state in Bloyé's education, from Bloyé's aptitude for mathematics, and from the introduction of the national system of scholarships during the Third Republic and Second Empire, which remove Bloyé from the proletarian universal through capital's ability to harness difference—here, in the form of social status and differential wages. Nizan's contribution is, in keeping with his overall understanding of the relationship between human emancipation and bourgeois society, the addition of a dramatized *malaise* that seems to stem, in AB, from the

*Sittlichen Schmerz* of separation from one's own class.<sup>84</sup> This is consistent with Nizan's position, sketched in the last chapter, regarding the impact of bourgeois alienation on human beings. In Nizan's world, it is impossible for anyone but the most malicious and successful capitalist or greatest coward to experience bourgeois *Sittlichkeit* without misgivings. The only true form of ethical community that presents itself in Nizan's literary world is proletarian *Sittlichkeit*,<sup>85</sup> which becomes especially evident in the passages where Nizan depicts the ethical community of workers or a particularly acute betrayal of it; this is experienced as painful and alienating (in Nizan's sense of alienation from *l'homme*) and robs Antoine's life of love, joy, and agency.

Two primary thematic axes expose the narrator to proletarian *Sittlichkeit*, although never fully, because Antoine is predestined to complete the initial separation from his place of departure: a love interest, the combative proletarian Marcelle, and solidarity amongst (always male) workers at the beginning of his career. It is only after the inexorable march towards a higher social status separates Antoine from these latent possibilities that his promise of treachery is fulfilled and his slow but inevitable descent into nothingness begins. The narrator links both of these forces explicitly in the text when speaking of Antoine's solidarity with his colleagues and their anger:

Antoine prenait parti pour cette colère. Il était parmi ces hommes, leurs histoires étaient ses histoires. Grand lui racontait ses « ennuis », les maladies de ses enfants, l'usure de sa femme. Antoine formait alors des pensées ouvrières : entre Marcelle et le service des

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<sup>84</sup> I resist the temptation to call this "false consciousness" because the term has a distinct meaning in the work of Marx and Engels, where it is applied exclusively to the bourgeoisie. Antoine's experience does however have definite parallels to Lukàcs's account of false consciousness. See Ron Eyerman, "False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory." *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 24, no. 1/2, 1981, pp. 43–56; and Georg Lukàcs, "Class Consciousness," in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*.

<sup>85</sup> It would be interesting to consider the relationship between romantic love and proletarian *Sittlichkeit* in Nizan's work as a whole, including his journalism and literary criticism, which make oblique references to the relationship, especially with regard to the portrayal of women in Nizan's work.

trains, il oubliait complètement qu'il pourrait être un jour, demain, du côté des maîtres. Il n'avait pas assez d'imagination pour se décrire son avenir, il adhérait à la vie présente. Il ne pensait pas au lendemain. (LOC 1454)

Here we see how proletarian *Sittlichkeit* arises out of the shared lived experience of proletarian exploitation. Antoine recognizes the identity of his own position and those of “ces hommes” because of the identity of their “histoires,” a word that means both story and history, in a way that shows that class consciousness, these “pensées ouvrières,” develops as a response to a specific set of material conditions. Like in Antoine’s attempt to organize a strike, where the necessary workers’ mediations were not available to lend an objective character to Antoine’s revolt, the novel shows Antoine’s final treachery as the direct result of the distance between where Antoine ends up and the objective determinants of proletarian life. At the beginning of his career in Paris, Antoine lives and works amongst other railroad workers, machinists, and skilled workers and feels that “il était l’un d’eux” (LOC 1160). His time working on the fast, long-distance trains sees him meld into the team and their machine; they personify the locomotive as they share cramped hotel rooms, cups of wine on the platforms, and call one another “compagnon” (LOC 1376). The narrator calls these moments of solidarity with machinists and regular workers a bridge and compares it, favorably, with Marcel; but other forms of male friendship in the novel prove to only re-enact a collectivity reserved for workers. Michel Besnier has shown that Nizan’s use of the demonstrative *ce* and *ces* allows Nizan to collectivize certain figures in *Antoine Bloyé* (67), but he does not mention the pronoun “on,” which appears as a collective noun and is used unironically in the passages where Antoine is together with his team of machinists and chauffeurs and their engine. It positively signifies, also through repetition, the collective identity and a kind of joy that issues from this melding of workmen and machine: “On

sort le panier du coffre, on boit sur le quai des petites stations, le soir tombe, on navigue comme sur une péniche, vers des feux accueillants” (LOC 1377). Antoine thus has, for a time, a form of class consciousness; it is only the “lendemain” of the above passage that will push his apprenticeship into a negative frame. The positive valence of work with the machines frequently portrayed as a kind of melding together of laborer and tool also recalls Nizan’s theory of alienation; the possibility of a form of work that engages all Antoine and the other workers’ potential in a kind of triumphal gesture provides a window into a world of non-alienated labor, while the context within capitalism and frequent reference to the suffering of workers reminds the reader that this is only a window into a possible, not yet actual world.<sup>86</sup>

Antoine also develops close bonds with a group of four other workers who experience the life of skilled workers as “une vie provisoire” because of their shared education, which destines them for greater heights than the machinists without formal study. The narrator describes this friendship in exuberant terms reminiscent of the meaningful group bond of Nizan’s earliest apprenticeship story, *Essais à la troisième personne*:

ils étaient cinq inséparables que paraissaient unir solidement leur solitude de célibataires, la communauté des souvenirs et des vocabulaires, des allusions, et la certitude d'un avenir à peine assez incertain pour les faire parfois rêver de ce qu'ils seraient devenus vingt ou trente ans plus tard... Bloyé, Vignaud, Rabastens, Le Moullec et Martin étaient de la

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<sup>86</sup> This is, of course, also a typical socialist vision about machines from the period, the vein of thought that ends in fully-automated luxury communism; but the portrayal has definitive parallels with the kind of work underlying a Hegelian concept of *Bildung* and this particular aspect of non-alienated labor in Marx as labor in which the organic capacities of the individual are realized in the act and in its product. In Nizan, it becomes, at times, almost a libidinal attachment: “Toute machine est comme un être, elle a ses mœurs, ses facilités, ses résistances, et des caprices. Les hasards du métal et de ses assemblages combinent une personnalité difficile à saisir. Une longue familiarité de la machine et de l'équipe produisait enfin une sorte de fidélité, de mariage : il fallait patiemment pénétrer ce grand animal noir et jaune, réticent comme une personne.” (LOC 1376) One might also argue, however, that one can glimpse here the contradiction between the self-affirmation of the proletariat in capital and its autonomous self-affirmation discussed by *Théorie Communiste*.

même promotion et ils possédaient des images communes qui se disposaient comme un texte facilement déchiffrable sous un titre décoré de festons et d'enclumes : Angers 1880-1883. (LOC 1160)

These moments of male companionship, made possible by shared fate, show what might have been for this group who needs, at this point, make no reference to their shared history and can enjoy one another's company in the present. As the narrator remarks immediately following this passage, the bourgeois lives that await them will destroy this possibility, leaving only speaking of their shared past to prevent them from "se taire, s'ennuyer, trembler ensemble" (*idem*)—another indication that true forms of sociability belong only to workers in Nizan's literary world. This is particularly evident in light of my argument in the last chapter about the necessity of revolutionary content for overcoming alienation as Nizan understands it; the future managers and overseers here are destined to end on the side of the oppressors, as supporters of alienation, which precludes the possibility of genuine camaraderie.

In a particularly interesting intertextual moment with regard to the BR, the group of friends climb to the top of Montmartre and look down upon the city in a recreation of Rastignac's triumphal declaration of war on Parisian high society at the end of Balzac's *Père Goriot*. But the narrator is quick to tell the reader how to interpret the scene, assuring us that "ces jeunes gens ne pensaient pas à la conquête de Paris, ce rêve n'était pas pour eux" (LOC 1214). Their universal is not that of the aristocratic arriviste who adapts well to bourgeois society and can claim such gestures as his own; their initial embeddedness in proletarian life determines their possibilities to live in human community. This aimless wandering through Paris, even without thoughts of conquest, nevertheless shows one of the few moments of Antoine's life in a collective and able to act in an unalienated way. They walk "sans but et sans raisons, pour le

plaisir” feeling “assemblés en un seul faisceau” (*idem*). These moments, whilst deprived of their positive force by their structural significance as a moment of treachery in the narrative, are nevertheless noteworthy because they show Antoine glimpses of community. The negative thrust comes not from the experiences themselves, which are rendered hollow by their reactionary character in the Manichean logic of Nizan’s literary world, but from the fact that all the originally working-class members of the group will eventually betray their class, condemning themselves and their erstwhile friendships to a life worthy only of scorn on the side of the oppressors. The narrator insists that this liberty “des noctambules” is just a cheap imitation of the pastimes of the sons of the rich that ultimately reveals itself as without merit, as yet another force that separates “Antoine de ses frères” (LOC 1241), but the similarities between these scenes and those of Antoine with his *équipe* nonetheless gesture towards an experience of proletarian *Sittlichkeit* in a (male) collective.

The narrator contrasts this noctambulism and exposure to bourgeois society through the petty-bourgeois world of his friend Martin’s mother, where Antoine learns “à se tenir,” (LOC 1306), with “la force Marcelle” (LOC 1309). Unlike male camaraderie, Marcelle appears as an unadulterated form of proletarian *Sittlichkeit* in the novel and is consistently associated with resistance and hatred for the oppressors of the working-class. When his affair with her ends, so do his chances for a life worthy of the name. Marcelle is the widow of a train conductor who runs a café with her mother near Antoine’s quarters in Paris. The narrator emphasizes her understanding of his work and links her desirability to Antoine’s earliest experiences of sexuality in Bretagne, thus linking her explicitly to the proletarian solidarity Nizan experiences with other workers on the “rapides” and his peasant heritage. The initial description of their affair is telling:

Ses amis le raillaient et moquaient « ta rouquine », mais il franchissait sans arrière-

pensée, sans honte les complots décents de l'amitié, de l'ambition, il s'enfonçait dans le lit de plume de Marcelle comme dans l'univers brûlant et pauvre qui lui convenait le mieux. L'amour de Marcelle luttait contre l'attrait d'une destinée solidement préméditée. Couché près de la jeune femme, il lui parlait de son travail avec des mots professionnels qu'elle comprenait ; elle lui contait avec une grande ardeur de haine contre les gens riches de tristes histoires de Paris. (LOC 1353)

This passage demonstrates well not only Marcelle's importance but the determinant nature of *Sittlichkeit* for the narrative. We see the "amitié" and "ambition" desired by the bourgeois social world as "complots," because they belong to the wrong ethical community. The language of treachery is firmly connected to the former, while the verb "franchir" is positive, laden with connotations of autonomy and effort not otherwise associated with Antoine in the novel. This "univers brûlant et pauvre qui lui convenait le mieux" further suggests the importance of class determinism for Nizan's figures; even if the worker can escape the suffering associated, from the beginning of the narrative, with the life of workers, it will be at the expense of a deeper form of well-being and the chance to be understood. Nizan's workerism takes the form of a proletarian *Sittlichkeit* in consequence of the Manichean worldview discussed in detail in the last chapter – the individual worker, like the individual human, can only find a life worthy of *l'homme* insofar as he fights against the system of human oppression represented by French bourgeois society. The passage also shows, through the juxtapositions of the last sentence, a kind of balance in the relationship not associated with bourgeois romance in the novel. Indeed, Anne, the woman Antoine marries, is portrayed as a child, while Marcelle is Antoine's equal in the relationship and even, politically and humanly, his superior according to the logic of the novel.

After the break with Marcelle and the promotion away from the material determinants of



proletarianization, Antoine begins to lose substance and is slowly effaced from his own life story. As Doris Kadish has argued, he even stops speaking, the discourse attributed to him diminishes into nothing:

One feature [of the effacement of Antoine] is the stripping away from the individual protagonist of such narrative attributes as voice and vision, a stripping away which is presented as corresponding to the reification caused by bourgeois life. As an individual, Antoine Bloyé cannot speak or see because, like his social class, he has been alienated from natural contact with himself, the world, and others. (4)

Like Suleiman, Kadish pays insufficient attention to the initial developmental arc of the novel, in which Antoine – for a brief period – begins to develop “voice and vision,” qualities not associated with his pre-proletarian, peasant heritage or his life after marriage to Anne. But the passivity and eventual “stripping away” of any recognizable agency or, indeed, humanity from Antoine is undeniable, and Kadish is correct to situate this slow descent into nothingness as corresponding to bourgeois life.

Bloyé is himself the victim of a treachery on the part of his bourgeois masters in the third and final part of the novel. At the start of the First World War, the railway workshops Antoine oversees are converted to manufacture artillery for the war effort. After a delivery of bad munitions, a military inquest finds Antoine in dereliction of duty and his superiors inform him he should be content to not be charged as a spy or saboteur. He leaves the workshop in a stupor on his final day, which the narrative explicitly codes as the last day of his life:

Voilà. Il allait continuer à manger, toute sa vie, les choses allaient se dérouler, il allait continuer à dormir, à manger. Il n'aurait plus aucun orgueil, il était comme un soldat qui vient d'être dégradé... Il se rappela soudain des phrases que sa belle-mère citait : un sac

vide ne tient pas debout, tant qu'il y a de la vie il y a de l'espoir... Il rentra chez lui. Sa femme se mit à pleurer en le voyant. Pierre regardait ses parents avec angoisse parce qu'il sentait dans la maison un air de débandade et de défaite. La bonne servit le dîner : « Mange, disait Anne. Il faut prendre des forces... » C'est ainsi que des traits partis du nuage même de la guerre allèrent frapper au loin un homme qui croyait être heureux. (LOC 3410)

This moment has a double function in the narrative. On the one hand, it is the pinnacle of the negative moment of the apprenticeship for Antoine, where the false promises of arrivisme are laid bare. It makes all that came before laughable in that Antoine is now the victim of a double-treachery; he betrayed his own class and happiness to join the class that betrayed him in turn. Life around him will continue, but he no longer exists. In a related vein, it shows the barrenness of the bourgeois universal, the pinnacle of the Lukácsian “rich and enriching resignation” that should have accompanied Antoine’s development proves itself to be the total evacuation of significance and life which gives the lie to the belief that he was ever “heureux.” The war and Antoine’s betrayal by bourgeois society didactically demonstrate that no worker, no matter how dedicated, can escape alone from “la dureté de la vie ouvrière” (LOC 943).

*Antoine Bloyé* locates, in line with Nizan’s other work, the only possibility for *Sittlichkeit* in the revolutionary proletariat. Underlying this portrayal is a workerism that functions as an historically conditioned essence. Antoine, as a worker, can only find self-actualization in the workers’ movement. While this fulfillment is only partial, since the real fact of exploitation always remains, the possibility of resignation to the proletarian universal offers Antoine, and by extension all members of his class, the only true possibility of successful *Bildung*. Nizan portrays Antoine’s failure, however, as part of a dialectic between socio-historical forces and personal

failings; his treachery is never merely moral, but rather historically conditioned. *Antoine Bloyé's* negative apprenticeship, however, paints a clear picture of the material basis for political consciousness and action that confirms the salience of the model for the development of class consciousness suggested in the second chapter of this dissertation. The worker becomes a proletarian—the latter understood as the class conscious instance of the former—through proletarian life and the proletarian movement; without this embeddedness in the every day experience of exploitation *and* the existence of workers' mediations, Nizan's work, in line with the worker-authors of the second chapter, provides no causal nexus to account for class consciousness. This has important consequences for *La conspiration*, wherein the fraught lives of its intellectual protagonists can only be saved by a narrative *deus ex machina* to make up for the absent material determinants of class consciousness.

## **II. Indeterminate imperatives: the fragility of political development in *La conspiration***

*La conspiration* is a complex novel that allows for a variety of readings and refuses a neat, monolithic interpretation. Koenraad Geldof and Maurice Arpin have shown that early critics tended to focus on *La conspiration*, and Nizan's work in general, as examples of his non-orthodoxy as both writer and communist in ways that tell us more about the critics and their own historical moments than they do about Nizan's text. Geldof identifies three tendencies that have historically plagued scholarship of Nizan: first, critics seek to show that Nizan was a heterodox communist; second, that he wrote fiction like a heterodox communist; third, that this combination of aesthetic and political heterodoxy create the ideal type of revolutionary literature or *littérature engagée*. Michael Scriven's 1988 chapter on the novel is exemplary of this critical trend. Scriven argues that "the underlying theme of *La Conspiration* is the painful transition from an immature to a mature politics," and sees in the text a simultaneous "indictment of the

*uncertainty* of pre-communist alienation” and “of the *certainty* of sectarian communist simplicity” (148-9, emphasis in original). He refers to this “dual resonance” as “the ideological secret” of the novel. Scriven’s goal is to save the novel for heterodox communism, which allows him to draw simplistic conclusions from the very aspects of the text that seem to demand nuance and aptly demonstrate the need for Arpin and Geldof’s meta-criticism.

Popular work on *La Conspiration* similarly downplays the omnipresent ambiguity that an adequate reading would need to address, but in the name of the literary – here, Nizan the author needs to be saved from Nizan the Stalinist, in line with the general tenor of a certain line of Nizan studies since Solal’s biography of Nizan as a family man and accidental communist. The following passage from Claude Herzfeld’s 2010 chapter on *La conspiration*, for example, demonstrates the common methodological and imaginative shortcomings of these readings, which seek to emphasize the alleged literariness and downplay both the communism of the author and the ideology of the critic:

Mise au service de la plus grande escroquerie de l'Histoire, l'idéologie — et la propagande, et la phraséologie qui en découlent — risque de frapper *La Conspiration* d'obsolescence. Or ce roman est encore lu, malgré les goulags, Pol Pot, la chute du mur de Berlin... Cette survie s'explique, à notre sens, par la littérarité de l'œuvre — malgré le prêchirêcha stalinien —, c'est -à-dire le discours [...] Si la première partie de *La Conspiration* donne son titre au roman et désigne une action dont la nature est collective, les deux autres parties qui portent le nom de "Catherine" et de "Serge" centrent l'intérêt sur des individus.

It's unnecessary to comment in detail on this passage, whose rabid anticommunism is equaled only by its superficiality of analysis, but it is representative of the thrust of certain readings of

Nizan's work in general and of *La conspiration* in particular. Indeed, the proposition that a communist intellectual and party functionary for the PCF between the wars stands in an immediate relation to Pol Pot and gulags that can only finally be mediated "par la litt  rit   de l'oeuvre" invites the question as to whom or what has been put in the service of "la plus grande escroquerie de l'Histoire." The simple opposition between individual and collective Herzfeld uses to justify the non-communism of the novel is also puzzling. While such binary oppositions are without doubt frequently found in proletarian literature and are an important tenet of socialist realism, the appearance of a romantic relationship between individuals seems an insufficient proof of liberalism. A related way to read the novel is to do the same in reverse; instead of searching for literariness beyond the political, the novel is read as a *roman    these* that helps reveal, to speak with Michael Scriven's monological reading, "the core of the doctrinal message" (153). These two methods are often mixed with a more or less rigorous historicism, where the doctrinal message (or lack thereof) points to certain aspects of Nizan's life, times, and personal relationship to the party.

Of the few critical works on the novel in English, most at least mention the importance of aspects of the novel that relate to formation. Nicolaj L  becker (2013), for example, discusses at many points the relationship between *La conspiration* and the *Bildungsroman*, but his use of the term is inexact and doesn't contribute in any meaningful way to his reading of the novel as a commingling of struggles of recognition. Instead, L  becker avoids the problem by recasting the Hegelian "*Bildungsprozess*" as a search for recognition (25) without clarifying how that process is understood. Angela Kershaw mentions somewhat offhand the "political criteria set by the text" for achieving successful "*Bildung*" (37) without sketching those criteria in any systematic way, though her feminist reading is illuminative of the political possibilities of one of Nizan's most

substantial female characters. Kershaw's reading also draws important attention to the masculine coding of Nizan's intellectuals and points to the importance of virility or its absence in the development of the three main characters. Scriven and Susan Suleiman go furthest in the critical literature in trying to read the novel seriously as a novel of apprenticeship or *Bildungsroman*. For Scriven, "*La Conspiration* records with varying degrees of depth and complexity, a series of concurrent apprenticeships, some concluding negatively, others concluding at the threshold of possible solutions" (150). The unfortunate search in Scriven's account, however, for that which reveals the "core of the doctrinal message" (153) makes it difficult for him to see the nuance and uncertainty so difficult, in my reading, to ignore; he also fails to account for the relative arbitrariness of those apprenticeships that end up "at the threshold of possible solutions." Suleiman's Greimasian reading insists repeatedly that the novel can be productively read as a *Bildungsroman*; for her, however, this is a structural rather than theoretical category that serves to underpin her reading of the novel as a *roman à thèse*. While *Authoritarian Fictions* does less violence to Nizan's texts than Scriven's reading, the ultimate focus on uncovering the underlying message of the novel based on structural aspects leads to a reduced awareness of the contingency underlying processes of formation in the novel; structural causality allows for a reading of development that frequently flirts with a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* analysis. Though published in French, Claudia Bouliane's recent (2018) exhaustive reading of adolescence and its linguistic markings in the text argues that *La conspiration* defines its protagonists according to their age more than any other characteristic (194) and refers to the "situation existentielle" of the protagonists as "celle d'être encore en formation" (212), but doesn't go further than to thoroughly demonstrate the (semantic and syntactic) situation of constant uncertainty, critique, and re-evaluation experienced by Pluvillage, Laforgue, and Rosenthal, which she rightly

attributes to the important theme of adolescence in the novel.

My purpose here is to define the content of political formation and to compare the developmental arcs of the three primary figures. What path, if any, can an intellectual take to develop political consciousness in *La conspiration*? What obstacles does such a developmental trajectory face? Finally, I consider the implications these models have for conceptualizing political *Bildung*. To anticipate my argument, successful political *Bildung* in *La conspiration* involves a complete rejection of the bourgeoisie and its values; overcoming poetic forms of revolutionary activity; exposure to workers and communist ideas; and joining the Communist Party. These markers, however, all appear as necessary but never sufficient grounds for successful political development – the relationship is not causal and the success or failure does not allow for universalization or generalization for any other actor. While Kershaw, Lübecker, Scriven, and Suleiman all place great weight on the choices of the characters and the consequences they have for the narrative, an attentive reader could also be scandalized by the apparent lack of choice, especially in a novel that allegedly avoids superficial social determination (Kershaw, 39). Indeed, *La conspiration* portrays many pivotal moments in the development of its three protagonists as contingent, arising out of a tangled web of circumstances and personal idiosyncrasies that call into question the possibility of political *Bildung* for members of the bourgeoisie.

The novel centers around the fraught psychological and political development of three young French intellectuals in Paris, their successful launch of a radical philosophical journal, and the eponymous naïve and eventually unsuccessful attempt at a military and industrial conspiracy in the name of proletarian revolution. While it may be surprising, *Aden Arabie* and its ideas are omnipresent in the novel despite the seven-year gap in composition, which is consistent with

James Steele's argument that the image of the communist intellectual in Nizan's work did not significantly change throughout his life. *Aden Arabie* even anticipates the form of the three primary developmental trajectories portrayed in the text; when the narrative voice in *Aden Arabie* wonders if he could have achieved the same developmental path in France, he responds in the negative because he could have "être un traître" or "étouffer." The three journeys of formation portrayed in *La conspiration* explore these latter two possibilities in greater depth than their positive correlate.

The novel has a tripartite structure. The first section, entitled "La Conspiration," tells the story of Bernard Rosenthal, the son of an extremely wealthy Jewish *agent de change*<sup>87</sup> and the leader, with Philippe Laforgue, of a group of five friends who launch a radical political journal entitled *Civil War* and then begin and abort the eponymous conspiracy. Philippe convinces an old school friend performing military service to copy the plans for the defense of Paris, which they plan to pass on to the *Parti communiste français* (PCF), whilst Laforgue steals plans for a new train engine from his father's factory that they intend to have sent on to the Soviet Union. The second section focuses on Bernard's love affair with his sister-in-law, Catherine, which causes him to neglect the conspiracy and eventually provokes his suicide. Separating the first and the second part is a series of diary entries by an older friend of Rosenthal's, the successful novelist François Régnier, who functions partially as a foil for the narrator and whose harboring of a communist official in hiding<sup>88</sup> allows for Serge Pluvinage's betrayal. Pluvinage is the least academically successful and also the poorest member of the group; while he is the first and only

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<sup>87</sup> This profession had a monopoly on financial transactions on the French Stock Exchange until 1987; there were variously 60 or 100 at any given time, making the fictional Rosenthals an extremely wealthy and prominent family in the world of the *Bourse*.

<sup>88</sup> Named Carré in the novel, the figure is an invention of Nizan's likely inspired by Paul Vaillant-Couturier, a founding member of the PCF and the author of *Jean sans pain*.



member of the group to join the PCF in the novel, he becomes a police informant, and the novel implies that he will go on to be a police functionary or some other kind of failure. The final section is a frame story entitled “Serge,” in which Laforgue receives a confession from Pluvinage outlining his reasons for betraying the group and relating the treachery to his past experiences and the resentment he bore Rosenthal and Laforgue. At the end of this section, the latter nearly dies of an infection, and only after this brush with death does the narrative suggest that Laforgue has somehow completed a successful developmental trajectory. According to Scriven, the first edition of the novel ended with a footnote indicating that Bloyé and Laforgue would go on to join the PCF (152). Whether or not that is the case, Laforgue’s eventual turn towards the party is implicit, while his primacy of place in the narrative and the way his interventions resemble the narrative voice “laisse penser qu’il agit généralement comme relais de la voix narrative” (Bouliane, 193). Bloyé hardly appears at all in the novel except to echo statements Laforgue makes, but is the son of Antoine Bloyé who appears as a communist militant in Nizan’s second novel, *Le cheval de Troie* (1935), which further supports the contention that Laforgue finishes his apprenticeship at the end of the novel.

The relatively complex narrative voice frequently comments on the actions of the protagonists, making the reader complicit and giving a sort of play-by-play of the misadventures of the young group and the way they are to be interpreted. What Kershaw astutely dubs “the all-encompassing nature of the narratorial irony” (31) in the text leads to mostly negative indications of what is desirable; what is befitting of the successful, integrated adult communist comes through most frequently as the opposite of whatever the characters do, although the narrative aligns itself fundamentally with their critique of French society. As Bouliane says, they are motivated by “aspirations authentiques” (200), but these aspirations serve mostly to indicate the

inadequacy of their actions, which the narrator – despite a deep underlying sympathy for their plight – revels in criticizing. The introduction of the five friends at the beginning of the text drips with this narrative irony:

Peut-être Rosenthal est-il simplement promis à la littérature et ne construit-il que par provision des philosophies politiques ; Laforgue et Bloyé sont encore trop près de leurs arrière-grand-pères paysans pour se livrer sans beaucoup d'arrière-pensées et de restrictions mentales et de sérieuses manifestations mystiques ; Jurien se laisse aller à suivre des camarades singulièrement différents de lui-même : il a le sentiment qu'il jette sa gourme ... et que la Révolution est moins dangereuses pour la santé que les femmes : il est vrai qu'elle donne d'abord moins de plaisirs, elle ne l'empêche pas de faire de mauvais rêves ; Pluinage est peut-être le seul d'entre eux qui adhère pleinement à son action, mais c'est un adhésion qui ne peut que mal finir, parce qu'il ne se soucie au fond que de vengeance et croit à son destin sans retour d'ironie sur lui-même. (30-31)

This passage is crucial not only because it displays the narratorial irony in fine form, but also because it shows at a very early moment in the narrative what I call the contingency of political formation. The phrasing of Rosenthal's description is important – he *may* be “promis à la littérature,” which would make the whole political adventure the novel describes nothing but a long false-start, and the stylistic displacement of the adverb *peut-être* emphasizes this uncertainty or unpredictability, itself a rather ironic remark from an omniscient narrator. The character and political potential of Bloyé and Laforgue is determined to some extent by their historical nearness to their peasant heritage, which tempers Kershaw's claim cited above that the novel avoids social determinism – it resists cheap social determinism, but always takes into account the

historical and psychological determinants under which its characters act.<sup>89</sup> There are also parallels to *Antoine Bloyé* here; the nearness of peasant roots is somehow both a possible link to the proletariat and a weakness with a dubious, reactionary flavor. The description of the novel's traitor, Pluvinage, is perhaps the most shocking in its juxtaposition of laudable commitment to act with a psychological portrait that irremediably denies that commitment larger political and personal meaning. The narrator further emphasizes the contingency of the group's intersocial and political identities, remarking that "[t]out cela est terriblement provisoire, et ils le sentaient bien" (31).

Another description of the group from the novel's opening section deepens this general impression:

Ils étaient plutôt sensibles au désordre, à l'absurdité, aux scandales logiques, qu'à la cruauté, à l'oppression, et la bourgeoisie dont ils étaient les fils leur paraissait enfin moins criminelle et moins meurtrière qu'imbécile. Son dépérissement et sa condamnation, ils n'en doutèrent jamais. Mais ils ne souhaitaient pas se battre pour les ouvriers, qui heureusement ne les avaient point attendus, mais pour eux-mêmes : ils ne les regardaient que comme leurs alliés naturels. Il y a bien de la différence entre vouloir couler un navire et ne pas consentir à couler avec lui...

Le vif dégoût familial qu'ils éprouvaient de la bourgeoisie auraient pu les conduire à une critique violente mais anarchiste. Mais l'anarchie leur paraissait illettrée et frivole : leurs études de professeurs les sauvaient. (59)

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<sup>89</sup> The importance of socio-historical determinants in the portrayal of a life is a much more explicit concern of Nizan's *Antoine Bloyé*, a slightly fictionalized *Bildungsroman* that tells the story of a peasant who becomes an important railway functionary based on the life of Nizan's father. I have chosen not to include it here because it does not conform to the generic standards I have set for a novel of *political* development, highlighting rather the absence of the political in his father's formation, but it would be of great interest for an in-depth exploration of the dialectic of autonomy and social determinism in Nizan's work.

This passage lists more clearly the determinants surrounding the immature politicization of the group. First, unlike the worker-authors of the second chapter and the workers glimpsed in *Antoine Bloyé*, their immediate relationship to the bourgeoisie “dont ils étaient les fils” leads to a different sensibility regarding the violence of capitalist oppression. As Nizan writes in *Les chiens de garde* with reference to bourgeois intellectuals, there is no “écart douloureux entre ce qu’il éprouve et ce qu’il pense” (95). Where workers’ life-writings repeatedly show the relationship of the worker to the bourgeoisie as one characterized by violence in the form of police repression, the threat of unemployment and starvation, mandatory military service, etc., the intellectuals Nizan describes here are not oppressed but offended. Their resistance to the bourgeoisie is a question of consent, whereas it was a question of survival for the workers of the last chapter as well as the workers in whose name Nizan’s narrator criticizes his protagonists. The “différence entre vouloir couler un navire et ne pas consentir à couler avec lui” recalls the discussion for avenues of solidarity in the previous chapter around *se sentir écrasé*; here, Nizan seems more aware of the tenuousness underlying the solidarity encapsulated in this phrase. The strength of their conviction is enough to save their own skins, but not to mount an attack. The metaphor points to the unequal basis for solidarity in bourgeois and proletarian experience operative in the novel; the bellicose stance of the proletariat here is a response to their position as subject “à la cruauté, à l’oppression” of the bourgeoisie. The necessary response is a return of hostilities, the desire to sink the ship of capital; whereas the young intellectuals are simply unwilling to sink with something they find stupid, further implying that such a commitment is “terriblement provisoire.” The risk described of their social critique slipping into anarchy also demonstrates the text’s reliance on contingency. Whatever justifications are offered by the characters for their own actions in the novel, the initial motive for their politicization is familial disgust and the form it

takes resists anarchism because they are overeducated. While the text naturally wants to criticize the point of departure of the young men in order to demonstrate the immaturity with which they initially pursue their political project, it is crucial to emphasize here that the tragic thrust of the novel grows from the failure of the characters to move beyond this point. We can, with Scriven or Kershaw, speak of failed developmental trajectories in the novel, but the text refuses to couch these failures in terms of simple moral failings, poor choices, or as the result of naiveté. While the verbs *vouloir* and *souhaiter* point to will and desire, the elaboration in the second paragraph shifts the focus to happenstance by relegating the content of their politics to the conditional, to the “*aurait pu*” of birth and proclivity. This is also the same conditional we find in *Aden Arabie*, where the author posits that, had he never journeyed to Aden, he could have been a traitor or suffocated, pointing intertextually to the largely accidental nature of political development in Nizan’s portrayal of the radical intelligentsia. Their rejection of anarchy, like their rejection of the bourgeoisie, results from circumstance and sensibility, not from the experience of exploitation, the disclosure of identity with the proletarian movement, or even moral superiority or duty and related categories operative in bourgeois ideologies of formation. Importantly, the above passage also implies that the case for workers is different, that they do have the will to “*couler un navire*” and luckily did not wait for young bourgeois theoreticians to liberate them.

The accidental nature of these developmental trajectories becomes even more apparent at critical moments in the narrative where the characters fail to live up to their own ideals or make a mistake that forecloses the possibility of positive political and personal development – although, as will be shown below in the case of Philippe Laforgue, this positive possibility is itself equivocal. The most tragic moment in the text is Bernard’s suicide. After having an affair with

his sister-in-law,<sup>90</sup> Bernard allows his brother to discover her in bed in his apartment and hopes to provoke a confrontation which would achieve a kind of “engagement irréversible” (80), an idea he associates with the hero of Dostoevsky’s *The Adolescent* (71). This imagined “idée dostoïevskienne” (85) leads Bernard to begin the conspiracy in the first place, but develops into a desire to possess Catherine and steal her away from his family after he abandons it; the stolen plans for an industrial boiler and strategic defense of Paris in case of a workers’ uprising the group manages to acquire lay forgotten in a drawer until after Bernard’s death. The pages preceding Bernard’s suicide describe his own false interpretation of his feelings and motives:

Il se persuade que la pureté de la passion s’est heurtée à la toute-puissance des mythes, de la société, du destin. Mais la passion qu’il croit encore avoir éprouvée pour Catherine est moins pure qu’il ne le pense, elle est mêlée de jalousie, de colère, des vieux ressentiments de l’enfance ; elle manque de force et de candeur. Personne n’est là pour l’éveiller, pour lui dire qu’il s’est composé seul une femme irremplaçable : il est incapable de comparaisons, incapable de se dire qu’à son âge, il peut encore vivre sur les inconnues, et qu’il a été fou de tout jouer sur Catherine.

Il prend pour du désespoir l’impuissance de l’orgueil. (235)

This passage provides two primary causes for Bernard’s suicide. The first stems from the conception of maturity that permeates the novel. Bernard, unable – the repetition of *incapable* is significant – to understand the root causes of his situation and thus to adequately relativize his emotional state, mistakes the “impuissance de l’orgueil” for despair and thus sees suicide as an appropriate reaction to the straw man of an impossible passion of his own making. Like Pluvinage, he acts “sans retour d’ironie sur lui-même.” The second reason, however, has

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<sup>90</sup> Incest is a prevalent theme in criticism of the novel. See Kershaw pp. 33-35.

affinities with the *could have* discussed above; *personne*, no one is there to help him come to this realization. The novel does not provide any specific explanation for why Bernard never speaks with his friends about Catherine. Laforgue only pieces together the causes of his suicide by accident, thanks to a photograph Bernard had addressed but never sent to Catherine he finds in Bernard's papers and an exchange of glances he observes at a family dinner before the affair truly begins. The obvious explanation is purely circumstantial – the affair largely takes place during the summer holidays, where he and his friends are only in contact through letters, and Bernard's obsession with Catherine leaves him little mental capacity to maintain his correspondence or think about much else. Further reasons can be inferred from various situations – none of the young men has much experience with romantic love, which contributes to their situation as adolescents in the process of maturation and is thematized repeatedly in the novel; but the novel refuses here to give either a moral or causal explanation for the fruits of Bernard's failed formation. The alienation experienced by all of the novel's characters, whether they suffer from it or not, is certainly part of any adequate response to the why of Bernard's suicide, but the novel chooses not to account for why this alienation has these consequences in Bernard's case and not in that of Bloyé or Laforgue. Instead, we have a set of circumstances – psychosocial, socioeconomic, historical, etc. – that lead eventually to this moment in which Bernard is *incapable* of understanding what he has experienced in such a way as to deprive suicide of its tragic dignity and *personne* is there to compensate for this deficiency. The scene deprives both the failed as well as the implied successful formation of the communist intellectual—what might have happened if Bernard were able and someone had been there?—of didactic meaning and iterability.

Scriven argues of Rosenthal and Pluvinage's failed trajectories that the "logic of their

family situation leads irreversibly to suicide and betrayal” (151) but neglects, despite highlighting the narrative as a novel of apprenticeship which invites the reader to “interpret the novel in a communist perspective” (153), to account for the fact that a bourgeois upbringing in Nizan always has the potential for suicide and betrayal. In *Le cheval de Troie*, we meet Bloyé five or six years after the events portrayed in *La conspiration*. His description of his past – the only discussion of political formation that appears in the work – is particularly instructive in this regard:

[Cinq ou six ans plus tôt], quand il réfléchissait, sa pensée tournait en rond autour d'elle-même, il ne savait guère aboutir à autre chose qu'à la mort. L'idée de la mort était dans l'air du temps. Les philosophes, les poètes s'en étaient aperçus les premiers, mais elle était comme un gaz essentiel dans l'air que tout le monde respirait, un air irrespirable à cause de tout cet azote de la mort. Il avait fini par se trouver parmi des hommes qui n'étaient pas ceux parmi lesquels il était né. (132)

Here we see the product of a successful communist formation; its success frees Bloyé from an obsession with death and, as what follows this passage shows, gave him a purpose, allowed him to overcome this obsession with death and say “je suis un homme” (*idem*). But the causal chain follows the indeterminate pattern laid out above. Bloyé “avait fini par” becoming a communist; the syntax reduces the role of the agent in the sentence while describing “l'événement le plus important de sa propre vie” (132).

If one of the wishes at the heart of the classical *Bildungsroman* can be expressed as the sublation of the particular in the universal, where the will of the individual and the necessities forced on the individual by the collective coincide in the organic (self-) realization of both, and the political *Bildungsroman*, as I have argued, defers the possibility of such a reconciliation to a



post-revolutionary future and instead situates mature resignation as the humble but useful (Steele) work of militant activism, Nizan's novel, while still portraying this positive possibility, questions the role of self and choice and recognizes the serious obstacles contingency introduces into the political apprenticeship of intellectuals. While the *Arbeiterbildungsroman* posits at least the potential generalizability for all members of a class, which Nizan's novel still seems to posit for workers in the rare moments in which they appear, no such validity exists for the successful completion of an intellectual political apprenticeship. While they may *se sentir écrasé* and see workers as their "alliés naturels," this proves to be a necessary but insufficient condition for commitment to the workers' movement or the PCF. Indeed, political commitment, exposure to suffering, and education do not even promise a successful transition from youth to adulthood; the transition can fail in every direction and only occasionally succeed in one. The generalizability of workers' experience and their political development for the class does not exist for the protagonists of *La conspiration*, not even in an emaciated form that could be reduced to validity for a subset of young intellectuals belonging to a particular movement or moment or possessing certain specific qualities.

An examination of Philippe Laforgue's development in the novel deepens this impression. Laforgue starts the narrative as the best equipped to successfully manage the challenges of adolescence and to arrive at the kind of temporary resignation necessary for the successful completion of a journey of political formation. In the first section of the narrative, Laforgue works with Rosenthal diligently on their revue, but sees the entire project in the same ironical vein as the narrator and constantly hints that a real political vocation is likely significantly less (self-) satisfying and considerably less sexy. He ironically compares the group and Bernard's belief that the "victoire dans la pensée doit précéder la victoire dans la réalité"

(64) to a debate club of the Young Hegelians, *Die Freien*, led by Bruno Bauer,<sup>91</sup> who, like they do, “préféraient décidément les révolutions des consciences aux cassages de gueule des révolutions” (63). This position echoes the narrator’s (and Marx and Engel’s) own, and the identification strengthens the impression of maturity and encourages the reader to view Philippe as the positive, materialist foil to the idealist Bernard.

After Bernard explains his idea for a conspiracy to Philippe in a letter, the latter agrees to help but responds with a rather lengthy critique:

[Rosenthal’s *idée dostoïevskienne*] me paraît incroyablement romantique. S’il est question d’engagement, j’ai comme une impression que l’engagement d’un métallurgiste dans une cellule du parti, dans une cellule d’usine, va beaucoup plus loin que n’importe quelle manifestation à la fois retorse et mystique. Retorse, parce qu’il est explicitement entendu que des types comme nous ne sont jamais pris, ne sont pas prenables. Le métallurgiste risque, et tout de suite, pas dans six mois, pas dans l’intemporel, sa liberté, son travail et sa croûte [. . .] Peut-être que si nous ne redoutions pas une servitude politique et que si rien ne nous semblait plus important que de ne pas choisir, la véritable solution consisterait pour nous aussi dans l’adhésion pure et simple au parti, bien que la vie ne doive pas y être facile tous les jours pour les *intellectuels* [emphasis in original].

Ce sera à voir... (85-6)

He goes on to tell Bernard that his conspiracy seems more likely to bring about Bernard’s “perfection personnelle” than the “réussite concrète de la conquête du pouvoir politique par le prolétariat” (86). The critique of Bernard’s *romantisme* recalls not only the disparaging remarks of the narrator, but also the critique of intellectuals and academic philosophy in *Aden Arabie* and

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<sup>91</sup> I assume this is the reference – in the novel, it appears as the *Doktorclub*.

*Les chiens de garde*. These similarities and the fact that Philippe can see all this and views the “veritable solution” in joining the party – a germinal version of Politzer’s “et fini l’avant-garde” – gives a fairly clear idea of what a successful journey of formation might look like, even if the end of the novel does not explicitly state that Laforgue joins the PCF. Yet Philippe’s suggestion returns to the conditional mode premised on a *peut-être* and a *si*, if, which casts doubt on both the necessity and the possibility of intellectual engagement as a possible form of “servitude politique” while reinforcing the gap between the “engagement” of workers and intellectuals.

In fact, the portrayal of communist workers in the narrative shows that they are not subject to the same set of problems regarding the development of class consciousness. This is already apparent in Laforgue’s description of the metallurgist above. While he stresses the vulnerability of the organized working class, the very real risks taken by a worker “dans une cellule d’usine, dans une cellule de parti” make the engagement significant and provide the worker a reason to want to sink the ship. Bernard’s idea is *retors* because he risks nothing, whereas the idea of clandestine party work for the worker has meaning, in part, because of the significant risk to “sa liberté, son travail et sa croûte.” Other references to workers are scarce. In a flashback scene that portrays the group’s “premier souvenir politique” (45), the transfer of Jean Jaurès’ remains to the Panthéon in November of 1924, the friends flow into the sea of workers from the North and East districts of Paris and disappear into the mass. The workers are portrayed positively by the narrator (54-5), who mocks the appropriation of Jaurès’ memory by socialist deputies because they had just voted to provide secret funding for the Ministry of the Interior (55). The only other significant portrayal of workers in the text appears in Pluvinage’s recollections of his life in the Party and explanation for his betrayal. After joining, he ends up in a cell with workers from a tool factory and recalls his experience in the *récit* he sends to Bloyé

and Laforgue:

Ces types [the workers in his cell] étaient extrêmement braves et amicaux, ils ont tout fait pour me mettre à l'aise. C'était une époque où on faisait encore beaucoup d'ouvriérisme dans le parti, mais ils ne marquèrent jamais ma condition d'*intellectuel* que par une espèce d'ironie cordiale dont il m'était impossible de m'offenser. Ce petit groupe d'hommes m'a donné la seule idée que j'aurai d'une communauté humaine : on ne guérit pas du communisme quand on l'a vécu...

Personne ne me demandait compte de ma vie passée, de ma famille [...]

Comprends-moi : la question du péché social originel ne se posait absolument pas...

Cette espèce d'amitié politique couvrait tout, mais dans le seul présent de chacun de nous, elle ne concernait pas seulement l'action, l'usine, la guerre et la paix, mais les ennuis, l'angoisse, toutes nos vies. Comme le parti était fort isolé à cette époque [...] le sentiment de la solitude partagée créait un lien extrêmement fort, quelque chose comme une complicité charnelle, une conscience presque biologique d'*espèce* : pour la première fois de mon existence, j'ai senti une grande chaleur m'entourer.

Mes camarades étaient gais, ils savaient rire, ils étaient beaucoup plus humains que vous-mêmes qui aviez sans cesse à la bouche les mots d'Homme et d'Humanisme. Ils manquaient complètement de ressentiment, de haine, ils étaient des constructeurs bien portants. Le sens de la vie éclatait sous la maladresse de leurs mots. Je devais les regarder comme un enfant qui ne sait pas courir regarde des enfants se poursuivre : jamais je ne me suis vu plus raté que parmi eux. (283-4)

The initial paragraph stresses Pluvinage's otherness, his alienation from the working-class as an intellectual, to show the workers in a positive light and to dispel any doubts that his comrades

may have somehow contributed to his grounds for betrayal. It also supports my reading of *Antoine Bloyé* as a failed apprenticeship that continued beyond the point where it should have stopped; because he had lived it, Antoine could not “guérit du communisme.” Pluvinage is welcomed into the Party community. The perpetually alienated student—alienated from life by the time spent in the bureaucratic apparatus that occupies itself with the dead, from family by the early death of his father, from love through his difficult relationship with his mother and misadventures with a teenage cousin, and from his own community of intellectuals by his own *ressentiment* and their superiority—finally finds a positive model of human community, proletarian *Sittlichkeit*. The adjective “humain” and its association with *l’homme* in the passage, in *La conspiration* in general, and in Nizan’s other works makes the description of the “communauté humaine” and the differentiation in the final paragraph between those who talk about “l’Homme” and “l’Humanisme” and those who practice it all the more significant. Yet instead of sharing in this human community and the identity “d’espèce” of his comrades, this possibility of recognition as a member of a whole so important for the development of class consciousness in the narratives from the previous chapter leads only to a greater feeling of alienation, to an even more acute sense of failure to belong to any human community. *Se voir raté* and the *ressentiment* it generates ultimately move Pluvinage to betrayal. For Scriven, this is a demonstration of Pluvinage’s “extremism” in “alienated discourse” (156), but the novel leaves the question of responsibility – we have, apart from a few short scenes, only Pluvinage’s self-analysis to determine the reasons for his actions – open. Scriven’s analysis here fails to account for the determinants of this alienated discourse, but the text strongly implies that this *identité d’espèce* is determined by class – in the final instance, the intellectual is a different species, perhaps, implicitly, not able to become part of *l’espèce humaine*. Thus *he*—the pronoun is,

again, important in Nizan—is unlikely to overcome this alienation in such a way as to change species, to want to sink the ship. If the general sense provided by the novel is that Pluvinage’s feelings of inferiority – as Kershaw rightly notes, especially vis-à-vis virile masculinity – lead to a form of existential alienation that cannot be overcome, it appears as the result of a corrupt and foolish bourgeoisie and the *inability* to overcome that corrupt idiocy, even after Pluvinage takes the supposedly decisive step of party membership and enjoys the concomitant experience of human community. The failure of Bernard and Serge to develop political consciousness inheres in the class that talks about humanism and humanity but is structurally – indeed, genetically – unlikely to act politically. There is a material basis for their inability to commit, whereas there is none for their commitment. As Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav have noted in the context of the material determinants of forms of struggle, “it can be rather difficult to impeach material conditions and elect new ones” (750).

Before examining the details of Laforgue’s apparently successful transition out of youth, it is important to consider the one image of a mature communist intellectual presented by the text – the fictional Carré. Carré occupies little space in the text, but he is structurally significant because he provides Pluvinage the means for betrayal and embodies the values outlined by the narrator of *La conspiration*, *Antoine Bloyé*, and *Aden Arabie*. Despite his intellectual origins – Régnier, with whom he served in the First World War, refers to him as an intellectual, and Carré cites Goethe’s *Faust* in the same conversation (212-213) – he is a member of the central committee of the PCF and appears to be, as Scriven claims, “the exemplary communist militant” who carries “the core doctrinal message” (153) of the text. While Scriven’s position is, as noted above, overstated, since the text is complex enough to be read against Carré, Carré’s description of the life of a communist functionary is worth analyzing because it not only portrays the

“mature communist vision” (Scriven, 154) echoed in many places by the narrator but also provides an important contrast to the vacillations and contingency depicted in the development of the other characters. In conversations with Régnier while Carré is in hiding at the former’s country house, the narrator stresses Carré’s dedication to communism, which “n’était pas seulement pour Carré la forme qu’il avait donné à son action, mais la conscience même qu’il avait de lui-même et de sa vie” (210). Being a communist requires a total commitment, which is contrasted here, as elsewhere in the novel, with the tendency of the liberal intellectual to refuse to commit in the name of an illusory freedom. The narrator, Carré, and Laforgue all make critical remarks vis-à-vis this form of thought, which Carré explicitly contrasts with the commitment required to live as an *homme*. The only glimpse we have of Carré’s own development besides his war-time service with Régnier is a response to the latter’s question about why he, specifically, became a communist:

Je suis communiste depuis le Congrès de Tours, pour des quantités de raisons, mais il n’y en a pas de plus importante que d’avoir pu répondre à cette question : avec qui puis-je vivre ? Je peux vivre avec les communistes. Avec les socialistes non. [...] Ce sont des citoyens. Ce ne sont pas des hommes. Même maladroitement, même à tâtons, même s’il retombe, le communiste a l’ambition d’être absolument un homme... Le plus beau de ma vie a peut-être été l’époque où je militais en province, où j’étais secrétaire d’un rayon. Il fallait tout faire, c’était un pays qui naissait ou qui renaissait, le comité de rayon faisait un boulot comme dans Balzac le Médecin de campagne. En plus sérieux. Un communiste n’a rien. Mais il veut être et il veut faire. (212)

In addition to the obvious parallels to *Aden Arabie* – the emphasis on *l’homme* and the critique of the socialist party – the importance of the totalizing nature of communist identity for Carré is

significant. Indeed, he elsewhere claims that communism is not only a politics but also a “style de vie,” which he compares with the church in that communism “joue comme [l’Eglise] sur la certitude d’une victoire absolument totale” (211). When taken seriously, this comparison implies that being or becoming a communist is, at least for the intellectual Carré, a vocation. While the working-class communists in Pluvinage’s cell encapsulate communist being through an *identité d’espèce*, the communist intellectual fulfills a vocation, he is somehow interpellated by the cause and thereby becomes identical with it. This is also the only way to understand this statement as being anything other than a blind, ideological position; it is consistent with Nizan’s contention, as outlined in the last chapter, that the only non-alienated form of activity possible is the struggle for proletarian revolution. It demands total commitment because it represents the totality of possible commitment. Precisely this aspect of Carré’s identity disturbs his friend Régnier; the narrator explicitly states that “[r]ien ne troublait plus profondément Régnier que cette coïncidence d’une politique et d’un destin, cet agencement qu’il désespérait d’atteindre jamais entre l’histoire et l’homme” (211). Communist intellectuals can only hope to achieve proletarian *Sittlichkeit* through a vocation, whose totalizing nature compensates for the totalizing determinant of the value relation in the lives of workers. The developmental process is, however, wholly elided in the case of the mature intellectual militants introduced in Nizan’s work—Carré and the Bloyé of *Le cheval de Troie*. While the above passages certainly criticize the pseudo-freedom of intellectuals who in the name of intellectual liberty refuse to engage, an important point throughout Nizan’s oeuvre, the implication of spiritual vocation and use of “destin” align with the novel’s general tendency to undermine agency in favor of largely accidental explanations. If workers become communists because of a class-dependent species-being, intellectuals do not for the same reason, with the notable exception of those who have been



called by an ephemeral destiny to do so.

Laforgue's implicit transition to communist maturity in the novel follows the same logic and requires, like the *voyage d'Ulysse of Aden Arabie*, something mystical. When he returns for the Christmas holidays after Rosenthal's suicide, he takes ill and nearly dies. The narrator couches his illness in the terms of a coming-of-age ritual, claiming that the "maladie intervint dans la vie de Laforgue et remplit pour lui l'office de sorcier" (303).<sup>92</sup> He suffers a long fever filled with strange hallucinations before falling into a coma, but doesn't die, instead finding himself again "en deçà des frontières sablonneuses de la mort" (305) as all those around him celebrate his "resurrection" (306). This near-death experience points Philippe in the direction of communism. He asks himself if he had to "risquer la mort pour être un homme?" (307), much like the narrator of *Aden Arabie* wonders if he needed to leave for the same reason. Finally, "tout commençait, il n'avait plus une seconde à perdre pour exister rageusement; le grand jeu des tentatives avortées avait pris fin, puisqu'on peut réellement mourir" (*idem*). For a careful reader of the novel and of Nizan's other work, this admission is enough to make clear that Philippe has decided to join the communist cause. He tells himself that "[i]l va falloir choisir" (307), and he has long considered the direction in which he will go. As cited above in his dialogue with Rosenthal, he is already aware that engagement is the only path to "exister rageusement." Like Carré, then, whose time in the war is perhaps – the novel does not say – his own brush with death that brings him to the necessity to "choisir," Laforgue succeeds because he has a vocation as a communist, one complete with the call from a veritable coming-of-age *sorcier* in the form of a brush with death.

### III. Conclusion: Who you gonna call?

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<sup>92</sup> The reference to a "sorcier" involved in coming-of-age rituals takes up a line of thought pursued by Laforgue in a previous paragraph where he wished he had a shaman and a ritual to escape youth.

The important and surprising insight gained from Nizan's portrayal of the development of political consciousness is that it is either materially conditioned or accidental. Although I have repeatedly emphasized above the difference between Nizan's portrayal of political development and that of the worker-writers in this dissertation's second chapter, both Nizan's literary works and texts by German worker-writers of the turn of the century make a similar argument about class consciousness. They treat communist revolution as the new universal; they portray workers as the bearers of class consciousness, the result of an identity *d'espèce*; they present the relationship between workers and political engagement as necessarily mediated through party membership or other workers' organizations, at least implicitly; and they portray class consciousness as concomitant with the worker's lived experience of exploitation. While this is never a guarantee of workers' consciousness—Nizan's own workerism reads as utopian due to the paucity of real depictions of the working class and the highly deterministic relationship between class identity and PCF membership, as if all laborers were communists—the worker has a predilection to class consciousness as a worker as a worker that other members of bourgeois society do not. Despite the historical chasm and the split of the First World War, these narratives nevertheless explicitly link class consciousness and political action that results from it with the material conditions of the Program Era, the existence of an organized or organizing industrial proletariat.

Nizan's unique and useful contribution to this study is the implication that class consciousness does not hold in practice without the structural support of a specific relation to exploitation, and thus a specific relation to capital; it belongs to workers as a species. His communist intellectuals are not Gramsci's organic intellectuals, nor a particularly useful or necessary part of party organization until they change species, making them almost

indistinguishable from the workers in whose struggle they take part. In the words of Bloyé in *Le cheval de Troie*, workers see such a newborn intellectual as “l’un d’entre eux,” but only after “des années pour se défaire des façons et des coutumes de ce monde des écrans et des escamotages d’où il était parti, il avait fallu inverser le sens de sa pensée” (132). Their class consciousness, in that sense, is wholly ‘inorganic’. If the communist intellectual, far from Annie Cohen-Solal’s *communiste impossible*, is nonetheless a real possibility for and preoccupation of Nizan’s work and life, the odds of an intellectual following the trajectory described by *Aden Arabie* and *La conspiration* are long at best. Arriving at Scriven’s mature communist intellectual requires, in the final instance, either elision (Carré, Bloyé) or an act of God (Nizan, Laforgue). Yet this vocation still has its own material foundation, just not an immediate one. These intellectuals are able to align themselves with a larger movement moved by concrete, material forces by uniting with the workers’ movement during the period of industrial development. Thus, while the bourgeois intellectual has no necessary material ground to identify his interests as aligning with the collective, a subjective vocation can nevertheless transcend its own particularity by aligning itself with the proletarian universal. The existence of the industrial proletariat makes this a horizon for political engagement for all classes insofar as they come to identify the *identité d’espèce* Nizan sees in his broad category of alienation. This basis in shared abjection, the fact of *se sentir écrasé*, can be mediated by the workers’ movement to develop into authentic class consciousness, but it also implies that – without such a mediating instance – class consciousness would be nothing more than idealism, a theme for the *die Freien* and all those who prefer “les révolutions des consciences aux cassages de gueule” of the real thing.

## Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has tried to tell two related but different stories. The first of these stories is about the *Bildungsroman*, and goes something like this: *Bildung* unites several facets of the contradiction of capital itself. Because the novel in general and the *Bildungsroman* in particular are the primary forms of modernity – I prefer the world capitalism, but modernity does good work, too – *Bildung* ends up having a lot to do with a lot of novels. We can call these novels *Bildungsromane*, novels of formation, novels of apprenticeship, developmental novels, *Künstlerromane*, or whatever else we want to, since all these designations can offer particular advantages to a critic depending on the kinds of questions she wants to ask, but we probably miss a lot of if we forget that most novels are trying to tell us something about *Bildung*, and it's generally interesting to try and find out what. I think novels try to tell us things about *Bildung* because, quite simply, they cannot do otherwise; the novel and *Bildung* are part of the “shared code” within whose “general unity” the “dialogue of class struggle” (Jameson 84) takes place. Despite the multiplicity of voices, this is still a dialogue, because each voice, each utterance can be attributed to the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, to capital or wage-labor, oppressor or oppressed. The *Bildungsroman* is an important part of this dialogue because it tries to help a problematic individual, often as the type of a certain collective, find an earthly home under conditions where the level of general abjection have long made that possibility appear as “logical scandal” or “paradox” when it “comes before the purely contemplative mind” (Jameson 82-3). In *Wilhelm Meister*, the *Bildungsroman* speaks for capital, it shows the bourgeois that he can still be reconciled to the world; as if the promise of formal subsumption could last forever, as if cycles of accumulation (Arrighi) were infinite, as if labor and management would marry in the spring. But through time, the voice of the *Bildungsroman*, in its search for an earthly home,

begins to speak more for the oppressed—after all, it is the proletariat who is cut off from *Bildung*, whose labor will never look like *Selbsttätigkeit*, who can never freely choose the object of their will. In the *Arbeiterbildungsroman* or Socialist *Bildungsroman* (Kohlmann), the negation of initial *Bildung* lays bare that the domination of capital and its agents – states and their guard dogs, international corporations, financial markets – is the changeable exploitation of the many by the few. I would predict that this is true, on some level, for every such attempt at reconciliation in other variants of the *Bildungsroman* from oppressed groups that have, like the proletariat, emerged out of capital. Unfortunately, despite Lukàcs' hopes, it seems laying bare the naked interests of capital has not yet been able to abolish this state of affairs. But perhaps it just has yet to reach the point where the quantity of small victories in the ideological struggle morphs into the qualitative victory of praxis. We shouldn't hold our breath, but we can hope.

So that is the first story – about *Bildung*, the *Bildungsroman*, the longevity of the form and its on-again, off-again relationship with bourgeois ideology. The second story was about history and class consciousness. This story is easier to tell, or at least I feel like I know it better. Capital brings workers together, because it can only do its job (M-C-M'), especially in the early phases that *Théorie Communiste* associates with formal subsumption, if there is a ready supply of labor from whom to extract surplus value. Over time, these laborers begin to develop an identity as laborers, they realize that their interests, in the short and in the long-term, often overlap. They learn to work together in the factories, they are forced to buy the same cheap goods to survive, they live in the same garbage housing, have the same fears, pains, sorrows. It makes it easy to work together, they are united in an abjection that's plain for all to see – Paul Nizan would tell us that *ça crevait les yeux*. So they found ways to try and help each other, because they could accomplish nothing alone and because class consciousness, the knowledge

that the struggle of one was the struggle of all, was given in their material world. And they did, in fact, help each other. But the form this mutual assistance took was too rooted in their relationship to capital to grow into *the* revolution, despite growing into many separate revolutions. The soil in which class consciousness could grow, the soil of Arrighi's long nineteenth century, the *only* soil in which class consciousness could grow, was still too far east of Eden, and – eventually – the soil changed, and class consciousness could grow no more.

This is the same story that Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav tell in “Can dialectics break BRICs?”, and that Paul Nizan tells, probably unintentionally, when he fails to provide a plausible developmental trajectory for radical political engagement for his young, problematic intellectuals. The workers' mediations of the program era grew out of material conditions in a period where capital could still absorb massive amounts of labor in value-productive industries. In the absence of those material determinants, there can be no class consciousness, no vanguard party, and no revolutionary union of laborers. That's the bad news; the good news, is, however, that those mediations were unable to do what was to be done to abolish the class struggle and create a world in which the organic self-realization of all would be the condition for the organic self-realization of each. That task has to be accomplished if the promise of *Bildung* is ever to be fulfilled, and I hope this dissertation has managed to at least gesture compellingly in that direction. If it has failed, then it is a failure I can live with, because it was only the failure to communicate what I learned by writing it.

If the material conditions for programmatism no longer obtain, the question becomes what material conditions do, what forms of struggle correspond to those conditions, and if those forms of struggle might accomplish the autonomous self-affirmation of the proletariat in its own abolition. I do not know the answers to these questions, but I would like to offer some

preliminary and potentially deeply flawed thoughts by way of a conclusion. In Marx, the form of struggle was never the motor of struggle; the motor has always been abjection, and the hope has always been that the general abjection, stripped of any transcendental justification, would lead the overwhelming majority to abolish class society. As G.M. Tamàs has summarized quite well in his contrasting of Rousseauian and Marxist socialisms, the proletariat's "wretchedness, its total alienation," is what must account for its "revolutionary motives" (Jasper Bernes) if we hope to one day abolish class society. And if there is one thing on the planet today that we appear to have in abundance, it is the abject.

The problem with this general abjection is that it does yet seem to unite significant portions of the abject in such a way as to encourage the development of some form of revolutionary solidarity. Tamàs again: "Class as an economic reality exists, and it is as fundamental as ever, although it is culturally and politically almost extinct. This is a triumph of capitalism" (28). Reminding us, similarly to *Théorie Communiste*, that the old forms of cultural and political class organization were not communism or socialism, but capitalism, Tamàs sees the silver lining in the fact that we are now free of the heroic mode of socialist thought and can see our task, abolishing capitalism, more clearly, similarly to my argument about the positive potential of the after-life of the *Bildungsroman*. But Tamàs is much too smart to offer platitudes or to present this as a hopeful situation. The current situation, in which the material basis for the necessity of the abolition of capitalism is clearer than ever, but in which the material basis for the global solidarity needed for that potential to be actualized seems tragically absent, is hardly promising. But he does gesture to the utility of political *Bildung* in the present: our job is to present this task to as many people as possible – the abolition of class society in Marx always had a quantitative element – until *ça crève les yeux*.

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