Jacob Sloan. "Country and City in the Proletarian Realist Novel: Kang Kyŏng-ae's *From Wŏnso Pond* and Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy*." *Mediations* 33.1-2(Fall 2019-Spring 2020) 31-68. www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/country-and-city

Country and City in the Proletarian Realist Novel: Kang Kyŏng-ae's *From Wŏnso Pond* and Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy*

Jacob Sloan

> Of course, nothing would circulate inwardly either if the outward were completely solid. Outside, however, life is just as little finished as in the ego which is working on this outside. No thing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world were closed, full of fixed, even perfected facts. Instead of these there are simply processes…The Real is process; the latter is the widely ramified mediation between present, unfinished past, and above all: possible future.
>
> —Ernest Bloch[1]

> Without the revelation of important traits and without an interaction of the characters with world events, objects, the forces of nature and social institutions, even the most extraordinary adventures would be empty and meaningless.
>
> —Georg Lukács [2]

I. Country, City, and the Proletarian Realist Novel

In the past few decades, scholars of proletarian literature have labored to extend the definition of the genre beyond its temporal and national boundaries. Moving beyond the traditional description that grounds literary proletarianism in the years surrounding the Great Depression in the United States, Jim Holstun presents us with a more genre-specific and less time- and nation-bound definition. Reminding us that "[b]ecause the capitalist mode of production is global, so too is the proletariat and the proletarian novel," Holstun defines the proletarian novel as "a fictional narrative that,

from a particular proletarian perspective, totalizes the capitalist mode of production in movement." Holstun argues that because the genre

> totalizes, it shies away from modernist *durée* or the "one-day narrative" and moves toward longer-scale narratives of capitalist crisis. For proletarian literature, time is not a flow or a slice. These crises include the primitive accumulation that founds capitalism from below, the accelerated accumulation (including imperialism) that drives capitalism from above, [and] internal capitalist dynamics like population movements and revolution.

Taking seriously the shared temporality of proletarian novels—their active portrayal of longer-scale narratives of crisis and their necessary embeddedness within a global capitalist mode of production, itself the basis of a shared experience of dispossession and exploitation—I advance, in what follows, a comparative reading of two proletarian novels. Kang Kyŏng-ae's *From Wŏnso Pond* narrates peasants, laborers, sex workers, and factory girls in both the colonial Korean countryside and city;[3] Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy* depicts black South African miners, city dwellers, and newly dispossessed urban migrant laborers in pre-Apartheid Johannesburg and the various slums and townships surrounding it.[4] Separated from one another by more than a decade—Kang's novel was published in 1934 and Abrahams's in 1946—and by their focus on vastly different national and imperial situations, both *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* portray and attempt to totalize the complex relationship between capitalist countryside and capitalist city. Both novels realistically portray what Raymond Williams describes as the two signal narrative moments of "the long history of the literature of country and city": dispossession and rural-urban migration. Cities the world over, Williams reminds us, have "drawn in…the surplus people and the uprooted laborers of the rural areas."[5]

The comparative reading that I pursue here extends Barbara Foley's typology of proletarian themes—strike novels, novels on race and antiracism, novels describing the development of class consciousness, novels focused on non-class conscious proletarians, and novels portraying daily working-class life—to include the country and city novel.[6] According to Michael Denning, the narrative frame of country and city, or, more specifically, of rural-urban migration is by no means absent from the history of the proletarian novel and, in fact, performs a decisive function in this history. As Denning argues in "The Novelists' International," a "larger historical sensibility" among proletarian writers the world over became "fully developed in the novels that grew out of the recognition that the new proletariat of the century were not simply factory workers and tenement dwellers, but were migrants from the countryside."[7] The historical scope of the country and city framework, with its focus on and access to "a larger historical sensibility," moved the narrative frame

proletarian literature as a whole beyond the "paradoxically ahistorical modernism that…tried to document the lived experience of radically new factory and tenement."[8]

Denning's linking of the proletarian novel's move out of "ahistorical modernism" with its post-1917-1919 focus on the historical frame of rural-urban migration under capitalist pressure forms the backdrop of my comparative reading of Kang and Abrahams in this essay. If this reading demands an extension of Foley's thematic typology, it also demands an engagement with this shift away from an "ahistorical modernism" to a country-city based realism. Indeed, while we should locate the form of both *From Wŏnso Pond*—a multi-protagonist social novel—and *Mine Boy*—a proletarian *Bildungsroman*—"squarely within the . . . tradition of critical realism," it is also the case that both novels have been criticized for clinging to the supposedly naïve projects of literary mimesis and socialist commitment. [9] Sonja M. Kim, for example, first notes that *From Wŏnso Pond* "displays most clearly Kang's use of fiction to address social issues that were pertinent to intellectuals and the underprivileged within Korea's colonial context, issues such as peasant tenancy, exploited labor, and the victimization of women," and then goes on to devalue the novel for its critical realism. She argues that Kang's works after *From Wŏnso Pond* "are more sophisticated and less blatant in their critical realism," linking this evolution to either "increasing censorship [on the part of the Japanese Empire] or a growing maturity in her writing." What is immediately intriguing about this description of Kang's oeuvre is that it posits her move away from politically committed writing as being less critically *realist* and therefore inevitably "more sophisticated."[10] In a similar devaluation, Ntongela Masilela tells us that *Mine Boy* ultimately "fails as a piece of literary modernity, because it ignores and obfuscates the literary devices of modernism." For Masilela, *Mine Boy*'s "attempt to articulate the ideologies of Marxism and Pan-Africanism as the pre-eminent political philosophies of modernity in Africa and the African diaspora" is certainly modern, but this attempt at articulation is betrayed by the novel's "realist poetics." According to Masilela, Abrahams, under the spell of fellow proletarian realist Richard Wright, rejects the modern and modernist techniques of writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance, which Masilela dubs "a new black literary aesthetic." Abrahams's modern, and thus apparently inevitably modern*ist*, ideologies, then, cannot be properly transmitted, for, according to Masilela, the novel's anti-modernist form must necessarily stand in the way of their full articulation.[11] Far from advancing original positions, Kim and Masilela, in immediately and uncritically devaluing literary realism, reproduce a literary-critical commonplace. For these critics, literary realism is unworthy of in-depth critical consideration; little more than a moment of under-development, it is an unsophisticated position that leads to aesthetic and even political failure.

Foley outlines a similar trend in "the original Cold War account of 1930s literary radicalism" in the US, which "dismiss[ed] proletarian novelists as practitioners of a plodding realism, impervious to the subtleties of modernism."[12] This Cold War anti-

Communist reading of the proletarian novel, and the literary left more generally, extended beyond the temporal bounds of the Cold War proper. Foley argues that "anti-Communism…retains its force because of its covert incorporation into various premises guiding postmodern theory."[13] Singling out what she describes as the "postmodernist critique of novelistic realism," Foley notes that such a critique often collides with most U.S. proletarian writers' "intellectual commitment to a cognitivist aesthetic," which judges works of literature on the basis of their explanatory power. Most US proletarian writers, Foley explains, valued story over propaganda and realistic representation over textual experimentation. For they were convinced that realism's attention to the concrete and the everyday, its focus on the rounded character's response to specific historical and material pressures, would allow them to narratively theorize the forces of social, political, material, and historical motion. [14] Though the proletarian cognitivist aesthetic insists on textual mediation—the investigation, reordering, and concentration of experience through language and story—its insistence on realistic representation comes up against what Foley describes as the guiding "premise of the postmodern position": "that…the text conducts its battles against authoritarianism and repression not primarily in its partisan representation of social conflict in its 'real-world' referent, but through its adoption of strategies of subversion in the zone of textuality itself."[15] In the end, there's very little to differentiate this ostensibly *post*modernist critique of realism from its modernist, Cold War variant. For modernism carries with it a similar form of textual politics, one which Neil Larsen succinctly indicates when he describes "left-formalist theory of aesthetic negation as constituting a new sphere of emancipatory activity after the decline of 'politics' in its traditional modes."[16] According to this position, as Foley outlines it, "a text," if it "wishes to query the existing order of things in a thoroughgoing way,"

> must itself adopt . . . an "interrogative" form, that is, one that decenters all the putatively authoritative expressions of politics. Despite its posture of confronting and unmasking reactionary idealisms with an unflinching portraiture of "what is," the argument goes, realism turns out to be not an ally but an antagonist to the project of literary radicalism. However left-wing their intentions, proletarian writers who work in the form of the realistic novel end up confirming the very world order they originally set out to oppose.[17]

Of course, literary realism is not always literary proletarianism, nor is all literary proletarianism realist in the traditional sense of the term. For every radical realist like Kang or Abrahams, there is a conservative realist like Balzac or Walter Scott. And for every proletarian realist novel like *From Wŏnso Pond* or *Mine Boy*, we have the more formally experimental proletarianism of something like *Christ in Concrete*,

Pietro di Donato's operatic stream-of-consciousness mediation on Italian-American bricklayers and factory workers in New York City; Cho Se-hui's *The Dwarf*, a non-linear linked-story novel about South Korean proletarians struggling under the pressures of Park Chung Hee's capitalist dictatorship of the 1970s; and the more formally adventurous collective novels produced during the golden age of proletarian literature in the US, like William Rollins's *The Shadow Before* and Clara Weatherwax's *Marching! Marching!* However, even when critics acknowledge these moments of proletarian experimentation or take into account the often tense relations between the proletarian novel and various forms of politically engaged writing produced in the 30s,[18] what Foley calls the "binary opposition" between "bad realism" and "good experimentalism" persists.[19]

The cognitivist aesthetic of the proletarian novel, because it insists on the knowability and representability of a fundamentally extra-textual reality and on the possibility of communicating this reality, has often been subsumed under the category of non-complex "bad realism." The proletarian novel's attempt at mimesis becomes, in this argument, its cardinal sin. What we have here, though, is less an argument based on textual engagement and close reading, than one based on what Raymond Williams describes as the selectivity of the modernist tradition. The problem is not that modernism selects or develops a canon, as all traditions do. Rather, Williams explains, modernism becomes a kind of "highly selective version of the modern" that "offers to appropriate the whole of modernity."[20] As we have seen, though, modernism also threatens to appropriate the whole of literary and representational complexity. The realist, even if contemporary, is consigned both to an abstract past and, at the same time, described as textually and representationally inadequate, even regressive.

What is necessary, then, is not the enumeration of formally diverse texts of proletarian modernism. Such an intervention, which often devolves into the mere demand that we recognize the experimental and therefore really modernist and actually complex nature of proletarian writing, fails to shift the fundamental terms of the "binary" that Foley describes. If the proletarian novel is often bound up with a cognitivist aesthetic—and if it is often, even if in an experimental way, realist therefore—we need to actually engage this realism on its own terms. Arguing for the importance and the continuing relevance of proletarian literature depends upon a concomitant project of recovering the importance and continuing relevance of literary realism.

A number of scholars have recently undertaken such a project.[21] However, far from unsettling the primacy of modernism and literary anti-realism, their work has largely confirmed it. For instance, in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) argues that the various literary techniques commonly associated with "the distinctive (and restricted) Euro-American literary formation typically addressed under the name of 'modernism,'" ought, in fact, to be read for their realism, that is, as the "formal registers of (semi-)

perhiperality in the world-literary system." Terming such techniques "irrealist" rather than modernist, WReC argues that "anti-linear plot lines, meta-narratorial devices, un-rounded characters, unreliable narrators, contradictory points of view, and so on" are, in fact, "discernible wherever literary works are composed that mediate the lived experience of capitalism's creative destruction (or destructive creation)."[22] While approaches such as WReC's have yielded invaluable literary-critical insights, they continue to privilege the literary techniques traditionally associated with modernism, almost entirely ignoring what WReC refers to as texts of "ideal-type" realism.[23] WReC tells us that "[w]hen pre-existing unities"—especially pre-existing modes of production—"are violently destroyed, the relative stability . . . required by realist representation of the 'ideal type' disappears with it."[24] Such a reading, though, fails to break away from what Larsen describes as "the dominant mode of apology for modernism itself": "the idea that modern*ism* and modern*ity*"—in this case, capitalist modernity—are "consubstantial categories" and that modernism is "somehow already precontained in the raw and immediate experience of contemporary life."[25] Here again, realism—though now with more subtlety and nuance—is relegated to a realm of non-complexity and representational inadequacy next to the modernist values of irrealism. Even if WReC does not want to dismiss realism out of hand, then, they largely reproduce the modernist "selective tradition" that Williams critiques.

Even when realist writers and texts are mentioned in *Combined and Uneven Development*, they're never really engaged. How could they be? For realist portrayal in general, WReC suggests, cannot possibly register the dynamism and violence of unevenly developed societies, nor can it properly represent the dislocations that occur when (semi-)peripheral societies come into contact with capitalist pressures. But this dismissal puts the critical, evaluative, and canonical cart before the literary horse. WReC refuses to actively or explicitly dismiss realism, but in focusing their work on irrealist texts only, they refuse to seriously engage with peripheral or semi-peripheral *realist* texts.

But if WReC largely avoids any direct engagement with what they describe as "ideal-type realism," especially in the non-European periphery, they do at least gesture toward a way out of the too-direct and at times mechanistic relationship they set up between capitalist exploitation and the development of irrealism. As WReC goes on to argue, the "realisms that achieve the most full-fledged and dominant expression are . . . those associated with revolutions or liberation movements, with their investments in a conception of reality as apprehensible and accessible to realist representation springing directly from their political commitments." Such realist texts, WReC explains, "[a]dapting Fanon's idea of a 'fighting phase' in literary history," can be described as "various 'fighting realisms,' whose investment is not merely in mapping present realities but in the revelation of possible futures and emergent social orders."[26]

While WReC's adoption and expansion of Fanon's literary periodization pushes

back against their own claims about irrealism's representational primacy in the face of capitalism's uneveness, their attempt to take up Fanon's work fails to keep faith with the evaluative argument that Fanon himself makes about realism in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In Fanon's framework, realism remains the most valuable form of literary representation because of its cognitive explanatory power. It does not, as WReC suggests in their treatment of realism more generally, statically map reality, but rather attempts to understand and represent, to make knowable, reality's interrelated social, material, political, and subjective forces of motion. Indeed, Fanon opposes the "fighting phase" of literary realism to various forms of what we could describe as non-realism, anti-realism, or to take up WReC's own term, irrealism. According to Fanon, these forms divert the possibility of actually understanding, explaining, and therefore properly intervening in the struggle for liberation and in human history more generally. For him, the non-realist and non-fighting phase of literature comes to us as "a harsh style, full of images, for the image is the drawbridge which allows unconscious energies to be scattered on the surrounding meadows. It is a vigorous style, alive with rhythms, struck through and through with bursting life; it is full of color, too, bronzed, sunbaked, and violent."[27] As Fanon makes clear, this literary style of the violent image certainly registers specific historical conditions, including, most importantly, the writer's distance from the dynamism of revolutionary culture and the everyday life of the people. But even if it encodes this reality, such a style is a failed attempt to actually represent and come to terms with the struggle on the ground, including the historical and economic forces driving this struggle. Rather, it flattens what could be focus on historical motion into "a banal search for exoticism." Though this first phase of literary representation can include the depiction of revolution, Fanon argues that it fetishizes this violent movement, and it fails to actually portray the people themselves in movement, often reducing the struggle for liberation to the relatively unconscious reaction of a static and exotic folk tradition against colonial and capitalist modernity. In this moment, the writer "sets a high value on the customs, traditions, and appearances of his people," but these customs are turned into unchanging, unknowable, and unconscious ways of life.[28] WReC's misappropriation of Fanon's schema—their rewriting of his realist fighting phase as a very specific form of fighting realism—is symptomatic of the tendency in modern scholarship to partially appropriate the terms of realism in order to devalue realism as a global—and often consciously progressive—narrative project.

Far from aligning Fanon's conception of a fighting phase in literature with WReC's general theory of irrealism, we would do better align it with Lukács's account of realism. Across his oeuvre, Lukács argues for a conception of realism as that which is attuned to the nonsynchronous nature of reality under capitalism. Realism is able to both register and make sense of "the massive rupture effected at the levels of space-time continuum, lifeworld, experience and human sensorium by capitalist modernization."[29] In his landmark *Studies in European Realism*, Lukács shows how

realism strives to provide, "a total picture of society in motion, complete with all its determinants and antagonisms."[30] Realism is fully capable of providing a temporally complex picture of capitalist society, for as Lukács reminds us, "only vulgar sociology… conceives of class structure as something static. It is a dynamic thing, containing within itself past, present, and future of the society in question."[31] Realism narrates the dialectical interaction between creative human agency and objective constraint, portraying "man in the whole range of his relations to the real world." It is able to capture "tendencies of development that only exist incipiently and so have not yet had the opportunity to unfold their entire human and social potential."[32] This focus on futurity and praxis is the true strength of the realist novel. Indeed, it is this that Fanon has in mind when he rejects the static portrayal of exoticized particularisms for the representations of the fighting phrase: "that fluctuating movement" that human beings engaged in the struggle for a more humane future are actively and consciously "giving shape to."[33] The most essential moment of temporal unevenness that realism is capable of portraying is the movement of historical agents, acted upon and often impeded by the social relations in which they live, toward a different social and material future.

Taking seriously this relationship that Fanon and Lukács set up between "ideal-type" realism and revolutionary praxis, in what follows I read both Kang's *From Wŏnso Pond* and Abrahams's *Mine Boy* as particular examples of the fighting phase that Fanon outlines. It is not only that both novels depend upon and move within the shared narrative frame of the country and city, of rural-urban migration under capitalist pressure, but also that they self-reflexively portray this narrative frame as that which can be realistically represented therefore understood. They do so, it must be emphasized, from a proletarian perspective, linking not only rural-urban migration but also processes of both accelerated primitive accumulation in the countryside and labor exploitation in the city to the demands and workings of capitalism. Both of these novels, not despite but because of their shared commitment to an "ideal-type" realism, are able to register, in the words of WReC, "the manifest incongruities, dislocations and forms of unevenness characteristic of the (semi-) periphery."[34]

Decades before theorists like Williams were to attempt a historical materialist rehistoricization of both capitalist countryside and capitalist city, proletarian realist novels like *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* attempted not only to represent but also to theorize these spaces as shot through with class struggle and historical possibility. As we will see, as realist proletarian novels attuned to the concrete and everyday experiences of capitalist social relations and class struggle, *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* dereify what Williams describes as the static images of country and city that develop under capitalism: the country as the "old 'organic society'" and the city as a space of "modernist 'universal alienation.'"[35] *From Wŏnso Pond* opposes itself to both the literature of the "agrarian nationalist circles," which portrayed "idealized and pastoralist" images of rural life in colonized Korea and also the Korean "labor

reportage literature" of the late 1920s and early 1930s, with its narrow focus on "factory and other urban workers."[36] Kang's novel upsets the static images of country and city, rewriting each space as equally constrained by the overarching demands of capitalist accumulation and equally populated by human agents capable of undertaking radical, future-oriented projects. *Mine Boy* engages in a similar project of country-city materialist analysis and realist portrayal, linking intense expropriation in the South African countryside with rural-urban migration and capitalist exploitation in the Johannesburg mines. Even while engaged in such a project of totalization, *Mine Boy* also registers the importance of residual forms of non- and even anti-capitalist life, especially in its protagonist's memories of his youth in the South African countryside. But in *Mine Boy*, hope is much more than mere nostalgia. The novel also portrays forms of experimental collectivity that arise in the city and that bring some of the non- or anti-capitalist values to it, even if only in a revised form.

II. "A Fight against All of the Tŏkhos of the World": Country and City in Kang Kyŏng-ae's *From Wŏnso Pond*

From Wŏnso Pond follows multiple protagonists as they come into contact with exploitation in the Korean countryside—especially as represented by the abuses of the Korean landlord and colonial collaborator, Tŏkho—and in the factories of the increasingly industrialized Korean city. The movement of the novel grounds itself in the stories of two propertyless laborers from the village of Yongyŏn: Ch'ŏtchae and Sŏnbi. Born to a poor, landless family, Ch'ŏtchae works as an agricultural laborer in Tŏkho's fields. After participating in a food riot, Ch'ŏtchae can no longer find work in his own village, and even traditional forms of gleaning, such as the gathering of wood from the forest, having been suspended. Unable to support his mother and his elderly companion, Yi Sŏbang and suffering from hunger, Ch'ŏtchae moves to Seoul, and later to Inch'ŏn in order to try his luck as a day laborer. Sŏnbi's movement follows a similar country-city trajectory. Some years after her father is murdered by Tŏkho, Sŏnbi finds employment in the landlord's house as a domestic servant, working alongside an elderly and impoverished woman simply referred to as Granny. After a protracted period of exploitation and sexual abuse, during which she is both raped by Tŏkho and mistreated by his wife and daughter, Sŏnbi searches out her former friend, Kannan, who recently escaped Tŏkho's sexual exploitation, and joins her in In'chŏn. Kannan, a communist, soon relocates to the Taedong Spinning Mill in Seoul and takes Sŏnbi with her. In the spinning mill, Sŏnbi encounters exploitation on the factory floor, the unwanted sexual advances of the factory managers, and through Kannan, communism. Ch'ŏtchae is also introduced to communism through his conversations with Sinch'ŏl—a former law student turned Marxist intellectual, and one-time companion of Tŏkho's daughter, Okchŏm—who is imprisoned after a failed strike in Inch'ŏn. Toward the end of the novel, Sinch'ŏl recants his communist beliefs, betrays his fellow activists, marries a wealthy woman, and moves to Manchuria.

But this abandonment of the class struggle on the part of Sinch'ŏl is paralleled by Sŏnbi's decision to take over for Kannan and begin organizing inside the spinning mill. The novel concludes with Sŏnbi's death at the hands of capital, her body driven to exhaustion by overwork.

In *The Country and the City*, Williams faults Marxist theory and, at the time, actually existing Communist states, for what he describes as its "absolute urban and industrial priority," its focus on and fetishization of the city and its concomitant dismissal of the country as a site of exploitation, class struggle, and revolutionary possibility. Tracing contemporary revolutionary movements and historical moments, from the Chinese to the Cuban revolutions, Williams notes, toying with Marx's own terms of dismissal, that "the main revolutionary force in the world" has been, "for the last forty years," the "'rural idiots' and the 'barbarians and semi-barbarians.'"[37] At first glance, Kang Kyŏng-ae's *From Wŏnso Pont*, despite its complex portrayal of rural exploitation in colonized Korea, might seem to adhere to and, in some sense, uncritically adopt this widespread "industrial and urban priority." Indeed, the various forms of rural exploitation and class struggle that occupy the novel's first half eventually give way to the movement of the newly dispossessed to the city, in this case Seoul and later In'chŏn, and their development of class consciousness. As Samuel Perry notes, for instance, in Kang's novel, the "physical journey from country to city" that her characters make "parallels a gradual transformation of political consciousness, as different forms of community in the city offer them new lives within the industrializing urban economy of the colony and new opportunities to become underground activists."[38] However, I want to suggest that *From Wŏnso Pond* advances a much more integrative and totalizing portrayal of the relationship between countryside and city, between rural labor and urban labor, and between rural capitalism and metropolitan capitalism. For the novel does more than simply reject the static countryside in favor of the dynamic city; instead, it engages in a kind of totalization that seeks, by tracing the forced or determined movement of the typical character of the newly dispossessed rural migrant, to reunite the different forms of capitalist exploitation that color both the ostensibly divisible spheres of the rural and the urban in colonized Korea. This is not to say that *From Wŏnso Pond* jettisons historical and regional specificity; rather, the novel pays attention to what we could describe as the uneven or, perhaps better, nonsynchronous manifestations of capitalist exploitation in colonized Korea—from the semi-feudal yet capitalist social relations that mark the rural millet fields and the country village to the mechanized factory labor that shapes the daily lives of laborers in both Seoul and In'chŏn. The novel seeks to understand and provide a concrete portrayal of the common social, historical, and economic forces and relationships—namely, the imposition of capitalist social relations—that produce such ostensibly different forms of exploitation and such ostensibly different ways of life.[39] In *From Wŏnso Pond*, though, the class consciousness that characters like Sŏnbi, Ch'ŏtchae, and Kannan come to is only possible because they are able to reflect on their experiences of

exploitation in both the countryside and the city and read these experiences through one another. Thus, even if the lion's share of proletarian commitment and action takes place in the city, the novel grounds capitalist exploitation in both the country and the city, and demands a rural-urban proletarian totalization that unites these two supposedly disparate spheres. What the novel attempts to portray, then, is not a kind of retreat to either the idealized countryside or the idealized city, but rather what Peter Linebaugh forcefully describes as the common "proletarian experience of violent loss shared wherever capitalism seeks self-development by taking away subsistence."[40] As we shall see, *From Wŏnso Pond* accomplishes this process of totalization through both a strategy of narrative patterning, making use of a number of mirrored narrative moments that unite the country and the city, even in their difference, and a withering critique of the idealization of both countryside and city.

From Wŏnso Pond's overlapping narrative patterns of movement towards the city and into class consciousness does not constitute an attempt to equate life in the city with class consciousness. It is not the move as such that radicalizes characters like Sŏnbi and Ch'ŏtchae: there are many apolitical proletarians in the city. Rather what radicalizes them are processes of proletarian education and mentorship, under Kannan and Sinch'ŏl respectively. In the novel, for instance, Ch'ŏtchae's comes to class consciousness through "meeting Sinch'ŏl" and discussing concerns about labor and exploitation with him:

> Ch'otache felt that there was nothing anymore that he didn't understand about the world. Everything that had puzzled him, immobilized him for half his lifetime, he could now understand clearly, as clearly as he saw this newly built road spread out before him. Even the path his life would take in the future now seemed as clear and as smooth as the newly built road...[41]

A similar relationship of proletarian education emerges between Kannan and Sŏnbi, as Kannan repeatedly refutes the claims made by their factory supervisors: "Just think about it, here they are making us work, sometimes all through the night, and all they give us to eat is this imported rice. ...They're only interested in getting as much work out of us as possible, even if it kills us."[42] Later in the novel, Sŏnbi directly connects her new understanding of the factory system, and indeed of the whole of Korea as she knows it, to Kannan's attempts to teach her. After seeing a "powerful, almost terrifying glow" in Ch'ŏtchae's eyes when she sees him on the docks, for instance, Sŏnbi "remember[s] something that Kannan was always telling her—that the world was full of enemies, people just like Tŏkho. If we want to stand up to them, we have to do it together. Somehow Sŏnbi felt suddenly empowered. Only by doing what Kannan had taught her could she ever imagine taking Ch'ŏtchae's hand into her own."[43] What we have here, then, is not an attempt to automatically equate spatial reorientation and

geographic movement with the development of class consciousness and proletarian empowerment, but rather the association of class consciousness and its development with human contact and agency, with collective projects of proletarian education.

However, what is most interesting about these two specific projects of proletarian education, though, is not what unites them, but rather what differentiates them. Kannan's attempt to bring Sŏnbi to class consciousness, for instance, depends on her attempt to link country with city through commonalities, especially through the figure of Tŏkho: "Sŏnbi! I'm telling you, the supervisors who put us to work and all those people behind them—they're hundreds and thousands of times more frightening than Tŏkho."[44] What Sŏnbi learns, then, is not that the world is divided into a static countryside and a dynamic city; instead, she comes to see that both spheres are linked together and are marked by similar processes and logics of dispossession and exploitation. She comes to see that the solution to all of the violence she has experienced is not retreat or movement but rather a collective struggle against capital: "There was no other choice but to bring together all those backs and all those hands and to join together in a fight against all of the Tŏkhos of the world. This was the only path Sŏnbi could now see before her."[45] In this particular textual moment, Kannan and Sŏnbi—and, through them, Kang—actively blur the division between countryside and city, and the two ostensibly distinct spheres are described as suffering under the regime of capital, under the demands of "all of the Tŏkhos of the world." By grounding capitalism in the figure of Tŏkho, then, Kang does not localize exploitation, but rather develops a far more general and totalizing critique of capitalist exploitation. Here, capitalism is not presented as a "thing;" instead, it is described as a variable and mutable "social relation of production pertaining to a particular historical social formation."[46] Though these social relations manifest themselves in vastly different forms, Kang and her characters actively unify experience with the expansion of Tŏkho into Tŏkho*s*. This totalization functions not because it attempts to read back abstract political-economic concepts onto the concrete, but rather because it is personal to Sŏnbi, because the complex dynamics of the capitalist mode of production can be understood through her own lived experience.

This totalizing movement, however, is largely absent from Ch'ŏtchae's discussions with Sinch'ŏl. Though Ch'ŏtchae's understanding of exploitation begins in the countryside, when he is separated from his land and the products of his labor, Sinch'ŏl never deigns to work capitalist exploitation of peasants and rural laborers like Ch'ŏtchae into his understanding of class struggle. When Sinch'ŏl asks Ch'ŏtchae if he has "been working as a laborer ever since" he was "young," for instance, he feels no need to correct or expand upon Ch'ŏtchae's negative answer: "No. I started out weeding in the fields, before doing this." Rather than working to connect this supposed form of nonlabor (weeding) with the topic of labor more generally, Sinch'ŏl instead romanticizes "Ch'ŏtchae's deep voice and unpretentious words."[47] Sinch'ŏl's inability to connect the fields of the countryside with the factory labor of the city stems

ultimately from his idealization of the countryside. For Sinch'ŏl, the countryside, even with all of its exploitation, remains a kind of refuge, cut off from capitalist exploitation. This romanticization comes to the fore most forcefully early in the novel when Sinch'ŏl is staying with Tŏkho. Observing a hand, obviously Sŏnbi's, picking squash, Sinch'ŏl can only bring himself to ask the following: "Whose hand is that? …That hand! It had thick knuckles and cracked nails…he had no idea whom it could have belonged to."[48] Sinch'ŏl cannot comprehend the relationship between Sŏnbi's rural labor and her hands and continually idealizes her physically, even when she spends most of her time sacrificing her health to labor. For Sinch'ŏl the countryside remains a space of purity, a space free from the physical deformations associated with harsh labor and capitalist exploitation. One is reminded, when reading his descriptions of both Sŏnbi and the countryside itself, of Williams's brilliant critique of the tendency of the neo-pastoral and the country house poem to excise labor from the countryside in *The Country and the City*.[49] Sinch'ŏl's understanding of the countryside, though, does not depend on the excision of labor; it depends, rather, on the idealization of Sŏnbi's work. Sinch'ŏl describes Sŏnbi as a "pure, lovely figure." For "only at the place of work," Sinch'ŏl continues, "could one discover the truth and beauty of human beings."[50] When confronted with Sŏnbi's hands, proletarian hands, he merely creates an idealized image to take their place:

> The image of thin, slender fingers came to his mind. Yes, these are Sŏnbi's hands! he thought. The unpleasant thought he had suffered on account of that one ugly hand were clearing up of their own accord. Yes, that was someone else's hand. How could Sŏnbi's hands look anything like that? Especially someone as pretty as Sŏnbi! That one ugly hand had caused him to make a gross mistake about Sŏnbi's hands—hands that he had no doubt taken unconscious note of . . . Sinch'ŏl's analysis of the matter complete, he now longed for Sŏnbi even more strongly and he wanted to postpone his departure, even by just a little.[51]

This image of Sŏnbi's idealized hands becomes the figure through which Sinch'ŏl understands the countryside. Indeed, his idealization of rural labor runs throughout the rest of the novel. After leaving home, for instance, Sinch'ŏl is described as wishing that he could abandon his city work and move to the county, where "he could spend time working the land and learning about all sorts of things alongside the farmers."[52] Sinch'ŏl's desire to return to the ostensible ease and purity of rural labor runs up against the presence of exploitation in the countryside, and also what we could describe as the accelerated primitive accumulation that, even during his idealization of the country, is dispossessing farmers through various social and economic processes. Sinch'ŏl's inability to recognize the countryside as a space riven by class struggle comes through in his individualistic desire to "rescue" Sŏnbi

"from her situation;" here, Sinch'ŏl rejects the possibility of transformation in the countryside, and indeed the existence of other rural laborers like Little Buddha, Ch'ŏtchae, Kaettong, and Granny, casting Sŏnbi's mistreatment at the hands of Tŏkho and his family as a purely singular problem from which flight is possible, rather than as a particular manifestation of capitalist exploitation. [53]

The narrative structure of *From Wŏnso Pond* disrupts Sinch'ŏl's idealization of the countryside through a process of narrative mirroring or repetition. For rather than idealizing either the countryside or the city, and thus replacing the struggle for socio-material transformation with geographical flight, this narrative patterning reveals the overarching social and material relationships of capitalism hold sway over both country and city, subjecting both rural laborers and factory workers, not to mention a growing surplus population, to exploitation and dispossession. In the novel, indeed, many of the processes of exploitation and dispossession that we observe in the rural village mirror or prefigure what we eventually see in the city and, more specifically, in the factory. The relationship of dependency that characterizes the rural laborers' relationship to Tŏkho, for instance, is mirrored in the dependence of the factory girls on the urban factory. We see the germ of this shared, though indeed very different, dependency in the painful memory that flashes up as Little Buddha sings with his fellow fieldworkers. "Like a whirlwind," we are told, "a memory had swept through his mind—the memory of borrowing grain from Tŏkho on outrageous terms."[54] This primarily affective episode is fleshed out structurally during the scene in which Tŏkho comes to collect his debts from Kaettong and his fellow laborers: "'Just bring seven sacks over. No, you still owe me ten won, mind you. But I know you've got to live on something, so I'll let you take at least one sack home—half for your share, and half as a bonus from us. Think of it as thanks for all your good work this year,' Tŏkho chuckled."[55] This dependent relationship not only structures the work in the fields, but also the lives and labor of domestic workers like Sŏnbi and Granny. In a particularly poignant textual moment, Granny reflects on her inability to sustain herself without working for Tŏkho and his family: "No matter how long she stayed in this house, all she got out of it was more and more work, thought Granny…Maybe she'd be better off quitting come fall. But if she left this house, what could a woman liker herself do, without any children of her own to depend on? Oh, help me, I'd be better off dead."[56] This rural exploitation prefigures the factory girls' dependency on the factory itself for their "food and daily necessities."[57] Sŏnbi, in fact, describes how, during her time at the factory, "they'd subtracted her board, as well as the cost of her shoes and her toiletries, so that now there was only about three won fifty left in her account." This relationship of dependency even discourages her from taking a trip the "infirmary," which, as she notes, would put her in "debt."[58]

The novel also pursues this rural-urban totalization with a more labor-focused and auto-historicizing moment of narrative mirroring, using the speech of the county magistrate to prefigure the speech of the factory manager at the Taedong Spinning

Mill. However, the county magistrate's speech—much like the scenes of rural dependency above—is much more than just a setup for a later, properly capitalist and city-based speech and situation of exploitation. Indeed, in this moment Kang foregrounds the process by which the social relations specific to capitalism have come to colonize the Korean countryside, even with all of its pre-capitalist forms of peasant production and with its traditional hierarchical social structure. It is telling, for instance, that Kang introduces the figure of the county magistrate by describing his close proximity to Tŏkho. He is described, for example, as sharing the same "platform" with not only the township clerks, but also with Tŏkho. This proximity between the leader of the village, now made mayor of the township, and the county magistrate typifies the specifically rural manifestation of capitalism in the countryside. For even if peasant production and village hierarchy are preserved in some sense, the county magistrate makes clear that this preservation is only carried out through a form of capitalist subsumption. His advice to the peasants, for instance, has very little to do with pre-capitalist and largely extra-economic forms of appropriation; instead, it calls, in a specifically capitalist way, for intervention and innovation at the point of production. "Now," the county magistrate begins, "it goes without saying that we all need to work diligently when it comes to farming."[59] As the county magistrate soon makes obvious, this diligent work is not to be done in order to supply the needs of the peasants themselves, or even of the entire village, but rather to meet the demands of encroaching capitalism. The county magistrate has little concern for subsistence. Indeed, he goes on: "The farmer must now ask himself: How can I make my paddies yield the most grain? How can I make a small paddy yield as much grain as a big one? In other words, he must go about his work with a firm grasp on the methods of farming."[60] The methods in question, though, are based largely around capitalist exploitation at the point of production. The magistrate tells the peasants, "if you all worked just a little bit harder…ah, well, what I mean is that you need to take advantage of your break time."[61] What marks the mode of production specific to the village in *From Wŏnso Pond*, then, is not some sort of pure pre-capitalist feudalism, but rather the formal subsumption "of labor by capital." In her work on the agrarian origins of English capitalism, Ellen Mieksins Wood, drawing on the work of both Marx and E.P. Thompson, defines this specific relationship as one in which "capital appropriate[s] surplus labor from workers still engaged in traditional forms of production." Such forms of exploitation, Wood continues, though they maintain a pre-capitalist appearance, are "driven by capitalist imperatives," by capitalism's "compulsions of competition and accumulation," even if these compulsions do not initially "transform the technical process of production."[62]

The factory manager's speech takes place in a more obviously capitalist setting, the urban factory, but is based on similar methods and similar pieces of advice. Much like the county magistrate, who begins from and legitimizes his demand that the peasants work through their breaks with an appeal to the abstract and unclassed collectivity

of the nation,[63] the factory manager concludes his speech about the spinning mill by asking the factory girls "to think of this factory" as their "very own factory." What concerns him, though, is not the wellbeing of the factory girls themselves, but rather that they "work as efficiently as possible." "Any slackers," he continues, "will pay penalties, mind you, so be forewarned."[64]Just like the village peasants who are told to work through their breaks, the factory girls have their own time colonized by the demands of capital.

Through this narrative patterning, *From Wŏnso Pond* offers us an integrated, though still differentiated, image of the semi-feudal yet capitalist countryside and city. What unites the two is not a necessarily synchronic manifestation of capitalism but rather the dependency upon which capitalism itself depends. As Marx argues in *Capital*, this dependency is established and extended through an ongoing process of primitive accumulation:

> The capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the laborers from all property in the means by which they can realize their labor. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the laborer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage laborers.[65]

That is to say, then, that this process removes the "means of production and subsistence" from the hand of the "immediate producer," and converts them into the "means of exploitation and subjugation of the laborer."[66] The novel itself depicts this process of accelerated primitive accumulation not only through the characters of "old man P'unghon," whose "crops" are "seized by creditors before they were even harvested,"[67] and Ch'ŏtchae, who loses "tenant rights to his fields,"[68] but also through the proletarian trope of migration, through the narrative trajectory shared by Sŏnbi, Kannan, and Ch'ŏtchae. After Ch'ŏtchae loses his tenant rights, for instance, Yi Sŏbang suggests that he go to one of those "places in Seoul or P'yongyang they call factories, where poor folk like us can go to work and make money—earn a decent living."[69] Here, then, we see one of the many results of primitive accumulation: the fact, to return to Williams's formulation above, that "cities…[draw] in…the surplus people and the uprooted laborers of the rural areas."

Such laborers must move within a many-sided mode of production whose "basic objective," as Wood makes clear, "is the production and self-expansion of capital."[70] This means not only that capitalism is oriented toward its own reproduction, but also that it concerns itself only with this reproduction and not with the subsistence

of the laborer. This is, indeed, the relationship that Marx describes in his chapter on the working-day in *Capital*. "Capital," Marx writes, "is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks."[71] Kang sometimes represents this relationship as one in which the laboring body is virtually possessed by capital. Toward the end of the novel, for instance, and shortly before her death, Sŏnbi is described as being unable to stop working in order to seek medical attention:

> Her whole body was roasting over the intense heat of the cauldron. Her throat was parched, her heart was throbbing, even her sinuses and the sockets of her eyes felt like they were on fire. If she had her way she would have lain down right there and rested for a few minutes. Several times already she had heard the supervisor's footsteps behind her, and each time she'd wanted to tell him that she just couldn't work any longer because of the pain. But her lips had always remained tightly sealed, and the words simply never came out.[72]

Some of Sŏnbi's inability, as I've already noted, stems from her own dependency and from her own attempt to avoid going into debt. However, her inability to signal the fact that she can no longer work is also the product of the specific forms of work discipline demanded by both the factory and by the capitalist mode of production more generally. Shortly before her death, Sŏnbi herself comes to understand the predatory nature of capitalist social relations. The reels in the spinning mill begin to appear to her as "giant insects slowly gnawing away at her existence."[73] This predatory relationship between capital and labor eventually leads to Sŏnbi's death, but even before the end of the novel, it is made clear that the lives of laborers like Sŏnbi are subordinated to capitalism's ceaseless drive for profit. In a particularly forceful moment, for instance, we are told that:

> Even as Sŏnbi cleaned the machine…it remained in operation. All the girls in this factory came to understand that a machine was something that never stopped moving. In fact, they were all so afraid they might get their hair or clothing caught in the machines that they tied their hair up with towels and made black, full-length aprons for themselves that covered them from head to toe. They had never worn these sorts of things before, but last spring one of the girls had gotten her hair caught, and had died a gruesome death when she was twisted up into a machine. Inside of the factory this was a closely guarded secret and no one was allowed to talk about it.[74]

Here, the demands of capitalism appear, to use Sartre's description in *The Critique of*

Dialectical Reason, as a kind of "prefabricated destiny."[75] Capitalism attempts to confine laborers like Sŏnbi—who, as propertyless workers, must sell their labor in order to sustain themselves—to an already preempted future of continued exploitation.[76]

What remains so interesting about characters like Sŏnbi, Kannan, and Ch'ŏtchae, who typify the dialectically interrelated processes of capitalist exploitation in the semi-feudal countryside and capitalist exploitation in the city, is that they render this relationship understandable not only by suffering it but also by themselves learning to understand it and by beginning to act within it in a future-oriented way. All of these characters are typical in the Lukácsian sense of the term. "A character is typical," Lukács explains in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, "when his innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society," and when he or she acts on or against the basis of this determination, Kang's characters embody and are determined by the very different and yet dialectically interrelated processes of capitalist exploitation in the colonized Korean countryside and city.[77] This totalization through characterization disrupts the idealized image of the countryside set up by Sinch'ŏl, replacing his individualistic plan of "rescue"—which, through the act of ideological conversion, he repurposes in order to save himself at the end of the novel—with a collective struggle against capitalist exploitation in both the Korean countryside and city. It is Ch'ŏtchae's ability to recognize the totalizing character of this struggle against capitalism, and not, as Perry suggests a kind of vulgar and "troubling workerism,"[78] that leads him to conclude that "Sinch'ŏl has many paths to follow. That's what makes us different people!"[79] This realization is not driven by a mere anti-intellectualism—Ch'ŏtchae, as we have established, actually learns much from Sinch'ŏl—but rather by the realization that the emancipation of a vast section of both the Korean countryside and city, of the propertyless masses who cannot buy, recant, or marry their way out of exploitation, can only be accomplished by rejecting Sinch'ŏl's acquiescence, his plan of individualistic rescue, and by struggling within and against the exploitative relationships that make up the capitalist mode of production.

III. *Mine Boy*: A Historical Novel of the Nonsynchronous

Though the two novels chronicle very different imperial and capitalist situations, the relationship between country and city, between dispossession and rural-urban migration, that is theorized in *From Wŏnso Pond* reappears in and, in fact, structures Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy*. In this pre-apartheid proletarian novel, the protagonist, Xuma, a black small producer, who realizes that he can no longer sustain himself on his family's land and moves from rural subsistence production to the gold mines of Johannesburg. Xuma settles in the township of Malay Camp, where a community of black city dwellers—headed by Leah, the sheebeen queen, who illegally brews and sells beer in the township—takes Xuma in, giving him food and a place to sleep. Here, Xuma meets Eliza, a schoolteacher; Maisy, a domestic servant; Ma Plank, an elderly woman; and Daddy, a disillusioned activist turned alcoholic. Xuma also meets

Johannes, one of Leah's regulars and a mineworker, who finds Xuma a job as a boss-boy, a black foreman working under Paddy, a radical Irish miner, dubbed the "Red One" by the black mineworkers. Paddy encourages Xuma to protest against the inhumanity of the working conditions in the mine. Toward the end of the novel, Johannes and his white foreman, Chris, are killed when improperly maintained beams—to which Xuma and Paddy previously alerted the mine's white engineers—give way and the mine collapses. In response, Xuma and his fellow black workers refuse to return to work until the beams are repaired. Despite the death of Chris, the white miners largely refuse to take part in the action. Paddy joins Xuma, though, and is arrested in the ensuing clash with the police. After fleeing, Xuma decides to take responsibility for the strike, turn himself in in solidarity with his fellow strikers and Paddy, and commit himself to a politics of interracial proletarian struggle.

According to Michael Wade, the movement of the novel depends and comments on the moral and political divide between country and city, proposing a higher moral synthesis of these two spaces and their concomitant values through Xuma's own transformation from a naïve and displaced rural laborer to a proletarian radical. Wade describes Xuma, for instance, as "coming raw from the country to seek work on the goldmines in the big city. He undergoes a transformation in the course of the novel, from being the embodiment of everything that is rural in location and traditional in morals, to the new man, hero and leader of the new class: but his successful growth depends on the health of his former roots."[80] Opposing Xuma to Leah, Wade goes on to argue that "Xuma's country code is meant to embody . . . virtues like loyalty whose application may seem universal but which are rejected by even the kindly and the good in the city. The relevance of his values has to be proven afresh, but this can only happen after they have developed and been modified through participation in urban life."[81] But the novel doesn't traffic in the division that Wade sets up between a moral countryside and an immoral city. Rather, Abrahams' novel is structured both by a much more dialectical and historically specific relationship between the country and the city, which refuses to reify either space into some sort of geographical allegory or moral symbol, and also by an understanding of human possibility less regionally or spatially bounded than Wade suggests.

We should read *Mine Boy*, I submit, not only as a country and city novel, but also as an attempt to map and understand the relationship between socio-material constraint and creative praxis, between necessity and what we could describe, by expanding Ernst Bloch's terms out a bit, as nonsynchronous possibility. Bloch associates the nonsynchronous with the uneven development of capitalism and with the existence of different temporalities and modes of production within a single moment. Though aware of the danger of the nonsynchronous image or idea as a mechanism of deflection and, even perhaps, the root of a kind of blood and soil fascism, Bloch goes on to note that the "factors of the nonsynchronous contradiction, which are… incapable of overturning present-day contradictions, nevertheless already recalled,

sentimentally or romantically, that wholeness and liveliness from which communism draws genuine material against alienation."[82] By paying attention to and representing the nonsynchronous experience of its protagonist and of those around him, *Mine Boy* avoids the easy division between idyllic and virtuous country and corrupt city, proposing, instead, a much more interesting reading of the relationship between human actors and historical circumstances. In the novel, indeed, we see the emergence of various nonsynchronous social spaces, experimental collectivities, and non- or even anti-capitalist moral economies (no matter how limited) in both Johannesburg and Xuma's own elegiac remembrances of his youth. What we have here, then, is not the proletarian novel as pastoral idealization, but rather the proletarian novel as the complex space in which the relationships between pre-capitalist forms of sociality are portrayed in their historical interaction with the anticipatory utopian relationships subordinated within and to capitalist constraints in the present.

At first glance, of course, the division between Xuma and Leah seems profound and seems to figure the division between a kind of rural loyalty and urban self-interest. After bribing a police officer for information, for instance, Leah agrees to his suggestion that she "not tell the others" about an upcoming raid. "I look after myself," Leah explains. After sensing Xuma's disappointment with her decision, Leah confronts him directly, maintaining that any attempt to "tell the others" about the raid would be foolish and would undermine her own source of information. "If I tell the others," Leah explains, "the police will know we have been warned and that will be no good."[83] Later on in the novel, Leah, in a similar moment, connects her supposed self-interestedness to the city itself, setting up an argument for a kind of urban pathology: "In the city it is like this: all the time you are fighting. . . . And you look only after yourself. If you do not you are finished. If you are soft everyone will spit in your face. They will rob you and cheat and betray you. So, to live here, you must be hard. Hard as stone."[84] The novel then shifts to Xuma's image of the countryside, which he himself opposes to Leah's description of the city and to her "hard[ness]." For Xuma, indeed, the image of the countryside is not one of "fighting," nor one of self-interest. Though Xuma acknowledges the capitalist pressures that forced him to flee the countryside, it remains, at least in Xuma's memories, a space of collectivity and joy. Unlike those "fighting" in city, Xuma's "people and all other people would be sitting in front of the huge communal fire now. They would be talking and dancing. And others would be singing. The young ones would be playing and the old ones watching." Focusing once again on the city, Xuma concludes that "here it's so different. No one trusted anyone else. Leah said it was always fighting."[85] But, as Xuma soon learns, it isn't.

Indeed, despite this separation between rural and urban values set up by characters, the division between country and city in *Mine Boy* is much less stark. The images of the self-interested and competitive space of the city, and, on a more limited level, Leah's hardness, are problematized by recurring images of experimental urban collectivity and solidarity. Far from only being self-interested, Leah takes Xuma into her home

and takes care of him, sustaining him with food, drink, and shelter. In the first few pages of the chapter, indeed, Leah demands that Xuma be given "food" and a place to rest because "[h]e is tired and hungry."[86] A similar relationship develops, again around the division and sharing of food, between Xuma and Nana, a fellow miner. Nana not only demands that Xuma eat with him, but also "divide[s] his food" and gives Xuma "half." In the same scene, though, Nana provides Xuma with a piece of advice that is as non-revolutionary as Leah's own sermons on self-interest, telling him his own exploitation will become easier to bear and that his alienation will eventually dissipate as he resigns himself to the demands of capitalism:

> First there is a great fear, for you work and you work and there is nothing to see for it. And you look and you look and the more you look there is nothing to see. This brings fear. But tomorrow you think, well, there will be nothing to look for and you do not look so much. The fear is less then. And the day after you look even less, and after that even less, and in the end you do not look at all. Then all the fear goes. It is so.[87]

"I watched them," Xuma explains to Nana, describing the eyes of the other men in the mine, "they are like the eyes of sheep." Nana fatalistically acknowledges, even insists, on the inevitability of their abjection, responding simply, "Are we not all sheep that talk."[88] Nana's concern with Xuma's wellbeing, though, reaches into and disrupts his more fatalistic pronouncements about accepting the status quo, rendering him a layered character, poised between the quiet acceptance of social and material workings of capitalism and a kind of humanism, a moral economy of the mine, that takes seriously those things which capitalism does not—namely, the physical wellbeing of the laborer. Soon after, for instance, Nana's caring is juxtaposed with the management instructions Paddy gives to Xuma: "Sometimes the men will be lazy then you must use your fist and you must kick them. It is so here, that's why I want a strong man."[89]

Much like Nana's advice to blindly accept what "is so" blindly, Leah's gospel of self-interest conflicts with and is problematized by some of her own social practices, especially her commitment to a kind of Stockvelt collective. At one point in the novel, for instance, Leah opens her home to the Stockvelt, to a gathering of "women who sell beer." For "if one is arrested," she explains, "they all come together and collect money among themselves and bail out the arrested one. They are here to collect money for those who were arrested yesterday."[90] Here, then, we see a habitual and conscious practice of working-class solidarity. And Leah's engagement in it, of course, seems to conflict with her previous advice to Xuma to "look only after yourself."

The values that Xuma locates in the countryside—collectivity and a commitment to a non-capitalist moral economy—are not entirely absent from the "corrupt" city, nor have they been undermined by the ostensibly inescapable urban milieu with all

of its various social pathologies and forms of alienation. For we see the same kinds of collectivity and the same commitment to a kind of non-capitalist moral economy, though still embedded within and in conflict with capitalist social and material relationships, that Xuma locates in his memories of the countryside refigured within the various experimental collectives of the city. The pre-capitalist countryside, with its lifestyle of subsistence production and its commitment to collectivity, provides Xuma with an incredibly important, if still complex and contradictory, image of a non-capitalist socio-material existence. However, the novel makes clear that this existence, though it survives as a memory and a kind of longing, is being driven out of existence by an accelerated and ongoing process of primitive accumulation. Xuma tells Eliza, for instance, that his home is "far away…Between two hills and a river. And it's quiet. Not like here. When I think of it now I long for it. At one time we had many cattle but now there are only a few and the land is poor."[91] The use of "[a]t one time" here signals a moment of violent historical transition, thereby pushing the ostensibly geographical divide between Xuma's homeland and the city into a historical, temporal divide, and into a kind of longing. Xuma's longing reaches across a violent historical transition, conflating geographical and temporal distance—or rather subordinating the former to the latter—in the register of a kind of autobiographical folktale.

Here, Abrahams foregrounds the fact that the South African countryside is being hollowed out by capitalism, and that its former inhabitants are being forced to migrate to the city in order to sustain themselves and their families. As Patrick Hogan explains, "Xuma was part of a massive exodus from the countryside that resulted from a series of measures taken by the South African government," including the imposition of taxes that forced rural laborers to seek jobs in the mines and other urban industries. Of course, such measures were in line with a long history of black dispossession and proletarianization in South Africa.[92] In *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, V.L. Allen notes that, after the dispossession of black South Africans was codified into the 1913 Native Land Act and the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, South African small producers were limited to native reserves, which occupied only nine percent of "the total land surface of the country." The fixed amount of land allotted to South African small producers led to "soil erosion," for there was "insufficient land to allow any of it to lie fallow and recover." Recruiters from the mines made use of these insufficiencies, treating native reserves as "labor reservoirs for the mines."[93] Xuma's typicality as a rural-urban migrant laborer is concretized by further evidence of these expropriations in the novel. In a subsequent conversation with Johannes, Xuma hears of the "compound" that houses the mine boys, many of them displaced rural laborers. Most of these men, Johannes explains, "are not of the city, they come from the farms and some are from the land of the Portuguese and others are from Rhodesia. The white man fetched them. And those that are fetched must live in the compounds."[94]

However, certain constrained spaces also witness a reemergence of the kind of social relationships that Xuma associates with a past rural lifestyle of subsistence

collectivity. Hoopvlei (Afrikaans for Hope Valley), for instance, is a resettlement camp in the "outlying district of Johannesburg," which the novel's narrator describes as "another of the white man's ventures to get the natives and the Coloureds out of the towns…in the hope of killing Vredeorp and Malay camp."[95] It is here, however, that Xuma finds "laughter, free and happy as in the old days on the farms."[96] The sections of *Mine Boy* set in Hoopvlei, just like those set in Johannesburg or Malay Camp, foreground the impossibility of a mere return or flight to the countryside . Xuma describes the crowd at Hoopvlei, for instance, as talking "much of the farms for the man of Maisy's friend came from the farms and loved the farms much. He talked of going back to the farms when he had money to buy a piece of land. But when he did so his woman looked at him as one would look at a child playing with water."[97] Here, then, the longing for the pre-capitalist countryside runs into capitalist constraint, and yet the possibility emerges of reestablishing spaces that are governed by the same "laughter, free and happy" that Xuma and his fellow displaced laborers remember and desire.

Thus, *Mine Boy*, as it turns its narrative gaze towards the experience of alienation determined by capitalist production for the market, and towards the processes of dispossession and forced migration determined by capitalist primitive accumulation, refuses to liquidate the forms of non- or anti-capitalist sociality that Xuma associates with the utopian image of the countryside. Indeed, these images provide Xuma with the criteria against which to define his experience and his exploitation. Xuma's idealization of the countryside provides him with a different image of social and material circumstances that is not easily brushed aside. Indeed, in a review of Williams's *The Country and the City*, E.P. Thompson reminds us that far from being merely nostalgic and backward-looking, the retrospective stance taken by somebody like Xuma can be the lifeblood of oppositional, and even anti-capitalist, values. "For if capitalism is the basic economic process," Thompson writes, "there has been evidence throughout (and this is the challenge which socialist theory makes) of *human* processes that are alternatives to capitalism." In some sense, Thompson continues, these human processes, which are themselves a form of futurity, must necessarily take on a retrospective cast, especially for those who, like Xuma, have lived through transitions from pre-capitalist economic and social relations to capitalism proper:

> We have to go on to ask: what form could a human protest take against an ongoing, all-triumphant economic process unless as "retrospect"? And it is exactly this defense—of use-values against money values, of affections and loyalties against the marketing of values, of idealized old community against new competition—that we find in some of the most interesting works of English literature.[98]

Thompson is himself an English historian and he's reviewing Williams here, so

the focus on England is expected and fair. But these novels remind us that the transition to capitalism is far from a specifically English, or indeed a specifically European, historical experience, nor is the retrospective experience of looking back towards pre-capitalist, and usually rural, economic formations in order to imagine, however partially, a non-capitalist future. *Mine Boy*, then, leads us to understand its characters' longing for the countryside as essentially a longing for the non- or pre-capitalist, as a kind of Romantic anti-capitalism. For as Michael Löwy notes, the "essential characteristic of Romantic anti-capitalism is a *thorough critique of modern industrial…civilization* (including the process of production and work) *in the name of certain pre-capitalist social and cultural values*."[99] According to Löwy, though, this Romantic dimension is by no means absent from Marxism, and it, indeed, gives to it a broader moral base from which to critique capitalism, a focus on "the degradation and de-humanization of the worker."[100] In *Mine Boy*, this Romantic dimension, which often asserts itself in moments of humanist concern—in a concern for the wellbeing of fellow human beings that is not subsumable within capitalist social relations as such—cannot be relegated to the past. Instead, it reappears in the mine, in Leah's place, and in the segregated enclave of Hoopvlei. *Mine Boy*, then, is not a proletarian pastoral, but a novel of the nonsynchronous. Ultimately, though, *Mine Boy* advances a nonsynchronism that chronicles not only the persistence of the past in the present, but also the prefiguration of the possible future in both of these moments.

These nonsynchronous moments provide Xuma with oppositional values and forms of experimental collectivity, but they also throw his own exploitation at the hands of capital into sharp relief, allowing him to read his work in the mines against his pre-capitalist labor in the countryside. Indeed, his statement to Nana about the sheepishness of his fellow miners is occasioned not only by the complacency that Xuma observes; it is also the product of Xuma's coming into contact with the condition of propertylessness that characterizes the worker under capitalism, and, more precisely, with alienated labor. Watching his coworkers move sand, for instance, Xuma is struck by their lack of immediate reward: "And for all their sweating and hard breathing and for the redness of their eyes and the emptiness of their stare there would be nothing to show." "It was this," we are told, "that frightened Xuma. This seeing of nothing for a man's work. This mocking of a man by the sand that was always wet and warm; by the mine-dump that would not grow; by the hard eyes of the white man who told them to hurry up."[101] In the *Grundrisse*, Marx explains the source of the distress that someone like Xuma would feel: though pre-capitalist relationships, like all modes of production, are mediated through specific social relations, they share a common thread of immediacy, basing themselves not only on the presupposition of the laborer's ownership of the conditions of her subsistence, but also, and by extension, on the immediacy of bodily need. In such modes of production, Marx continues, "*Property* . . . means no more than a human being's relation to his natural conditions of production as belonging to him, as his, as *presupposed* along with *his own*

being; relations to them as *natural presuppositions* of his self, which only form, so to speak, his extended body."[102] In the mine, of course, the natural presuppositions that Marx describes as a kind of "extended body" are almost entirely absent. Their absence speaks not only to the separation of the producer from the conditions of production wrought by capitalist primitive accumulation, but also to the subordination of production for subsistence to production for the capitalist market. Xuma's own sustenance is mediated by his alienated wage labor and the capitalist market itself. The various nonsynchronous moments in *Mine Boy* oppose themselves to this set of social relations, even while existing within them. These moments foreground and respond directly to bodily necessity, placing the importance of food and shelter over and above the individualizing and self-isolating logic—and, more importantly, the capitalist logic of production for exchange—that supposedly structures the entirety of the capitalist city.

As Thompson tells us in his essay on the moral economy, the action of the eighteenth-century crowd, even when it took the form of the food riot, was based on some sort of "legitimizing notion."[103] Popular action, he continues, was not merely "spasmodic," an unthinking revolt against hunger, but was, rather, "grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of the several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions… was the usual occasion for direct action."[104] We can see a fairly consistent, if diffuse, kind of moral economy that runs throughout both Xuma's remembrances of the countryside and through the various portrayals of experimental collectivity, most of them based around food and shelter. And the "legitimizing notion" underlying all of these nonsynchronous moments is the recognition of, and attempt to fulfill, bodily needs.[105] All of the passages I focus on above, for example, are passages in which the persistence of various forms of collectivity and human concern overwhelm, go against, or problematize the capitalist present. And these passages point not only to the image of the pre-capitalist countryside so cherished by Xuma and others, but also to the possibility of a non-capitalist future. They all, from Leah's contradiction of her own gospel of self-interest to Nana's care for Xuma, refuse the amorality of capitalist production and capitalist social relations more generally. Marx, for instance, in the first volume of *Capital*, explains that "Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labor-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labor-power, that can be rendered fluent in a working-day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the laborer's life."[106] These disparate moments of non-capitalist care and collectivity are concretized and, indeed, made a point of action and commitment in the final scene of the novel. Johannes and Chris actualize this moral economy or nonsynchronous humanism by keeping the collapsing mine "up with their bodies" so that their fellow laborers "could get out."[107] After this, Xuma, and later Paddy, not to mention the bulk of the black workers in the mine, take a stand for the wellbeing

of the human and against the wellbeing of capital. Refusing the manager's demand that they all return to work, Xuma demands that the company "fix the place up first!" "We warned them about it. They said it was all right. Now two men are dead! Good men! Let them fix it up first then we will go down!" This collective refusal is immediately connected with a kind of humanism that overrides the demands of capitalist exploitation. "We are men!" Xuma shouts. "It does not matter if our skins are black! We are not cattle to throw away our lives. We are men!"[108]

The nonsynchronous humanism that reappears throughout the text, which remains, with its non-market concern for the subsistence and health of the needy proletarian body, out of step with capitalism, is actively brought into what Bloch would describe as a kind of "militant optimism," a particular kind of "attitude" to the "undecided material" of history, "which can however be decided through work and concretely mediated action." Bloch's prime example of this attitude, which has not yet, he makes clear, fully succeeded, is "the revolutionary decision of the proletariat which today commits itself to the final struggle of liberation, a decision of the subjective in alliance with the objective factors of economic-material necessity."[109] The strike scene toward the end of *Mine Boy* embodies this shift into a militant optimism. At first glance, this scene appears to be an all-too-rapid attempt at narrative closure; it seems, in fact, to embody the ostensibly hackneyed conversion narrative of the proletarian novel (a common caricature of the proletarian novel). Bloch connects the possibility of struggling for a different future, though, to a complex and dynamic understanding of historical motion and of reality as such. For "as long as the reality has not become a completely determined one," Bloch explains, "as long as it possesses still unclosed possibilities, in the shape of new shoots and new spaces for development, then no absolute objection to utopia can be raised by merely factual reality."[110] Refusing both static depictions of the country and the city, along with static depictions of human beings as mere illustrations of one space or the other, *Mine Boy* illuminates these "new shoots and new spaces of development," drawing them out of Xuma's own understanding of the countryside and the other nonsynchronous, or non-capitalist, forms of sociality present across the country and city in twentieth-century South Africa. Indeed, in rendering his characters, Abrahams refuses the kind of "Idealist Marxism" denounced by Sartre in *Search for a Method*: a mechanistic materialism that claims that, "entirely determined by prior circumstances—that is, in the final analysis, by economic conditions—man is a passive product, a sum of conditioned reflexes."[111] All of the characters in *Mine Boy* are constrained by material circumstances and the objective socio-material relationships of capitalism, yet they are not in any way reducible to passive products. Instead, they retain, revise, and bring into being forms of sociality, and indeed various kinds of moral economies, that are at odds with, if not entirely opposed to, the capitalist drive for profit.

IV. Closure and Praxis in the Proletarian Realist Novel

Both *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* conclude by refusing any sort of narrative closure, and, even more importantly, by foregrounding the necessity of continued political commitment. As Perry notes, "Kang's novel famously ends not with a successful working-class struggle, or with an eloquent denouement wrapping up all" its "loose ends." *From Wŏnso Pond*, instead, "concludes with…the precipitous death of its proletarian heroine, and an impassioned authorial interjection."[112] Similarly, *Mine Boy* ends not with a successful strike, but rather with police violence, Paddy's capture, and Xuma's impending arrest .[113] And yet, in each novel present defeat breeds future possibility.

At first glance, Kang's concluding interjection certainly seems grim: "These human problems! More than anything we need to find a solution to them. People have fought for hundreds and thousands of years in an effort to solve them. But still no one has come up with a solution! And if that's the case, just which human begins will actually solve these problems in the future? Just who? "[114]After reading Kang's novel, however, we can see that her questions here are not without answers. The collective "who" longed for here is already prefigured in the various manifestations of collective proletarian force throughout *From Wŏnso Pond*, from the workers who watch "the sun rise" and the "factory girls over at the rice mill" who take "control of the siren" and get "violent" during the strike toward the end of the novel," to the relatively non-class-conscious, or not fully class-conscious, peasants who come together to defend Kaettong's rice from Tŏkho.[115] In Kang's novel, indeed, there is an incipient element of futurity, and this futurity is prefigured in the political commitment of workers like Sŏnbi, Ch'ŏtchae, and Kannan, and in the struggle toward consciousness, toward self-understanding and collective totalization, inaugurated by the appearance of short proletarian pamphlets, "funny scraps of paper," among factory girls.[116] Sŏnbi's death at the hands of capital and Ch'ŏtchae's blinding and paralyzing grief over it at the end of the novel do not erase these other moments of collective engagement and proletarian education. Kang's direct address places a sense of responsibility on the reader who has now, like Sŏnbi and Ch'ŏtchae, been educated (by the novel's own narrative totalization) to understand the connections between capitalist exploitation in the countryside and the city and the collective path to revolution.

Mine Boy ends with a similar turn to future commitment, as Xuma rejects both his original impulse to "run away" from the strike-breaking police and Ma Plank's advice to "[g]o to another city," deciding, instead, to join Paddy in jail and to devote himself to a life of political engagement. [117] "It is good," he tells Ma Plank and Maisy, "that a black man should tell the white people how we feel. And also, a black man must tell the black people how they feel and what they want. These things I must do, then I will feel like a man."[118] Here, then, the very possibility of humanity, of Xuma feeling "like a man," is yoked to a project of proletarian resistance and education, to a project not only of making demands on behalf of "black people," but also of helping them to

realize and clarify "what they want." Xuma's commitment here, though, is not only to the "black people," but also to fellow laborers, whether white or black, like Paddy. "The Red One's in jail," Xuma explains. "I must go there too."[119]

By expanding out the canon of literary proletarianism to include these realist novels of the country and the city, these realist novels of third world proletarians coming to class consciousness and working toward political maturity, we can begin to understand not only the thematic linkages uniting proletarian novels across the globe, but also the importance of "ideal-type" realism to the project of narrative totalization and explanation. Instead of reading realism as an inevitably backward literary imposition that stands in the way of proletarian radicalism, we can begin to understand the turn to realism as a conscious aesthetic choice made by proletarian writers in order to totalize and explain the social relations—always uneven and nonsynchronous, always in conflict with pre-capitalist and emergent post-capitalist social relationships—that make up the capitalist mode of production.[120] Because realism insists on the lived sociality and the subjective experience of these ostensibly abstract and objective relations, it gives us a proletarianism that insists on historical specificity and historical struggle at the level of the individual and of the collective. Realism can explain the development of class consciousness and of communist political organization not as certainties, but as lived realities, as struggles, in process. The theory of class struggle developed in *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* does not paper over historical specificity with some sort of arch-theory of capitalism's structural relationships; rather, these relationships are filtered through typical bodies and consciousnesses that attempt to grasp capitalist social relations and bend them toward different futures. For as Sartre argues, there is no political potential in Marxism without this attention to the lived reality of exploitation in all of its historical complexity:

If the material conditions which govern human relations are to become real conditions of *praxis*, they must be lived in the particularity of particular situations. The diminution of buying power would never provoke workers to make economic demands if they did not feel the diminution in their flesh in the form of a need or of a fear based on bitter experiences.[121]

The proletarian realist novel takes this "particularity" seriously as something to be both represented and investigated, as something to be narratively theorized. Instead of exerting some sort of blind didactic force, such proletarianism remains in touch with and cognizant of historically real possibilities and obstacles to proletarian revolution, and the historically real and difficult work that will possibly bring it into being. Indeed, as Lukács argues, a properly dialectical conception of reality, toward which the proletarian novel ought to be working at all times, is only available to us when we grasp both the incipient radical tendencies present in any given historical moment and, at the same time, the lived "obstacles" to "the upward course of the revolutionary movement."[122]

As we've seen, both *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* attempt to portray these

struggles. The "smooth" path of class struggle that Sinch'ŏl imparts to Ch'ŏtchae is disrupted and disappointed by Sinch'ŏl's project of self-rescue through betrayal and by the real, concrete, and particular way in which the demands of capital act on the bodies of even revolutionary workers like Sŏnbi. Similarly, the strike scene in Abrahams's novel speaks to the necessity of cross-racial solidarity based in the needs of the proletarian body, and also to the way in which existing relationships of anti-black racism in South Africa stand in the way of this solidarity, as they so often did in the non-fictional strikes that rocked the area, and often pitted white and non-white mineworkers against each other, from the early 1910s to the historical moment that Abrahams investigates.[123] However, both novels refuse to fetishize these moment of failure into some sort of inevitability or guiding fate. Instead, these moments of failure are obstacles to be represented, understood, and eventually transformed through the conscious work and action of the proletariat. It is the proletarian realism of both *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* that give us this portrayal of the future as ultimately unclosed. As proletarian realist novels, they both narrate what Lukács in "Narrate or Describe?" terms the "poetry of life": the "poetry of men in struggle, the poetry of the turbulent, active interaction of men."[124] Indeed, as we have seen, these novels perform not only a diagnostic function—linking accelerated primitive accumulation in the countryside and urban exploitation to the unequal social relationships that make up capitalism—but also what we could describe as a recuperative function, rediscovering anew the importance of proletarian agency and collective praxis by portraying reality as the "dialectical interaction" of subjects and objective constraint. This refusal to, in the words of Lukács, "inflexibly and mechanistically . . . split subject from object," provides the groundwork for the realist novel—with its commitment to representing the interaction between human agents and the social and historical pressures in which they act and by which their projects are constrained—as we know it. [125] This refusal ultimately allows both novels to transcend the equally limited and limiting images of the idyllic countryside and the modern or modernist city, basing their hope for a more human future not in urban modernization or the development of the productive forces, but rather in the human project of developing class consciousness. *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* resituate the country and the city, and indeed the shared theme of rural-urban migration, within the frame of human history, thereby repopulating these ostensibly static, but now understood as dynamic, spaces with human agents and opening them up to the possibility of collective praxis. The novels work through Williams's dialectical conception of country and city some thirty years before he writes it down. For as Williams reminds us, if "we take only the images," and not the lived experience of the country and the city under capitalist pressure, "we can swing from one to the other, but without illumination."[126] In the end, it is neither the city that will "save the country nor the country the city. Rather the long struggle within both," the struggle against the demands and exploitative processes of capitalism must "become a general struggle."[127] In the proletarian realist novel of

the country and the city, then, retreat gives way to engagement and flight gives way to the possibility of a fight. In *From Wŏnso Pond* and *Mine Boy* the future, in both the country and the city, remains unclosed, for it is not presented, in the words of Bloch, as that which "come[s] over man as fate," but, rather, as that which is able to be transformed through "a combination of courage and knowledge."[128]

Notes

1. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope,* trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge: MIT P, 1986) 196. Thanks to Jim Holstun for scholarly guidance and for introducing me to the work of Kang and Abrahams. Thanks also to my partner, Ariana Nash, for her comments and support; to Willis McCumber for his incisive suggestions; to the two anonymous reviewers for Mediations for their advice; and to Joe Valente, Sean Pears, and other colleagues at UB for their comments on earlier drafts of this project. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my comrades in the Living Stipend Movement, who continue to organize and fight for the subsistence of all graduate students at UB.
2. Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, trans. Arthur D. Kahn (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971) 124.
3. Kang Kyŏng-ae (1906-1944) was born to a poor peasant family in Songhwa in the Hwanghae province, now North Korea. Her farm-laborer father died when she was three, and Kang's mother's remarriage two years after to a man living in Jangyeon proved to be both a source of financial stability and a stark introduction to gendered exploitation, for both Kang and her mother were treated as unwaged domestic workers. After attending school in Pyonyang and Seoul, Kang settled in the politically unstable region of Hailin, northern Manchuria, in 1927. Here, she came into sustained contact with the Communist Party of Korea and Korean nationalists, both of whom were engaged in struggles against Japanese colonial rule. She was also brought face to face with the unevenness of Japan's imperialist capitalism, which depended upon the collaboration of Korean and, in Manchuria, non-Korean landlords. A socialist, Kang lived a life of practical political commitment, establishing a night school for poor children and participating in the development a local branch of the socialist-feminist Kunuhŏe in Jangyeon in 1928. Settling in Manchuria again in 1929—this time, in Kando—Kang began to devote herself to writing fiction. *From Wŏnso Pond (In'gan munje),* which draws on her own experience as an unwaged domestic servant and as a day laborer in In'chŏn, was serialized in Tonga ilbo in 1934. With the aid of her husband, it was published as a monograph in 1949, five years after Kang's death. For more extensive biographies of Kang, see Sang-Kyung Lee's *Introduction to The Underground Village: Short Stories by Kang Kyeong-ae* (London: Honford Star, 2018) viii-xvi; Sonja M. Kim "Introduction: Crossing Borders—Manchuria, Class, and Gender in the Works of Kang Kyŏng-ae," *Imperatives of Culture: Selected Essays on Korean History, Literature, and Society from the Japanese Colonial Era*, ed. C. Hanscom, W. Lew, and Y. Ryu (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2013) 132-136; and Yung-Hee Kim's biographical note on Kang in *Gendered Landscapes: Short Fiction by Modern and Contemporary Korean Women Novelists*, ed. and trans. Yung-Hee Kim (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2017) 58-62.
4. Peter Abrahams (1919-2017) was born in Vrededorp, in the city of Johannesburg. His father was an Ethiopian miner and his mother was a Colored domestic worker. After the death of his father, Abrahams's mother struggled to find work and support the family, and he spent a significant portion of his childhood with relatives like his Aunt Mattie, a brewer of illegal beer and, in all likelihood, the model for the character Leah in *Mine Boy*. Abrahams was attracted to the South African left because of what he felt to be its humanist promises of future equality and economic security for all South Africans, its commitment to interracial solidarity, and its materialist analysis of South African racism. During his time in South Africa, though, Abrahams became increasingly upset by the infighting he witnessed among Marxists, and with what he felt to be a general attitude of disinterestedness on the left toward the actual needs of the masses. After giving up his job as a teacher in the impoverished Cape Flats region in Cape Town,

Abrahams left South Africa in 1939, never to return, and moved to London in 1941. Abrahams's second and most widely read novel, *Mine Boy*, which draws from his experiences as a proletarian and as the relative and friend of other proletarians, including native mineworkers, women brewers, and domestic workers, in and around Johannesburg, was published in 1946. Abrahams relocated to Jamaica in 1956, continuing to work as a writer and a journalist. He was murdered in his home in 2017. Jean-Philippe Wade, "Peter Abrahams," *Literature and Politics Today: The Political Nature of Modern Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, ed. M. Keith Booker (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2015) 1-2. The most detailed accounts of Abrahams's life are to be found in his two autobiographies: *Tell Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) and *The Coyaba Chronicles: Reflections on the Black Experience in the 20th Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000).

5. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the* City (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973) 288, 287.
6. Barbara Foley, "The Proletarian Novel," *A Companion to the Modern American Novel, 1900-1950*, ed. John T. Matthews (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 357-359.
7. Michael Denning, "The Novelists' International," *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006) 721.
8. Denning, "The Novelists' International" 723.
9. Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 262.
10. Kim, "Introduction: Crossing Borders" 134.
11. Ntongela Masilela, "Peter Abrahams in the Modern African World," *Current Writing* 16.2 (2004): 34-35.
12. Foley, "The Proletarian Novel" 12.
13. Foley, *Radical Representations* 7.
14. *Radical Representations* 253, 274.
15. *Radical Representations* 254.
16. Neil Larsen, "The 'Boom' Novel and the Cold War in Latin America," *Modern Fiction Studies* 38.3 (1992): 771.
17. *Radical Representations* 225.
18. Stacy I. Morgan makes much of the loss of faith in, or, to use his own terms, "revolutionary skepticism" about, the novel among social realist writers in *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature, 1930-1953* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004) 239-301. For more on the debates among proletarian writers, especially in the U.S., concerning the efficacy of the novel form, literary realism, and formal experimentalism, see Foley, *Radical Representation* 86-169, 249-283. For a theory of proletarian literature that insists on formal realism, see Georg Lukács, "The Novels of Willi Bredel" and "Reportage or Portrayal?" *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT P, 1983) 23-32, 45-75.
19. *Radical Representations* 54.
20. Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkey (London and New York: Verso, 2007) 33.
21. Literary-historical surveys, collections of critical essays, and special journal issues on realism abound. See, for instance, Pam Morris's *Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); *A Concise Companion to Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); "Peripheral Realisms," ed. Jed Esty, Colleen Lye, and Joe Cleary, *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012); and "Worlding Realisms," ed. Lauren M.E. Goodlad, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49.2 (2016).

22. Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2015) 51.
23. Esty and Lye also attempt a revaluation of realism. But their attempted revaluation is similarly problematic. Indeed, rather than dealing with realism as a specific literary form, and thus calling for critical attention to be paid to various texts of third world realism, Esty and Lye suggest a "retrospective critical operation" of "[r]ecoding peripheral modernisms as realist." See "Peripheral Realisms Now" 281.
24. WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development* 72.
25. Larsen, "The 'Boom' Novel" 771.
26. *Combined and Uneven Development* 77.
27. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove P, 1963) 220.
28. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* 221.
29. *Combined and Uneven Development* 50.
30. Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964) 89.
31. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin, 1979) 95.
32. Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," *Aesthetics and Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2007) 48.
33. *Wretched of the Earth* 227.
34. *Combined and Uneven Development* 62.
35. Williams, "Country and the City in the Modern Novel," *Pretexts* 2.1 (1990): 13.
36. Sunyoung Park, *The Proletarian Wave: Literature and Leftist Culture in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945 (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2015) 142-143*.
37. *The Country and the City* 304. Here, Williams is referencing the relatively stagist model of class struggle and political-economic development advanced by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Paul Sweezy (New York: Monthly Review, 1964) 9: "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life." As Holstun notes in an essay on Marx's relationship to the Russian peasant commune or Mir, "'Idiocy' may retain the Greek sense of 'private, personal, separate,' but that does not eliminate the condescension." Indeed, in his pre-1870s work, Marx tended to critique the peasantry for attempting to maintain their holdings and, by doing so, for holding back the development of the productive forces. As Holstun notes, "in his later writings, Marx himself abandoned" this "city-centered modernization narrative," for "a theory of historical transition emphasizing the relations of production rather than the autonomously developing forces, historically particular class struggles rather than the universal and inevitable unfolding of a developmental sequence." Holstun continues, "Marx's new theory of history brought along with it a new respect for, even fascination with, peasant smallholders who retain the means of production." Holstun, "Communism, George Hill and the *Mir*: Was Marx a Nineteenth-Century Winstanleyan?," *Prose Studies* 22.2 (1999): 125. For a fuller picture of Marx's late-career transition, see also Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2010) and *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, ed. Teodor Shanin (New York: Monthly Review, 1983).
38. Samuel Perry, "The Context and Contradictions of Kang Kyŏng-ae's Novel *In'gan munje*" *Korean Studies* 37.1 (2013): 100.

39. In the novel itself, instances of proletarian education and organized proletarian self-activity do occur in the city, and the various instances of narrative mirroring I pursue in this section of the essay depend on the move from country to city. My argument is not that Kang ignores the political possibilities opened up by this migration under capitalist pressure and by urban life more generally. It is clear in the novel that the city offers, along with different manifestations of capitalist exploitation, various forms of class-conscious experimental collectivity and various opportunities for proletarian self-activity that are not immediately available in the countryside. In the city, indeed, we get not only the Korean Communist Party, but also the disruptive proletarian technique of the industrial strike. Rather, my argument is that Kang refuses—unlike Sinch'ŏl, her typification of a kind of insulated and ill-informed, though not unimportant, petty bourgeois intellectual—to write capitalist exploitation in the Korean countryside out of the equation. The very structure of *From Wŏnso Pond* depends on drawing fairly direct lines between rural and urban exploitation.
40. Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland: PM, 2014) 212. Park offers a historical overview of accelerated capitalist primitive accumulation in the Korean countryside, noting that "the . . . class structure of Korean rural society [became] increasingly bipolarized [after] Japan's implementation of the rice production increase policy (1920-34). This policy's export-oriented industrialization of Korean agriculture led to the concentration of agricultural capital in the hands of a small number of large-scale landlords and, correspondingly, brought about a decline in the number of owner cultivators and semi-peasants." See Park, *The Proletarian Wave* 145.
41. Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wŏnso Pond*, trans. Samuel Perry (New York: Feminist Press, 2009) 222.
42. *From Wŏnso Pond* 218.
43. *From Wŏnso Pond* 232.
44. *From Wŏnso Pond* 219.
45. *From Wŏnso Pond* 232.
46. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1993) 953.
47. *From Wŏnso Pond* 201.
48. *From Wŏnso Pond* 81.
49. *The Country and the City* 31-32.
50. *From Wŏnso Pond* 62.
51. *From Wŏnso Pond* 82.
52. *From Wŏnso Pond* 178.
53. *From Wŏnso Pond* 80. Ruth Barraclough explains that much of the factory girl literature produced by Korean proletarian writers, and especially the texts produced by male proletarian writers, "simplified the complex experience of factory girls into tales of seduction and rescue," while Kang's novel "shows how one might appropriate the resources of the social imaginary for women." See Ruth Barraclough, "Tales of Seduction: Factory Girls in Korean Proletarian Literature," *Positions* 14.2 (2006): 364. Drawing from and extending Barraclough, one could argue that Kang's novel goes beyond mere appropriation, actively critiquing the individualist assumptions of a politics based on rescue through the figure of Sinch'ŏl.
54. *From Wŏnso Pond* 42.
55. *From Wŏnso Pond* 92.
56. *From Wŏnso Pond* 78.

57. *From Wŏnso Pond* 215.
58. *From Wŏnso Pond* 266.
59. *From Wŏnso Pond* 102.
60. *From Wŏnso Pond* 102-103.
61. *From Wŏnso Pond* 103.
62. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London and New York: Verso, 2002) 67. Moving beyond Wood's focus on the English countryside, Vivek Chibber makes a similar observation about the top down transition to capitalism in colonized societies. The "expansion of capital's economic logic," he explains, "may not require…deep cultural transformations." Rather, capitalism is often able to "meet its basic needs by relying on the very cultural forms" that seem "inimical to it—those typical and traditional political economies, suffused with outdated forms of social hierarchy and subordination." See Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2013) 52.
63. "In this land of ours called Choson, ah…farmers make up over eighty percent of the population. The truth is that the destiny of our great nation has always depended on the fortunes our farmers." *From Wŏnso Pond* 102.
64. *From Wŏnso Pond* 216.
65. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967) 714.
66. Marx, *Capital* 767.
67. *From Wŏnso Pond* 92.
68. *From Wŏnso Pond* 104.
69. *From Wŏnso Pond* 118.
70. Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* 3.
71. Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, 233.
72. *From Wŏnso Pond* 265.
73. *From Wŏnso Pond* 264.
74. *From Wŏnso Pond* 261.
75. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason,* Volume I, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London and New York: Verso, 2004) 233.
76. This relationship of dependency does not stop at the bounds of the field or the factory. It also structures specific instances of sexual exploitation in Kang's novel. Indeed, Sŏnbi's dependency leads her not only to Tŏkho's house as a domestic laborer, but also, after Tohko rapes her, as a concubine. Before Sŏnbi is taken into Tŏkho's house, Kannan migrates to the city to escape the same fate. And we see similar instances of sexual violence in the factories in the novel. Indeed, it is implied that the bonuses promised to the factory girls are often dependent upon their sexual submission to the factory managers. See *From Wŏnso Pond* 128, 235, and 263. Because of Kang's attention to sexual extortion and its relationship to capitalism, *From Wŏnso Pond* demands a reading as a literary project of feminist-socialist totalization. For work that advances such a reading, see Park 196-231 and Barraclough.
77. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 122.
78. Perry, "Context and Contradictions" 117.
79. *From Wŏnso Pond* 269.

80. Michael Wade, "South Africa's First Proletarian Writer," *The South African Novel in English*, ed. Kenneth Parker. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978) 96.
81. Wade, "South Africa's First Proletarian Writer" 98.
82. Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," *New German Critique* 11.11 (1977): 35. In this essay, indeed, Bloch advises caution. For though nonsynchronous contradictions can point, by locating the traces of a more humane future in the past, to unfulfilled possibilities in residual forms of life, these contradictions are easily preyed upon and turned rightward by reactionary political formations.
83. Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (New York: Collier, 1970) 30.
84. Abrahams, *Mine Boy* 58.
85. *Mine Boy* 60.
86. *Mine Boy* 11.
87. *Mine Boy* 51.
88. *Mine Boy* 51.
89. *Mine Boy* 54.
90. *Mine Boy* 56. The proletarian stakes of the Stockvelt are brought to the fore even more forcefully in Abrahams's first autobiography. Here, Abrahams's describes the collective as a "trade union of the women who deal in illicit liquor. Each pays a weekly contribution. The total amount thus collected is given to a different member each week. The union also helped arrested members. Often, a well-known '*Skokiaan Queen*' was sent to prison without the option of a fine. In such cases the *Stokveld* helped with the home and children till the member came out of jail." See Abrahams, *Tell Freedom* 118-119.
91. *Mine Boy* 32.
92. Patrick Hogan, "Allegories of Political Maturity: Labor, Marxism, and the ANC in Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy*," *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 6.2 (1999): 43.
93. V.L. Allen, *The History of Black Mine Workers in South Africa*, Volume I (West Yorkshire: The Moor Press, 1992) 216, 220, and 223.
94. *Mine Boy* 42.
95. *Mine Boy* 103-104.
96. *Mine Boy* 105.
97. *Mine Boy* 105.
98. E.P. Thompson, "Country and City," *Making History: Writings on History and Culture* (New York: New Press, 1994) 250.
99. Michae Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization," *Theory and Society* 16.1 (1987): 891.
100. Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique" 894.
101. *Mine Boy* 50.
102. Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973) 491.
103. E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Customs in Common* (New York: New Press, 1991) 188.
104. Thompson, "The Moral Economy" 185, 188.
105. Thompson touches directly on this relationship between the moral economy of the poor and the needy proletarian body in his longer review essay on the concept. See "The Moral Economy Reviewed," *Customs*

in Common, 259-352.

106. *Capital* 265.
107. *Mine Boy* 186.
108. *Mine Boy* 187.
109. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* 199.
110. *The Principle of Hope* 197.
111. Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968) 85.
112. "Context and Contradictions" 100-101.
113. *Mine Boy* 188.
114. *From Wŏnso Pond* 269. Rather than existing outside the bounds of literary realism, the direct address with which Kang concludes her novel may be described as a kind of self-aware performance of the experience of reading a realist text. See Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel, 1977) 38-66.
115. *From Wŏnso Pond* 240, 95.
116. *From Wŏnso Pond* 219.
117. *Mine Boy* 189.
118. *Mine Boy* 190.
119. *Mine Boy* 189.
120. In *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy Over Leftism in Literature* (Chicago and Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991), James Murphy gives us a history of the development of proletarian literature that keeps faith with its commitment to realism as a project, not a Party directive. As Murphy shows, the commitment to realism was the product of international debates among proletarian writers, especially in light of their interpretations of Marx's and Engels's then newly discovered writings on realism. See especially 1-104 and 191-195.
121. Sartre, *Search for a Method* 97.
122. Lukács, "Willi Bredel" 27.
123. *Mine Boy's* publication in 1946 coincides with one of the largest strikes of black mineworkers in South African history. As Ronald Young notes, "Nearly 1,000 black workers," led by the African Mine Workers Union, "struck, completely or partially shutting down 13 mines." Up against intense police violence, the strike failed. See Young, "Miners' Strike: South Africa 1946," *St. James Encyclopedia of Labor History Worldwide*, Volume I, ed. Neil Schlager, Willie Thompson, and Daniel Nelson (St. James Press, 2004) 638. See also Allen 358-425.
124. Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 126.
125. Lukács, *A Defense of* History and Class Consciousness*: Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie (London and New York: Verso, 2000) 51, 49.
126. *The Country and the City* 298.
127. *The Country and the City* 301.
128. *The Principle of Hope* 198.