quate. It does not provide an adequate explanation of how union officials come to exist within class relations as a social layer with distinct interests. Nor does it capture how bureaucracy in the working-class movement involves the relations between members and officials. This is not unrelated to the book's weakness in terms of working-class history, especially in light of its enormous advances first sparked by New Left scholarship. *The New Men of Power* only mention African-Americans and women in passing in a handful of places, with no sense of the significance of racism and sexism for class formation and politics in the US. Mills's suggestion of the importance of worker intellectuals is correct. Unfortunately, it is plain that the heirs of the leaders he studied in the mid-1940s have not helped develop the kind of worker intellectuals needed to deal with the crisis wrought by decades of bureaucratic business unionism, and this book provides no clues about how they can be fostered.

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Robert Seguin, *Around Quitting Time: Work and Middle-Class Fantasy in American Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

Robert Seguin, in common with many visitors to the United States, is both fascinated and disturbed by the absence of any substantial discourse on class conflict. For a country that has experienced such violent labour struggles and visibly exhibits so much disparity in wealth and opportunity this absence has proved to be a constant puzzle. Seguin, in *Around Quitting Time*, examines the role and concept of the middle class in perpetuating and explaining this lack of class discourse. In the United States almost anybody from an assembly line worker to a wealthy stockbroker can make a legitimate claim to be middle class. Seguin identifies this ubiquity of middle classnessness as ironically and inextricably entwined within the American belief in a classless society. The novels under study here, by Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Nathanael West, John Barth and Ernest Hemmingway, in various ways dramatise and engage with the development of what he terms a "middle class imaginary" from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s.

This middle class imaginary is produced between the real material conditions of life and the realm of ideas and cultural discourse. This space is significant in that it creates a particular identity – the middle class – which *appears* to have a real anchor in the material conditions, but which is in fact ideologically driven and only a partial reflection of real conditions:

> In this space – which is ideological, but also material, physical – class itself and the exigencies and investments attendant upon it are, I argue, at once produced but then occluded and rearticulated, to the point where the term "middle class" itself becomes synonymous with "classnessness" (2)

For Seguin the development of the middle class is a dynamic process which constantly maintains an equilibrium between the real conditions of life and an investment in an identity grounded in these conditions which is essentially idealistic. The implications of this for any radical or socialist understanding, or investment in contrary class identities, is crucial:

> Middle-classnessness, along with a host of other forces and possibilities, cuts across the domain of social conflict, disrupting the pedagogical potential of differential class perception. It subsists, finally, on the very boundary between reason and emotion, between knowledge and affect, providing perhaps an unstable sense more than a clear certainty... (4)

The novels under study here participate in differing ways within this space; exploring and negotiating the connections between lived experience and emotional responses. The novels are important in that they allow Seguin to explore what he calls the "semantic complex" of the middle class which he sees as "the combined histories of narrative and socioeconomic change that converge in its emergence." Novels do not merely respond to and negotiate these changes, but as products are physically embedded within these processes.

The phrase "quitting time" is taken from the opening of Nathanael West's 1939 novel *The Day of the Locust*: "Around quitting time, Tod Hackett heard a great din on the road outside his office." Seguin focuses on the word "around" in that this denotes not a clear demarcation of time but a coming together of moments, specifically where work and non-work exist simultaneously. This zone of work and non-work is central to identifying the space with which the middle class imaginary is developed in that it is an ambiguous moment where the definitions of the terms work and leisure become ambiguous. Seguin points out that work itself is a "realm of freedom and of necessity all at once" while leisure "posits itself as the simple renunciation or negation of work, thus forfeiting any larger political potentiality...." Suspended between these two states the middle class imaginary can then suspend the radical political agency implicit in both. Throughout the book Seguin builds a series of related oppositions within which this middle class imaginary exists.

This middle class imaginary is a twentieth century phenomena and Seguin traces its origins to the late nineteenth century and opens his analysis with a look at Chicago in the 1880s and Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie*. Carrie arrives in Chicago at a significant period in the economic development of the

United States, epitomised most notably by Frederick Jackson Turner's paper on the frontier delivered at the Chicago World Fair of 1893. Carrie's fragile position within the newly industrialised and urbanised city allows Seguin to identify and develop a series of oppositions within which this new middle class emerges. The zone of work and non-work is a central mediating opposition and identified early in the novel when Carrie watches the workers leaving at the end of the day. For Seguin this moment captures "a fleeting period when labour and leisure effectively interpenetrate one another...." This state between work and non-work exists in a specific historical moment and therefore coincides with other middle states, most notably the one between the rural and the urban. *Sister Carrie* is primarily concerned with the "ideological function of an older image of idealised agrarian production being translated into the terms of modern consumer ideology...." Dreiser's use of the pastoral urban ideology suggests an "exemplary middle space or landscape, where invidious extremes of any kind are wondrously neutralised." This of course serves as the central point of Seguin's argument regarding all these sites. Importantly *Sister Carrie* explores "a new ideological world of middle-classnessness, to which social class *as such* stands as a kind of constitutive outside." [my italics]

Seguin traces the development of this middle class imaginary as it develops through the twentieth century. Each writer is seen to engage with differing formulations of this middle space as the United States emerges into a mature capitalist system. While each writer is seen to negotiate differing tensions and oppositions as economic and labour conditions change, Seguin identifies a common concern with this middle space and the implications for political agency. In his reading of Willa Cather he places the novels *A Lost Lady* (1923) and *The Professor's House* (1925) within the context of the rise of the professional and managerial classes, alongside a redevelopment of a work/leisure opposition. In a rereading of these novels, and attention to Cather's own ambiguous position as a writer, he argues that the traditional view of Cather as a conservative, especially regarding her belief in hierarchy, is "not so much wrong as insufficiently elaborated." For Seguin, Cather demonstrates such an ambivalent response to the rise of these managerial and professional classes that it is possible to locate a much more radical tension that is implicit within her novels. Cather's attempts to read back into the prairie past a class hierarchy that never actually existed is not necessarily a conservative yearning, but a potentially radical response to the rise of the middle classes, of which Cather's own position as a writer is inextricably bound.

Seguin moves through to the 1930s and examines the rise of mass culture and consumerism alongside the radical promise of the New Deal and the

Popular Front. In a reading of West's *The Day of the Locust* he argues that the failed desire and violence within the novel is symptomatic not only of the "disappointments of consumption and mass culture" but of the "failure of the possibility of collective action as such, and the commensurate weakening of the individual." The "missed opportunity" of the 1930s leads into the final chapter on the 1940s and 1950s. During the period of the "Fordist golden age" John Barth's *The Floating Opera* (1956) and Ernest Hemmingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) emerge during a troubled period for radical action. Collective challenges to capitalism become muted within the collective experience of a matured middle class, where even the novel itself is fighting for survival.

About Quitting Time is engaged with that long-standing issue as to why socialism has constantly failed to impress in the United States. Whereas other recent studies such as Seymour Martin Lipset's and Gary Mark's *It Didn't Happen Here* have focused on the economic and political structures in the United States, Seguin engages with the cultural and ideological pathways that work in and around such structures. Specifically he highlights the importance of literary texts in their ability to reveal such ideological movements, but also as products become integral to ideological resistance, negotiation and occasionally capitulation. Issues such as literary form, aesthetics, readership and criticism therefore become crucial in engaging with the development of what Seguin terms the "cultural presence" of "social class in its specifically capitalist sense."

Seguin's approach necessitates a highly theoretical understanding of cultural processes within the realms of politics and economics and as such there is the occasional difficulty of grounding such a theoretical method within the vagaries of everyday life. Seguin is well aware of this and in this light he calls for an understanding of class theory that holds together an understanding of class as being "much more than an economic category" while simultaneously accepting that class is "indeed, ruthlessly, economic." Such a balancing act has always been difficult to maintain within Marxist theory and practice, especially when operating in such an inhospitable environment as the United States. Seguin sees recent attempts to overcome this problem by downplaying class in favour of lived experience and difference as tending towards a ratification of the underlying political and economic structures of capitalism. As a rejoinder to these moves he attempts to re-articulate the role of class in the United States as a dynamic and crucial category while avoiding the reductionism that has often attended a merely functional understanding of class. *About Quitting Time* is an excellent study of cultural formations of class grounded in political and economic change while maintaining a focus on close, critical readings of the novels. Whether he has succeeded in offering

some form of resolution to the problem of class and political agency in the United States I feel will be vigorously debated.

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