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Ideologies of American Oppression:

Tracing Capitalist Discourses in Twentieth Century Protest Literature

Twentieth century America prided itself on doing three things well: constructing, consuming, and controlling. An industrial revolution propelled the commercial sphere and the general standard of living to previously unseen levels, allowing many individuals to amass great wealth, but not the majority of the population. Instead, wealth became polarized, as did the power wielded by elites through private and public venues, such as corporations and the state. Conversely, American social progression required the organization of large bodies of labor to support the continued growth of an economy dependent upon the production of commodities. Capitalism, or the described economic system of economic competition and control, did not find its inception at this time or even in America. Rather, the framework for Twentieth century economic relationships had been developed through the evolution of ideologies and social structures arising from the Enlightenment in Europe, and later, the advent of Modernity.

Ideologies supporting these capitalist behaviors, institutions, and beliefs have been influential roots of economic stratification. Stratification of ownership not only continues to guide contemporary social organization, but it also operates within the culture and, consequently, the art produced currently as well as throughout the past century. Thus, literature reflects the cultural locus, deriving meaning from behind society's signs and symbols in association with any and all active discourses at any given point in time. Critical analysis of social structures in

fiction, in the stories individuals within society choose to tell and the words they decide to use to describe themselves and others, is a lens through which insight can be gained about the structures present amongst the foundation for the continued development of capitalist society through the 20th century, and even into the present. I intend to apply this lens to the discourses of 20th century American literature to ultimately uncover the ideologies of elite economic, racial, and sexual control that exist within the works.

The issues that can be explored through an analysis of dominance within American literature remain and will continue to be relevant to stratified society, American and otherwise. In order to best observe this relationship, rather than critique texts most manifestly representative of the influence of capitalism, the focus shall remain on three select works of literary protest: *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, and *Spartacus* by Howard Fast. These novels sought to inspire outrage and draw attention to the perceived inequities of their time, and all of them are mass-read texts well-suited to studying the presence of ideology within literature—especially when those pieces were written with the intent to subvert or foil an aspect of the dominant cultural understanding. The texts under primary consideration are important because of their content and plot in relationship to these ideologies, and well as the ways in which the texts have expanded American discourses. A respected frame of critical literature will be utilized as influential parts of a cypher through which domination ideologies will be decoded. This primarily includes (but will not be limited to), *The Dialogic Imagination* by M. M. Bakhtin, *History of Sexuality, vol. 1* by Michel Foucault, and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* by bell hooks. Through the works of these theorists, a functional literary model of the interaction between ideology, culture, and the literature within the culture, can be synthesized that can fruitfully lead to a traceable trail of capitalism as future culture is outlined,

produced, and disseminated.

Contrary to the assertions of analyses utilizing strictly deterministic or aesthetic theoretical principles, literature is neither a predestined reproduction of culture, nor does it spring forth from creative oblivion into existence. A work is as much a reflection of the culture from which it was produced as it is an influential description of the ongoing chain of interactions and structures that will be the culture. There are definite historical forces and actors that cause the “feedback loop” relationship this thesis will attempt to analyze and discuss in relation to the 20th century and its literature. Through critical dissection, an answer to the question of the effect of elite economic, racial, and sexual control of literature can be approached. The intellectual foundation established by the aforementioned works provides a basis for understanding literature and art, generally, beyond the specific applications that can be found for the selected novels. Their fusion allows for a much greater range of criticism spanning a further extent of the ideological intricacies observable within the discourses.

As the first text in this study’s theoretical underpinning, bell hooks’ *From Margin to Center* provides a critique of interconnected ideologies supporting oppression along class and race lines, as well as gender and sex. Acting as a dissenting voice within the largely white-dominated feminist movement, hooks criticizes the feminist movement for predominantly operating to equalize the sphere of employment for white women of middle and upper classes and reducing the importance of the experiences of poorer women and women of color. Calling this outcome “unsurprising,” hooks says the dominant white women “make [nonwhite women and impoverished women] the ‘objects’ of their privileged discourse of race. As ‘objects’ [women of color and poor women] remain unequals, inferiors” (hooks 13). Referencing the large preponderance of work produced for the women’s liberation movement that specifically attacked

sexism and/or men, hooks illustrates the manner in which this positioning disregards the gradients of class, the effects of racism, and their combination:

Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means? Implicit in this simplistic definition of women's liberation is a dismissal of race and class as factors that, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed. (19)

Hooks follows with an extensive and thorough critique of the exclusion of men from the feminist movement and the general antagonism, therein; an analysis of the heterosexist family and the accountability of doctrines advocating for dominance of any one form of sexual identity; and suggestions for intellectual change to assist in a revolution of the dominated.

The ideologies under hooks' scrutiny have played substantial roles in the social construction of sexuality, and this is supported by French theorist Michel Foucault as he delves further into the social forces that have guided the historical creation of a human sexuality in volume one of *The History of Sexuality*. Because sexuality exists as such an intense nexus of many different forms of communication, it was nothing more than a rational use of elite labor for the organized forces of social control, such as the church, the bourgeoisie capitalist class, and the state, to utilize this form of discourse (or even, *discourses*) to affect their dominance:

This is the essential thing: that Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant optimization and increasing valorization of the discourse on sex; and that this carefully analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects

of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself.

(Foucault 23)

From this, “never had there existed more centers of power” to which power could be exerted and the desired behavior of a population (and its labor) could be exacted (49). From the connection of sex to life and life to death, and through the historically “new” techniques of discipline and control wielded by the state and other institutions of social regulation, society enters into an era of what Foucault refers to as “bio-power” (140). Throughout, he is critical of notions of a “sexual revolution” or an “antirepressive” sexual struggle ever having actually occurred and succeeded, calling it “nothing more, but nothing less—and its importance is undeniable—than a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment of sexuality” (131). The significance is the manner in which even movements of protest can easily (and often do) operate along the discursive parameters created by institutions and social structures that seek to oppress.

Finally, the four essays written by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin from his posthumously published book *Problems of Literature and Esthetics* and translated under the title *The Dialogic Imagination* collectively discuss the greater theoretical implications of the novel as a genre, or, more specifically, an unfinished genre broadened with the addition of every piece of work. For Bakhtin, “the novel is the only developing genre,” and from the present encroachment of time, the primary literary genre that is as unfinished as the procession of human society producing it (4). Therefore, with the creation of each piece, the genre changes, and the discourses presented to the reader evolve “in dialogue” with each other order to reconcile the ideological past as well the ideologies of the author. This is the dialogic nature of language: “... a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view, not an intra-language struggle between individual wills or logical contradictions” (273). Through the various technical strategies of novelistic literary writing, the

social conditions that govern meaning within any given instance, what Bakhtin terms “heteroglossia,” can enter into the writing, and then through what is written, back into the social world (263). Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel, is “*another’s speech in another’s language*,” “dialogizing” between authorial intentions and social discourses (emphasis in original; 324). This continuous process is nothing short of a social cycle of literary meaning-making, and it is the method by which ideologies of domination and oppression are recycled into the culture, yet non-deterministically, as the dynamic nature of time has an effect on their interactions.

The analysis undertaken with this composite theoretical lens is apt to begin with the functional aspects of American protest literature. Authors of novels of this genre from the Twentieth century often optimized the socialist realist fiction-writing mode for their ideological ends. Posed in such a way as to present a mirror to society, to show the true reflection of a morally corrupt social system, messages are packaged under a pretense of the natural, or, in the words of Vladimir Lenin, “straightforward reporting”—“the way things are,” so to speak—simply described in truth to reveal oppression and inflame an outcry from the reader (Drake 4). But this use of naturalism actually belies the many authorial techniques, such as protagonist identification, that protest authors utilized to affect the desired response in their readerships. As stated by Jesse Cohn in *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation*, this relationship is deeply problematic in that the stance continues to create a hierarchical association between author and subject, the latter the target of representational control (12).

Within this seemingly simple contradiction is where characters constructed to reflect stereotypical notions of racism and sexism enter. This is even true for classism, although a foremost attention of the genre was certainly dedicated to highlighting the economic inequities

inherent to capitalism. It is important to note that the presence of hierarchical ideological constructs within these three novels under examination, as well as those to be analyzed within any piece of literature, does not summarily detract from the works' value in criticizing then-contemporary or existing social structures facilitating domination. Concurrently, "[i]t also does support and perpetuate sexist [and racist and classist] oppression" (hooks 42). As a result, the contradiction is not a neutralization.

The relationship progressive/socialist movements have had and continue to have with the multiple intersections of social identity and positionality can be paralleled with that of the white, bourgeoisie feminist movement criticized by hooks, ultimately guilty of conferring primacy upon one aspect as a base, sex, much as the economy is prioritized by Marx and following Marxists, showing all other forms of oppression, all other aspects of society, to be stemming from the control of the means of production, resources, and wealth (Marx 159-160). In this way, nonwhites are located (often forcibly) upon the periphery, and are treated in such a way as to reflect their status as an "other." This denies that systemic forms of oppression are linked socially as well as foundationally, as stated by hooks: "The sexism, racism, and classism that exist in the West may resemble systems of domination globally, but they are forms of oppression that have been primarily informed by Western philosophy. They can best be understood within a Western context, not via an evolutionary model of human development" (hooks 36). The contextual "philosophy" to which hooks refers is the intersectional spectrum of hierarchized oppression, the rule of the "powerful," or those empowered by social and historical circumstances, the dominant, over those held in domination. Thus, reducing the complexities of domination to a singular pole while ignoring and/or utilizing other oppressive ideologies is tantamount to advocating for world views that employ these ideologies as otherwise truthful

representations of reality. In doing so, they actually propose a naturalistic fallacy—objectifying the other, some other, for the sake of advocacy of their message.

While under the inspection of the reader, this objectification is turned upon the ethnicity of the Lithuanian Rudkus family in *The Jungle*. While Jurgis is given the primary focus of Upton Sinclair's narrator, in the beginning, he is nonetheless presented as the other, his body given ethnicity, then his body described to explain his character. The author even includes a pronunciation of the main character's name in the margins of the text, "Yoorghis," to emphasize this otherness; he has "mighty shoulders and giant hands," and his physical prowess at the age of eighteen is impressive, especially in spite of his nervousness at the sight of his fifteen-year old bride, Ona (emphasis in original; Sinclair 2). Ona's newly fatherless family is thrown into destitution and decides to follow Jurgis out of the old country under the auspices of money to be made across the Atlantic Ocean. Jurgis, as for himself, goes seeking wealth and to legitimize his marriage to Ona, to become a "rich man in the bargain" (Sinclair 19). Out of the total party of twelve, only Jurgis and his middle-aged father are in the position to work the male-guarded jobs that can provide the largest portion of the income necessary to support the group (although the women do work). Missteps such as these plague the Rudkus clan (as well as those events pointedly written as out of their control), and, as stated by one critic, "[Sinclair] provides a plethora of victims to be picked off by the evil capitalist system" and conveniently omits the rational and collective interactions undertaken by immigrants communities during the turn of the 20th century to support themselves and each other (Elliot 44). These relationships included, but were not limited to, memberships in organizations such as churches and social groups established by and catering to specific ethnic groups within Packingtown, but also opportunities for inter-ethnic cooperation (Barrett 75).

On multiple occasions, members of the Rudkus family are directly referred to as ignorant (Sinclair 34). Seemingly ensuring this, despite living amongst many other immigrants who have been inhabiting the area and working in the stockyards for some time before them, it is only after falling victim to a housing scheme that the family receives any helpful information from the community. In fact, it is through an older Lithuanian and socialist, Grandmother Majauszkiene, that this knowledge is gained too late. While cynical, Majauszkiene is shown to be accurately aware of the exploitation commonplace to Packingtown (and America), yet her socialism is, at first, met by the group with vague mistrust spoken through the narrator: to them, she is either a socialist or “some such strange thing” (56). Even though she is well-connected to channels of intelligence from “inside” the system (her son belongs to a political organization with the contractor who built the low-quality, high-interest homes) (55), validating her knowledge, “the grim old woman[’s]” warnings are first questioned for exaggeration (57), then solidified as the truth as Majauszkiene is transparently described as “typifying fate” in her physical appearance (58).

Instead of exchanging communal assistance to address their impending problems, the disturbed Rudkus family send their experienced neighbor home, viewing themselves as “victims of a relentless fate, cornered, trapped, in the grip of destruction” (58), and futilely resolve to work longer, harder, and through more family members—namely their children (59). The absence of any outreach for support through Majauszkiene, as well as the shift to deterministic language regarding fate, is Sinclair manipulating reality and his stereotypical immigrant representations to fit the project of his narrative. There must be setup for tragedy so that afterward Jurgis may be saved by the enlightenment granted by socialism; the reader’s early exposure to the ideology’s veracity only serves to reinforce its validity. By the end, Jurgis must

have “the black and hideous fact made plain to him” by a fiery socialist speaker about the nature of the system within which he works, even and especially after all the horror and degradation he has personally experienced up until that point (Sinclair 258). Jurgis and the immigrants must embody ignorance in order to fulfill the purposes of the author and his socialist ideology.

The appropriation of ethnicity can be observed in a similar manner through the Jewish attorney Boris Max in *Native Son*. Max takes up Bigger Thomas’ defense for the rape and murder of Mary Dalton, delivering the powerful court remarks that make up the climax of the final chapter of the book, “Fate.” Max espouses the socialist thesis of environmental conditioning to explain the structural forces that create Bigger, the man and criminal, and is an open communist vilified by Richard Wright’s depiction of the Chicago public in part because of his ethnicity. He is attempting to relate to Bigger’s ostracism when he admits “[the public is] writing letters, calling me a ‘dirty Jew’” (Wright 348). Max explains his political ideology as in part connected to his ethnicity: “‘Oh they’ll hate me, yes,’ said Max. ‘But I can take it. That’s the difference. I’m a Jew and they hate me, but I know why and I can fight’” (359). Wright, himself, in a refutation of a negative review in the *Atlantic Monthly*, makes a conscious effort to parallel black struggles against oppression with that of the Jewish people, saying the latter have appreciated Soviet Russia’s “proletarian” solution to the problem of race, a solution Wright says he would accept in the United States (“*Native Son: About the Book*” 11). Both Boris Max and Grandmother Majauszkiene not only illustrate the appropriation and misappropriation of ethnicities, but they also display the authors’ creation of “ideologues.” Ideologue characters (which are technically *all* characters) “exposes convictions that are then subjected to the novel to contest,” and ultimately allow the author to communicate the righteousness of their argument to the reader (Bakhtin 333).

The depictions of Africans in Howard Fast’s *Spartacus* in part operate as ideologues,

albeit through the guidance of narrative rather than dialogue. They are also exemplary of the privileged relationship given to whites by the ideology of white supremacy in America's capitalist culture. Blacks are shown to be utilities, objectified, for their bodies and their significance to the plot. It is the black gladiator Draba's suicidal attack on the homosexual nobility in the arena stands that serves as the virtual martyrdom to inspire Spartacus to lead an uprising. Draba "loves and values [Spartacus] above all other white men in the place," for his charisma and the paternal relationships the latter has built with the former and all other gladiators, regardless of relative age (Spartacus is in early 20s) (Fast 81). Rather than fight his friend to the death, Draba's refusal is also his sacrifice, and Spartacus' recognition of the value in fighting, even with the prospect of failure, for a cause rather than simply due to a desire for survival, is stimulated by the other's death. The black man is reduced to his dead body, both literally and metaphorically, and "the great body of the Negro," mutilated and hung along the wall, becomes a vehicle through which the plot is delivered to the point where an expanded understanding is realized by the protagonist, and, hopefully, the reader (111). This is skillfully completed by Fast so that on page 114 he can claim of the relationships among the gladiators an absence of a sense of "race, city, or state." In truth, this is a strategy frequently employed by writers of protest literature.

This is the author "shaping" historical stories, through figurative language and emotional descriptions, to compel a desired expansion of consciousness from the reader, yet simultaneously maintain the reader's self-assurance that what they are consuming is representative of "reality" (Drake 7). From this point, a question of racial oppression is pushed to the margins of the *Spartacus*'s call for social justice, even though it is through a racialized character. As a result, this text builds upon American racist discursive lines that do nothing to destabilize the facet of

domination enabling white supremacy; instead it undermines its otherwise progressive efforts. To quickly disperse the possible conjecture, it should be noted that a central theme of *Spartacus* is the corrupting presence of slavery within Roman society (Spartacus's revolt the last of Rome's Servile Wars); rather than a political commentary on African American chattel slavery or even contemporary, American race relations, the novel intends to present a criticism of class and the system of domination.

Sinclair provides a less admirable characterization of black Americans in *The Jungle*. While the unionized workers of Packingtown go on strike, Jurgis (now happy to quickly take advantage of any dishonest means to gain wealth or power) begins overseeing a slaughterhouse full of strikebreakers—"scabs," "criminals and thugs," as well as "Negroes and the lowest foreigners—Greeks, Roumanians, Sicilians, and Slovaks" (224). Managing the black "scabbers" frustrates Jurgis, as they are "stupid" and too lazy for work (225). The stereotype begins to take on a singular, physical presence throughout the following passage: that of the "black buck." The racist ideologue is given a single line of dialogue, created to represent the entirety of the collective group of threatening "black bucks": "'See hyar boss,' a big black 'buck' would begin, 'ef you doan' like de way Ah does dis job, you kin get somebody else to do it'" (226). This stereotype exists independent of *The Jungle*, and it is characterized by a lazy and dangerous black male ascribed animalistic or subhuman attributes, such as decreased intelligence and an oversexed libido (Noon 431). This is why it is specifically delivered with such scandal that amidst the slum dwellings where the trucked-in black workers are residing there are "young white girls from the country rubbing elbows with big buck Negroes with daggers in their boots," and "the nameless diseases of vice were soon rife" (Sinclair 229).

The intersectional nature of oppression can be observed through the aforementioned

“white girls” interacting with the “black bucks,” but also via the following single direct illustration of black women in *The Jungle*. Sinclair’s narrator depicts, around a “bonfire blazing... an old, gray-headed Negress, lean and witchlike, her hair flying wild and her eyes blazing, yelling and chanting of the fires of perdition and the blood of the ‘Lamb,’ while men and women lay down upon the ground and moaned and screamed in convulsions of terror and remorse” (Sinclair 230). As related by hooks, this racist stereotyping of black women as having some inhuman power and strength over others, while white women are seen as powerless, “mystifies” and ignores the social reality that black women are often victimized as a result of their sex and race, and it is sometimes white women who perform the “maintenance and perpetuation of that victimization” (15). The described passages are evidence Sinclair’s writing was certainly influenced by a doctrine of white supremacy (Noon 431). To Sinclair, blacks represent a threat not only to the economic gains that can be made by socialist workers through striking, but also to the moral and social wellbeing of his constructed world. Their ancestors are condemned as savages, and the “freedom” they gain through their transportation into Packingtown will only result in them “wreck[ing] themselves” (229). For Sinclair, it is best to exclude blacks from his utopia because of their natural inferiority.

The racial objectification described above is paralleled in the literature’s treatment of sex and gender. Many of the characters employed, both male and female, illustrate the usage of essentializing stereotypes that equate sex with socially-constructed gender roles. These sex-marked ideologues that exist to categorize differences along a binary—“identity/other, man/nature... man/woman”—function to assert a biologically deterministic depiction of sex and also relegate women to the passive and objectified pole in the hierarchy (Jones 91). Thus, the discourse on sex that expands in relationship to the author’s narrative decisions does not deviate

from the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal mode, because it is such "...biological determinism that is the philosophical foundation for notions of male supremacy," in the first place (hooks 129). The outcome is the casting of male and female characters in roles that reflect the author's conception of a natural sexual hierarchy.

The ideology of sexual domination appears as a pervasive dialogic aspect in *The Jungle*, giving an ample amount of thematic significance to the intrinsic social roles of men and women, and how they face those lived experiences denied, stunted, or deformed at the expense of their gender and as a result of the capitalist system. Jurgis and Ona operate as these ideals, to be propped up and destroyed by the events of the novel. In the very beginning, Jurgis always responds to the family's impending crises with the shout, "I will work harder!" causing Ona to think of her husband: "[I]t was so wonderful to have a husband, just like a grown woman—and a husband who could solve all problems, and who was so big and strong!" (Sinclair 14). This ideal is constantly impeded through the presentation of the harsh realities of life in Packingtown (and by extension, inside capitalist society). For example, on page 36, the reader is informed it would be "a strange thing," for a man with the physical prowess of Jurgis, the perfect worker, if he "could not support the family," the logic described if Ona were to have to find work, and she of course must when they discover the extra debt they have incurred from the housing scheme that has entrapped them. It is this turn of events that places Ona at work to be preyed upon by Miss Henderson and the "red-faced Irishman named Connor," effectively confirming the paternal impulse as justified and warranted (88). In the final act of the novel, Jurgis' inability to attain the masculine ideal comes to a head, as he sees his body physically reduced to a state of emasculating weakness. A "hideous experience" that "almost [breaks] his heart," he is turned away from a job because of the obvious appearance of his withered strength, and the consequent

desperation he feels is both from his hunger and what joblessness means to the homeless and starving in the winter, and also because of its meaning as the final subversion of the masculine role he has been prevented from embodying throughout the novel (236).

The depiction of Ona's life and death provides an obvious opportunity for an analysis of sex and gender with *The Jungle*. Although this certainly extends to the utilization of her sexuality, such a topic will be reserved for greater focus and discussion later. First, to begin with, Ona is described as "sensitive" (Sinclair 61), and in need of Jurgis "to do battle for her against the horrors he [sees] about them" (62). The reader is to understand this as a legitimate need rooted in reason, as Jurgis has begun to accept the evils that are caused by the capitalist system, and it is within the same page that his paternalism is again given credence. Although Jurgis is apprehensive, he chooses to "put" Ona on a streetcar to send her to work in a torrential rain; as a result of the obstinacy, greed, and lies given by the conductor, Ona is forced off at the wrong stop and must walk to work in the downpour, causing her to sit all day in the "cold cellars of Brown's" and grow sick for the next following weeks (62). Ona's life is objectified as under the paternal care and possession of Jurgis, and the reader is supposed to sympathize and identify with his attempts to protect her, especially as they are foiled by "the blow of an enemy that [Jurgis] could not possibly have thwarted" (62). Similarly, the forces of weather are symbolically linked to the callousness of unaffected, unyielding actors within the system (the conductor), so the foreshadowing within in the same paragraph on the following page makes this connection clear: this enemy is just as likely a "forelady" who "[does] not like to have girls marry—perhaps because she was old and ugly and unmarried herself," but who is, in actuality, pimping them out—literally to Connor and metaphorically to the system of capitalism (63).

The most important role Ona plays in the novel is that of the mother, of the possessor of a

body that can and does give birth. This is not only true through the progression of plot, but also through the effect that her pregnancies have upon Jurgis, effects also supposed to occur upon the reader. Ideologically, this reflects a preeminence given to motherhood within the life of the woman as well as the correlative social relationship defined between mothering and womanhood—naturally, that women are “more suited to raise children” than men because they are “inherently caring nurturer[s]” (hooks 137). This does not equate to a greater valuation of the woman’s life, but rather, a subjugation of her and her body to her role as a mother. As is stated by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*:

It is not possible to measure in the abstract the burden of the generative function for woman, just as it is not possible to measure her grasp on the world: the relation of maternity to individual life is naturally regulated in animals by the cycle of heat and seasons; it is undefined for woman; *only society can decide; woman’s enslavement to the species is tighter or looser depending on how many births the society demands and the hygienic conditions in which pregnancy and birth occur.* So if it can be said that among the higher animals individual existence is affirmed more imperiously in the male than in the female, in humanity individual “possibilities” depend on the economic and social situation. (emphasis added; 69)

To de Beauvoir, the experience of pregnancy is as multivariate as the multiplicity of conditions and women undergoing the reproductive process—and in response to a social demand, not a biological imperative. To Sinclair, the family ideals associated with the “American Dream” that dictate the reproduction of children are of elevated, natural importance, and, although a “nuclear” family is not explicitly described, the assumption of bearing children is not questioned as being anything other than an intrinsic part of womanhood. For Ona, the number of births is one

successful, one deadly; such is shown to be the toll of capitalism upon the woman and her life, pointedly illustrated through her biologically determined role as a mother.

Although Ona's first birth is described in positive terms, it is presented from the perspective of Jurgis in relationship to the products of her birth-labor: "[The comical imitation of his father's nose]... was intended to signify that it was his baby; that it was his and Ona's, to care for all its life. Jurgis had never possessed anything nearly so interesting—a baby was, when you came to think about it, assuredly a marvelous possession" (Sinclair 89). Jurgis is at last able to "achieve" one of the foremost goals of manhood—a male legacy, as is further communicated through the naming of the baby Antanas, after Jurgis' late father. Following, the misfortune of the situation, that a working man such as Jurgis can not enjoy his own child on his own time, is immediately impressed upon the reader. Ona's relationship to the baby, similarly couched in wording that implies a "use-value" of their child, comes secondarily, and then only to comparatively reinforce that of Jurgis through Ona's physiological need to stay home for her own health, and also that of the child through breastfeeding. Finally, the true effect of the pregnancy on Ona is disclosed, and the positivity given to little Antanas' birth, what Sinclair has crafted to stress the foremost, is reversed.

Forced to go back to work only a week after giving birth, both to avoid termination and also to supply for the material needs of the family, Ona takes ill with one of a number of post-natal diseases and disorders Sinclair broadly defines as "'womb trouble,'" and is "never again a well person as long as she lived" (90). The narrator reveals that Ona is directly representative of "the great majority" of the Packingtown women physically suffering after having children, and despite the commonplace feature of the widespread set of medical problem, none discuss it with their doctors (90). With this detail, Sinclair solidifies that the suffering of women goes

unalleviated, and in doing so, ensures the depiction of a just pregnancy and family origination subverted under his target of criticism. In other words, capitalism causes the woman to be denied the opportunity to healthily embody her role as is dictated by nature—that of the mother. For Ona, the denied identity is equivalent to a denial of her biological sex, and intended to work as another condemnation of capitalism.

Ona's last action in *The Jungle* is to die in childbirth with her second child (Sinclair 158). Jurgis, imprisoned for assaulting Connor, is released in time to struggle back to his house to find his family has been evicted, that they are now in living in the equivalency of a cramped crawlspace with many other workers, and that Ona is in the midst of a violent and complicated birthing (149). Rushing to find medical assistance, Jurgis knows he cannot afford a male doctor like he would prefer and who was present during the birth of Antanas, and settles on “a Dutchwoman” midwife, described frequently as “enormously fat,” named Madame Haupt (151). After extorting Jurgis for a large sum in debt, that is, by his admittance, probably impossible to pay back, Haupt relents to see Ona with what can be interpreted as the author's cynical description of her self-involved “empathy”: “[Jurgis] turned and started away again. He was halfway down the stairs before Madame Haupt could shout to him: ‘Vait! I vill go mit you! Come back!... It is not goot to tink of anybody suffering,’ she said in a melancholy voice. ‘I might as vell go mit you for notting as vot you offer me, but I vill try to help you...’” (153).

Unlike the depicted competence of the male doctor, the midwife fails to save Ona and proceeds to shift blame onto the family as a result of their class, complaining that their living conditions are unsuitable even for dogs, and demanding food and drink (154). The anger that is intended to be ignited within the readership is both at the system that forced the ideal example of the female sex to die without aid, alone and without her husband, but also at the disgusting

caricature of femininity deformed by greed (although not *because* of this caricaturization) that is alive to continue to charge Jurgis for its failure to do what a man did before successfully. In his attempts to emphasize the terrible effects of capitalism upon the woman's body, Sinclair actually subjugates Ona, the representation of an ideal women, to ideological and stereotypical assumptions about the experiences of women; discursively, this further entrenches *The Jungle* in the oppressive sexual hierarchy confounded with 20th century American capitalist society.

Rather than enacting ideal conceptions of man and woman under attack from the target of the author's criticism, Howard Fast creates idealized versions of the sexes in *Spartacus* in the form of the titular character and his wife to show the reader how a corrupt society warps man and woman's nature. Through a mixture of flashbacks, character narrative, and direct exposition, a composite picture of Spartacus is created as more than just a figure or a symbol, but an individual man with human characteristics and interpersonal relationships. Spartacus is a slave born to and from a lineage of slaves, identified as a Thracian, but Fast immediately plots the man on a course in the black mines of Nubia, a veritable man-made "hell," that will direct him to a life of violent glory (52). Spartacus is described as unaware of his destiny, and, "with no cause to remember the past" (54), is shaped in the "womanless place" (60). The African mine is a harsh crag where "a new kind of man [is] needed" to survive the conditions (53). Although this is literally used to mean the relationship of the slaves to their environment, the reader is meant to recognize the mine as the crucible that physically produces Spartacus, a "new man" with the strength to act as leader and upon whom the rest of the Thracian slaves would bestow the paternal title of "Father" (59). Through a physical process, he has become the idealized form of man.

The "woman" to Spartacus' "man," Varinia is described in terms laden with references to

her physical body and her womanhood. During her first appearance, she is said to find peace in listening to her husband's seemingly endless, soft breathing, a calm the reader is told that Varinia, herself, consciously connects to the "fruition of the egg within the woman" (Fast 77). Even during exposition, Varinia gains definition through her body. Spartacus falls in love with her as a result of seeing her naked for the first time, her dress ripped away by the detestable gladiator-trainer, Batiatus; it is explicitly told to the reader that it is "not for her nakedness," but for her lack of shame that causes the gladiator's instant adoration (79). To Spartacus, Varinia is desirable and lovable exactly because she chooses to embody her nakedness, and the author reflects this throughout the novel in the way the woman is written to function specifically through her objectified, sexualized body, even when interacting with the protagonist, her ideal lover. This is especially true during her imprisonment by the general who led the forces that killed Spartacus, Licinius Crassus. Varinia symbolically resists her oppressor through the enactment of her physical femininity, by taking pleasure in breastfeeding her child, looking "all the lovelier for the fullness of her breasts with milk" (252), and "allowing" her breastmilk to ruin the expensive clothes Crassus forces her to wear (253).

This naturalized presentation of femininity, portrayed as the pinnacle of womanhood in Varinia, is contrasted against the women of Rome. Relating the events that left him the only survivor of a dispatch of Roman cohorts, the soldier Aralus Porthus speaks to and for a terrified Rome when he describes slave women not "such as [any he had] ever seen or dreamed of" (Fast 160), and this is echoed by Spartacus when he parallels the dichotomy, insisting that slave women are "cherished" by slave men, while the women of Rome are made into whores (162). As a further setup, the young, patrician Claudia attempts to dismiss Varinia as a myth, saying there are "no such women" (169). Not only does the reader know that Varinia is real and therefore

such women *do* exist (outside of the Roman female population), but if there remained any lingering question, Crassus, himself, draws the literal connection between what a woman “is” (and by inverse, what a woman is not) and Varinia. The narrator tells us that Crassus knows “the real thing is different,” and when Helena further prompts the general to explain what the “real thing” is, his only response is, “a woman” (182). Helena attempts to seek the meaning of his cryptic response, asking, “What woman?” but Crassus does not reply (182). Taking into consideration the whereabouts of Varinia revealed later, the reader comes to know that she is the woman, the real thing, the ideal form of womanhood. Any doubts are answered through the Roman senator and pseudo-mouthpiece and ideologue, Gracchus, whom acts as a voice of cynical reason amongst the Roman elite decadence. After merely encountering the simple notion of Varinia, Gracchus falls madly in love with her, and admits he “never knew a woman who was a human being” before her, going so far as to posit that the women of Rome were corrupted by their exploitative society (259). With this nod to the reader, Varinia’s idealization receives authorial validation.

It is via Varinia that the reader is told Spartacus is the “way in which men should be formed” (Fast 109). He is ready and willing to “do what men must do”—primarily, commit acts of violence, and at the same time, it is made very clear that Spartacus is above other men, as he is “pure and there [is] no other like him” (119). This is symbolically reflected in the following scene as Spartacus takes physical command of his army, leading the march from the front. Equally laden with meaning is that Varinia is walking with him, in front of the procession, with her arm around his waist; Fast literally tells the reader the two are equals, but this is in saying, only, not in affect (126-127). As soon as one page later, Spartacus begins codifying a simple edict of spoken laws governing his men’s relation to the spoils of war, but also to their women:

“‘And we will take no woman, except as wife,’ said Spartacus. ‘Nor shall any man hold more than one wife. Justice will be equal between them, and if they cannot live in peace, they must part. But no man may lie with any woman, Roman or otherwise, who is not his lawful wife’” (129). The reader is supposed to understand this as a response to the Roman practice of slave rape and the purchase of female harems for the express purpose of violent sexual gratification (237). Although there is the explicit mention of equal justice, regardless, women are still the objects to be acted upon, to be safely coupled with a single protective man. What this disparages is the link between violence, in general, and violence against women. Following hooks, when violence is committed, even in the name of love, it reinforces the multi-faceted hierarchy of oppression by asserting righteousness is contained within the violent domination of another (120). Additionally, support of biological determinism is logically attached, as the male is given a sex-based rationale for his violence: that it is natural and inherent (hooks 127). Thus, Fast, through the protagonist, structures an ideal of sex relations that continues to oppress women, positioning the man as the active, dominant party, and the woman as the receptive object.

The hierarchical discourse that ideologically constructs women as representational objects can be additionally observed in the way Wright positions his protagonist, Bigger Thomas, to the females in his life as depicted in *Native Son*. Bigger interacts with his sister Vera and his mother, alternatively pitying and hating them for their relation to him, and the dialogue reveals an awareness that the women around him are at least cognizant of the fact that Bigger can't help but objectify with his gaze. This is displayed by the sensitive Vera, who “seemed to be shrinking from life in every gesture she made” (Wright 108), and demands that Bigger stop staring at her after accusing him of looking under her dress the morning after his murder of Mary Dalton (109). While this exchange is illuminating, this analysis will focus specifically on the first of the

women who are written so as to allow Bigger's affected sexuality to manifest physically (and violently) upon the novel's world: the aforementioned heiress, Mary Dalton.

Bigger is first introduced to Mary through a newsreel appearing before a showing of the film *Trader Horn*. Sitting in the dark theatre with his friend Jack, Bigger begins to masturbate as a clear act of defiant masculinity. After climaxing, Bigger is surprised to hear what is posed as the sensual and scandalous intrigue amongst the youthful elite, "*the naughty rich*" (emphasis in original; Wright 32). It is the antics of the daughter of his future employer coincidentally cast up on the screen, and as the reel's narrator taunts Bigger, "*Oh boy! Don't you wish you were down here in Florida?*" (emphasis in original; 32), he is prompted by his friend to imagine the possibility of "rich, white women" who will "go to bed with anybody, from the poodle on up. They even have [sex with] their chauffeurs" (33). At the talk of titillating transgressions into the rich white world, the world of Mary Dalton and other "rich, white women," Bigger is "filled with a sense of excitement about his new job" and imagines an economic coupling with the objectified white woman who has now entered into his consciousness as a possible sexual conquest (33). He yearns for the opportunity to "get some of it"—some of the wealth, some of the white women, some of the humanity denied him because of his race. To offset this inequity, Bigger consumes a "fantasy diet of male supremacy and power" that does nothing but futilely inflame his desire for the white women he is not allowed to access (hooks 121). This is, in part, confirmed by Wright, whom, in referring to the many "Bigger Thomases" he had encountered throughout his life, defines such men by their attempts to "react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to [them] through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the more imposing sight and sound of daily American life" ("How 'Bigger' Was Born" 439). Consequently, the novel portrays white women as unobtainable objects outside of

the grasp of black males; as a character, Mary Dalton operates as the bodily representation of such inaccessible objects.

Once Bigger has resolved to accept the employment offered by the Mr. Dalton (not entirely or directly resulting from the attraction he felt towards the sight of Mary Dalton earlier in the text), he suffers through the excruciating anxiety of fear at the intersection of every interaction with his rich, white employers. After an evening where Mary and her white, communist boyfriend, Jan, attempt to force socialization upon Bigger, through an awkward and anxiety-laden meal at a black restaurant and a shared bottle of rum, Bigger is left drunk and alone with an intoxicated and incapacitated Mary. While he is careful to gently and quietly carry her back into the house and her bedroom, Bigger also takes the opportunity to kiss and physically molest Mary, although her body is described with an air of receptivity: “He tightened his fingers on her breasts, kissing her again, feeling her move toward him. He was aware only of her body; his lips trembled” (Wright 85). Bigger’s awareness of the transgression he is making upon Mary’s body, regardless of what the reader is supposed to recognize as reciprocated intoxicated desire, is, in essence, an important facet of Wright’s narrative message: Mary’s desire does not matter. In an effort to illustrate this imperative, the magnitude with which the black male must fear the body of the white woman, Mary is objectified before her death, and her sex-marked, dead body becomes appropriated as a dynamic symbol of Bigger’s terrifying and evolving relationship to the white world.

The ideological purposes that inform the objectifying portrayals of race and women’s bodies within the surveyed literature only constitute one aspect and step in the construction of the functional discourses presented and extended by the works. Of these, one of the most prevalent is that of sexuality. Through a detailed identification granted by Foucault, the

“polymorphous techniques of power” operating within “the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in [the Western] part of the world” can be uncovered, examined, and criticized, but also recognized as implicative of the hegemonic domination found within 20th century American capitalist society (11). Foucault describes how a socially constructed “technology of sex” (116) guided structures and engendered sexuality as a discourse; this latter detail is important because “... discourse (including literature and criticism) not only serves and expresses power, it also embodies and produces it, by constructing and regulating knowledge” (Bracher 5). Thus, the structure of the Western discourse that is sexuality intrinsically implies the existence of a hierarchized field of power.

That is not to say that “power” comes from a single fixed point, nor that there is an objectively true knowledge, a “nature” that solely exists to be manipulated for one ideology or another in dialectic opposition. Foucault admonishes this position when he thematically advises analysis “must at the same time conceive of sex without the law, and power without the king” (91). Instead, sexuality should be understood as resulting from the compounding layers of historical social interactions across all strata. This is how he conceptualizes power, as well:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embedded in the state apparatus, in

the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 92)

What becomes most immediately observable about expressions of power in society is really a composite picture depicting “major dominations,” such as patriarchal and white supremacist oppression, for example; in actuality these are “the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations” inherent to the struggle for power (Foucault 94).

Because of the historical structure of the discourse on sexuality, through the pathways of power identified as guiding the creation of meaning-making, the concept of a “natural truth” has been discursively enmeshed with sexuality. To extract such a nature of sex, a “*scientia sexualis*” or “procedures for telling the *truth* of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of imitations and the masterful secret” was developed, what Foucault identifies as the confession (emphasis added, 58). In order to best bring out sex into the world of discourse, sex had to be identified, categorized, and most importantly, interrogated. Power had to be expressed upon the speaker to compel them to articulate their “most secret nature,” and to best effect this, the confession has been integrated into many areas of Western society: legal, medical, familial, etc. (59-60). Thus, truth is a social “production,” created by discourse, and “thoroughly imbued with relations of power” (60). The reciprocal product was a discursively-manufactured sexuality: “The essential features of this sexuality are not the expression of a representation that is more or less distorted by ideology, or of a misunderstanding caused by taboos; they correspond to the functional requirements of a discourse that must produce its truth” (68).

The truth-sex relationship is a present feature of the selected examples of protest literature. To begin with, a central element of *Native Son* concerns the knowledge Bigger gains about himself through his enactment of sexuality, specifically through his murder and metaphorical rape of Mary, and through his actual rape of Bessie. Bigger’s fearful reaction that

causes him to kill Mary is one set off by “emotions” conditioned from interacting with “many Marys,” or the many white women who are both unattainable, and yet able to intrude into his own peace of mind (Wright 114). They exist to both act as objects that should be within Bigger’s masculine reach and control and also as trespassers violating their and Bigger’s sexual roles. Quickly, Bigger casts his murder as “a supreme and meaningful act” (116) that should make him “an idea in [the white consciousness]’ mind,” but also a redefined man in terms rooted in the truth of his own actions (131). This truth of Bigger’s violent “Zarathustrian principles” (Margolies 80) is deeply invested in a violent masculine sexuality: “What his knife and gun had once meant to him, his knowledge of having secretly murdered Mary now meant” (Wright 150).

After Bessie is enlisted in the cover-up of Bigger’s murder and ransom scheme, she begins to withdraw from Bigger emotionally. In response, he reconceptualizes the woman into two Bessies: an objectified body that is receptive to his sex (that he desperately needs to alleviate his anxiety and emotional turmoil), and an individual represented through her face (Wright 140). Bigger debates himself as to what to do with Bessie, first concluding that there is no workable solution but to bring her with him in flight, then that she will continue to be liability to him if left alive. His psychology can be read through his rationale, in that it is Bessie who stimulates the knowledge of his rape:

“They’ll... They’ll say you raped her,” [Bessie said].

Bigger stared. He had entirely forgotten the moment when he had carried Mary up the stairs. So deeply had he pushed it all back down into him that it was not until now that its real meaning came back. They would say he had raped her and there would be no way to prove he had not... He stood up, his jaws hardening. Had he raped her? Yes, he had raped her. Every time he felt as he had felt that night, he

raped. But rape was not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one's back was against the wall and one had to strike out, whether one wanted to or not, to keep the pack from killing one. (Wright 227)

Wright is actively manipulating the act of rape as a symbol, transcribing new meaning into it, while remaining discursively committed to the relationship of sex-knowledge-power: "Rape becomes a figure for white culture's violation of the mind and body of the black man, as well as for [Bigger's] reaction to it" (Drake 57). Rape functions as a symbol of an invasion, an act of taking knowledge of another by force. Thus, rape means a direct expression of power, even by connotation. Hence why after Bigger is forced into the rapist role by white society and, in an attempt to better know himself, he becomes determined to inhabit the stereotype, an inverse of the conception of his own identity as a "private place invaded by white racism," manifesting physically (Drake 60).

For Bigger to be able to accomplish this task, to display this effect of white society's "rape" of his being, Wright sacrifices Bessie, her separated body, and her ability to resist: ... [T]his time he heard in [her sigh] a sigh deep down beneath the familiar one, a sigh of resignation, a giving up, a surrender of something more than her body" (233). While this sexual violence "forever bars [Bigger] from white society and ultimately from black society, as well," it nonetheless is quintessential to Bigger discovering who he is in relationship to power (Drake 60). Nowhere is this more apparent than Max's last interaction with his client: "'I didn't want to kill!' Bigger shouted. 'But what I killed for, I *am*! It must've been pretty deep in me to make me kill... What I killed for must've been good... I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for 'em... It's the truth, Mr. Max. I can say now 'cause I'm going to die'" (Wright 429). This is intended to be read as proof of Bigger's antisocial conditioning, as is

evidenced by Max's "horrified" reaction and expression. Through the sexed deaths of Mary and Bessie, Bigger is actualized to fit the author's purposes of showing the effects of a social rape into the consciousness of black men by white America.

Through the linkage made between sex and knowledge, the female sex has been and can be operationalized in multiple ways, much to an effect of discursive control. Women's bodies have been ideologically constructed as hystericized and being "saturated with sexuality," so as to better allow for the discourse's expression of power upon them and their bodies (Foucault 104). In literature, this functions to make the woman's sexuality an objectified plot element, one that can display the author's "truth," just as sex supposedly displays the "truth" of an individual according to the discourse on sexuality. *The Jungle* is no different, appropriating Ona's sexuality to illustrate the deformity brought to bear upon the sex of women under capitalism.

Ona not only displays physical symptoms spurred by attempting to keep the secret of her extorted sex from Jurgis, she also shows signs of mental deterioration: "Even worse than that was the fearful nervousness from which she now suffered; she would have frightful headaches and fits of aimless weeping; and sometimes she would come home at night shuddering and moaning, and would fling herself down upon the bed and burst into tears" (Sinclair 116). The truth that she has been keeping from him is of such traumatic magnitude that the revelation and the act of confessing reduce her to hysterics, "furious gusts of emotion," followed by "wild, horrible peals of laughter" (123), but they are also presented as the logical sequitur after, first, the narrator pointedly describes Ona's employment, the place where it is revealed she was raped, as work "no woman was fitted for," work "no woman ought to be allowed to do" (116), and second, Jurgis becomes aware of her lie.

Ona is missed two nights in a row, and lies to Jurgis about her whereabouts, which

disturbs his emotional state and his masculinity: “Ona had deceived him! She had lied to him! What could it mean... a sense of impending calamity overwhelmed him” (Sinclair 120). A futile alternative is presented by Ona, that Jurgis should “have faith in [Ona]” (123), “only believe [her], and “do not ask [her]” (124) what she only did “to save [the family]” (125). Even though, quite literally later on the same page, Ona describes Connor’s sexual advances as culminating in an evening when he “caught hold of [her]” and “he would not let go,” forced himself upon her, and began blackmailing her into meetings at a prostitute madam’s house, Ona’s violation is written with emphasis instead on her actions and the knowledge that her sex has been and is being shamefully uncovered; although, it is useless—the “agony of her shame” must come out so that the shame of capitalism may be revealed by it (125).

This narrative strategy is entirely representative of the Western logic of sex as illuminated by Foucault: “Thus sex gradually became an object of great suspicion; the general and disquieting meaning that pervades our conduct and our existence, in spite of ourselves; the point of weakness where evil portents reach through us: a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends” (69). The gravity and instinctive centrality that sex is given in life by the discourse on sexuality makes it all the more amenable to a line of power through which the author can issue a call to truth. Therefore, as presented in Sinclair’s capitalist society, it is only “natural” that the “pure” body of Ona would be corrupted and ultimately killed through sex and its resulting product.

To impress this point finally, Sinclair locates the last revelation Jurgis receives in regards to the nature of capitalist society at an intersection with Marija Berczynskas before his “socialist conversion.” Now turned to prostitution and substance abuse, Marija is finally able to support what remains of the family Jurgis had earlier abandoned. Rather than acknowledge Jurgis’

culpability in bringing Marija and their kin to such a place when he fled, the latter character presents prostitution as an eventuality, given the circumstances, and even scolds Jurgis for interfering in the predations that had occurred against Ona: “‘When people are starving,’ [Marija] continued, ‘and they have anything with a price, they ought to sell it, I say’” (244). Jurgis then accepts this reality, thinking emotively “...he ought to have sold his wife’s honor and lived by it” (245). The important precept to note is that, as stated above, the attachment of social destinies to sex and gender, even in a polemical narrative inversion, such as what Sinclair performs with Ona and Marija, do not come from a direct locus in the physical world, but via a discourse that exists to express power upon others to achieve control:

Causality in the subject, the unconscious of the subject, the truth of the subject in the other who knows, the knowledge he holds unbeknown to him, all this found an opportunity to deploy itself in the discourse of sex. Not, however, by reason of some natural property inherent in sex itself, but by virtue of the tactics of power immanent in this discourse. (Foucault 70)

Following Foucault, the assumption that a woman’s sex is inherently “more suited” for sex-work or general sexual objectification becomes simple to problematize as socially constructed and a patriarchal sexualization of the woman’s body. In employing this construction, Sinclair effectively operationalizes his scenes and characters for a sexuality discourse inextricable from relationships of power, and consequently, oppression.

The ubiquity of the sexuality discourse and the frequency of its distribution in the literature is a direct result of the great “instrumentality” sexuality has in its ability to be deployed in expression of power relations (Foucault 103). In addition to the hystericization of women’s bodies, another key avenue for this expression is through the notion of the “perverse adult,” or

the sexually-deviant, homosexual male (105). Although persecuted at various times and with various intensities throughout Western history, the homosexual male is not excluded from the discourse on sexuality, but rather, integrated in such a way as to illustrate a violation of sex as the “natural law,” much like the criminalization of hermaphrodites had positioned such individuals as similarly “physical” transgressors (38). This is the operative function of homosexuality as enacted by Licinius Crassus, primary antagonist of *Spartacus*, and the pointedly decadent and submissive Caius Crassus. The short distance in their kin-relationship to each other is not so much pronounced, but rather left as an artifact of historical accuracy in regards to their status as Roman aristocracy; instead, Crassus is shown inhabiting a “perverted” inversion of masculine sexuality and patriarchal male superiority. In the moment before their first night of intercourse, Crassus is described as looking “more manly than ever” to “cat-like” Caius, and after they finish having sex, lying in bed, Crassus is “fatherly and pleased with himself and mellow” (Fast 37). Similarly, the slave-drivers who manage the Nubian mines that produce Spartacus are likewise perverted by homosexuality through the narrator’s exposition: “Their lusts are warped but commonplace; they lie with men and they sleep a drugged sleep over the juice of Khat leaves, which grow on the coast of the Red Sea” (61). Later, it is through Varinia that the ideological axiom makes its dialogical stand, during her argument with Crassus. Asking as to what made Spartacus so great, one of Varinia’s answers links his superiority to Spartacus’s male interactions, but also that of the slaves in contrast to the men of Rome: “He loved his comrades. They would embrace each other and kiss each other on the lips when they met. I never saw men among you Romans embrace or kiss, yet here men sleep with men as easily as they sleep with women” (257-258). The homosocial behavior of the slaves is described as so love-filled, it takes on a state of ascended platonic meaning through the actions of embracing and kissing—yet

“rightly” ends at just that level of physical intimacy. The author makes a clear division between the perverted homosexuality of the Romans and the fraternal, paternal (as Spartacus is the “Father”), homosociality of the slaves.

In reality, this division is manufactured and initiated by a Western ideology of masculinity that insists the existence of a rigidly codified field for expressing male-on-male desire. It should be duly noted that this theoretical illumination of male relationships within literature owes much credit to a framework provided by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her influential critical work, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. She identifies desire as the “affective social glue” that connects an individual to another, often characterized by a will to emulate another, even when the substance of that connection is flushed with negative interactions and “charged” by some form of hostility (Sedgwick 27). She recognizes that “[t]o draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (26). In short, the fluidity of one man’s desire for another between the homosexual and the homosocial is what defines that desire, not its situational, polar location on a continuum (Reeser 59).

One way in which a man can express his desire for another man while still maintaining his conceived distance from homosexuality, whether it be his desire to emulate or to eliminate a rivalry, is through desire of the “other man’s woman”—the erotic love triangle, fraught with the constructions of objectifying masculinity (Sedgwick 45). Here women are seen as objects of exchange within a system of male dominance and female oppression, utilized to mediate the relationships of men and without their own subjectivity (Reeser 61-60). Brought to its

conclusion, this masculine strategy illustrates the effects and presence of the patriarchy, even in this “tripartite” relationship (Reeser 55): “We can go further than that, to say that in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence” (Sedgwick 50). Men begin the exchange with the position of social dominance over women that is granted to them as a result of their sex and maintain this dominance as the operators of the exchange.

A close reading focusing on the triangular relationships the prominent men of the novel have amongst themselves and *through* Varinia actually serves to further undermine Fast’s own constructed division between the ideal male as homosocial and the perverted male as homosexual. First, it is discovered through the thoughts of the crucified and dying Jew, David, one of Spartacus’ closest advisors and friends, the extent to which the former loved and emulated the latter man. Appraising him above all others, David is shown admitting to Spartacus in a memory that he ““will never be one half of what [Spartacus is]”” (Fast 207). Despite, or more likely, because of this fact, David still loved and lusted after Varinia, “this woman who is the wife of Spartacus,” much to his dying shame (208). David recounts castigating himself while on the cross: “Everything you have in the world, you owe to Spartacus, and how do you repay him? You repay him by loving his wife. What a sinful thing” (208). His next mental image flashes to a private moment with Varinia, where, after her motherly chiding bruises his masculinity, David questions her love for Spartacus. Her angered response not only stimulates his forceful assertion that he would die for Spartacus, but also an authorial reminder of the difference between the two characters’ love for the man (209). The implication is that David rightly feels a quasi-religious shame for the “sin” of his desire to take the woman who belongs to Spartacus. It doesn’t matter

this desire for her is linked to his strong homosocial desire for Spartacus, which is positive, but that David's "crime" is the covetous "theft" of Varinia from another man, a violation of the slaves' code of the sexual possession of women (129). His symbolic crucifixion assures this.

Inversely, the mediating female exchange appears as the plot vehicle through which the novel's remaining conflict is resolved—Varinia's escape from her imprisonment under Crassus. Gracchus uses his wealth and power to "steal" Varinia from the Crassus estate. Before this plot is orchestrated, Gracchus is advised by his underling, Flavius, to be wary of the consequences of his actions, warning that "no one ever took anything from Crassus" (Fast 260). In this case, Gracchus is shown to be the exception, and successfully stole away in his urban Roman apartment, Gracchus confesses his love to Varinia, his "true," ideal woman. They also share in a conversation about the purity and perfection of the deceased Spartacus, a conclusion Gracchus has also reached and wants to relate to the woman who loved the gladiator (261). Although Gracchus commits to the notion of granting her freedom, Varinia offers herself to him in sexual partnership, saying she will "be good for [him] too—as good as she [could] be for any man" who was not Spartacus; he graciously denies her, stating wistfully and somewhat ironically that the only woman he can ever love is the city of Rome, his mother—and his "mother is a whore" (270). Varinia then departs, and it is revealed that Gracchus is readying himself not only for the furious arrival of Crassus, but also for a ceremonial suicide. As the general pounds on Gracchus's door, the old politician's last words are to knowingly admonish Crassus for his misplaced desire for Spartacus: "But you didn't love [Varinia], Crassus. You wanted Spartacus to nail on a cross, and when you couldn't have him, you wanted her" (273). In the end, both instances of the homosocial love triangle, through David and Crassus, are aligned with the perverted, a flawed extension of love and a corrupted masculinity. Through Gracchus' similar

intervention, it can be understood that beneath these connotations the spirit of male-to-male desire remains unchallenged, that women are objects through which masculine conflict or emulation can be facilitated, and that the homosociality that betrays a male-to-male desire operatively conferred upon perverse homosexual men can be similarly read within the actions of characters intended to be just.

The sex-truth-knowledge-power chain of discursive control, deployed through such strategies as the hysterization of the woman's body and the perversification of the homosexual male, finds its most effective site in the Western family. According to Foucault, "[t]he family cell... made it possible for the main elements of the deployment of sexuality (the feminine body, infantile precocity, the regulations of births, and... the specification of the perverted) to develop along its two primary dimensions: the husband-wife axis and the parents-children axis" (108). These roles provide social locations through which the multiple diktats of the discourse on sexuality can be reliably physically embodied (as a result of the reproductive preoccupation of the family), both through the interrelations of the gendered sexes and the socialization the children receive from their parents. Accordingly, the role of the family is to "anchor sexuality and provide it with permanent support" (108). Within the confines of the family, the "proper" roles for men and women can be inhabited, enacted, and replicated.

In *The Jungle*, Sinclair attempts to condemn industrial, capitalist America exactly because it "wasn't a world in which a man had any business with a family," long foreshadowing that "sooner or later Jurgis would find that out also..." during his stifled attempts at approaching the masculine ideal (137). The author validates his prediction first through Ona's seduction, then her death in child-birth, and finally via the death of the younger Antanis, who falls into a flooded ditch and drowns one day while Jurgis is at work (175). This last event is what causes Jurgis to

sever himself from the rest of his family and society and become a tramp, and later, another exploitative member of the system, concluding “[t]his was no world for women and children, and the sooner they got out of it the better for them” (177). His rationalization comes immediately after his by In Sinclair’s ethnicized conception of the family, therein lies the “force” and site for which support and contentment can be found for the male worker; within the same notion is a moral outrage that such a system should deny the worker his opportunity for a family, and consequently, happiness. Centering the family as a location of communal strength destabilized by capitalism misleadingly posits the kin-alliance-based social institution as diametrically opposed to the industrializing American society of the late 19th and early 20th century. This positioning denies the structural reality that, as of the time Sinclair is writing, the family had taken shape from a historical process confounded with the evolution of the contemporary period capitalism.

For Varinia in *Spartacus*, family is directly equated with freedom. After escaping Crassus with her child in tow, she settles in a small, Gaulish peasant village with a recent widower whose wife had died in childbirth. She conveniently fills the dead woman’s shoes, her “full breasts” able to feed the newborn; the man “worships” Varinia, and she is said to eventually reciprocate some of his feelings (to a far lesser extent than with Spartacus) (Fast 278). She comes to have seven children by her second husband, numbering her brood at nine, in total, and, although her life is “not an easy life,” full of physically-taxing, subsistence agricultural labor, she dies fulfilled by what her life has brought her: deliverance from slavery, true love, and a large family (279).

With these discursive elements under consideration, sexuality is exposed as another tool for the expression of power. Guided by Foucault’s historical analysis, sexuality is a social creation produced by historical structure, the construction of the discourse on sexuality originating in the bourgeoisie capitalist class’s attempt to maximize its longevity by creating a

“‘class’ body with its [own] health, hygiene, descent, and race: the autosexualization of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body, the endogamy of sex and the body” (Foucault 124). In an attempt to refine their social control, the bourgeois class may have first applied this technology of sex against themselves (and in doing so, oppressed women and nonwhites within the class), but once the discourse was enforced upon the working class (through the various ideological and institutional mechanisms of the past three-plus centuries), the regulation of the sexual body meant domination for all those living within the society upon which the discourse was operating. Hence the importance in identifying and locating the presence of the discourse on sexuality within the literature: even amongst the voices of progressive social protest, a “truth” held in sex is means by which oppression is upheld and applied.

The discourse on sexuality is only one among many discourses that can be structurally analyzed within the three novels, and the novel genre, in general. Much as Foucault illustrates the discourse on sexuality as the end result of a historical power-process occurring over time, M. M. Bakhtin attributes to the entire literary novel genre “... an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the opened present)” (7). He uses the novel as an allegory for representing modern, conscious human existence; in the words of Bakhtin scholar and translator of *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist, this is Bakhtin’s analogy for the “authoring” of the self (Holquist 30). The novel’s multilayered, multi-linguaged (assuming Bakhtin’s understanding of language as, generally, a communication system with signs used to translate meaning) “three-dimensionality,” or its evolution over and in interaction with time, comes from a relocation of human orientation on the present (as opposed to the epic of a mythical classical time, which is firmly located in a realized, completed, and culturally understood *past*) (Bakhtin 11). The novel, in its presentation of events

unfolding, becomes representative of this reorientation, and enters into contact with the present and the temporal accoutrements of sociohistorical context (30). This is what distinguishes the novel as an artistic genre in contrast to the “closed” genres of times past, and also as such a genre that can be found permeating all other modern genres.

Because of this omnipresent connection to advancing time, even within novels that seek to appropriate as narrative historical instances in times past (such as *Spartacus*), the author and their voice is brought to a level of direct literary communication with the reader. They place themselves (though not necessarily as the result of craft choice) on the “field of representation” for the reader to identify (Bakhtin 28). Thus, the authorial voice, along with the rest of the novel, enters into a “radically new zone for structuring images in the novel,” a zone situated in “maximally close contact” between the represented object and the contemporary progression of reality through time (31). This allows for a dynamic relationship to form between the moment in historical context and the literature.

Structurally, as has been shown, both the content and the form of the discursive “languages” that are “spoken” (literally and metaphorically) by the speaker, the author, are socially constructed, but continue to progress as a “living mix of varied and opposing voices,” or a heteroglossia (Bakhtin 49): “The social and historical voices populating language, [heteroglossia]... which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch” (300). These voices are integrated and set in dialogized contact through compositional techniques, such as authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, and the speech of characters (263). Concurrently, languages are engaged by the “centripetal” effect of centralizing and assimilating social forces (*aktuell*

forces, in Bakhtin's words and native language) (270), those created from cultural and language struggle, "seeking a "unitary language" (271). Within every spoken word, "every utterance," in the novel, the centripetal forces of a unitary language and the stratifying, multi-linguaged nature of heteroglossia interweave and interact (272-273). The language of the novel is, at once, "period-bound" and "ever-evolving," a "*system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other" (emphasis in original; 47). This constant interaction between the two forces cannot be decoupled; all heteroglot languages are ideological by function, "are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words," and it is their dialogic conflict, in the long run, that pushes for unity (291-292). But there is no one language that emerges victorious and is made permanent in its received form, all future interactions neutralized, such as is understood by dialectics. Rather, the continual process sees that "[e]ach word [in each language] tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all [languages'] words and forms are populated by intentions," and those intentions change in relationship to the speaker and the listener and the time (293).

Inside the novel, again, Bakhtin recognizes an analogical structure for an explanation of the dialogism he theorizes to describe language and reality. Separateness and simultaneity, the attributes of a continuous dialogue, are held as "basic conditions of existence," and this is reflected in the multirelational dialogue between the self and the other (Holquist 20). Through the lens of dialogism, it becomes possible to see within the novel genre "[a]uthors are somehow both inside and outside their work" (Holquist 30), located in a zone of "dialogical contact" with their narrators, their characters, and even their own voices; here the author can critique the language they employ for the sake of composition, while at the same time, relying on the language to communicate their message, despite the fact that "as a system it [may] be a historical

dead end” (emphasis in original; Bakhtin 45). The author’s “conversation” with the language is a penetration to the interior of his ideological discourses and a dialogization of them from within (46). To the reader, the conversation is set against their own “conceptual horizon,” and the author’s word is against the reader’s “apperceptive background,” or positional viewpoint and, consequently, belief system (282). Therein lies the dialogic field upon which the two (and really, the two are many) ideological viewpoints come into contact amongst the heteroglossia—the many voices, languages, and discourses.

The heteroglossia vocal within the novel is, in fact, fundamental to the construction of the author’s style, including the presentation of their discursive word. The creative authorial drive to simulate a unity of languages works to simultaneously maintain the author’s unique arrangement of voices to chorus (Bakhtin 298). The “objectivized” languages through which the author “ventriloquates” are already ideologically populated with “the social intentions” of past speakers are refracted, and refracted in a multiplicity of ways (299-300). Here, the concept of heteroglossia as “another’s speech in another language” is illustrated, as it is “another’s utterance in a language that is itself ‘other’ to the author as well...” (303) that constitutes the pairing Bakhtin dubs a “hybrid construction”: “... an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems” (305). Hybrid constructions are prevalent and important staples of novelistic stylization, facilitating a dialogic interaction between the author and the reader.

Rationally, the author optimizes particular belief systems because they are “highly productive,” as in they function to both show the “object of representation in a new light (to reveal new sides or dimensions in it),” and to “illuminate in a new way the ‘expected’ literary

horizon, that horizon against which the particularities of the teller's tale are perceived" (Bakhtin 312-313). The author's voice and ideology manifest not only in their effect on the narrator, on the narrative voice's speech and language, but also in their effect on the subject of the story: "Behind the narrator's story we read a second story, the author's story" in which the "story" of the narrator and how they tell stories is told" (313-314). Two separate yet simultaneous levels can be observed during each instance in the story: one, "the level of the narrator" and its associative heteroglot origination, and two, "the level of the author, who speaks (albeit in a refracted way) by means of this story and through this story" (314).

In *Spartacus*, Fast's narrator is constantly operating on these two planes. At once the narratorial voice is cynically working through the language of a historical narrative of the Roman aristocracy after the end of the Servile War. Often from the perspective of patrician elites contemplating themselves in the midst of their victory, beginning the novel with the phrase "It was recorded..." as if reading from an antiquated document (Fast 1). The narrator frequently acknowledges the way in which "the young men were busy manipulating the history of Rome," calling into question any attempt at a rejoinder to history (103). That being said, Fast's denouncement of homosexuals shows the presence of contemporary 20th century ideologies and discourses used to condemn an aspect the reader is intended to accept as an unquestioned historical assertion. More importantly, the author's devotion to the symbol of Spartacus as a representative of righteous rebellion under labor exploitation all throughout history has to at least acknowledge a historical reality to which the author can issue the call to protest. This is likely the most evident with the final sentence on the last page, after undermining and destabilizing the legitimacy of historical assertions: "And so long as men labored, and other men took and used the fruit of those who labored, the name of Spartacus would be remember, whispered sometimes

and shouted loud and clear at other times” (280). The dual levels the narrator’s voice implicates depicts the seemingly contradictory nature of the novel explained by the simultaneous and multiplicitous understanding given through dialogism.

Equally heteroglot, each character’s speech may be spoken “in another’s language,” but at the same time elicited through a voice in possession of its own belief system; this may amount to a refraction of authorial intentions (Bakhtin 315). Novel characters are ideologues, and, through the presence of their voices, they also stratify the language in the novel and act as vehicles through which heteroglossia will enter the text. The “zone” where this takes place contains the dialogized interaction played out between the author and their characters (320). Through their discourse and heteroglot social apperception, the author speaks about only what has reached their “socio-heteroglot perception”; thus, the correlative is that, for the novelist, “there is no language outside the heteroglot intentions that stratify the world” (330).

That is not to say all languages are spoken at the same volume or at the same time. Two examples of this relationship within *The Jungle* previously identified are the voices of the “black buck” and Madame Haupt. Both are made to speak out and take form as the embodiments of the author’s disdainful otherizing perceptions of the characters’ referents. They align with popular ideological narratives of the early 20th century, and, assumedly, were intended to provide the reader with examples of the degrading effects of capitalism, yet are clear examples of ethnic, racial, and sexual objectification. Alternatively, of greater magnitude to the author’s intentions, is the socialist speaker’s impassioned speech ending the novel. In truth, this entire last paragraph acts as a rallying call to take the city of Chicago for socialism. With historical perspective, it is apparent how the speech of all of these characters has taken on a changed and expanded meaning, and in the former two cases, revealed to be laden with oppressive ideological

assumptions. The same can be said for Boris Max's court statements in Wright's *Native Son*. The prevalent doctrine of environmental determinism, deeply connected to the character and author's communist ideology, has been shown to be similarly problematic as other essentializing theories that rely on the same naturalistic fallacy. It is only with time that these new dialogic interactions can take place, and assuredly they will continue to with future readings of the texts.

From the dialogization of languages in the past, an "authoritative discourse" emerges as the dominant, "*a priori*" discourse; validated and socially legitimized by the fact that its "authority was already *acknowledged* in the past," it receives the privilege of a hierarchized discursive distance where it faces less contestation (emphasis in original; Bakhtin 342). Internally persuasive, it is "affirmed through assimilation" into the ideological consciousness of its receiver: "The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*" (emphasis in original; 346). The most obvious demonstration of the literary relationship to the authoritative discourse here is the discourse on sexuality as identified by Foucault, especially considering the expansive/invasive character and permeability the discourse has shown through its socio-historical construction up to the present. The same can be said of the oppressively hierarchical philosophical underpinnings of hook's white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. While they exist in a position of dominance, as discourses they are constantly entering into dialogic contact with every new utterance in language. It is this reality that prevents a determinative outcome from each and every reading and reevaluation of them in language.

Twentieth century America was a period of rapid expansion and change, and this is represented in the above-analyzed novels. By definition, protest literature exists with the intention to stimulate change, transformation—some humanistic progress. The authors sought to

produce works that could function as artistic fuel for a movement away from the status quo and all the exploitative inequities inherent to their contemporary time. Unfortunately, the status quo exists supported by a discursive dominance that propagates the ideological aspects of a white supremacist patriarchal capitalist social system in such a way as to create a capitalist hegemonic regime. This extends to and includes *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, and *Spartacus* by Howard Fast, and while the content and plots of these novels in relationship to these ideologies may often attempt to undermine an aspect of the capitalist system, because of the socio-historic construction of the language they employ, there are substantial structural forces leading to the reinforcement of the capitalist hegemony. With an analytical framework constructed from the works *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* by bell hooks and *History of Sexuality, vol. 1* by Michel Foucault, the texts' utilization of racist ideological stereotypes, a biologically deterministic world view of sex and gender roles, and, in general, the discursive enactment of sexuality and the sex-truth-power technology of sex that has been so useful in the social control of Western society by elites within the system of capitalism, become easy to identify and criticize for providing support to American systems of domination and oppression. Finally, with the inclusion of *The Dialogic Imagination* by M. M. Bakhtin, the texts receive a further reexamination as "living" documents. They can be understood as pieces of art that come from socio-historic locations and enter into dialogic contact with the ideological discourses of the contemporary present, past, and into the future. This dimension of time is likely the most critical to understanding any literature in a dialogic process, let alone 20th century protest literature: the context of identifiable social structures, evidenced as guilty of pervading and affecting literature at any point in time, does not deterministically lead to a perfect reflection of the culture of society. Instead, literature is representative of the dialogic experience of reality

as in a constant state of dynamic flux, feeding back into itself with the experiences of the previous moment. In order to truly subvert the status quo, the author must interrogate in what ways their operative discourses play into the reinforcement of the dominant culture. Until then, efforts will be hampered by the ideological and discursive connections between all forms of oppression.

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