

Books

Portrait of the Gangster

THE YOUNG MANHOOD OF STUDS LONIGAN, by James T. Farrell. Vanguard Press, \$2.50.

THE cumulative effect of *Young Lonigan* (published 1932) and its sequel, *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, is exceedingly impressive. These two novels by James T. Farrell are the truest and most ruthless commentary upon street-Arab adolescence and manhood ever written in America. *Young Lonigan* is a study of a Chicago gang of boys from which our political life stems. Grown to maturity these drugstore cowboys, poolhall sharks, and killers on the make become ward heeled, racketeers and political leaders.

Since the characters belong somewhere in the upper brackets of the propertied classes, poverty is not the theme and the "mean streets" are not the milieu of either of these books. The special genre of brutal longings, the dehumanized, competitive desires, which characterize Studs Lonigan, the protagonist, belong to all America, and the sources from which they spring touch all shores and levels of society. The mind of the book, and not of the author, can be illustrated to some extent by the following: The reviewer, as a child, remembers looking into the window of a high-class cigar store and watching a thin, phthisical man, with a macabre, nicotine complexion, seated at a table, smoke one cigarette after another and drink milk and eat hershey bars to sustain himself. This was in 1907 or 1908, and it was one of those horrendous endurance-contests to which the exacerbated wealthy as well as the shipping clerk go for their catharses.

Since then the American psyche has reaped the pentecost of new technological discoveries. There is the cartoon, with sound effects, out of which jump abstract ghouls, mice, ghosts, the dismembered imaginings of bad dreams; Walt Disney's confectionery fables for infantile minds. Then there were the Lloyd comedies of a few years back in which lovable, tortoise-shelled Harold invariably succeeded in whipping up the sadistic impulses of the "totalitarian" audience by precariously balancing himself on the ledge of a thirty story window. This is the background without which we cannot understand the neuroses of Studs Lonigan, Weary Reilley, Paulie Haggerty, Davey Cohen, Barney Keefe and others.

These Chicago Attilas, when not attending the Catholic parochial school, raid candy stores, steal milk, and attempt to set in motion race riots in order to give their lives the dramatic atmosphere of western pulp stories. Their sleazy pugilistic mores, their vandalistic and predatory habits of mind are harrowingly portrayed in a mimic war scene on a vacant lot. Standing in trenches which they have dug,

these boys, protected by a Hooverville assortment of tin cans, boxes and barbed wire, hurl large rocks at one another. The raw, competitive motive of the American streets, which runs through our business, science, and art, is again made manifest in a football game in which the "home team" almost kills the fleet-footed Schwartz in order to win the game. And the same impulse of the street canaille is seen in a snapshot of Armistice Day on a Chicago El.

When the playmates of Studs Lonigan have flowered into manhood, "the Alky Squad of 58th Street," they become dipsomaniacs, contract venereal diseases, and die of tuberculosis. They are driven by the same kind of jungle appetites as compel Archibald MacLeish's Wall Street conquistadors to outstrip their competitors in power and prestige.

The one moment of relief and respite in the book comes when Studs, cowed by the death of Arnold Sheehan, decides to join a Y gymnasium so that he can trim down his alcoholic "aldermen" and live to be a centenarian. However, this feeling of penitence is fugitive, for at the close of the book Studs Lonigan is lying in the gutter, drunk and unconscious, after a New Year's rape party.

The two novels make a definite and original contribution to American literature. Unlike Jack Conroy's prose, which is the remnants of writing that has been done in the past five to seven years, Farrell's Americanese is enormously skillful and deeply fused.

Farrell's novels are the intransigent documents of a fellow-traveler, and doubtless will not please certain snipers in the ranks of the pseudo-Marxists—these sharpshooters, with one essay and one review in their belts, who have never made any deviations for the simple reason that they have never written one creative or critical line that will last. It is altogether regrettable that some of the more original and sensitive minds in the movement have not yet done a book on the Marxist approach to American literature and spared us some of the leftist hemorrhages.

It is true, there are no strikes or demonstrations in Farrell's novels. Besides that, there is scarcely a figure or a character that can be salvaged, and yet these books are highly serviceable to both workers and intellectuals.

If Mr. Farrell has taught us nothing more than how hooliganism arises, grows, and festers in this horrific America, and if he has shown us nothing else but where to look for the vandals, the Pelleys and Art Smiths, the American Storm Troopers, he has instructed us well and profoundly. Some day, in our future, classless society, readers will examine *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, and say, "Look what we were, and see what we have come through!"

EDWARD DAHLBERG.

Yugoslavia Awakes

THE NATIVE'S RETURN, by Louis Adamic. Harper and Brothers. \$2.75.

George Plechanov, the well known Russian Marxist scholar, once prophesied that good journalism would eventually become a legitimate brother of good literature. In a sense his prophecy has already come true. Artistic *reportage* in France, or *ocherkism*—sketchism—as they refer to it in Soviet Russia, is now occupying a prominent place in the literary scene of these two countries. Artistic *reportage* in the Soviet Union, for instance, is an organic outgrowth of the literary shock brigade movement. Worker-correspondents write sketches depicting intimately their lives in the factories, mines, and collective farms. Well known writers frequently employ the sketch form to describe in detail the particular farm or factory they investigate.

In America, on the other hand, "journalism" is still a curse often hurled at writers, particularly proletarian writers. When the work of a revolutionary writer (Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited*, for instance) cannot very well be attacked by our arty critics as being "crude propaganda," it is usually dismissed as "capable reporting" or "high class journalism." Some of our revolutionary critics, unfortunately, are also guilty of this practice.

That good journalism can have all the qualities usually attributed to "authentic literature," is once more proven by Louis Adamic in *The Native's Return*. Adamic is unquestionably both a talented writer of distinguished prose and a keen observer of life. His latest volume is at once a vivid portrait of his native Yugoslavia and a competent analysis of its economic, social, and political order.

Fresh from the industrial scene in America, Adamic was captivated by the primitive, almost medieval life of the peasants in his native village of Blato. With the zeal of a man who rediscovered the country of his childhood, particularly after a turbulent career as worker, hobo, soldier and author, he sat down to record the folklore, customs and superstitions of his people. His *My Cousin Toné Marries* and *Death Waits for My Uncle Yanez* are both fascinating and stirring. Likewise his flashes of the colorful Yugoslav landscape—the Montenegro mountains, the peasant Riviera, Dalmatia—are as real and alive as the photography in an Eisenstein film.

There is no doubt that Adamic's story of primitive life of the Yugoslav peasants is somewhat over-romanticized. On the other hand, it must be said to his credit that the exotic, primitive, and picturesque did not obscure from his vision the sordid life of the people in this Balkan kingdom—one of the many results of a peace treaty designed to further the ends of European and American imperialism. Because of his knowledge of the three main Yugoslav languages—Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian—Adamic was able to