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 Robert Cantwell and the Literary Left

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JOHN DANIEL

When We Were Good University of Texas Press

The Radical Novel and the Classless Society analyzes utopian and proletarian novels as a single socialist tradition in U.S. literature. Utopian novels by such writers as Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Sutton E. Griggs and proletarian novels by such writers as Robert Cantwell, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, Meridel Le Sueur, Claude McKay, and Ralph Ellison can help us conceive of a unity of utopian and Marxist socialisms. We can combine the imagination of the future classless society with present-day socialist strategy. Utopian and proletarian novels help us to imagine—and realize—the classless society as achieving the utopian goal of recognizing race and gender and the Marxist goal of overcoming social class.

The Beautiful Music All Around Us Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

"Here is a story of the Mississippi River South in its great days of the steamboat era, by one of its most distinguished citizens. Colonel Falkner, great-grandfather of William Faulkner, Nobel-prize novelist of our time, was a plantation owner, railroad builder, Civil War hero, writer and founder of schools. The White Rose of Memphis, first published in 1881, was the Gone with the Wind of that period; edition after edition kept appearing until about the time of World War I, when it went out of print; since then it has been unobtainable and legendary."--Publishers's description
On the Trail of Negro Folk-songs University of Illinois Press
 Filmmaker, musicologist, painter, ethnographer, graphic designer, mystic, and collector of string figures and other patterns, Harry Smith (1923-1991) was among the most original creative forces in postwar American art and culture, yet his life and work remain poorly understood. Today he is remembered primarily for his *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952)--an idiosyncratic collection of early recordings that educated and inspired a generation of musicians and roots music fans--and for a body of innovative abstract and nonnarrative films. Constituting a first attempt to locate Smith and his diverse endeavors within the history of avant-garde art production in twentieth-

century America, the essays in this volume reach across Smith's artistic oeuvre. In addition to contributions by Paul Arthur, Robert Cantwell, Thomas Crow Stephen Fredman, Stephen Hinton, Greil Marcus, Annette Michelson, William Moritz, and P. Adams Sitney, the volume contains numerous illustrations of Smith's works and a selection of his letters and other primary sources.
Merle Haggard University of Washington Press

Robert Emmett Cantwell (January 31, 1908 - December 8, 1978) was a novelist and critic. His most notable work, *The Land of Plenty*, focuses on a lumber mill in a thinly disguised version of his hometown in Washington State.

The Land of Plenty Rowman & Littlefield

Robert Cantwell and the Literary Left is the first full critical study of novelist and critic Robert Cantwell, a Northwest-born writer with a strong sense of social justice who found himself at the center of the radical literary and cultural politics of 1930s New York. Regarded by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway as one of the finest young fiction writers to emerge from this era, Cantwell is best known for his superb novel, *The Land of Plenty*, set in western Washington.

His literary legacy, however, was largely lost during the Red Scare of the McCarthy era, when he retreated to conservatism. Through meticulous research, an engaging writing style, and a deep commitment to the history of American social movements, T. V. Reed uncovers the story of a writer who brought his Pacific Northwest brand of justice to bear on the project of “reworking” American literature to include ordinary working people in its narratives. In tracing the flourishing of the American literary Left as it unfolded in New York, Reed reveals a rich progressive culture that can inform our own time.

[The Land of Plenty](#) Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press

The Beautiful Music All Around Us presents the extraordinarily rich backstories of thirteen performances captured on Library of Congress field recordings between 1934 and 1942 in locations reaching from Southern Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta and the Great Plains. Including the children's play song "Shortenin' Bread," the fiddle tune "Bonaparte's Retreat," the blues "Another Man Done Gone," and the spiritual "Ain't No Grave Can Hold My Body Down," these performances were recorded in kitchens and churches, on porches and in prisons, in hotel rooms and school auditoriums. Documented during the golden age of the Library of Congress recordings, they capture not only the words and tunes of traditional songs but also the sounds of life in which the performances were embedded: children laugh, neighbors comment, trucks pass by. Musician and researcher Stephen Wade sought out the performers on these recordings, their families, fellow musicians, and others who remembered them. He reconstructs the sights and sounds of the recording sessions themselves and how the music worked in all their lives. Some of these performers developed musical reputations beyond these field recordings, but for many, these tracks represent their only appearances on record: prisoners at the Arkansas State Penitentiary jumping on "the Library's recording machine" in a rendering of "Rock Island Line"; Ora Dell Graham being called away from the schoolyard to sing the jump-rope rhyme "Pullin' the Skiff"; Luther Strong shaking off a hungover night in jail and borrowing a fiddle to rip into "Glory in the Meetinghouse." Alongside loving and expert profiles of these performers and their locales and communities, Wade also untangles the histories of these iconic songs and tunes, tracing them through slave songs and spirituals, British and homegrown ballads, fiddle contests, gospel quartets, and labor laments. By exploring how these singers and instrumentalists exerted their own creativity on inherited forms, "amplifying tradition's gifts," Wade shows how a single artist can make a difference within a democracy. Reflecting decades of research and detective work, the profiles and abundant photos in *The Beautiful Music All Around Us* bring to life largely unheralded individuals--domestics, farm laborers, state prisoners, schoolchildren, cowboys, housewives and mothers, loggers and miners--whose music has become part of the wider American musical soundscape. The hardcover edition also includes an accompanying CD that presents these thirteen performances, songs and sounds of America in the 1930s and '40s.

[Ethnomimesis](#) Center Point

In this revisionary study, Barbara Foley challenges prevalent myths about left-wing culture in the Depression-era U.S. Focusing on a broad range of proletarian novels and little-known archival material, the author recaptures an important literature and rewrites a segment of American cultural history long obscured and distorted by the anti-Communist bias of contemporaries and critics. Josephine Herbst, William Attaway, Jack Conroy, Thomas Bell and Tillie Olsen, are among the radical writers whose work Foley reexamines. Her fresh approach to the U.S. radicals' debates over experimentalism, the relation of art to propaganda, and the nature of proletarian literature recasts the relation of writers to the organized left. Her grasp of the left's positions on the "Negro question" and the "woman question" enables a nuanced analysis of the relation of class to race and gender in the proletarian novel. Moreover, examining the articulation of political doctrine in different novelistic modes, Foley develops a model for discussing the interplay between politics and literary conventions and genres. *Radical Representations* recovers a literature of theoretical and artistic value meriting renewed attention from those interested in American literature, American studies, the U. S. left, and cultural studies generally.

[Kate Chopin](#) Catapult

A second edition of the classic introduction to arts in social movements, fully updated and now including Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, and new digital and social media forms of cultural resistance *The Art of Protest*, first published in 2006, was hailed as an “essential” introduction to progressive social movements in the United States and praised for its “fluid writing style” and “well-informed and insightful” contribution (*Choice Magazine*). Now thoroughly revised and updated, this new edition of T. V. Reed’s acclaimed work offers engaging accounts of ten key

progressive movements in postwar America, from the African American struggle for civil rights beginning in the 1950s to Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter in the twenty-first century. Reed focuses on the artistic activities of these movements as a lively way to frame progressive social change and its cultural legacies: civil rights freedom songs, the street drama of the Black Panthers, revolutionary murals of the Chicano movement, poetry in women’s movements, the American Indian Movement’s use of film and video, anti-apartheid rock music, ACT UP’s visual art, digital arts in #Occupy, Black Lives Matter rap videos, and more. Through the kaleidoscopic lens of artistic expression, Reed reveals how activism profoundly shapes popular cultural forms. For students and scholars of social change and those seeking to counter reactionary efforts to turn back the clock on social equality and justice, the new edition of *The Art of Protest* will be both informative and inspiring.

[The Bluegrass Reader](#) U of Minnesota Press

Fictional account of a failed strike by lumbermill workers in Aberdeen, Washington during the 1930s.

[The Poetics of Tenderness](#) Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

The story of the banjo's journey from Africa to the western hemisphere blends music, history, and a union of cultures. In *Banjo Roots and Branches*, Robert B. Winans presents cutting-edge scholarship that covers the instrument's West African origins and its adaptations and circulation in the Caribbean and United States. The contributors provide detailed ethnographic and technical research on gourd lutes and ekonting in Africa and the banza in Haiti while also investigating tuning practices and regional playing styles. Other essays place the instrument within the context of slavery, tell the stories of black banjoists, and shed light on the banjo's introduction into the African- and Anglo-American folk milieus. Wide-ranging and illustrated with twenty color images, *Banjo Roots and Branches* offers a wealth of new information to scholars of African American and folk musics as well as the worldwide community of banjo aficionados. Contributors: Greg C. Adams, Nick Bamber, Jim Dalton, George R. Gibson, Chuck Levy, Shlomo Pestcoe, Pete Ross, Tony Thomas, Saskia Willaert, and Robert B. Winans.

[The White Rose of Memphis](#) University of Illinois Press

A labor strike at a lumber mill divides a town based on the author's hometown of Aberdeen, Washington. "The Land of Plenty" portrays the blue-collar workers' struggle for existence and depicts, with sensitivity and compassion, workers and owners alike in their poverty, depravity, and their ultimate goodness. "The Land of Plenty" created a political firestorm when it was published to great success in 1935. Long out-of-print it remains one of the most graphically exciting novels of the Thirties, a lost American classic.

[When We Were Good](#) Univ. Press of Mississippi

Demonstrating the intimate connections among our public, political, and personal lives, these essays by Robert Cantwell explore the vernacular culture of everyday life. A keen and innovative observer of American culture, Cantwell casts a broad and penetrating intelligence over the cultural functioning of popular texts, artifacts, and performers, examining how cultural practices become performances and how performances become artifacts endowed with new meaning through the transformative acts of imagination. Cantwell's points of departure range from the visual and the literary--a photograph of Woody Guthrie, or a poem by John Keats--to major cultural exhibitions such as the World's Columbian Exposition. In all these domains, he unravels the implications for community and cultural life of a continual migration, transformation, and reformulation of cultural content.

[Hawthorne](#) Springer Nature

A labor strike at a lumber mill divides a town based on the author's hometown of Aberdeen, Washington. "The Land of Plenty" portrays the blue-collar workers' struggle for existence and depicts, with sensitivity and compassion, workers and owners alike in their poverty, depravity, and their ultimate goodness. "The Land of Plenty" created a political firestorm when it was published to great success in 1935. Long out-of-print it remains one of the most graphically exciting novels of the Thirties, a lost American classic.

[The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell](#) National Geographic Books

A stunning love story about a young Black woman whose life is torn apart when her lover is wrongly accused of a crime—"a moving, painful story, so vividly human and so obviously based on reality that it strikes us as timeless" (*The New York Times Book Review*). "One of the best books Baldwin has ever written—perhaps the best of all." —*The Philadelphia Inquirer* Told through the eyes of Tish, a nineteen-year-old girl, in love with Fonny, a young sculptor who is the father of her

child, Baldwin’s story mixes the sweet and the sad. Tish and Fonny have pledged to get married, but Fonny is falsely accused of a terrible crime and imprisoned. Their families set out to clear his name, and as they face an uncertain future, the young lovers experience a kaleidoscope of emotions—affection, despair, and hope. In a love story that evokes the blues, where passion and sadness are inevitably intertwined, Baldwin has created two characters so alive and profoundly realized that they are unforgettably ingrained in the American psyche.

[Public Folklore](#) Routledge

Beginning in the 1830s, the white actor Thomas D. Rice took to the stage as Jim Crow, and the ragged and charismatic trickster of black folklore entered—and forever transformed—American popular culture. Jump Jim Crow brings together for the first time the plays and songs performed in this guise and reveals how these texts code the complex use and abuse of blackness that has characterized American culture ever since Jim Crow’s first appearance. Along with the prompt scripts of nine plays performed by Rice—never before published as their original audiences saw them—W. T. Lhamon, Jr., provides a reconstruction of their performance history and a provocative analysis of their contemporary meaning. His reading shows us how these plays built a public blackness, but also how they engaged a disaffected white audience, who found in Jim Crow’s sass and wit and madcap dancing an expression of rebellion and resistance against the oppression and confinement suffered by ordinary people of all colors in antebellum America and early Victorian England. Upstaging conventional stories and forms, giving direction and expression to the unruly attitudes of a burgeoning underclass, the plays in this anthology enact a vital force still felt in great fictions, movies, and musics of the Atlantic and in the jumping, speedy styles that join all these forms.

[Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang](#) DigiCat

When We Were Good traces the many and varied cultural influences on the folk revival of the late fifties and sixties. In his capacious analysis of the ideologies, traditions, and personalities that created an extraordinary moment in American popular culture, Cantwell explores the idea of folk at the deepest level.

[Frances and Bernard](#) Univ. of Tennessee Press

Drawing on memoirs, oral histories, newspapers, magazines, recordings, photographs, literature, and films, Stowe looks at New Deal America through its music and shows us how the contradictions and tensions within swing--over race, politics, its own cultural status, the role of women--mirrored those played out in the larger society.

[Republic of Detours](#) BRILL

Kate Chopin was a nationally acclaimed short story artist of the local color school when she in 1899 shocked the American reading public with *The Awakening*, a novel which much resembles *Madame Bovary*. Though the critics praised the artistic excellence of the book, it was generally condemned for its objective treatment of the sensuous, independent heroine. Deeply hurt by the censure, Mrs. Chopin wrote little more, and she was soon forgotten. For decades the few critics who remembered her concentrated on the regional aspects of her work. In the *Literary History of the United States*, where Kate Chopin is highly praised as a local colorist, *The Awakening* is not even mentioned. In recent years, however, a few critics have given new attention to the novel, emphasizing its courageous realism. In the present book, Mr. Seyersted carries out an extensive re-examination of both the life and work of the author, basing it on her total oeuvre. Much new Kate Chopin material, such as previously unknown stories, letters, and a diary, has recently come to light. We can now see that she was a much more ambitious and purposeful writer than we have hitherto known. From the beginning, her special theme was female self-assertion. As each new success increased her self-confidence, she grew more and more daring in her descriptions of emancipated woman who wants to dictate her own life. Mr. Seyersted traces the author’s growth as an artist and as a penetrating interpreter of the female condition, and shows how her career culminated in *The Awakening* and the unknown story ‘*The Storm*.’ With these works, which were decades ahead of their time, Kate Chopin takes her place among the important American realist writers of the 1890’s.

[A Key to the Ulysses of James Joyce](#) University of Oklahoma Press

A *New York Times Book Review* Editors' Choice | Winner of the New Deal Book Award An immersive account of the New Deal project that created state-by-state guidebooks to America, in the midst of the Great Depression—and employed some of the biggest names in American letters The plan was as idealistic as it was audacious—and utterly unprecedented. Take thousands of hard-up writers and put them to work charting a country on the brink of social and economic collapse, with the aim

of producing a series of guidebooks to the then forty-eight states—along with hundreds of other publications dedicated to cities, regions, and towns—while also gathering reams of folklore, narratives of formerly enslaved people, and even recipes, all of varying quality, each revealing distinct sensibilities. All this was the singular purview of the Federal Writers' Project, a division of the Works Progress Administration founded in 1935 to employ jobless writers, from once-bestselling novelists and acclaimed poets to the more dubiously qualified. The FWP took up the lofty goal of rediscovering America in words and soon found itself embroiled in the day's most heated arguments regarding radical politics, racial inclusion, and the purpose of writing—forcing it to reckon with the promises and failures of both the New Deal and the American experiment itself. Scott Borchert's *Republic of Detours* tells the story of this raucous and remarkable undertaking by delving into the experiences of key figures and tracing the FWP from its optimistic early days to its dismemberment by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. We observe notable writers

at their day jobs, including Nelson Algren, broke and smarting from the failure of his first novel; Zora Neale Hurston, the most widely published Black woman in the country; and Richard Wright, who arrived in the FWP's chaotic New York City office on an upward career trajectory courtesy of the WPA. Meanwhile, Ralph Ellison, Studs Terkel, John Cheever, and other future literary stars found encouragement and security on the FWP payroll. By way of these and other stories, Borchert illuminates an essentially noble enterprise that sought to create a broad and inclusive self-portrait of America at a time when the nation's very identity and future were thrown into question. As the United States enters a new era of economic distress, political strife, and culture-industry turmoil, this book's lessons are urgent and strong.

If Beale Street Could Talk LSU Press

Wide-ranging and provocative, this book will fascinate all those intrigued by how we create and perpetuate our representations of folklife and culture. Ethnomimesis is Robert Cantwell's word for

the process by which we take cultural influences, traditions, and practices to ourselves and then manifest them to others. Ethnomimesis is an element of ordinary social communication, but springing out of it, too, is that extraordinary summoning up that produces our literature, our art, and our music. In the broadest sense, ethnomimesis is the representation of culture. Using such diverse cultural artifacts as King Lear and an eighteenth-century English manor garden to deepen our understanding of ethnomimesis, Cantwell then explores at length the representation of culture in our national museum, the Smithsonian, focusing especially on the Festival of American Folklife. Like many other such exhibitions, the Festival enacts presentations of culture across the boundaries of rank and class, race and ethnicity, gender and the life cycle. Like the concept of 'folklife' itself, Cantwell argues, the Festival stands where ethnomimesis finds its creative source, at the cultural frontier between self and other. That boundary, and the energy that accumulates there, runs through the many, varied 'exhibits' of this book.