Abstract

This study considers how examining the Popular Front movement against fascism in Britain sheds new light on thirties leftist fiction. It brings into view a range of critically neglected texts, focusing on the work of John Sommerfield, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Jack Lindsay, Lewis Jones and James Barke. The thesis shows how their fiction relates to and participates in a mobilisation of cultural forces against fascism both at home and abroad. The thesis is divided into three parts. Part One, ‘Realism and Modernism’ begins by examining how British writers negotiated the respective claims of the developing Soviet aesthetic of socialist realism, the mobilisation of European intellectuals against fascism and the heritage of literary modernism (chapter one). These currents of thought are then explored through readings of John Sommerfield’s May Day (chapter two) and Arthur Calder-Marshall’s Pie in the Sky (chapter three). Part Two, ‘On English History’, discusses leftist writings of the history of England under the rubric of anti-fascism; at its heart is a reading of Jack Lindsay’s trilogy of English historical novels (chapter four). Part Three, ‘Class, Nation, People’, first examines the ‘national’ turn in Communist politics as it was negotiated in the work of the Scottish novelist James Barke (chapter five), before turning to the fiction of the Welsh proletarian novelist Lewis Jones (chapter six). In both We Live and The Land of the Leal, the Spanish Civil War plays a key role in mediating the relationship between working-class historical experience and the demands of internationalist anti-fascism. The chief contributions are firstly a recovery and critical reconsideration of a range of marginalised works, and secondly a demonstration of how these novels can be read in terms of a radicalised and populist realist aesthetic, consonant with and interpretable in terms of the work of Georg Lukács in the 1930s.
In his book, Mr. Cowling describes the relationship between British party politics and the conduct of British foreign policy between Hitler's arrival in office in 1933 and Chamberlain's resignation in May 1940. He sets British policy in the context of European, Imperial, League, national and isolational sentiments and takes account of the strategic and financial limitations within which decisions were made. Not because of direct interests and commitments but because French governments regarded a second front as crucial if the Rhine was to be defended. It was for this reason that the British desire to keep out was thwarted by the French need to keep in, and why policy had to be conducted on the assumption that detachment was impracticable. In Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front (1985), Jim Fyrth calls the Aid Spain campaign 'the largest movements for international solidarity the biggest movement of international solidarity in British history'. The Communist Party of Great Britain lost three important intellectuals, Ralph Fox, John Cornford and Christopher Caudwell, who all died fighting for the Republic. SN: Beside the novels that those writers produced, did the British Popular Front period also produce theoretical writings on the role a novel should play in the political struggle or on aesthetic issues? E.T.: There are no systematic treatments of aesthetics, only the rather sporadic and fragmented reviews and discussions that appear in the left-wing press. In The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934-1940, Elinor Taylor provides the first study of the relationship between the British novel and the anti-fascist Popular Front strategy endorsed by the Comintern in 1935. Through readings of novels by British Communists including Jack Lindsay, John Sommerfield, Lewis Jones and James Barke, Taylor shows that the realist novel of the left was a key site in which the politics of anti-fascist alliance were rehearsed. Maintaining a dialogue with theories of populism and with Georg Lukács's vision of a revived literary realism ensuing from the Popular Front, this book at once illuminates the cultural formation of the ...