

INTRODUCTION



James T. Farrell

(1904-1979)

Born in Chicago, Illinois, on February 27, 1904, James Thomas Farrell forever carried the spirit of his birthplace with him. Direct and energetic, Farrell secured his place in literature with his earlier novels, especially by his trilogy *Studs Lonigan*, which comprises *Young Lonigan*, *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, and *Judgment Day*. These novels established Farrell as a major figure in what has come to be called proletarian literature, for in them he depicts working-class people in working-class situations as they existed during his own boyhood. Farrell was so much a realist that his style has been called photographic, and *Studs Lonigan* is considered a work of sociological as well as literary significance.

Farrell's own life provided the model for his Danny O'Neill pentalogy, which began in 1936 with *A World I Never Made*. Like Danny, Farrell was born into a working-class family that was too large for his parents to support. Farrell was reared by his maternal grandparents, also like his character Danny. In addition, Farrell, like Danny, found his escape from working-class Chicago through writing. Both the fictional Danny O'Neill and his creator, James T. Farrell, were reared in environments that threatened to swallow up weak-willed and fainthearted people such as Studs Lonigan. Yet the thoughtful individual, one with a vision of life that went beyond the streets of Chicago's South Side, could escape the fate that struck so many others. Both Farrell and Danny overcame their environments and attended the University of Chicago; they became writers, fiercely maintaining their visions of an America in which the underprivileged are duped into supporting the privileged.

Farrell's own career as a writer began at the University of Chicago, which he attended intermittently from 1925 to 1929. While he never received his degree, Farrell took several intellectual courses in writing while supporting himself with various jobs, ranging from service station attendant to express clerk. In 1929, Farrell published his first short story, "Studs," and began the manuscript that would become *Young Lonigan*. In the meantime, he married Dorothy Butler, and the two spent a year in Paris, where Farrell made some extremely useful literary connections, including Samuel Putnam and Ezra Pound, who admired the toughness of Farrell's style.

The year in Paris was a difficult one. The Farrells had little money, their first child died soon after birth, and their elopement had not endeared them to their families. Upon Farrell's return to the United States in April of 1932, however, the future brightened. *Young Lonigan* was published, followed in rapid succession

by *Gas-House McGinty*, *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, and *Judgment Day*. The Lonigan books were sufficiently well received to justify their being reissued as a trilogy. That republication brought Farrell to the forefront of the battles then raging over book censorship, for the Studs Lonigan books became the focus of an obscenity prosecution. The books were deemed acceptable in 1937. At the same time, Farrell was a leader in left-wing causes, a supporter of Leon Trotsky and an opponent of the Stalinist cause. Farrell was increasingly in demand during the 1930's and 1940's, as his Danny O'Neill novels firmly established him as a rising star of American literature.

Indeed, the twenty years from 1932 to 1952 represent an amazingly fertile era for Farrell, one seldom if ever equaled by any author. During that time Farrell published two trilogies, a pentalogy, two other novels, several volumes of short stories, and three books of literary criticism. Such activity cannot be sustained forever, and Farrell slowed his production considerably in the 1950's, as the public's taste for his brand of photographic realism waned. Perhaps disillusioned over a breakup with his longtime publisher, Vanguard Press, he turned away from long fiction, publishing instead books of short stories, essays, and reminiscences. Not until 1961 did Farrell, by then destitute, publish the beginning of a series he called "A Universe of Time," which he had hoped would include twenty-five novels. These later works are more uneven in quality than Farrell's earlier novels, but this period is notable for *The Silence of History*, *Judith*, and *Invisible Swords*, a novel based on his own experience of having a retarded child.

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