



# The Power of Political Art: The 1930s Literary Left Reconsidered

*Robert Shulman*

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During the 1930s, radical young writers, artists, and critics associated with the Communist Party animated a cultural dialogue that was one of the most stimulating in American history. With the dawning of the Cold War, however, much of their work fell out of favor, dismissed as dogmatic and un-American and disparaged as aesthetically and imaginatively deficient. Urging a reexamination of the literature and political culture of the 1930s Left, Robert Shulman explores the careers and creative work of five of the most talented writers of this group: Meridel Le Sueur, Josephine Herbst, Richard Wright, Muriel Rukeyser, and Langston Hughes. He shows persuasively that their political art retains the power to engage and challenge contemporary readers.

Shulman fuses close readings with a synthesizing concern for language, politics, and history to illuminate the art of his five writers, calling attention to their prose rhythms, imagery, and linguistic and formal innovations. In reclaiming their place at the forefront of artistic creativity in 1930s America, he demonstrates that these writers' individual voices were amplified by the radical dialogue of which they were part.

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