A PROSE LARGER THAN LIFE: A STUDY OF THE DICTION AND
DIALOGUE IN TWO PLAYS OF CLIFFORD ODETS

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DIALOGUE IN TWO PLAYS OF CLIFFORD ODETS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The reputation of dramatist Clifford Odets, once considered the most promising stage craftsman of the 1930's, has undergone significant revision in the past two decades. Although in an interview recorded in 1962 Arthur Miller does appraise Clifford Odets's technical handling of dramatic diction and dialogue in the Depression Thirties as "a new lyricism; a prose larger than life," he stresses that in the works of such playwrights as Lillian Hellman and Odets, "the inner voice broke through; they personally felt the public anguish of the Fascist years." It is the latter view which now seems most representative of present critical opinion of Odets as dramatist—that whatever may have been the degree of his theatrical skill, he was primarily a social critic. Indeed, in his final evaluation of Odets on the occasion of the playwright's death in 1963, the New York Times obituary writer decries Odets's "failure to outgrow the adjective 'promising'" and sums up Odets's dramatic

2Ibid.
3"Clifford Odets, Playwright, Dies" (author not given), New York Times, August 16, 1963, Sec. 1, p. 27.
accomplishment as merely that of social critic: "... in his day, Mr. Odets made a substantial contribution to the theatre. The social comment of his plays was widely praised during the Depression Era." Other critics agree. Michael Mendelsohn writes that "Odets was among those who could not completely escape the urge to propagandize"; and Robert Sanford Brustein feels that "social revolt dominates ... the entire work of such secondary dramatists as ... Odets." Murray Kempton states flatly, "It was for his message that he was worshipped by his candlebearers," while Gerald Babkin notes that there is no denying the "pervasive influence of Marxism upon the great bulk of his work." Even Odets's friend and director Harold Clurman suggests that the reason for Odets's importance in the thirties was that "his work reflected not only his own faltering, but the time and place with which he struggled." Whereas R. Baird Shuman pays tribute to certain of Odets's technical skills, he

4 Ibid.

5Michael J. Mendelsohn, "Clifford Odets and the American Family," Drama Survey, III (Fall, 1963), 238.


feels that it is perhaps too early to evaluate the author's position in the history of American drama, calling him "the most significant of the specifically proletarian playwrights of the 1930's."¹⁰

The inclination of the critics to consider the drama of Clifford Odets solely in the light of its political or social meaning is particularly a recent one, however, for in the 1930's Odets was most often praised for his achievements in dialogue and character creation. In 1935, Richard Watts exclaimed in the New York Herald Tribune, "'Mr. Odets' talent for dramatic writing is the most exciting thing to appear in the American drama since the flaming emergence of O'Neill.'"¹¹ "Mr. Odets' dramaturgy can be possessed of uncommon vitality . . . he has an astonishing ear for dialogue,"¹² wrote John Mason Brown in 1937--the same year that the New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson noted that Odets wrote "with the strength and gusto of a genuine artisan of the theatre."¹³ And in 1938, Burns Mantle proclaimed, "The most promising playwrighting talent that has come into the theatre in the


last ten years is the possession of a young man named Clifford Odets."^{14} It remained, however, for Joseph Wood Krutch to render the most significant judgment, summing up in 1938 the then-current opinion: "Odets' gifts as playwright are far more conspicuous in his plays than his gifts as a political thinker."^{15}

Yet when Clifford Odets, social critic, began to lose his followers in the late forties and fifties, only a very few, such as Arthur Miller, would recall the early achievements of Clifford Odets, dramatist, in dialogue technique and character creation. Most would remember Odets only as social spokesman. Yet is it solely for his contribution to the field of social-propaganda drama that Clifford Odets deserves to be remembered today? Or, as the earlier reviews suggest, has not this man contributed much that is significant to the development of contemporary American drama?

Clifford Odets was born in Philadelphia on July 18, 1906, of poor middle-class, Jewish-American parents. His father, a native of Philadelphia, at various times had sold newspapers, peddled salt, and worked for a publishing company, while Clifford's mother had worked in a factory. The family had moved back and forth between Philadelphia and the Bronx,

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before finally settling in New York City. Odets claimed later that he had been "'a worker's son until the age of twelve,'"16 at which time the family achieved financial security and settled in a moderately well-to-do section of the Bronx. As a child, Odets possessed an early ambition to act in plays, and he "wrote poetry, lots of it."17 As a teenager, he recalled later, "I was a melancholy kid, I guess. I thought high school was a waste of time, though I liked biology and English, and I acted in all the plays and belonged to the literary club."18 After having completed his second year at Morris High School in New York City, Odets quit school and went to work in his father's print shop. But the attraction of the theatre was persistent; after having obtained his father's reluctant permission to become an actor, Odets began his dramatic career as a member of an amateur group known as the Drawing Room Players. Later he joined Harry Kemp's Poets' Theatre, played in stock companies, and finally formed a group of his own, which performed on radio from 1925 to 1927. During this time Odets worked in vaudeville as well as on radio as a Roving Reciter, reading primarily from the works of Robert W. Service and


18 Ibid.
Rudyard Kipling. In addition, he wrote two plays for radio: *Dawn* (never performed) and *At the Waterline* (produced on three radio stations and in which Odets himself acted the role of hero). In the spring of 1929, he went to Broadway as an understudy to Spencer Tracy in *Conflict*, and shortly afterwards, he obtained a minor position with the Theatre Guild. 19

In 1930, Odets became a charter member of the Group Theatre, the beginning of an eleven-year association with a permanent acting company which was to be instrumental in shaping his dramatic style. Throughout his work may be seen the influence of the Stanislavski method of dramatic art, upon whose aims and directives the Group Theatre was founded. Odets himself formally recognized his debt: "... my chief influence as a playwright was the Group Theatre acting company, and being a member of that company, formed and trained and shaped and used by Lee Strasberg." 20

Yet what made Odets’s plays, especially as performed by Group actors, arrest the attention of the Depression audience was his individual dramatic style—his ability to combine themes of social impact with warm, vibrant, and highly personalized characterizations. In justification of his

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20 Michael Mendelsohn, "Odets at Center Stage,” *Theatre Arts*, XLVII (May, 1963), 76.
tendency to speak out on public, political, and social issues, Odets asserted that "new art works should shoot bullets." Odets, however, was neither the first nor even the angriest of the Depression playwrights to attempt to convert the masses to the Marxist ideology. It is, then, necessary to note how Odets used the then-current dramatic tradition and the Group Theatre training upon which to construct his individual creative endeavors.

The theatre of the thirties did, to apply Odets's own term, "shoot bullets" of social and political concern; for it was more closely related to its social context than is the theatre of today. Although the drama of the thirties did draw upon the expressionistic innovations of the theatre of the twenties, it remained realistic in presentation, concerned not with the depiction of tragedy as such but with the causes of that tragedy. Plays reflected both the devastating, widespread effects of the 1929 crash and the mounting tensions of an approaching war. Playwrights of the period, in attempting to analyze and interpret their society, filled their dramas with characters "close to the edge of frustration."*

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Yet to many dramatists, the mere presentation of the specific situation seemed insufficient, so they turned to Moscow-inspired doctrines for simple solutions to America's economic troubles. The establishment of the Theatre Union (America's first and only Marxist theatre) and the many radical amateur groups directly testify to the drama's movement toward the left. By 1933 Odets and several Group members were attending Theatre Union meetings. Odets had even begun to instruct classes for the Union's younger actors. As Group director Harold Clurman remembered, "While Odets felt that the Group was artistically more mature, he was intrigued by the down-towners, for with them he might become something of a leader, a teacher. Besides this, the slogans of the Theatre Union were more daring than those of the fense-sitting, hair-splitting Group." Less than a year after his first association with the Theatre Union people, Odets joined the Communist Party for a period dating from the end of 1934 to the middle of 1935. Gerald Rabkin notes that, "Odets, however, did not arrive at his radicalism after a long period of intellectual debate. He was, in a sense, born to it; radicalism was in the air his

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generation breathed." Moreover, Odets quit the Communist Party less than a year after he joined it, protesting its interference with his work—an action which indicates to Gerald Rabkin that Odets's dedication to the Party was "essentially more emotional than intellectual."  

The Theatre Union and New Theatre League specialized in that type of drama known as "agit-prop," whose specific purpose was, as its shortened name suggests, agitation and propaganda. Rabkin points out that this was drama "of didacticism and invective . . . created for the specific purpose of serving its unorthodox theatrical environment: labor meetings, rallies of the unemployed, etc." Direct influences of the agit-prop genre are evident in Odets's first one-act play, Waiting for Lefty, particularly in its conclusion. There, after brief episodic scenes have revealed the economic and social injustices which have made the taxi drivers ready to strike, the play concludes:

AGATE (crying): Hear it, boys, hear it? Hell, listen to me! Coast to coast! HELLO AMERICA! HELLO. WE'RE STORM-BIRDS OF THE WORKING-CLASS. WORKERS OF THE WORLD...OUR BONES AND BLOOD! And when we die they'll know what we did to make a new world! Christ, cut us up to little pieces. We'll die for what is right! put fruit trees where our ashes are! (TO AUDIENCE): Well, what's the answer?

26 Rabkin, Drama and Commitment, p. 179.
27 Ibid., p. 180.
28 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
The ending, a ringingly didactic one, is full of Marxist dedication.

The Theatre Union had a lasting influence on the dramatic scene and left its mark on Odets, for, although it consistently attempted to expose what it saw as proletariat exploitation from strictly Marxist viewpoints, the Union nonetheless endeavored to make articulate the voice of the Depression-stifled common working man. Having identified himself with the suffering proletariat and the destitute middle class, Odets maintained this same class consciousness in his later creative work.

Existing along with the other dramatic organizations of the thirties, the Theatre Guild, formed in the early twenties had become one of the foremost institutional theatres in the world. Its productions, though concerned with man's social position, were not politically inspired and had little to do with specific economic phenomena.


Harold Clurman, a Guild member, states that the Guild's platform remained politically conservative and, "from the first, was to do distinguished plays according to the best professional standards." It was from this theatre, not from the radically conceived Theatre Union, that the Group broke; for deeply concerned about the young actors' training under the Guild's system, Clurman, Lee Strasberg, Morris Carnovsky, and other young actors gathered to outline proposals for a new theatre group. Their approach to theatre, Clurman adds, was the philosophical one derived from Constantine Stanislavski of the Moscow Art Center: "We expected to bring the actor much closer to the content of the play, to link the actor as an individual with the creative purpose of the playwright." There were to be no "stars" in this theatre, "not for the negative purpose of avoiding distinction, because all distinction . . . was to be embodied in the production as a whole. The writer himself was to be no star either, for his play . . . was simply the instrument for capturing an idea that was always greater than the instrument itself."

The "Group" began to hold weekly meetings from November, 1930, through May, 1931. Clurman relates that "One actor, a young man who had played secondary roles in two Guild

32 Clurman, The Pervent Years, p. 23.
33 Ibid., p. 21.
34 Ibid., p. 32.
productions, confessed to me, after perhaps ten meetings, that he was just beginning to understand what I was talking about. His name was Clifford Odets.35 Ironically, it was the later emergence of this same young man as a playwright that is said to have been the "single most important factor influencing the success of the Group."36

Odets and the members of the newly formed Group struggled through the effects of the crash. By the 1934-35 season, the rise of the inexpensive "talking" motion pictures joined with the Depression loss of part-time non-theatrical employment to throw between twenty to thirty thousand actors and theatre people out of work.37 The year 1932, however, was financially bleakest for the Group--only eighteen of the thirty-member company were paid that season. Half of the company moved into an old ten-room flat, where they shared the cooking and living expenses. There, too, Odets wrote a play called I Got the Blues, which was later revised to become Awake and Sing! Neither I Got the Blues nor an earlier play entitled 910 Eden Street, which Odets submitted in 1931, gave any hint of creative potential. In fact, Harold

Clurman remembers of 910 Eden Street. "I hardly thought of it as a play, or of its author as a potential playwright." 38

By the fall of 1934 tensions within the Group had become somewhat strained over the company's conservative policies concerning agit-prop drama. Yet despite the activities of some of its radical members (between five and nine members of the Group were reported to have been associated with the Party at this time 39), the Group Theatre was never formally aligned with the Marxist Theatre movement. Through its artistic aims, it always remained linked to the tradition of fine drama sponsored by the Theatre Guild. The Group's commitment to social drama has been viewed by Babkin as one "more moral than political; it felt compelled to raise and reflect social questions, rather than to offer a uniform solution." 40

In the 1934-35 season with productions failing in Boston and New York, the Directors almost decided to close in mid-season. "At this juncture," writes Clurman, "Clifford Odets came to me one evening with an outline of a one-act play he contemplated writing for the New Theatre League. The League was looking for plays that workers might put on at any meeting place or hall . . . . It sounded very promising.

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38 Clurman, The Fervent Years, p. 63.
39 House of Representatives, Hearings, p. 3456.
40 Babkin, Drama and Commitment, p. 74.
I told Odets. On this he disappeared like a flash—and wrote *Waiting for Lefty* in three nights. Rewritten from *I Got the Blues*, Odets's *Awake and Sing!* was selected for Group production, and the company went into rehearsal for that play as well as *Waiting for Lefty*. By this time he had also finished two acts of *Paradise Lost*.

Early in 1935, Clifford Odets "arrived." Almost overnight, he emerged from virtual obscurity to become a vigorous, passionate spokesman for the social dissidence of American youth. Acted by members of the Group, *Waiting for Lefty* won the New Theatre League one-act play writing contest and was performed on January 5 at the League's Sunday night benefit. The worker-audience reaction was spontaneous and enthusiastic. Responding to the play's final militant question, the audience stormed the stage to congratulate the actors. *Awake and Sing!* began its Broadway run on February 19, 1935, and a companion piece, *Till the Day I Die*, was added to the hour-long *Waiting for Lefty* for Broadway production. The critics were generous to Odets. The reviewer for *The Literary Digest* described his emergence:

> In less than ninety days, toiling with the unrest of his times as a central theme, a young actor in the New York theatre, a young actor who was competent . . .

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41Clurman, *The Fervent Years*, pp. 132-133.

has become the most exciting spokesman the world of workers yet has produced, and . . . he has become perhaps the most articulate dramatist available in the theatre. \(^{43}\)

Brooks Atkinson stated flatly: "Until Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!* opened under the Group Theatre's canopy a fortnight ago I had not realized that we have been blundering along for some time without acquiring any new dramatists." \(^{44}\)

Concerning *Waiting for Lefty*, Richard Watts wrote: "'short dynamic drama . . . had all the qualities of a dramatic machine gun.'" \(^{45}\) Grenville Vernon exclaimed that "the characterizations and the dialogue have a bite and an originality of turn which set them apart from the somewhat pallid characters and dialogue of most modern plays." \(^{46}\) And Joseph Wood Krutch noted, "One of the most important things about *Awake and Sing!* is an extraordinary freshness." \(^{47}\)

Closing out the most exciting and dynamic year in the life of Odets, the Group produced *Paradise Lost* in the fall

\(^{43}\) "An Exciting Dramatist Rises in the Theatre" (author not given), *The Literary Digest*, CXIX (April 6, 1935), 18.


\(^{46}\) Grenville Vernon, "Mr. Odets' Plays Are Jewish," *Commonweal*, XXIX (December 16, 1938), 215.

and later a short monologue, I Can't Sleep, written and played at a benefit for the Marine Workers' Industrial Union. With four plays being staged on Broadway, and with Theatre League groups having produced Waiting for Lefty in some sixty towns simultaneously throughout the United States, Clifford Odets "scrawled his name across the page marked 1935 in American dramatic history."49

With these four plays running on Broadway, Odets began to hear from Hollywood. Although the offers for his services went to as high as $4,000 dollars a week, he refused to leave the Group, until Paradise Lost began to falter. Then, to get money to save that show, Odets went to Hollywood as a screen writer for 2,500 dollars a week, wrote the scenario for The General Died at Dawn, fell in love with and then married movie star Luise Rainer. Some associates felt that Odets had "sold out" to Hollywood, but in 1937 he returned from California and gave the Group Theatre Golden Boy, a play which earned enough to sustain the company for two more seasons. Many critics felt that Golden Boy was Odets's best play to that time: "There are moments when Golden Boy seems near to greatness,"50 wrote Joseph Wood Krutch.

48 Rabkin, Drama and Commitment, p. 180.
49 Ibid., p. 169.
50 Krutch, American Drama Since 1918, p. 272.
Rocket to the Moon (1938) and Night Music (1940) failed, receiving a poor press. Then, after Clash by Night (1941), Odets and the Group split. This, as Baird Shuman noted, "marked the final disintegration of the Group Theatre and the end of Odets' most fruitful and satisfying artistic period." 51

The thinning of Odets' talent is apparent in the post-Group dramas, The Big Knife (1948), The Country Girl (1950), and The Flowering Peach (1954), which represent a marked falling off from the earlier vigorous, exciting productions. The critics began to ask what had become of the "promising" Odets. In 1963, Odets struck out at such appraisals:

We live in a time where you say something in one decade, and a decade later you're old-fashioned. They talk about me as a playwright or the playwright of the Thirties . . . . What are they going to call me in the Sixties, when I produce three or four or five plays which will obviously have quality? What are they going to still call me, a playwright of the Thirties? 52

In the light of the author's death just two months later, this statement has taken on added irony; for, having made extensive notes on half a dozen future plays, Clifford Odets passed away just after he had finished the book for the musical version of the 1937 Golden Boy. 53

51 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 34.
52 Michael Mendelsohn, "Odets at Center Stage," Theatre Arts, XLVII (June, 1963), 30.
53 Catherine Hughes, "Odets: The Price of Success," Commonweal, LXXVIII (September 20, 1963), 559.
Thus unable to re-assert his dramatic talent in the fifties and the sixties, Odets remained known best for his achievements of the thirties—most notably for the first four or five plays which had been written with such dramatic force. However, when today's critic remembers Clifford Odets, his comments usually are concerned with the social implications of the earlier works, particularly *Waiting for Lefty*. This play, with its "stormbirds speech" became, in truth, "the ghost he could not escape."\(^5\)

This thesis contends that current critical appreciation of Clifford Odets as a dramatist is incomplete and that, contrary to the general view, Odets, a creator of living language and unforgettable dialogue, did make a significant and lasting contribution to the contemporary American theatre. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to demonstrate with what creative skill and with what theatrical precision Odets uses the dramatic language of his plays.

In order to re-evaluate the playwright's special handling of diction and dramatic dialogue, two plays of the Depression Decade are chosen for close textual analysis: the 1935 *Awake and Sing!*, "Odets' masterpiece in the opinion of most critics,\(^5\)\(^5\) and the 1937 *Golden Boy*. Odets's most

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popular and financially successful play. The body of the thesis is composed of Chapters II and III, each of which deals with one of the preceding dramas to show how diction is selected and arranged deliberately to establish character, to evoke mood and atmosphere, and to determine pace. Chapter II examines the function and the effectiveness of the dramatic language and dialogue in *Awake and Sing!* Chapter III, after analyzing the influence of the Hollywood cinematic technique on Odets' dramatic method, investigates specifically the use and the suitability of the diction and dramatic dialogue in establishing mood and atmosphere within the scenes.

Such an analysis of Odets' use of diction and dramatic dialogue in *Awake and Sing!* and *Golden Boy* should be of value as well as of interest to the student of American drama, for to date there has been no full-length study. The chief secondary sources used here are brief critical reviews, which due to their very nature could not undertake systematic structural analysis of the dramatic dialogue. Most of these reviews discuss the social implications of the drama, the themes within the play, and the performances of the actors. Thus they offer little, if any, relevant information concerning Odets' use of dramatic diction. Since the existing analyses of Odets' language are incomplete, this study makes what is hoped to be a significant contribution to critical knowledge of Odets' works.
There are, nonetheless, several books and articles which provide useful biographical background information. This study has made use of the following scholarly works: Baird Shuman's *Clifford Odets*, the only full-length critical interpretation of the man in relation to the entire body of his work; Harold Clurman's *The Fervent Years*, a personal account of the establishment of the Group Theatre and of the movements of Odets in the period 1930-1941; Gerald Rabkin's *Drama and Commitment*, a work which discusses politics in the American theatre of the thirties and which contains most relevant chapters on both Clifford Odets and on the Group Theatre; and John McCarten's 1938 article in *The New Yorker*, "Revolution's Number One Boy," which provides invaluable biographical data.

The primary sources of this study are, of course, the plays themselves. The 1939 Random House edition, entitled *Six Plays of Clifford Odets*, is used throughout, and all footnote citations to the plays are to this edition.
CHAPTER II

AWAKE AND SING!

In Awake and Sing! Clifford Odets departs from the traditional method of dramatic presentation, for, structurally, the play does not progress along the strict lines dictated by a realistic narrative plot, but instead advances and unfolds through the interplay of the conflicting attitudes and temperaments of the characters. The drama is primarily concerned with the lives of the Jewish-American Berger family—Jacob, Bessie Berger's father; Myron and Bessie Berger; and Ralph and Hennie, the Berger children. Two outsiders figure importantly in the action: Moe Axelrod, a suitor of Hennie's who becomes a boarder in the apartment, and Uncle Morty, Bessie's brother who is a successful business man. Schlosser, an overworked German janitor, and Sam Feinschreiber, who becomes Hennie's husband, also appear on stage. Awake and Sing! is a Depression play, with each individual mirroring in a different way the unhappiness and insecurity which resulted from the 1929 Crash. These lower-middle class people are likened by Odets to the characters found in Chekhov's dramas; and this, Odets claims, "is why the people in Awake and Sing! have what is called a 'Chekhovian quality,' which is why it is sinful to violate their lives and
aspirations with plot lines."^1

The drama is staged in three acts, with the second act broken into two scenes, and the entire action takes place in the Berger apartment in the Bronx, covering a time interval of one year. Through the individual members of the family unit, Odets explores what his introduction calls the theme of the play, the fact that "all of the characters in Awake and Sing! share a fundamental activity: a struggle for life amidst petty conditions."^2 Yet since much of what transpires happens not so much on stage as in the minds of the characters, the plot, when stated in summary, gives but a brief hint of what really takes place in the drama.

Awake and Sing! relates the story of the Berger family, whose daughter Hennie is pregnant as a result of an illicit affair. Bessie, who is "not only the mother in this home but also the father,"^3 discovers Hennie's condition and rushes her into a hasty marriage with Sam Feinschreiber, a "lonely man, a foreigner in a strange land, hypersensitive about this fact, conditioned by the humiliation of not making his way alone."^4 The grandfather, Jacob, protests the marriage but is overruled by Bessie. Myron, the quiet

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^3 Ibid.

^4 Ibid., p. 39.
father and a "born follower,"\(^5\) sits awe-struck by the
happenings. Moe Axelrod, who loves Hennie and would marry
her, refuses to declare his love, since he is bitter against
a world which permits wars, having lost his leg in World
War One, and thus "fights against his own sensitivity."\(^6\)

Though Jacob is disillusioned in the American economic
system and has turned to the teachings of Karl Marx, he is a
"sentimental idealist with no power to turn ideal to
action."\(^7\) He is consoled, however, by the thought that
perhaps his grandson Ralph might help to build a better
world. Ralph also is much dissatisfied with his way of life.
Yet he is a timid youth, for Bessie's domination over the
years has been strong. Though Bessie will not consent to
the match, Ralph is still in love with Blanche, an orphan
without money. Since Ralph is the one character who is
finally able to "awake and sing," the drama focuses on his
development from a passive and ineffectual personality to a
forceful and dedicated.

When Ralph later discovers the circumstances of
Hennie's marriage, he turns in anger on Bessie for
proposing the match and on Jacob for allowing it. Bessie
responds in anger by smashing her father's most cherished
possession--his Caruso records. The grandfather, sickened
by what has become of his family, commits suicide by

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 37. \(^6\)Ibid., p. 38. \(^7\)Ibid.
jumping from the apartment roof—but only after he has willed his insurance money to Ralph. Uncle Morty then conspires with Bessie and Myron to cheat Ralph out of his inheritance, but they are prevented by Moe, who produces a paper which he claims is a suicide note. Ralph finally does give the money to his family, after he is converted to Jacob's Marxist vision. At the play's conclusion, Moe persuades Hennie to run off with him, leaving her husband and baby; and Ralph, inheriting Jacob's books, is moved by his grandfather's spirit to fight for a better life.

Thus *Awake and Sing!* is a drama not concerned with specific economic interpretations of the causes of the Depression but with the psychological and spiritual attitudes which are its results. These attitudes are revealed primarily through a dramatic diction which expresses directly and simply the frustrations, the longings, and the hopes of the characters. This study maintains that it is the interplay of the personalities of the characters as expressed through dramatic dialogue which provides the dynamic movement of *Awake and Sing!*; for, by gradually exposing the characters' psychological frustrations through sharp and telling encounters, each building to an inevitable personality conflict, the drama achieves an unfolding rhythmic progression. Curiously, however, there has been a noticeable absence of critical comment on the manner in which O'Ness juxtaposes the attitudes and temperaments of his characters.
Further, although many of the critical reviews make brief mention of the lyrical and poetic qualities of the language of the drama, only Robert Warshow offers any extensive study of Odets's poetic technique. Warshow feels that many of the speeches of *Awake and Sing!* do have the effect of poetry, "suggesting much more than is said and depending for the enrichment of the suggestion upon the sensibility and experience of the hearer."\(^8\) But Warshow also believes that only the hearer can supply the psychological response to these vivid images from the cultural life of the Jews, that the poetic process "operates exclusively between the writer and the audience; it is not in the play"\(^9\) and that the characters "do not speak in poetry--indeed, they usually become ridiculous when they are made to speak 'poetically.'"\(^10\)

Although it is true that certain events of the play do strike the individual consciousness in such a way as to call forth a psychological response to life in the Jewish-American tradition, it is a basic contention of this thesis that it is the characters who are the instruments and that their utterances, rather than making them appear ridiculous, suggest to the audience their intense, emotional desires.

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and frustrations through a diction rich with imagery and allusions to idealized, escapist worlds.

This chapter, then, will analyze and evaluate Clifford Odets's deliberate selection of words--his use of dramatic diction--to reveal character, create mood and atmosphere, and determine pace. This section will also demonstrate how the conversation of the characters--the dramatic dialogue--is used to advance the action through the interplay of the attitudes and personalities of the characters.

The opening speeches of *Awake and Sing!* reveal the psychological states of two members of the Berger family and introduce the prevailing mood of frustration which so plagues them all:

Ralph: Well, advancement down the place? Work like crazy! Think they see it? You'd drop dead first.

Myron: Never mind, son, merit never goes unrewarded. Teddy Roosevelt used to say--

Hennie: It rewarded you--thirty years a haberdashery clerk!11

Ralph's initial comment marks him as an angry young man disgusted with the economic system. His early mention of death in this scene is a significant one, for it is the first of many references foreshadowing Jacob's death in Act II. And, further, it prepares the audience for the dramatic presentation of the many spiritual and psychological "deaths"

11Odets, "Awake and Sing!" *Six Plays*, p. 41.
which the characters each suffer as a result of home and economic environment.

Myron's first speech also provides an early insight into his character, as the linking of the old platitude with a statement by Teddy Roosevelt reveals the backward direction of his mental musings. An additional indication that Myron is not one at ease in the present is the fact that he makes no reply to Hennie's taunt. In just three short lines, the dialogue brings out a clear, sharp picture of a tired man whose roots are in the past. Subsequent speeches amplify this initial portrait. When, with no apparent relevance to any previous speech, Myron suddenly remarks, "This morning the sink was full of ants. Where they come from I just don't know. I thought it was coffee grounds...and then they began moving," the statement illustrates that he is unable to interpret present reality. For Myron, completely perplexed by the constant flux of life, shifting external appearances but reflect his own inner confusion.

Bessie and Ralph's opening argument establishes that the frustration which Ralph has experienced at the factory is also present in the home, where his mother personally stifles the development of any individuality:

Ralph: I wanna make up my own mind about things...be something! Didn't I want to take up tap dancing, too?

12 Ibid., p. 42.
BESSIE: So take lessons. Who stopped you?
RALPH: On what?
BESSIE: On what? Save money.
RALPH: Sure, five dollars a week for expenses and the rest in the house. I can't save even for shoe laces.
BESSIE: You mean we shouldn't have food in the house, but you'll make a jig on the street corner?
RALPH: I mean something.
BESSIE: You also mean something when you studied on the drum, Mr. Smartie!*

Here the dialogue not only briefly sketches the economic situation of the family, but it also shows how quickly and instinctively Bessie moves to pronounce on any questions which concern family finances and how thoroughly she dominates Ralph in the early acts.

In the language of the older characters, particularly Bessie and Jacob, Odets has relied heavily on Jewish dialect and idiom. The children, more involved in the American way of life, are further from the dialect and seldom lapse into it. In Bessie's diction Odets demonstrates a precise command of both dialect and speech rhythm, for her speeches are filled with the circumlocutions and inverted word orders characteristic of Jewish-American dialect. This dialect, however, never becomes obtrusive or confusing, and it is often used humorously: "I can't take a bite in my mouth no more," she exclaims in disgust—and the sense of her statement is as explicit as when, fifteen lines later, she remarks to Jacob, "You gave the dog eat?" Yet beneath the

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13 Ibid., pp. 41-42.  
14 Ibid., p. 42.  
15 Ibid.
humor of Bessie's Jewish speech rhythms, the diction reveals a personality totally concerned with preserving the family unit and its financial security. Bessie's advice to Hennie about marriage comically illustrates that aspect of her character which directs her decisions on familial matters: "It's time you already had in your head a serious thought. A girl twenty-six don't grow younger. When I was your age it was already a big family with responsibilities."  

The debilitating effect upon Ralph of Bessie's coercion is made explicit with his poignant lament, "I don't know... Every other day to sit around with the blues and mud in your mouth."  
Here the unusual linking of "blues and mud" forms an image which expresses his mental depression perfectly. And, moments later, using the concrete image of a pair of "black and white shoes" as an object of Ralph's desire, "It's crazy—all my life I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them. It's crazy!" the diction exudes the same sense of desperate frustration.

To Ralph's laments, Myron's comment, "That's how it is--life is like that--a cake-walk." gives further dimension to his initial characterization as one lost in the past by adding to it this totally unrealistic view of reality. The reference to life in terms of the trouble-free, musical world

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16 Ibid., p. 44.  
17 Ibid., p. 42.  
18 Ibid.  
19 Ibid.
of the "cake-walk" is especially significant in the dramatic context since it is the first of the many allusions to the various escapist worlds which contrast so keenly with the monotonous and drab life the characters actually live. For Myron, whose thoughts remain linked with the past, the only hope of escape in the confused present is that associated with money: the world of wealth that awaits by winning the Irish Sweepstakes or by picking long shots at the races.

"You can buy a ticket for fifty cents and win fortunes. A man came in the store--it's the Irish Sweepstakes," Myron blurts out inconsequentially shortly after his description of life as a cake-walk.

Bessie's sharp reply, "Who spends fifty-cent pieces for Irish raffles? They threw out a family on Dawson Street today. All the furniture on the sidewalk. A fine old woman with gray hair," again exposes her instinctive concern for family security.

As the family prepares for the vaudeville show, Ralph and Jacob are left alone. Ralph's simple, "I can't stand it," makes clear that what has transpired at dinner is not just an isolated family quarrel but a daily occurrence in Bessie's house. The mood swiftly changes to one of vigorous argument, however, as Bessie enters and begins her

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20 Ibid., p. 43.  
21 Ibid.  
22 Ibid., p. 45.
persistent questioning. Odets uses the short staccato lines to quicken the pace in recording the conflict of personalities. The lines build rapidly to Ralph's explosive exclamation:

BESSIE: ... (to RALPH): What'll you do?
RALPH: Don't know.
BESSIE: You'll see the boys around the block?
RALPH: I'll stay home every night.\(^{23}\)

The argumentative tone continues through Bessie's dispute with Schlosser, the janitor—one easily confused and dominated by Bessie's verbal aggressiveness—and his submissiveness critically underscores her authoritarian control of the other members of the family.

Again Bessie's dialogue is filled with colorful Jewish colloquialisms. In reply to Schlosser's comment about the apartment receiving new ropes for the dumbwaiter, she exclaims in heavy dialect: "He should live so long your Mr. Wimmer. For seven years already he's sending new ropes. No dumbwaiter, no hot water, no steam--In a respectable house, they don't allow such conditions."\(^{24}\)

Though the dialect is humorous, Bessie's speech brings out clearly her primary concern with family responsibilities, and her choice of the word "respectable" reveals significantly that it is the need to maintain this front of respectability\(^{25}\) which drives her to dominate the family.

\(^{23}\)Ibid. \(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 47.

After Bessie and the family leave, Ralph's speech vividly contrasts the joy usually associated with a birthday celebration with the sadness which he actually experienced. The diction slows the tempo as the mood reverts to one of gloom: "I never in my life even had a birthday party. Every time I went and cried in the toilet when my birthday came." But the dramatic tempo picks up rhythmically as Ralph tells Jacob of his newly discovered love for Blanche. Ralph's language breaks from the haunting images which have symbolized his frustration and becomes lyrical with his rising emotions:

RALPH: But she's got me! Boy, I'm telling you I could sing! Jake, she's like stars. She's so beautiful you look at her and cry! She's like French words! We went to the park the other night. Heard the last band concert.

JACOB: Must be...

RALPH: ... It got cold and I gave her my coat to wear. We just walked along like that, see, without a word, see. I never was so happy in all my life. It got late...we just sat there. She looked at me—you know what I mean, how a girl looks at you—right in the eyes? "I love you," she says, "Ralph." I took her home...I wanted to cry. That's how I felt!

JACOB: It's a beautiful feeling.

The images of comparison, such as "stars" and "French words," represent distant and relatively unattainable objects of desire, as the language becomes highly figurative. It is this same love which early in the drama holds Ralph's dreams.

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26 Odets, "Awake and Sing!" Six Plays, p. 46.
27 Ibid., p. 47.
of future happiness and escape from the family. The short responses and clipped diction give articulation to Ralph's mixed emotions of young love and mature decision:

| RALPH: They don't have to know I've got a girl. |
| JACOB: What's in the end? |
| RALPH: Out I go! I don't mean maybe! |
| JACOB: And then what? |
| RALPH: Life begins. |
| JACOB: What life? |
| RALPH: Life with my girl. Boy, I could sing when I think about it! Her and me together--that's a new life! |

Odets needs only one sharp line of dialogue to sober this lyric mood: Jacob's sudden and unexpected warning--"Don't make a mistake! A new death!"  

Recalling his former dreams in contrast to his present ineptitude, "Once I had in my heart a dream, a vision, but came marriage and then you forget. Children come and you forget . . . ." Jacob urges Ralph to identify himself with the cause for world betterment which he describes in Marxist terms:

| JACOB: Boyolichick, wake up! Be something! Make your life something good. For the love of an old man who sees in your young days his new life, for such love take the world in your two hands and make it like new. Go out and fight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills. A woman waits. |

Later in Act III Odets deliberately employs Jacob's phrases "...take the world in your two hands and make it new" and

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29 Ibid., p. 48.  
30 Ibid.  
31 Ibid.
"Go out and fight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills" to denote thematic advancement, i.e., Ralph's intellectual conversion to Marxism as shown by his echoing of parallel statements. Here, however, Ralph's quick reply, "Say, I'm no fool!"\(^3\) indicates what a distance he is from understanding the meaning of Jacob's message.

Moe Axelrod arrives as Ralph leaves. The good-natured exchanges between Moe and Jacob provide expository background concerning Moe's war experiences and his wooden leg, and they demonstrate also to what extent he has adopted a veneer of self-confidence and cynicism to cover his true feelings. Moe has learned to live in the capitalistic system and to earn his living from it, even though he breaks the country's laws as a small-time gambler and bootlegger.

Yet beneath the cooky exterior there lies an aspect of Moe's character which seeks normal expression in desire and tenderness:

MOE: Who's home?
JACOB: Me.
MOE: Good. I'll stick around a few minutes. Where's Hennie?
JACOB: She went with Bessie and Myron to a show.
MOE: She what?
JACOB: You had a date?
MOE (hiding his feelings): Here--I brought you some halavah.
JACOB: Halavah? Thanks. I'll eat a piece later.\(^3\)

This portion of the act begins in a low key, a conversation

\(^3\)Ibid.
\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 48-49.
between friends. However, images of violence and death
("to your dying day"; "my goddamn leg shot off"; "she'll
knock your head off"; "he'll die"; and "starving beggars")
even when spoken in jest, mark the dialogue and thus add to
a vaguely felt apprehension of further violence which fore-
shadows Jacob's suicide. However, Moe's sudden interjection,
"Where'd they go?" shows that throughout the conversation
his thoughts have been on Hennie.

The two begin a pinochle hand. But when Jacob puts on
a Caruso record which expresses a joyful vision of a Utopian
land, each suddenly discloses a personal longing for some
peaceful place far from the troubled Bronx. First Moe
speaks: "Ever see oranges grow? I know a certain place--
One summer I laid under a tree and let them fall right in
my mouth." Moe's mention of growing fruit suggests his
desire for a full and complete existence quite unlike his
present sterile life. Then Jacob's feelings, too, are moved
by the music, and he cries out in lyric accompaniment to the
music: "From 'L'Africana'...a big explorer comes on a new
land--'O Paradiso.' From act four this piece. Caruso
stands on the ship and looks on a Utopia. You hear? 'Oh
paradise! Oh paradise on earth! Oh blue sky, oh fragrant
air--'."

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34 Ibid., p. 49.  
35 Ibid.  
36 Ibid., p. 50.  
37 Ibid., pp. 50-51.
For but a brief instant the drama is held suspended as each man lays bare his inmost desire for escape to the visionary land. Then the mood is dissipated as Moe says cynically, "Ask him does he see any oranges,\textsuperscript{38}\textsuperscript{38} and as Bessie, Myron, and Hennie return. Bessie's abrupt, "Take off the phonograph, Pop,\textsuperscript{39}\textsuperscript{39}" cuts short the last moments of the beatific mood which had accompanied the idealized longings.

Upon Bessie's arrival both the mood and pace immediately shift, as a series of brief disputes arise. First, Bessie assumes the role of the "offended mother" in an argument with Hennie: "I don't understand what I did to God He blessed me with such children. From the whole world--\textsuperscript{40}\textsuperscript{40}" but she is interrupted by Moe who speaks up in Hennie's defense. The mother moves instantly to a personal attack:

\begin{quote}
MOE (\textit{coming to the aid of Hennie}): For Chris' sake, don't kibitz so much!
BESSIE: You don't like it?
MOE (\textit{aping}): No, I don't like it.
BESSIE: That's too bad, Axelrod. Maybe it's better by your cigarstore friends. Here we're different people.
MOE: Don't gimme that cigar store line, Bessie. I walked up five flights--
BESSIE: To take out Hennie. But my daughter ain't in your class, Axelrod.\textsuperscript{41}\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Moe then explains that one of Myron's long shots at the track has come in, paying twelve and a half to one. As Moe

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 51. \textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.} \textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.} \textsuperscript{41}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 51-52.
\end{quote}
exits to get change for a twenty, Myron blissfully contemplates his winnings: "Oh, that's a big percentage. If I picked a winner every day...";\(^4^2\) and, as his mind reverts to a favorite image of a financially secure future, he begins, "Just look at that--a cake walk. We can make--"\(^4^3\) Bessie, however, interrupts, and turns his thoughts back to reality: "It's enough talk. I got a splitting headache. Hennie, go in bed. I'll call Dr. Canton."\(^4^4\)

When Hennie's pregnancy is discovered, the dialogue brings the action to several intense peaks, each more strained than the previous one, and each marked by a diction which intensifies the atmosphere by revealing the agitated emotional states of the characters. First Hennie and Bessie argue. The girl cries out in anguish, "Shut up! Shut up! I'll jump out the window in a minute! Shut up!"\(^4^5\) Myron, still unable to accept the reality of Hennie's pregnancy, can only mumble tearfully, "It's like a play on the stage..."\(^4^6\) Bessie presses ruthlessly on: "To a mother you couldn't say something before. I'm old-fashioned--like your friends I'm not smart--I don't eat chop suey and run around Coney Island with tramps."\(^4^7\) But the mother then proposes a characteristic solution which will be fully "respectable"

\(^{4^2}\)Ibid., p. 52.\(^{4^3}\)Ibid., p. 53.\(^{4^4}\)Ibid.\(^{4^5}\)Ibid., p. 54.\(^{4^6}\)Ibid.\(^{4^7}\)Ibid.
("Tomorrow night bring Sam Feinschreiber for supper"\(^48\) as well as financially suitable (since "In three years he put enough in the bank, a good living").\(^49\)

Hennie weakly protests Bessie's decision, but she is abruptly silenced by Bessie's verbal attack. The girl's silence at this point is most telling, for it demonstrates to what extent she has been tyrannized by her mother. Her affair with an unknown lover shows, adds Baird Shuman, that she "lacks understanding and is utterly unable to face life realistically. Romance has replaced reason in her."\(^50\)

Hennie's temperament and attitudes toward life mark her as "the antithesis of Ralph and Jacob, for to them it is important that 'life should have some dignity,' while to Hennie this is unimportant. She wants to be comfortable physically and materially."\(^51\)

Thus Jacob, not Hennie, faces Bessie to protest the suggestion of such a marriage. The short, hard-hitting speeches again build in intensity to record the clash:

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JACOB: Such a thing you can't do.
BESSIE: Who asked your advice?
JACOB: Such a thing--
BESSIE: Never mind!
JACOB: The lowest from the low!
BESSIE: Don't talk! I'm warning you! A man who don't believe in God—with crazy ideas--
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\(^{48}\)Ibid.\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 55.

\(^{50}\) Shuman, *Clifford Odets*, p. 61.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 60.
JACOB: So bad I never imagined you could be.
BESSIE: Maybe if you didn't talk so much it wouldn't happen like this. You with your ideas—I'm a mother. I raise a family they should have respect.

JACOB: Respect? *(Spits) Respect! For the neighbors' opinion! You insult me Bessie!*\textsuperscript{52}

But Bessie's torrent of words is too much for Jacob, and he retreats to his room exclaiming in a speech which directly prefigures his death, ". . . But Ralph you don't make like you. Before you do it, I'll die first. He'll find a girl. He'll go in a fresh world with her. This is a house? Marx said it--abolish such families."\textsuperscript{53}

There is a momentary pause in the action as Jacob leaves the room in humiliation and as Moe returns carrying a box. His simple one-word reference to food at this moment ("Cake,"\textsuperscript{54} he notes putting the box on the table) seems at first insignificant. Yet Odets here uses the apparently trivial remark at the precise instant when the characters are about to make a moral compromise. Subsequent comments about food and drink in this act, as well as in the following acts, occur at the precise time the characters experience a moral concession. The coincidental recurrence leads one to conclude that such verbal references are both deliberate and meaningful.

\textsuperscript{52}Odets, "Awake and Sing!" \textit{Six Plays}. p. 55.
\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 56.
When Bessie prematurely announces Hennie's "engagement," Moe's repeated questions demonstrate further his interest in the girl.

**BESSIE:** We're soon losing our Hennie, Moe.
**MOE:** Why? What's the matter?
**BESSIE:** She made her engagement.
**MOE:** Zat so?
**BESSIE:** Today it happened... he asked her.
**MOE:** Did he? Who? Who's the corpse?
**BESSIE:** It's a secret.
**MOE:** In the bag, huh? 55

But then he attempts to cover his true feeling with cynical comments:

**BESSIE:** When a mother gives away an only daughter it's no joke. Wait, when you get married you'll know...
**MOE (bitterly):** Don't make me laugh--when I get married! What I think a women? Take 'em all, cut 'em in little pieces like a herring in Greek salad. A guy in France had the right idea--dropped his wife in a bathtub fulla acid. (Whistles.) Sss, down the pipe! Pfft--not even a corset button left! 56

Here the reference to Hennie's future husband as a "corpse" and the descriptions of a brutal murder add to the death motif. And Moe's remarks to Hennie, with their mention of "suicide," also contain ironic connotations important to the drama: Hennie's marriage does, in truth, lead to Jacob's "suicide," for Jacob's act proceeds directly from his acquiescence to the match:

**MOE (to HENNIE):** What's the great idea? Gone big time, Paradise? Christ, it's suicide! Sure, kids you'll have, gold teeth, get fat, big in the tangerines--57

As Hennie and Moe argue, the increased tempo of the sharp, angry exclamations projects forcefully the clash of temperaments:

HENNIE: Shut your face!
MOE: Who's it--some dope pullin' down twenty bucks a week? Cut your throat, sweetheart. Save time.
BESSIE: Never mind your two cents, Axelrod.
MOE: I say what I think--that's me!
HENNIE: That's you--a lousy fourflusher who'd steal the glasses off a blind man.
MOE: Get hot!
HENNIE: My God, do I need it--to listen to this mutt shoot his mouth off?58

Yet Moe's verbal assault on Hennie proves to be but a satiric mask for his true feelings. After Hennie leaves the room, Moe's words show his real concern and longing for her:

"Pretty, pretty--a sweet gal, your Hennie. See the look in her eyes?";59 and "Like a battleship she's got it. Not like other dames--shove 'em and they lay. Not her. I got a yen for her and I don't mean a Chinee coin";60 and, finally, admitting his love, "When I think about it...maybe I'd marry her myself."61

But when Bessie warms to the idea, exclaiming, "Why don't you, Moe? An old friend of the family like you. It would be a blessing on all of us,"62 Moe again quickly covers his feelings of disappointment and self-pity ("Even if I asked her. She won't do it! A guy with one leg--it gives

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58 Ibid., p. 57. 59 Ibid. 60 Ibid.
61 Ibid. 62 Ibid., p. 58.
her the heebie-jeebies") with interspersed cynical comments ("I need a wife like a hole in the head...What's to know about women, I know . . . I know what she's looking for. An arrow-collar guy, a hero, but with a wad of jack . . . .").

Once again at the instant when Moe compromises by suppressing his sensitive feelings Odets associates Moe's action with a reference to food:

BESSIE: It's right--she wants a millionaire with a mansion on Riverside Drive. So go fight City Hall. Cake? MOE: Cake.
BESSIE: I'll make tea . . . . Harold Clurman suggests that it is fitting that Moe should eat cake when told that he is losing the girl he loves, since life-long economic pressures produce "a certain lack of order, a confusion of physical details with spiritual crises . . . ."). Odets, however, as previously noted, seems to use references to food to identify specifically such moments of spiritual crisis and moral compromise.

The author uses the diction of Moe's speeches to create, vary, and sustain the concluding moods of the act to reflect inner feelings, which are given a haunting musical amplification by a Caruso lament from The Pearl Fishers playing in the background. In consecutive speeches, Moe's emotions

come full cycle before the audience. First his hesitant, sincere words evoke a softened atmosphere as he reveals his attraction to Hennie: "No wet smack...a fine girl..." But, as he attempts in his disappointment to mask his true feelings, the cynical phrases contain images suggestive of pleading humility ("She wantsa see me crawl--") and of sacrificial dedication ("--my head on a plate she wants!") indicating inner tension. And finally, in a concluding speech, the heavily accented, monosyllabic words produce a heightened mood reflecting Moe's intense frustration, as the diction explodes into a single passionate outburst: "What the hell kind of house is this it ain't got an orange!!" (Again the reference to food here seems deliberate and significant.) The final violent eruption is underscored by the slow curtain, and, in effect, the act concludes with the same mood of frustration that was illustrated in the play's opening speech.

The dramatic dialogue is used effectively in Act I to reveal the individual and distinct personalities of all the characters. Without forcing or obviousness of exposition, the diction of each exhibits his unique psychological make-up and his particular desire or stifled hope which is denied fulfillment. It is evident also that the act never becomes

68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
static precisely because there is a continual dramatic progression established through the conversations: the introduction and presentation of each personality reacting to the tense and confining atmosphere of the house. The diction of the characters specifically amplifies the mood of individual frustration, for romantic references to peaceful dreamy lands contrast sharply with the bitter outbursts which reveal the taut strain of actual conditions. Further, even the stage movement of the characters, a constant visual motion as they enter and leave the apartment, complements the concurrent dramatic advancement through dialogue.

The opening lines of Act II continue the mood of frustration from Act I. As Jacob is cutting his son Morty's hair, Bessie enters and confronts him with the sharp command, "Don't get hair on the rug, Pop. (Goes to the window and pulls down shade.) What's the matter the shade's up to the ceiling?" 71 The words not only re-establish Bessie's position as tyrant but continue the atmosphere of oppression and antagonism as well.

Jacob's terse comment and accompanying action—he pulls the shade up again—place his personality once again in dramatic confrontation with Bessie's: "Since when do I give a haircut in the dark? (He mimics her tone.)" 72 Bessie meets

his challenge with a response which indicates that, after a year's interval, she is still the overbearing matriarch concerned with her family and with keeping up appearances: "When you're finished pull it down. I like my house to look respectable." The comment has subtly ironic overtones in the light of Bessie's efforts to maintain family "respectability" in Act I.

The dialogue proceeds slowly in quiet domestic conversation. To Jacob's question about the news in the paper, Moe's reply seems merely a casual, cynical observation. But in reality the exchange, filled with images of Depression-caused suicides leaping from high buildings, seems deliberately to foreshadow Jacob's own act of self-destruction:

MOE: Still jumping off the high buildings like flies—the big shots who lost all their cocoanuts. Pfft!

JACOB: Suicides?

MOE: Plenty can't take it—good in the break, but can't take the whip in the stretch.

MORTY (without looking up): I saw it happen Monday in my building. My hair stood up how they shoveled him together—like a pancake—a bankrupt manufacturer.

MOE: No brains.

MORTY: Enough...all over the sidewalk.74

Following the comments about suicides, the diction holds the scene's pace in check, as subdued conversation refers to Jacob's artistic skill as a barber, and the Depression loss of jobs and working conditions. But when the characters argue,
tension is created through heated exchanges which juxtapose contrasting attitudes and temperaments:

MYRON: I'll tell you the way I see it. The country needs a great man now—a regular Teddy Roosevelt.
MOE: What this country needs is a good five-cent earthquake.
JACOB: So long labor lives it should increase private gain—
BESSION (to JACOB): Listen, Poppa, go talk on the street corner. The government'll give you free board the rest of your life.
MORTY: I'm surprised. Don't I send a five-dollar check for Pop every week?
BESSION: You could afford a couple more and not miss it.
MORTY: Tell me jokes. Business is so rotten I could just as soon lay all day in the Turkish bath.

Such dialogue demonstrates Odets's precise blending of the technical elements of the play, for the speeches control the pace and the mood, reiterate an essential aspect of each character's temperament, and provide an initial insight into Morty's feelings. Myron's unrealistic solution to the Depression troubles further characterizes him as one lost in memories of the past, and his second reference to Teddy Roosevelt demonstrates his attraction to a man who, Baird Shuman notes, "stands in polar opposition to him temperamentally." Moe's single comment in the short exchange is, typically, a cynical one; and Jacob's one line begins a Marxist interpretation of conditions. Bessie's speeches again illustrate how instinctively she moves to argue in

75 Ibid., pp. 61-62.
76 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 62.
personally insulting terms and how swiftly she responds to a mention of finances. Morty's statement that he sends a "five-dollar check" each week Ironically betrays an absence of any genuine love or feeling for his father. And this comment is followed immediately by a phrase which implies his financial security ("lay all day in the Turkist bath").

Further speeches build upon this initial characterization of Morty to illustrate to what extent his temperament is one of utilitarian practicality. His comment to Hennie makes clear that the lives of others do not affect him: "To raise a family nowadays you must be a damned fool." And he advises Bessie not to worry about Ralph's love for Blanche with words which expose the materialistic aspect of his own character: "When it's time to settle down he won't marry a poor girl . . . In the long run common sense is thicker than love . . . ." Morty's personality, like Moe's, demonstrates the compromise that he has made within himself to meet the demands of material success. Morty's speeches contrast such aspects of his practicality with the essentially passive qualities of the Bergers' temperaments. He tells Hennie, for instance, that "when they start arguing, I don't hear.

77 Odets, "Awake and Sing!" Six Plays, p. 62.  
78 Ibid., p. 65.  
79 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 56.
Suddenly I'm deaf. I'm a great boy for the practical side."\(^{80}\) When Hennie expresses the disheartening effects of her life with Sam, "Maybe I got the blues. You can't tell,"\(^{81}\) Morty confidently counters with a material solution to Hennie's spiritual problem: "You could stand a new dress."\(^{82}\)

The interplay of personalities through dialogue controls the pace of the drama throughout the scene. The speeches increase the dramatic tempo as Morty and Moe argue about Moe's wooden leg, relax it as Jacob quietly gives Morty instructions about his insurance policy, quicken it again as Ralph and Bessie clash, and bring it to a swift climax as Hennie and Moe exchange heated words and she slaps him—one of the few violent physical gestures in the drama.

The dramatic mood builds also in accompaniment to the tempo, for the language intensifies the feeling of frustration through a contrast of images of wealth and beauty with allusions to depressing realities. In Ralph's speech, for example, the material worth of the "Chrysler Building" is set in ironic contrast to the small sum of money needed for dental work or for a new suit:

Ralph: I been working for years, bringing in money here—putting it in your hand like a kid. All right, I can't get my teeth fixed. All right, that \(^{81}\) a new suit's like trying to buy the Chrysler Building. You never in your

\(^{80}\) Odets, "Awake and Sing!" *Six Plays*, p. 67.

\(^{81}\) Ibid.

\(^{82}\) Ibid.
life bought me a pair of skates even—things
I died for when I was a kid . . . . 83

Moe expresses his love for Hennie with an image which reveals
figuratively his sensitive attraction to her: in Hennie’s
eyes, Moe says, he sees (really feels), "Ted Lewis playing
the clarinet—some of those high crazy notes!" 84 And, again,
Moe’s diction mixes the images in illustration of the
contrast between what life could be and what it actually is:

MOE: . . . (Reads): "Ten-day luxury cruise to
Havana!" That’s the stuff you coulda had.
Put up at ritzy hotels, frenchie soap,
champagne. Now you’re tied down to "Snake-
Eye" here. What for? What’s it get you...a
2 X 4 flat on 108th Street...a pain in the
bustle it gets you. 85

The images of wealth and success in Bessie’s speeches
further amplify her desire for economic security and social
prestige: "Ralph should only be a success like you, Morty.
I should only live to see the day when he rides up to the
doors in a big car with a chauffeur and a radio. I could die
happy, believe me." 86 Yet these images contrast sharply with
her fears that Ralph will not marry a wealthy woman: "A
girl like that he wants to marry. A skinny consumptive-
looking...six months already she’s not working—taking
charity from an aunt. You should see her. In a year she's
dead on his hands." 87

83 Ibid., p. 66. 84 Ibid., p. 68. 85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 66. 87 Ibid., p. 65.
Jacob's speeches also contain images of wealth and luxury; and his words, condemning the economic system which holds up only "success" as a goal for Ralph, set these dream images in contrast to the real and depressing facts of his daily life:

JACOB: He dreams all night of fortunes. Why not? Don't it say in the movies he should have a personal steamship, pyjamas for fifty dollars a pair and a toilet like a monument? But in the morning he wakes up and for ten dollars he can't fix the teeth. And millions more worse off in the mills of the South--starvation wages. The blood from the worker's heart...

The contrast of such images also provides thematic progressions, for as Baird Shuman notes, "it is with such juxtapositions that Odets achieves his highest social dynamism. This, to Odets, is the great American lie."

As Jacob continues to speak out against the economic system of capitalism which Morty espouses, the scene builds in intensity. Bessie and Myron enter and side with Morty. When Ralph agrees with Jacob, there is a brief linking of attitudes which foreshadows Ralph's later conversion to Jacob's beliefs, and there is the obvious contrast of their gentle temperaments with the aggressive personalities of Bessie and Morty. The dialogue at this point specifically stresses Ralph's and Jacob's passive qualities, as Bessie

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88 Ibid., pp. 71-72.
89 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 63.
and Morty, triumphant, humiliate Jacob and rudely silence Ralph:

MORTY: I'm getting sore. Pop, with all this sweatshop talk.
BESSIE: He don't stop a minute. The whole day, like a phonograph.
MORTY: I'm surprised. Without a rich man you don't have a roof over your head. You don't know it.
MYRON: Now you can't bite the hand that feeds you.
RALPH: Let him alone—he's right!
BESSIE: Another county heard from.
RALPH: It's the truth. It's so
MORTY: Keep quiet, snotnose!

Jacob's speeches throughout the play are filled with suggestions of death caused by an economic system which curbs development of the individual personality. When, earlier in the scene, Jacob exclaims concerning Ralph, "In a house like this he don't realize even the possibilities of life. Economics comes down like a ton of coal on the head," the image of a slow death by suffocation most appropriately expresses Ralph's predicament. And, when Jacob's vehement tirade brings the scene to its climax, the diction contains references to death to contrast the longed-for happiness as found in the "sun" with the frustrating realities as actually lived "in this dark corner" (the Berger apartment):

JACOB: So you believe in God... you got something for it? You! You worked for all the capitalists. You harvested the fruit from your labor? You got God! But the past comforts you? The present smiles on you, yes? It promises you

90 Odets, "Awake and Sing!" *Six Plays*, pp. 72-73.
the future something? Did you found a piece of earth where you could live like a human being and die with the sun on your face? Tell me, yes, tell me. I would like to know myself. But on these questions, on this theme—the struggle for existence—you can't make an answer. The answer I see in your face...the answer is your mouth can't talk. In this dark corner you sit and you die. But abolish private property!  

But Bessie quickly demolishes his argument with a scornful dismissal, "(settling the issue): Noo, go fight City Hall!" And she and Morty effect their humiliation of the old man, for Jacob's faltering responses indicate that he is a man of ideas, not of practical action:

MORTY: He's drunk!
JACOB: I'm studying from books a whole lifetime.
MORTY: That's what it is—he's drunk. What the hell does all that mean?
JACOB: If you don't know, why should I tell you.
MORTY (triumphant at last): You see? Hear him? Like all those nuts, don't know what they're saying.
JACOB: I know, I know.
MORTY: Like Boob McNutt you know! Don't go in the park, Pop—the squirrels'll get you. Ha, ha, ha...

Evoking a softened mood to accompany Jacob's complete mortification, the short, quiet phrases, marked by a series of hesitant pauses, emphasize Jacob's pathetic ineffectuality and his frustrated senility:

JACOB: Go eat, boychick. (RALPH comes to him.) He gives me eat, so I'll climb in a needle. One time I saw an old horse in summer...he wore a straw hat...the ears stuck out the top. An old horse for hire. Give me back my young

92 Ibid., p. 73. 93 Ibid. 94 Ibid.
days...give me fresh blood...arms...give me—(The telephone rings...).\textsuperscript{95}

Stage effects combine with the dialogue to continue this atmosphere of frustration. When Ralph answers the phone call from Blanche, Jacob switches on the radio and, the stage directions indicate, "music comes in and up, a tango, grating with an insistent nostalgic pulse."\textsuperscript{96} The scene concludes with the symbolic pose of Jacob and Ralph, each overwhelmed by the encumbering circumstances of his life, locked in an embrace which prefigures Ralph's eventual acceptance of Jacob's doctrine. The ending is made even more compelling because the silent embrace takes place against the menacingly harsh background noises of the "happy" domestic setting:

\textbf{JACOB:} Don't cry, boychick. (\textit{Goes over to RALPH.}) Why should you make like this? Tell me why you should cry, just tell me. ...(\textbf{JACOB takes RALPH in his arms and both, trying to keep back the tears, trying fearfully not to be heard by the others in the dining room, begin crying.}) You mustn't cry...(\textbf{The tango twists on. Inside the clatter of dishes and the clash of cutlery sound. MORTY begins to howl with laughter.})

\textbf{Curtain}\textsuperscript{97}

The quiet opening of scene two with Jacob in his lighted room beyond the darkness of the living room offers again an expressive tonal contrast to the noisy close of the preceding scene, yet it, too, presents a visual portrayal of the man's

\textsuperscript{95}Ibid., p. 74. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{96}Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{97}Ibid., p. 75.
psychological state of frustrated isolation. The opening mood is strong and unified, as Jacob reads from a Marxist sheet which militantly indicts the evils of the capitalistic system:

JACOB: They are there to remind us of the horrors—under those crosses lie hundreds of thousands of workers and farmers who murdered each other in uniform for the greater glory of capitalism. (Comes out of his room.) The new imperialist war will send millions to their death, will bring prosperity to the pockets of the capitalist—Morty—and will bring only greater hunger and misery to the masses of workers and farmers. The memories of the last world slaughter are still vivid in our minds.\(^{98}\)

The old man's reading of the Marxist pamphlet contributes at least two elements to the scene: its words again evoke the images of death and violence and subtly foreshadow the sacrificial death of Jacob.

Jacob's stage movements—he retreats back into the room upon hearing a noise—betray the fact that he is not the man of strength and action that his Marxist words sometimes present him to be. When, in fact, he admits sadly the futility of his life to Ralph, the phrase "old man polishing tools" describes just such an ineffectual existence. Here Odets uses the food image of drinking "glass tea" to signify explicitly a passive acceptance of frustrating circumstances:

\(^{98}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 76.\)
JACOB: Look on me and learn what to do, boychick. Here sits an old man polishing tools. You think maybe I'll use them again! Look on this failure and see for seventy years he talked, with good ideas, but only in the head. It's enough for me now I should see your happiness. This is why I tell you--DO! Do what is in your heart and you carry in yourself a revolution. But you should act. Not like me. A man who had golden opportunities but drank instead a glass tea. No... *(A pause of silence.)*

A parallel device which illustrates Ralph's desire for a type of action which he is at present incapable of is the sound of the Boston mail plane passing overhead. Moments before, at the opening of the scene, Ralph's words had expressed his desire for action in terms of images of movement and transportation: "When I was a kid I laid *(sic)* awake at nights and heard the sounds of trains... far-away lonesome sounds....boats going up and down the river. I used to think of all kinds of things I wanted to do. What was it, Jake? Just a bunch of noise in my head?"  Implicit in these images from the commercial world, as Baird Shuman notes, is "the sense of going somewhere and to Ralph it is a sort of wish fulfillment...."  

The play ascends to its first major climax through a dramatic dialogue which builds an atmosphere of intensifying conflict. First Sam Feinschreiber arrives in nervous agitation, for Hennie has just told him that the child is

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not his. As Jacob offers him an apple (again the food image points to the spiritual compromise that the husband is about to make), Sam relates, in heavy dialect, the story of his own father's death. The reference to an old man's dying of a broken heart is placed effectively by Odets, for, besides revealing Sam's sensitive and over-delicate feelings, it specifically foreshadows the sense of shame which later precedes (and leads to) Jacob's suicide:

SAM: Cossacks. They cut off his beard. A Jew without a beard! He came home--I remember like yesterday how he came home and went in bed for two days. He put like this the cover on his face. No one should see. The third morning he died.

RALPH: From what?
SAM: From a broken heart...Some people are like this. Me too. I could die like this from shame.\textsuperscript{102}

When Bessie and Myron enter moments later, Bessie soothes Sam's upset feelings about Hennie and the baby, saying:

BESSIE: Take off your coat and hat. Have a seat. Excitement don't help. Myron, make tea. You'll have a glass tea. We'll talk like civilized people. (MYRON goes.) What is it, Ralph, you're all dressed up for a party? (He looks at her silently and exits . . .) . . . .\textsuperscript{103}

To the audience, the verbal suggestion here of a "glass tea" is significant, for it brings to mind Jacob's speech earlier which likens the taking of a "glass tea" to the compromises that the individual makes within himself. Sam, of course,

\textsuperscript{102}Odets, "Awake and Sing!" \textit{Six Plays}, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., pp. 79-80.
makes just such a compromise, as he leaves fortified by Bessie's assurances that Hennie really loves him and by what Myron offers as sage advice, "Teddy Roosevelt used to say, 'When you have a problem, sleep on it.'"\textsuperscript{104}

As the clash of personalities intensifies, the mood is amplified by the music of a Caruso record. Bessie steadfastly rejects her son Ralph's pleas to let Blanche move in with them, basing her arguments on "respectable" financial considerations: "With me it's one thing—a boy should have respect for his own future."\textsuperscript{105} Jacob's ringing declamation of a line from Isaiah punctuates the mood with its imagery of death and resurrection: "'Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, and the earth shall cast out the dead."\textsuperscript{106} The speech prophetically foreshadows Ralph's "awakening"—a course towards enlightenment which begins when Myron absent-mindedly reveals the truth of Hennie's marriage. The sharp stichomythic lines reflect the intensity of Ralph's anger:

\begin{verbatim}
RALPH:  What did he say?
BESSIE:  Never mind.
RALPH:  I heard him. I heard him. You don't needa tell me.
BESSIE:  Never mind.
RALPH:  You trapped that guy.
BESSIE:  Don't say another word.
RALPH:  Just have respect? That's the idea?
BESSIE:  Don't say another word. I'm boiling over ten times inside.
RALPH:  You won't let Blanche here, huh. I'm not sure I want her. You put one over on that
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{104}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 82. \textsuperscript{105}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 83. \textsuperscript{106}\textit{Ibid.}
little shrimp. The cat's whiskers, Mom?

BESSIE: I'm telling you something!107

In fury Ralph then turns on both Jacob and Myron:

RALPH: I got the whole idea. I get it so quick my head's swimming. Boy, what a laugh! I suppose you know about this, Jake?

JACOB: Yes.

RALPH: Why didn't you do something?

JACOB: I'm an old man.

RALPH: What's that got to do with the price of bonds? Sits around and lets a thing like that happen! You make me sick too.

MYRON (after a pause): Let me say something, son.

RALPH: Take your hand away! Sit in a corner and wag your tail. Keep on boasting you went to law school for two years.

MYRON: I want to tell you--

RALPH: You never in your life had a thing to tell me.108

Responding to Ralph's accusations with an emotional outburst, Bessie turns maliciously on her father. Her words bring the play to a dramatic pitch climaxed by her deliberate destruction of Jacob's phonograph records:

BESSIE (bitterly): Don't say a word. Let him, let him run and tell Sam. Publish in the papers, give a broadcast on the radio. To him it don't matter nothing his family sits with tears pouring from the eyes. (To JACOB): What are you waiting for? I didn't tell you twice already about the dog? You'll stand around with Caruso and make a bughouse. It ain't enough all day long. Fifty times I told you I'll break every record in the house. (She brushes past him, breaks the records, comes out.) The next time I say something you'll maybe believe it. Now maybe you learned a lesson. (Pause.)109

Hurt deeply by Ralph's invective and benumbed by the shattering

107 Ibid., p. 84. 108 Ibid. 109 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
of his most cherished possession, Jacob quietly replies, "Bessie, new lessons...not for an old dog"—a speech which ominously anticipates his forthcoming suicide.

The heightened tension is then eased through low-key speeches as each character reveals his inner longing or frustrated desires. There is no logical progression of conversation: thoughts are spoken as they come to mind. Moe sings softly of his escapist dream land: "'Good-bye to all your sorrows. You never hear them talk about the war, in the land of Yama Yama...'" The words not only expose Moe's visionary longing but also provide a tonal contrast to the violence which has just transpired.

Myron, rubbing his head, mentions pointlessly, "My scalp is impoverished." But when Moe speaks of the snow outside, Myron, too, divulges his thoughts of peace and solitude through nostalgic recollections of the past: "There's no more big snows like in the old days... No one hardly remembers any more when we used to have gaslight and all the dishes had little fishes on them." As Myron continues his apparently whimsical musings, his diction, filled with images of death and starvation, evokes a sense of foreboding:

MYRON: I was a little boy when it happened--the Great Blizzard. It snowed three days without a stop

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110 Ibid., p. 85.  
111 Ibid.  
112 Ibid.  
113 Ibid., p. 86.
that time. Yes, and the horse cars stopped.
A silence of death was on the city and little
babies got no milk...they say a lot of people
died that year.\textsuperscript{114}

In ironic juxtaposition, Moe's song of the happy,
peaceful Yama Yama land underscores the longing of each
character for a place without sadness, without violence:

\textbf{MOE (singing as he deals himself cards):}
"Lights are blinking while you're drinking,
That's the place where the good fellows go.
Good-by to all your sorrows,
You never hear them talk about the war,
In the land of Yama Yama
Funicalee, funicalee, funicalo..."\textsuperscript{115}

Refrains from the song are sung and hummed throughout the
conclusion of the scene, and its haunting melody eases the
previously strained atmosphere. With the mood thus prepared,
the announcement that Jacob has fallen from the roof comes
with stunning abruptness:

\textbf{MOE:} "In the land of Yama Yama, Funicalee, funicalo,
funi--"

(MYRON enters followed by SCHLOSSER the janitor.
BEESIE cuts in from the other side.)
BEESIE: Who's ringing like a lunatic?
RALPH: What's the matter?
MYRON: Momma...
BEESIE: Noo, what's the matter? (Downstairs bell
continues.)
RALPH: What's the matter?
BEESIE: Well, well...
MYRON: Poppa....
BEESIE: What happened?
SCHLOSSER: He slipped in de snow.
RALPH: Who?
SCHLOSSER (to BEESIE): Your fadder fall off de roof.
Ja. (A dead pause. RALPH then runs out.)\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. \quad \textsuperscript{115} Ibid. \quad \textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 88.
Odets uses the diction to reveal Bessie's character. First, reacting instinctively, she moves to notify Jacob's son:

BESSIE (dazed): Myron... Call Morty on the phone... call him. (MYRON starts for phone.) No. I'll do it myself. I'll... do it. (MYRON exits.)

But suddenly sensing that her own actions have led to Jacob's fall from the roof, she gropes desperately to rationalize his death, seizing on Schlosser's comment as the explanation:

BESSIE: He slipped...

The word, however, is reproachfully and accusingly re-echoed by Moe:

MOE (deeply moved): Slipped?

The episode concludes with Moe's scornful rejection of Bessie's request for help:

BESSIE: I can't see the numbers. Make it, Moe, make it...

MOE: Make it yourself. (He looks at her and slowly goes back to his game of cards with shaking hands.)

and with his last disdainful taunt which again implies her guilt:

BESSIE: Riverside 7---...(Unable to talk she dials slowly. The dial whizzes on.)

MOE: Don't... make me laugh...(He turns over cards.)

Curtain

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117 Ibid. 118 Ibid. 119 Ibid. 120 Ibid. 121 Ibid.
It seems evident, then, that throughout Act II, Odets uses effectively both diction and dialogue to probe and to contrast the psychological attitudes of all characters. The introduction of Morty as a representative of the capitalistic system seems also significant at this point, for Morty's economic ideas are antithetical to Jacob's Marxist tenets, and Morty's complete lack of feeling is directly opposite to Ralph's emotional character. The dramatic dialogue thus continues the interplay of personalities and sustains the mounting conflict. The confrontations of personalities advance the play structurally, since the episodes progress with increasing intensity toward the dramatic climax in scene two. The atmosphere is further heightened by images of death and violence which foreshadow Jacob's suicide. The prevailing sense of frustration is in large part sustained by diction which intertwines contrasting romantic images of wealth and references to Utopian lands with the oppressive real facts of a spiritually meaningless present. Following the climax, the dialogue allows a release of tension, but the general feeling of frustration is maintained as both Moe and Myron expose in their self-absorption the inner longings which possess them. The act concludes with their quiet and numbed acceptance of the news of Jacob's death.

The opening of Act III provides an effective tonal contrast to the quiet mood of stunned bewilderment on which
Act II concluded. The initial lines of the final act stress the absence of emotion in Morty and Bessie and their unfeeling practicality as they conspire to deprive Ralph of his inheritance. The dialogue again moves the characters through a series of disputes to advance the drama to its second high point, the thematic climax of Ralph's discovery and final affirmation of Jacob's Marxist doctrine.

As Morty and Bessie argue near the opening of the scene, Morty's sudden outburst illustrates the built-up tensions still existing within the family:

MYRON: Ralphie don't know Papa left the insurance money in his name.

MORTY: It's not his business. And I'll tell him.

BESSIE: The way he feels... He'll do something crazy. He thinks Poppa jumped off the roof.

MORTY: Be practical, Bessie. Ralphie will sign when I tell him. Everything is peaches and cream.

BESSIE: Wait for a few minutes...

MORTY: Look, I'll show you in black on white what the policy says. For God's sake, leave me live! (Angrily exits to kitchen. In parlor, MOE speaks to RALPH... .)

This instance of moral compromise is again emphasized by the use of an image of food, "peaches and cream," connoting in terms of the physical appetite the extreme pleasure and satisfaction that Morty derives from swindling his nephew.

At Ralph's first appearance in the scene, however, the diction reveals that he is still bewildered and confused by Jacob's death. As he and Moe talk, the boy's comments are

\[122 \text{iibid., pp. 89-90.}\]
limited to simple, brief questions, and his "I'm not sure what I think" explicitly demonstrates his mental uncertainty.

Moe: Wait a minute! (CROSSES OVER.) They're trying to rook you--a freeze-out.
Ralph: Who?
Moe: That bunch stuffin' their gut with hot pastrami. Morty in particular. Jake left the insurance--three thousand dollars--for you.
Ralph: For me?
Moe: Now you got wings, kid. Pop figured you could use it. That's why...
Ralph: That's why what?
Moe: It ain't the only reason he done it.
Ralph: He done it?
Moe: You think a breeze blew him off? (HENNIE ENTERS AND SITS.)
Ralph: I'm not sure what I think.
Moe: The insurance guy's coming tonight. Morty "shutted" him.
Ralph: Yeah?
Moe: I'll back you up. You're dead on your feet. Grab a sleep for yourself.
Ralph: No!
Moe: Go on! (PUSHES BOY INTO ROOM.)

Moe's reference to the eating of pastrami, "stuffin' their gut," when he describes the swindle, underscores the instance of moral compromise. Ralph, driven by family circumstances, and a ruthless economic system, is "forced" into "Jacob's room," a visually symbolic action foreshadowing his conversion to his grandfather's doctrine.

The sub-plots also begin to surface and resolve themselves in this act. As Moe and Hennie talk, Moe's hesitant pauses soften the mood and slow momentarily the pace of the action. Odet uses Hennie's repeated one-word questions

123Ibid., p. 90.
to illustrate her real concern for Moe, this being their first conversation in the play without sarcastic or cynical exchanges:

MOE: Don't run away... I ain't got hydrophobia. Wait. I want to tell you... I'm leaving.
HENNIE: Leaving?
MOE: Tonight. Already packed.
HENNIE: Where? 124

This quiet dialogue is abruptly interrupted, however, as Morty enters, exclaiming crudely, "My car goes through snow like a dose of salts." 125 And when he sighs with satisfaction, "I didn't have a piece of hot pastrami in my mouth for years." 126 the comment on food is again used just as he is about to expose the callousness of his nature. He offers an unfeeling eulogy on his father which displays a complete lack of understanding: "Personally, Pop was a fine man. But I'm a great boy for an honest opinion. He had enough crazy ideas for a regiment." 127 But when Morty continues to speak disparagingly of his father's dedication, Ralph's angry interjection reveals an aroused temperament and places his attitude in dramatic opposition to Morty's:

MORTY: Marx! Some say Marx is a new God today. Maybe I'm wrong. Ha ha ha... Personally I counted my ten million last night... I'm sixteen cents short. So tomorrow I'll go to Union Square and yell no equality in the country! Ah, it's a new generation.
RALPH: You said it! 128

124 Ibid., p. 91. 125 Ibid. 126 Ibid. 127 Ibid., p. 92. 128 Ibid.
As he turns to argue with both Morty and Bessie, the hard-driving, staccato sentences reveal Ralph's first emergence as a forceful personality:

Ralph (to his mother): The insurance man's coming tonight?
Morty: What's the matter?
Ralph: I'm not talking to you. (To his mother): Why?
Bessie: I don't know why.
Ralph: He don't come in this house tonight.
Morty: That's what you say.
Ralph: I'm not talking to you, Uncle Morty, but I'll tell you too, he don't come here tonight when there's still mud on a grave. (To his mother): Couldn't you give the house a chance to cool off?
Morty: Is this a way to talk to your mother?
Ralph: Was that a way to talk to your father?
Morty: Don't be so smart with me, Mr. Ralph Berger!
Ralph: Don't be so smart with me.129

He wins this dispute with Morty and Bessie because he receives unexpected support from Moe, who produces a paper which he claims is Jacob's suicide note. But following this--Ralph's first victory in any family argument--the diction and dialogue swiftly project his "awakening" as a forceful and effective character.

Moments later, when Bessie tells him, "Please don't have foolish ideas about the money,"130 Ralph answers abruptly, "Let's call it a day."131 She presses on, pleading in a lengthy speech which demonstrates how she has turned her role of mother into that of martyr:132

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129 Ibid., pp. 92-93. 130 Ibid., p. 94. 131 Ibid. 132 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 62.
BESSIE: Ralphie, I worked too hard all my years to be treated like dirt. It's no law we should be stuck together like Siamese twins. Summer shoes you didn't have, skates you never had, but I bought a new dress every week. A lover I kept—Mr. Gigolo! Did I ever play a game of cards like Mrs. Marcus? Or was Bessie Berger's children always the cleanest on the block?! Here I'm not only the mother, but also the father. The first two years I worked in a stocking factory for six dollars while Myron Berger went to law school. If I didn't worry about the family who would? On the calendar it's a different place, but here without a dollar you don't look the world in the eye. Talk from now to next year—this is life in America.133

Ralph's sharp, monosyllabic words indicate the reversal of his former passive acceptance: "Then it's wrong. It don't make sense. If life made you this way, then it's wrong!"134

In harmony with his expanding awareness, the firmly spoken lines, filled with strongly accented words, increase in tempo to a final declamation:

RALPH: No, I see every house lousy with lies and hate. He said it, Grandpa—Brooklyn hates the Bronx. Smacked on the nose twice a day. But boys and girls can get ahead like that, Mom. We don't want life printed on dollar bills, Mom!135

Suggesting his approaching acceptance of the Marxist ideal, his words echo Jacob's command in Act I ("Go out and fight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills").136 Thus when Bessie utters the same type of sarcastic rebuttal which was

133 O'dets, "Awake and Sing!" Six Plays, p. 95.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Cf. p. 33.
so effective against Jacob. "So go out and change the world if you don't like it."\textsuperscript{137} Ralph announces his conversion to the active Marxist life with the abrupt exclamation: "I will!"\textsuperscript{138}

Another example of Odets's continued use of the imagery in Ralph's speeches to reflect the progressive changes of his temperament is provided by the boy's comparison of his newly dedicated life to the straight direction of the mail plane passing overhead: "... There... hear him? The air mail off to Boston. Day or night, he flies away, a job to do. That's us and it's no time to die."\textsuperscript{139} It refers directly to those earlier images of transportation used in Act II to suggest his former vague and undefined desire for action.

The progression of the action is momentarily slowed by the thoughtful pauses in Ralph's speech when he talks quietly with Blanche over the phone. "Hello... Blanche, I wish... I don't know what to say... Yes... Hello... (Puts phone down.) She hung up on me."\textsuperscript{140} But, a few lines later, as Ralph brings an armful of books from Jacob's room, his exuberant words create an air of urgency and vigor to demonstrate his aroused intellectual awakening:

\begin{quote}
RALPH: ... Uptown, downtown, I'll read them on the way. Get a big lamp over the bed. (Picks up one.) My eyes are good. (Puts book in pocket.)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{137}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 95. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{138}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{139}\textit{Ibid.} \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{140}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 96.
Sure, inventory tomorrow. Coletti to Driscoll to Berger—that's how we work. It's a team down the warehouse. Driscoll's a show-off, a wiseguy, and Joe talks pigeons day and night. But they're like me, looking for a chance to get to first base too... Get teams together all over. Spit on your hands and get to work. And with enough teams together maybe we'll get steam in the warehouse so our fingers don't freeze off. Maybe we'll fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills.\(^{141}\)

The baseball imagery used in the speech makes explicit Ralph's dedication to a socialistic movement, as the references to teamwork, double plays, and efforts to "get to first base" stress an active group undertaking. The second specific repetition of Jacob's words ("...so life won't be printed on dollar bills") underscores Ralph's ideological conversion to Marxist socialism.

Bringing the sub-plot back into focus, Odets relaxes momentarily the pace of the dramatic dialogue. After Ralph leaves, Moe declares his love for Hennie and suggests that they too might break with the present life. His quiet speech contrasts images of peace and happiness associated with Hennie's love ("... you're home for me...") with those denoting the frustrations he suffers without her love ("... eating out your heart ... ");

Moe: So you're it—you're home for me, a place to live! That's the whole parade, sickness, eating out your heart! Sometimes you meet a girl—she stops it—that's love... So take a chance! Be with me, Paradise. What's to lose?\(^{142}\)

\(^{141}\)Ibid., p. 97. \(^{142}\)Ibid., p. 98.
But as Moe becomes more desperate, the diction increases the intensity of the mood by the inclusion of images which reflect his emotional agitation. The reference to the active, pulsating motion of the "tango" dance (suggestive of Moe's desperate longing for Hennie) is set in contrast to the cold, unmoving image of ice (indicative of her rejection of his love):

MOE (grabbing her): What do you want? Say the word--
I'll tango on a dime. Don't gimme ice when your heart's on fire! 143

Punctuated by one-word exclamations, the dialogue increases in tempo:

HENNIE: Let me go! (He stops her.)
MOE: WHERE?!!
HENNIE: What do you want, Moe, what do you want?
MOE: You!
HENNIE: You'll be sorry you ever started--
MOE: You! 144

Moe's allusion to his "fever" and his violent words of desperation which follow it ("... blow this whole damn town to hell") are indications of an inner emotional tension which is abruptly relaxed as he stumbles backwards:

MOE: No!.....I got enough fever to blow this whole damn town to hell. (He suddenly releases her and half stumbles backwards. Forces himself to quiet down.) You wanna go back to him? Say the word. I'll know what to do... 145

The sudden shift to a lyric pleading for escape to a peaceful land and the images of restful quiet and relaxation

143 Ibid. 144 Ibid. 145 Ibid.
reveals the momentary calming of his excited state:

MOE: Listen to me.
HENNIE: What?
MOE: Come away. A certain place where it's moon-light and roses. We'll lay down, count stars. Hear the big ocean making noise. You lay under the trees. Champagne flows like—

• *  »

However, as the sub-plot moves to its climax, Moe's agonized speeches transform the calm interlude into a mood of acute urgency. Moe's desperate allusions to escapist lands differentiate sharply between the suffocating vacuum of their present lives ("life in a coffin," "pins and needles in your heart," and "snake juice squirted in your arm") and the Utopian existence where "the whole world's green grass and when you cry it's because you're happy":

MOE: Make a break or spend the rest of your life in a coffin.
HENNIE: Oh God, I don't know where I stand.
MOE: Don't look up there. Paradise, you're on a big boat headed south. No more pins and needles in your heart, no snake juice squirted in your arm. The whole world's green grass and when you cry it's because you're happy.
HENNIE: Moe, I don't know....
MOE: Nobody knows, but you do it and find out. When you're scared the answer's zero.
HENNIE: You're hurting my arm.147

But as Hennie hesitates in her indecision, Moe grabs her arm forcefully—a physical gesture which is significant, for, as Baird Shuman notes, with this latter action Hennie capitulates, because "this has been Hennie's whole life:

146 Ibid.  
147 Ibid., p. 99.
capitulation, compromise, uncertainty, regret. Circumstances have been 'hurting her arm' for as long as she can remember, and she has had no control over this. Finally Hennie signifies her decision with a one-word exclamation, "Moe!" mumbles, "The man I love..." and exits to get her coat.

Building intentionally upon Hennie's capitulating decision to flee and upon Myron's apparently meaningless mumblings, Odets sets Ralph's speeches in purposeful contrast moments later. Such an emphatic juxtaposition dramatizes not only Ralph's responsible and unselfish choice in staying to fight for a better life, but also his mature forcefulness of character. The father's continued references to Teddy Roosevelt and to Roosevelt's life of activity are once more placed in opposition with the fact of his own unproductive life, and the stage action of paring fruit lends symbolic amplification to the final characterization of a man whose years have been wasted through moral compromises with reality.

MYRON: Don't wake her up, Beauty. Momma fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. I can't sleep. It was a long day. Hmmm. (Examines his tongue in buffet mirror): I was reading the other day a person with a thick tongue is feebleminded. I can do anything with my tongue. Make it thick, flat. No fruit in the house lately. Just a lone apple. (He gets apple and paring knife and starts paring.) Must be something wrong with me--I say I won't eat but

148 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 65.
149 Odets, "Awake and Sing!" Six Plays, p. 100.
150 Ibid.
I eat. (*HENNIE enters dressed to go out.*)

**Where you going, little Red Riding Hood?**

**HENNIE:** Nobody knows, Peter Rabbit.

**MYRON:** You're looking very pretty tonight. You were a beautiful baby too. 1910, that was the year you were born. The same year Teddy Roosevelt come back from Africa.

**HENNIE:** Gee, Pop; you're such a funny guy.

**MYRON:** He was a boisterous man, Teddy. Good night. (*He exits, paring apple.*)

At the play's conclusion, however, Ralph's spirited speeches dissipate the atmosphere of frustration and compromise. His diction is marked by vigorous accents and short phrasings which express his surging emotions. And, bringing the drama to an intensified thematic climax, the series of positively spoken ejaculations indicate Ralph's transformation to a firm and dedicated personality:

**RALPH:** When I look at him, I'm sad. Let me die like a dog, if I can't get more from life.

**HENNIE:** Where?

**RALPH:** Right here in the house! My days won't be for nothing. Let Mom have the dough. I'm twenty-two and kickin'! I'll get along. Did Jake die for us to fight about nickels? No! "Awake and sing," he said. Right here he stood and said it. The night he died, I saw it like a thunderbolt! I saw he was dead and I was born! I swear to God, I'm one week old! I want the whole city to hear it--fresh blood, arms. We got 'em. We're glad we're living.

**MOE:** I wouldn't trade you for two pitchers and an outfielder. Hold the fort!

**RALPH:** So long.

**MOE:** So long.

(They go and Ralph stands full and strong in the doorway seeing them off as the curtain slowly falls.)

**Curtain**

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Here the concluding images tighten up and complete former allusions, at the same time specifically revealing Ralph's changed attitudes. The phrase "die like a dog" suggests the dog-like passivity of Myron's character, for in Act II Ralph had exclaimed in anger to his father, "Sit in a corner and wag your tail." Yet this reference to a resigned death is set in immediate contrast to Jacob's sacrificial one which leads to intellectual rebirth and resurrection ("The night he died, I saw it like a thunderbolt! I saw he was dead and I was born!"). The zeal and activity of Ralph's new life ("I'm twenty-two and kickin'!") proceed directly from this intellectual conversion (likened to a flashing "thunderbolt")—the invigorating effects of which are made explicit through the images of physical rejuvenation ("fresh blood, arms"). Moe's final reference to the world of baseball, "I wouldn't trade you for two pitchers and an outfielder," suggests further the complete maturation of Ralph's character and awareness of reality, for in Act II Moe had referred to Ralph disparagingly as a "bush leaguer." The slow curtain at the conclusion underscores this final atmosphere, as Ralph stands symbolically triumphant in the doorway, left alone in the full visual focus of the audience.

153 Ibid., p. 84 (See thesis footnote number 108.).
154 Ibid., p. 70.
Throughout the last act Odets employs dramatic diction and dialogue to project Ralph's maturation and gradual conversion to the Marxist ideal—the revelation offering a final heightened thematic climax to the play. As abrupt, positively spoken lines replace hesitant and confused comments, Ralph's speech reflects his intellectual transformation; and his diction, sharpened by images of rebirth, further illustrates his spiritual awakening.

Thus in *Awake and Sing!* Odets evokes character skillfully through a deft control of diction and dialogue. Bessie, the mother and matriarch of the family, reveals her obsessive concern for family unity and security through a flow of Jewish idiom and colloquial speech rhythms which are as colorful as they are personal. With equal effectiveness the diction of Myron, with its pauses, its autobiographical musings, and its sudden irrelevancies, portrays him as one unable to cope with the present. Odets is no less sure in his characterization of Jacob, whose speeches reflect his sense of personal dignity: of Ralph, who expresses poignantly his struggles to establish an identity and to find a meaning in life; and of Moe and Morty, whose words show that they have lost faith in nearly all but themselves.

Yet it is clear that diction accomplishes much more than a simple cataloguing of the economic or social frustration of these lives. Through speeches rich with poetic imagery
and lyric exclamations, the playwright gives depth and
dimension to the characters, disclosing how each longs for
some symbol of personal fulfillment and how each is denied
attainment. The individualizing language thus reveals, with
a Chekhovian tenderness, how life in the Berger apartment
of Depression America is a spiritual death.

Odets's mature and deliberate handling of dialogue
contributes structural unity to the play, as explosive
confrontations of character and juxtapositions of con-
flicting attitudes advance the drama in rhythmic sequence.
Had Odets been less the master of dramatic dialogue, had he
less skill in projecting character through diction, Awake
and Sing! would have failed as an integral whole.

Odets, moreover, is equally certain in his handling of
dramatic language when he departs from the loosely plotted
"Chekhovian" dramatic presentation and chooses a tighter
plot and swifter-moving structure, as is the case in Golden
Boy.
CHAPTER III

GOLDEN BOY

In 1937 Clifford Odets returned from Hollywood and gave the Group Theatre Golden Boy, a play destined to become his greatest commercial success. Although critics of this play often have occasion to praise Odets's able handling of dialogue, there exist differing critical opinions concerning Odets's use of rhetoric in Golden Boy, unlike the unanimity of the reviews of Awake and Sing!, which generally praise that play's language. The reviewer for The Literary Digest states: "Hard criticism and violent differences of opinion are inevitable results of a Clifford Odets play."¹ Grenville Vernon, for instance, feels that it was time Odets learned that "vulgarity of expression is not drama. Some of the lines of Golden Boy are lamentable";² while on the other hand, Joseph Wood Krutch says that "his dialogue is often brilliantly suggestive, especially when he puts it into the mouths of ignorant or uncultured people . . . and he involves

¹"Clifford Odets' Golden Boy" (author not given), The Literary Digest, CXXIV (November 27, 1937), 35.
the spectator in the agonies of his characters." Edith Isaac is impressed by "that gift of rhythmic speech which is the mark of a more-than-one-play author"; yet she believes that Odets did not allow his characters to "speak out of their own mouths." But the reviewer for Time feels that "Odets' characters are most forceful when they speak the salty idiom of the street." These contradictory views generally fail to note the effects of the author's experience as a film writer upon his method of dramatic presentation in Golden Boy—a fact rather important in one's consideration of the author's selection and usage of dramatic diction. The characterization, plotting, and structure each reflect a marked influence of the cinematic technique; and in turn, the language of the play is adapted to this new method of presentation.

 Rather than recreating the "equal-sized roles" of the characters in his earlier dramas, Odets specifically traces the character development of only one central protagonist, Joe Bonaparte. This is not to imply, however, that Odets no

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5 Ibid.

6 "Golden Boy" (author not given), Time, XXX (November 15, 1937), 25.
longer uses dramatic diction to reveal characters; for in
Golden Boy he uses language skillfully to bring to life a
wider and more varied assortment of characters than in
either of the previous full-length plays, Awake and Sing!
and Paradise Lost. The essential difference is that these
characters are not each studied in elaborate, penetrating
detail: only one character, Joe Bonaparte, undergoes any
significant personality development and psychological change
within the drama. Joe is surrounded, however, by such
diverse characters as an unemotional racketeer, a philosophical
candy-store owner, a sympathetic fight trainer, a loud and
comic taxi driver, a desperate fight manager and his
attractive mistress, and an ethical though inarticulate "old
world" father. Yet here again Odets's mastery of vernacular
brings to life what Eleanor Flexnor praises as a "long and
rich gallery of characterizations";\(^7\) for, as Derek
Verschoyle notes, "Their ambitions and sympathies and lusts
are personal to themselves. They speak the language of life."\(^8\)

The dramatic structure and plotting also reflect the
author's experience with cinematic technique. Rather than
the long unbroken acts of Awake and Sing! and Paradise Lost,
Golden Boy's three acts are divided into twelve short

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\(^7\)Eleanor Flexnor, American Playwrights: 1918-1938 (New

\(^8\)Derek Verschoyle, "The Theatre," Spectator, CLXI
(July 1, 1938), 16.
climactic scenes. And, finally, the plot of Golden Boy differs from the seemingly "loose" Chekhovian design of the earlier works, as there is an easily discernable pattern of development in the protagonist's personal deterioration. In 1938, Eleanor Flexnor stated that Odets's "talent has never been seen to better advantage than in the construction and swift unfolding of Golden Boy"; and the following year John Gassner exclaimed that this was Odets's "best constructed and least rampant play."

The author's choice of diction and his dramatic dialogue follow from his use of these methods of plotting and tight dramatic construction, for as Walter Kerr notes, "the speech of the play adapted itself to the lean and hard-driving urgency of a thoroughly theatrical structure." Thus the speeches of Golden Boy are less filled with the lyric, near-poetic language and rich imagery which so marked the passages of Awake and Sing! although the dialogue does reveal the intense artistic sensitivity of the main character, Joe Bonaparte.

The drama relates the story of a twenty-one year old violinist, Joe Bonaparte, who turns from a life of artistic

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9 Flexnor, American Playwrights, p. 300.
dedication to a boxing career in an attempt to achieve fame and fortune. The choice to fight is posited as one antithetical to an artistic career, since by boxing, Joe faces the possibility of ruining his hands. He fights for Tom Moody, a small-time manager who dreams of discovering another contender for a boxing title so that he might divorce his wife and marry Lorna Moon, his mistress. Lorna, who calls herself a "tramp from Newark," loves the fight manager for helping her and in gratitude urges Joe to fight aggressively. The love triangle evolves as she is attracted by the sensitive aspects of his personality.

Joe's artistic sensitivity is understood by both his father and by a philosophical neighbor, Mr. Carp. Subsequently the father withholds permission from his son to fight. As Joe breaks with his family to fight for fame and financial success, the drama traces his movement away from the realm of art and the spirit to that of the senses and the material, a change marked by the gradual development of a hardened and egotistical attitude. At the same time, Joe's spiritual degeneration is paralleled by his rising success in the fight game which, as Anita Block points out, "epitomizes the battle for gain shorn of all pretense—at its most brutal and at the same time at its most lucrative and spectacular." 12

Finally, when Joe kills an opponent in the ring, he realizes with sudden insight just what he has really become. The revelation is too much for him, and since he cannot return to an artistic career with his broken hands, he speeds away into the night with Lorna, who has alternated between love for Moody and tender feelings for Joe. The high-speed flight from reality in the Duesenburg, the symbol of Joe's commercial success, ends in death. The drama concludes with a short epilogue scene at the Bonaparte home as the news of the wreck is received.

Although *Golden Boy* is about an Italian-American, and Italian dialect is specifically used in Mr. Bonaparte's speech, Grenville Vernon feels that "the ideas and idioms of the Italians are completely Jewish."\(^{13}\) Vernon's point, though a minor one, seems correct; but even though both Joe and Mr. Bonaparte are essentially Jewish in their mode of thought and expression, this fact does not detract from Odets's power to characterize--from his ability, as John Mason Brown states, to "see the characters with his own piercing eyes. He lays their secret torments bare by means of his own extraordinary ear for what is unmasking in their speech."\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\)Grenville Vernon, "The Case of Clifford Odets," *Commonweal*, XXVIII (June 10, 1938), 188.

Similarly, Odets handles the characterizations of the minor figures with what Baird Shuman calls "respect and understanding," for each is brought to life through a diction which marks him as individual and distinct. Yet Odets so places these characters within his strict theatrical structure that they are subordinated in order to focus full dramatic attention upon the play's protagonist. Joe's speeches progressively reveal his spiritual isolation, and thus the atmosphere which surrounds his changing personality becomes increasingly harsh and violent. Yet in a more subtle manner Odets uses the speeches of his minor characters to further intensify the tone by creating a mood which parallels the specific mental agitation or indecision of the protagonist at that very moment, even though he might not be on stage. Through the alternation of low and quiet speeches with highly charged explosive lines, Odets thus allows a rhythmic unfolding of mood within each episode.

It is one of the main contentions of this chapter, therefore, that Odets's effective handling of diction and dialogue, particularly for the creation of mood and dramatic rhythm, contributes significantly to his successful use of a new and different method of presentation in *Golden Boy*. Its purpose, then, is to demonstrate how by carefully selecting

and arranging his diction to reflect the changing moods of his characters and by rhythmically alternating the presentation of these moods through dialogue scenes, Clifford Odets communicates to his audience a felt tension which prepares them for the emotional climax, the resolution of Joe's conflict.

As Tom Moody and Lorna Moon argue at the opening of *Golden Boy*, the terse stichomythic lines indicate an initial mood of hostility:

MOODY: Pack up your clothes and go! Go! Who the hell's stopping you?

LORNA: You mean it?

MOODY: You brought up the point yourself.

LORNA: No, I didn't!

MOODY: Didn't you say you had a good mind to leave me?

LORNA: No, I said--

MOODY: You said you were going to pack!

LORNA: I said I feel like a tramp and I don't like it. I want to get married, I want--

MOODY: Go home, Lorna, go home! I ain't got time to discuss it. Gimme some air. It's enough I got my wife on my neck.

LORNA: What does she say?

MOODY: Who?

LORNA: Your wife--your sweet goddam Monica!

MOODY: She wants five thousand dollars to give me the divorce. (LORNA laughs.) I don't see that it's funny.\(^{16}\)

Indeed, the dialogue moves with what John Mason Brown calls "telegraphic brevity"\(^ {17}\) and provides the audience with an immediate sense of impending conflict as well as with necessary exposition.


\(^{17}\) Brown, "Clifford Odets: *Golden Boy,*" p. 220.
The drama is not yet fifty lines old when Moody, speaking of the prosperous years of the past, utters a comment which, seemingly unimportant, actually foreshadows the coming violence: "Those were the days when I had Marty Welch, the heavyweight contender—Cy Webster who got himself killed in a big, red Stutz. In '27 and '8 you couldn't go to sleep—the town was crawling with attractions." The statement deliberately prefigures Joe's death by car accident at the play's conclusion. Further, Moody's lines not only introduce a motif of violence which runs throughout the play but also subtly relate it to the images of speed and the automobile which figure importantly in later thematic development. Lorna's laconic reply, "My mother died in '28," adds a second reference to death to the suggestive undercurrent.

At Joe's entrance, his first speeches demonstrate his cockiness and apparent over-confidence. His words provoke an immediate antagonism in Moody, and the manager's loud outburst sets the initial mood of their meeting as one of conflict, providing an early foundation for their later, more violent relationship:

BOY (breathing quickly): Mr. Moody...
MOODY (spinning around): Don't you knock when you come in an office?

19Ibid.
BOY: Sometimes I knock, sometimes I don't.
MOODY: Say your piece and get the hell out!  

Odets continues the atmosphere of conflict throughout the episode, as Joe persists in arguing for an opportunity to fight, offensively calling the manager "Tom." Moody's discovery of Joe's optical disorder, and his subsequent remark, "You're cook-eyed, too," intensifies the direct clash of personalities. The mood of violence is further sustained by the rhythmic alternation of calm quiet and excited outburst, each outburst being more angry and intense than the preceding one. In the following exchange, for example, the dialogue builds through two verbal explosions by Moody to a final violent eruption:

BOY: . . . I need a good manager, Mr. Moody. You used to be tops around town--everyone says so. I think you can develop me. I can fight. You don't know it, but I can fight. Kaplan's been through for years. He may be the best fighter in your stable, but he's a stumble-bum for the younger boys growing up. Why don't you give me this chance, Tom?

MOODY: I don't want you calling me Tom! (He glares at the BOY and then returns to the desk and telephone.)

BOY: I'm waiting for your answer. (MOODY's answer is an exasperated glance as he begins to dial the phone. The BOY half approaches the desk.) There are forty-three thousand minutes in a month--can't you give me five?

MOODY: I'll give you this phone in the head in a minute! Who are you? What the hell do you want? Where do you fight?

BOY (with cool persistence): We ought to get together, Tom.

MOODY: I don't want you calling me Tom. You're brash.

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20 Ibid., p. 239.  
21 Ibid., p. 240.
you're fresh, you're callow—and you're cock-eyed! In fact, you're an insult to my whole nature! Now get out! . . .

When Joe finally identifies himself by name, the manager's laughter offers a mocking insult to the boy's personal identity:

BOY: Did you ever hear of me?
MOODY (sarcastically): No, who are you? I would honestly like to know—who are you?
BOY (quietly): My name is Bonaparte. (MOODY howls with laughter, and even LORNA, sympathetic to the BOY, laughs. The BOY continues.) I don't think it's funny...
MOODY: Didn't that name used to get you a little giggle in school? Tell the truth, Bonaparte. Didn't it?
BOY: Call me Joe.
MOODY (laughing): And your eyes. Didn't they used to get a little giggle too?

Joe's hard, sharp reply, "I don't like it...I don't want you to do it." and his stage action, as he seizes Moody by the coat lapels, demonstrate a hypersensitive temperament which flares out heatedly when provoked. Thus, later when the thematic examination of Joe's artistic individuality, frustrated as a musician, is begun in scene two, the question of his personal identity has been alluded to in such harsh terms that it is apparent that the study will be a brutally penetrating one.

Moody's angry outburst at the conclusion of the scene follows an interval of calm built up by four consecutive

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22 Ibid., pp. 240-241.  
23 Ibid., pp. 241-242.  
24 Ibid., p. 242.
quietly spoken speeches, and thus it brings the episode to a sharp climax. The final threat of violence, "I'll break your neck!" adds another ominous image of death to the implicit undercurrent of destruction, as well as establishing the conflict between the two.

MOODY: ... (He hangs up and turns around. JOE is the focus of all eyes.) It's revenge on somebody—maybe God.
JOE (quietly): I think you'll be surprised.
MOODY (sadly): Do your worst, kid. I've been surprised by experts.
JOE: Don't worry, Tom.
MOODY: Call me Tom again and I'll break your neck! Quick Fadeout

Rather skillfully, Odet uses the quick fadeout here to cut the action to prolong the effect of the scene's final angry mood.

The opening mood of scene two offers an effective contrast to the taut atmosphere of scene one, as the low-key conversation of Mr. Carp and Sigge reflects the quieter home surroundings and the less volatile personalities. Yet the argumentative mood of scene one is continued on a relatively minor scale as the action moves from Mr. Carp's sigh of contentment through a mildly angry dispute about social position:

As the lights fade in, MR. BONAPARTE turns his newspaper. Mr. CARP is slowly pouring beer from a bottle. He begins to sip as SIGGIE, MR. BONAPARTE'S son-in-law, enters from the kitchen. He is barefooted, dressed in an undershirt, trousers and hung-down suspenders.

25 Ibid., pp. 243-244.
He brings his own beer and glass, which he begins to fill with an expert's eye. In the silence, MR. CARP takes a long, cool sip of beer combined with a murmur of relish.

CARP (finally): I don't take it easy. That's my trouble—if I could only learn to take it easy...

SIGGIE: What do you call it now, what you're doing?
CARP: Say, it's after business hours.
SIGGIE: That's a business? A man who runs a candy store is an outcast of the world. Don't even sell nickel candies—penny candies!
CARP: And your taxicab business makes you higher in the social scale? 26

Mr. Carp's final question in the argument introduces into a quiet atmosphere an issue which bears direct thematic relevance. Later in this scene Joe himself argues heatedly for a life based upon such social prestige.

As in scene one, the method of alternating quiet speeches with loud outbursts is used to create recurrent moods of violence and foreboding. First Siggie and his wife Anna argue humorously with Mr. Bonaparte for money with which to buy a new cab. But their pleadings end in a mock-comic fight as they begin swatting each other with rolled-up newspapers. Finally, as Siggie loses his temper, the short, explosive monosyllabic words build up to the threat of physical violence, echoing exactly Tom Moody's outburst: "The next time I'll break your neck—I'm super-disgusted with you." 27

26 Ibid., p. 244.
27 Ibid., p. 247.
After Anna and Siggie exit, Mr. Carp and Mr. Bonaparte casually introduce the subject of Joe's skill with the violin. Here Mr. Carp's pessimistic comments are set in deliberate contrast to Old Bonaparte's happy praise of Joe's artistic ability, and Carp's repeated allusions to war quietly contribute to the atmosphere of impending violence, directly prefiguring Joe's later personal conflict:

MR. BONAPARTE: I feela good. Like-a to have some music! Hey, where'sa my boy, Joe? (Looks at his watch; is surprised.) One o'clock...don't come home yet. Hey, he make-a me worry!

CARP: You think you got worries? Wait, you're a young man yet. You got a son, Joe. He practised on his fiddle for ten years? He won a gold medal, the best in the city? They gave him a scholarship in the Erickson Institute? Tomorrow he's twenty-one, yeah?

MR. BONAPARTE (emphatically): Yeah!

CARP (leaning forward and dramatically making his point): Suppose a war comes? Before you know it, he's in the army!

MR. BONAPARTE: Naw, naw! Whata you say! Naw!

CARP (wagging his head in imitation): Look in the papers! On every side the clouds of war--

MR. BONAPARTE: My Joe gotta biga talent. Yesterday I buy-a him present! (With a dramatic flourish he brings a violin case out of the bottom part of the sideboard.)

But the exuberant mood which accompanies Mr. Bonaparte's speech is sobered quickly by Carp's ironic words with their suggestion of death: "It looks like a coffin for a baby." The deliberate shift of mood at a time when Joe's artistic skill is being discussed further foreshadows a change in Joe's temperament in this same scene.

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28 Ibid., p. 248.  
29 Ibid.
As the two continue to talk, the juxtaposition of such words as "competitive civilization," "millionaire," "bread and butter" with such terms as "good life" and "Muses" creates an implicit tension between the materialistic and the artistic ways of life before Joe himself asks the same questions:

CARP (sitting): Ask yourself a pertinent remark: could a boy make a living playing this instrument in our competitive civilization today?

MR. BONAPARTEE: Why? Don't expect for Joe to be a millionaire. He don't need it, to be a millionaire. A good life'sa possible—

CARP: For men like us, yes. But nowadays is it possible for a young man to give himself to the Muses? Could the Muses put bread and butter on the table?

To Carp's questions concerning the commercial value of music, Mr. Bonaparte's reply illustrates Joe's former attraction to music:

MR. BONAPARTEE: No millionaire is necessary. Joe love music. Music is the great cheer-up in the language of all countries. I learn that from Joe. (CARP sighs as MR. BONAPARTEE replaces the violin in the buffet.)

Yet as Mr. Carp presses his point, he argues from a philosophic tenet which adds still another warning of death to the undercurrent of violence and destruction:

CARP: But in the end, as Schopenhauer says what's the use to try something? For every wish we get, ten remains unsatisfied. Death is playing with us as a cat and her mouse!

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30 Ibid., p. 249.  
31 Ibid.  
32 Ibid.
Old Bonaparte's reply in heavy Italian dialect reveals his happy and instinctive approach to life, a philosophy clearly unaffected by the pressure of commercial success which so troubles Joe in the same scene:

MR. BONAPARTE: You make-a me laugh, Mr. Carp. You say life'sa bad. No, life'sa good. Siggie and Anna fight--good! They love--good! You say life-sa bad...well, is pleasure for you to say so. No? The streets, winter a' summer--trees, cats--I love-a them all. The goodness boys and girls, they who sing and whistle--(Bursts into a moment of gay whistling)--very good! I gone around on my wagon and talk to many people--nice! Howa you like the big buildings of the city?33

And through such speeches as this one, Odets establishes Joe's family as, Baird Shuman notes, "a potent force in the background of the action of Golden Boy. In this background are the representatives of the real values in life . . . ."34

The presence of Frank Bonaparte, a union organizer, gives further amplification to the family's role as representative of moral standards. Mr. Bonaparte tells Carp, "Frank, he fight-a for eat, for good life. Why not!"35 Thus the presence of the older brother offers an effective contrast in character to Joe, for whereas Frank "fights" for the rights of others, Joe chooses to "fight" only to gratify his own ego. This point is subtly re-emphasized

33Ibid.
34Shuman, Clifford Odets. p. 82.
through the conversation of Mr. Bonaparte and Carp. Here Odets deliberately uses references to a professional athletic career in such a way as to connote a purposeless, non-creative existence. The phrase "hit a ball, catch a ball" suggests just such a monotony, specifically foreshadowing what Baird Shuman calls "the falseness of the sort of activity in which Joe is engaging."  

CAHP (flipping over the newspaper): For instance,--
look: playing baseball isn't foolish?
MR. BONAPARTE: No, if you like-a to do.
CARP: Look! Four or five pages--baseball--tennisball--
it gives you an idea what a civilization.
You ever seen a baseball game?
MR. BONAPARTE: No.
CARP (wagging his head): Hit a ball, catch a ball...
I believe me, my friend--nonsense!

When Joe arrives home from his first professional fight, he answers evasively questions concerning his whereabouts. But when Frank points out that the news of the fight is already in the paper ("Truth is cheap. We bought it for two cents.") Joe speaks, as the stage directions indicate, "belligerently" and "challengingly." Following hard upon the interval of quiet conversation, these outbursts heighten the tension of the atmosphere. The hard explosive words, spoken in rapid succession, shift the mood to accompany Joe's aroused psychological state after the fight:

36 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 83.
38 Ibid., p. 251.
JOE (finally, belligerently): Well, what are you going to do about it?
MR. BONAPARTE (still puzzled): Abouta what?
JOE (challengingly): Tomorrow's my birthday!
FRANK: What's that got to do with being a gladiator?
JOE (turning to FRANK, with sudden vehemence): Mind your business! You don't know me—I see you once a year; what do you know about me? 39

Bringing the scene to an abrupt climax, Joe's speech, filled with rhetorical questions, sharp phrasings, and exclamations, quickens the pace and intensifies the mood as Joe declares his intention to fight. The use of such phrases as "wonderful things," "better than me," and "no possessions" directly reveals Joe's concern with and desire for material success, thus bringing out the same thematic question which had been prefigured earlier in a parallel, though much calmer, conversation between Carp and Mr. Bonaparte:

JOE: Don't want to sit. Every birthday I ever had I sat around. Now'sa time for standing. Poppa, I have to tell you—I don't like myself, past, present and future. Do you know there are men who have wonderful things from life? Do you think they're better than me? Do you think I like this feeling of no possessions? Of learning about the world from Carp's encyclopaedia? Frank don't know what it means—he travels around, sees the world! (turning to FRANK) You don't know what it means to sit around here and watch the months go ticking by! Do you think that's a life for a boy my age? Tomorrow's my birthday! I change my life! 40

The tension is eased by Mr. Bonaparte's words at the close of the scene. Spoken softly with quiet pauses, his speech creates a gentle, quizzical mood. The slow fadeout

39Ibid., p. 252.  40Ibid.
allows this mood to linger, as the episode ends with an
ominous questioning of Joe's motives:

CARP (sadly): Fortunes! I used to hear it in my
youth—the streets of America are paved with
gold. Say, you forgot to give him the present.
MR. BONAPARTE (slowly, puzzled): I don'ta know...he
say he gonna fight...41
Slow fadeout

In scene three the action reverts to Moody's office in
the gym. There the opening mood is apprehensively set by
Moody's nervous pacing back and forth and by Roxy Gottlieb's
anxious words, for Joe has not been the aggressive fighter
that they had hoped for:

ROXY: They don't like him. They seen him in five
fights already. He's a clever boy, that
Bonaparte, and speedy—but he's first class
lousy in the shipping department! I bought a
piece of him, so I got a right to say it: a
mosquito gives out better! Did you read what
he wrote in his column, that Drake? He writes
he's a regular "brain trust."42

Although the opening speech of this scene continues from the
final words of scene two the question of whether or not Joe
will be a fighter, the diction illustrates that Roxy's
feelings toward Joe proceed from sentiments quite unlike the
genuine concern expressed by the father. Roxy's words, "I
bought a piece of him, so I got a right," shift the tone to
the pragmatic and commercial. The shift in mood is here
significant, since it directly parallels Joe's mental decision
to enter into the callous world of commercial success.

41 Ibid., p. 253. 42 Ibid., pp. 253-254.
Even though the fighter is not on stage, the dialogue between characters from his old and from his new way of life reflects the tension of Joe's inner conflict.

Mr. Bonaparte enters the office hesitantly and inquires timidly about Joe's future as a fighter. After he tells the shocked listeners of Joe's skill with his hands as a violinist, his words reveal his confusion and sorrow at Joe's decision to fight:

TOKYO: Why did you come and tell us this?
MR. BONAPARTE: Because I like-a to help my boy. I like-a for him to try himself out. Maybe thisa better business for him. Maybe not. He mus' try to find out, to see whata he want...I don't know. Don't help Joe to tell him I come here. Don't say it. (He slowly walks to the door.)

But this mood of indecision and sorrow is shifted quickly after his departure as Moody reacts "joyously," exclaiming, "I'm beginning to see the light! Joe's mind ain't made up that the fist is mightier than the fiddle." Now convinced that he can persuade Joe to risk his hands to fight aggressively, Moody speaks out in positive declarations. Here Odets uses the image of the "Resurrection" for deliberate effect, suggesting Moody's suddenly awakened confidence and enthusiasm:

MOODY: Right! The Middle West tour is on! Tokio goes along to build up a real offensive. I take care of the newspapers here. Chris', I thought it was something serious! I'm getting

\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 257.  \(^{44}\)Ibid.
His exclamations, however, prove to be ironic and prophetic, for in underscoring the earlier reference to his fighter who died in the Stutz in 1928, his words subtly link allusions to death and destruction with Joe's forthcoming decision to fight wholeheartedly.

But as the various questioning and indecisive moods have suggested, Joe is not fully convinced that he should continue his boxing career. The words, "Maybe I won't be there. I might give up fighting as a bad job. I'm not over-convinced it's what I want. I can do other things..." make explicit his irresolution. The diction at the conclusion of the scene extends Joe's depressed uncertainty to the other characters, as Moody tells Lorna sadly, "Don't Brisbane me, Lorna. I'm licked. I'm tired. Find me a mouse hole to crawl in..." The concluding mood of the scene hints of Joe's forthcoming compromise, as Lorna vows to persuade him to fight:

LORNA: I'll make him fight.
MOODY: How?
LORNA: How?...I'm "a tramp from Newark," Tom...I know a dozen ways....

*Slow Fadeout*

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Through the dialogue in scene four, where Joe and Lorna converse on a bench in the park, Odets achieves subtly controlled, varied moods. Lorna's opening words directly foreshadow the choice that Joe must make in this scene: "Success and fame! Or just a lousy living. You're lucky you won't have to worry about those things..." Throughout this episode Joe's speeches reveal his inner feelings, his conflicting emotions of hope, longing, fear, and frustration. The dramatic diction sustains each mood momentarily. Then, moving in accompaniment to the changing traffic light in the background, the words quickly reproduce the varying moods indicative of Joe's unstable psychological state.

As Joe tells Lorna of his childhood loneliness, his statements reveal a temperament alienated from human society:

LORNA: Weren't you ever a kid, for God's sake?
JOE: Not a happy kid.
LORNA: Why?
JOE: Well, I always felt different. Even my name was special--Bonaparte--and my eyes...

The reference here to his crossed eyes as a determining factor in Joe's self-imposed isolation carries deliberate thematic significance, since the affliction suggests, as Baird Shuman notes, "his inability to focus on one goal at a time." Further speeches in this scene manifest Joe's

49Ibid. 50Ibid. 51Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 85.
simultaneous attraction to the irreconcilable careers of music and boxing.

As Joe expresses his identification with music, the dialogue evokes a softened mood, accompanying his sensitive shift in feeling and arising from his expression of a happy and harmonious union with life:

JOE: With music I'm never alone when I'm alone—
Playing music...that's like saying, "I am man. I belong here. How do you do, World--
good evening!" When I play music nothing is closed to me. I'm not afraid of people and what they say. There's no war in music. It's not like the streets... ... 52

Yet in subsequent speeches the diction, filled with images of violence, subordinates these sensitive feelings to more callous and commercial emotions. As Joe divulges his frustrations, he speaks again of the struggle for existence outside the confines of his room as "war," 53 exclaiming that "Music can't help me there." 54 Continuing this motif through such allusions to violence as "hurt," "get even," and "shot bullets," he reveals his desire for a career based on public acclaim:

JOE: People have hurt my feelings for years. I never forget. You can't get even with people by playing the fiddle. If music shot bullets I'd like it better--artists and people like that are freaks today. The world moves fast and they sit around like forgotten dopes. 55

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53 Ibid., p. 264.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
Lorna's blunt statements help sustain the mood, as she analyzes Joe's attraction to commercial success:

LORNA: You're a miserable creature. You want your arm in gelt [sic] up to the elbow. You'll take fame so people won't laugh or scorn your face. You'd give your soul for those things. But every time you turn your back your little soul kicks you in the teeth. It don't give in so easy. 56

By juxtaposing these gentle and harsh moods in accompaniment to Joe's shifts of feeling, Odets makes explicit the fighter's intense psychological conflict.

The same technique is again used effectively moments later; for, as Joe indicates his choice of a boxing career, the two moods which accompany this decision point further to the conflicting attractions of his temperament. First there is the gentle atmosphere evoked from Joe's softly spoken words as in disappointment he understands Lorna's purpose. Yet when Joe utters his intention to fight, his quiet words carry little of his earlier conviction, but instead suggest an underlying sensitive awareness of Lorna:

JOE (quietly): Moody sent you after me—a decoy! You made a mistake, Lorna, for two reasons. I make up my own mind to fight. Point two, he doesn't know you don't love him.

LORNA: You're a fresh kid.

JOE: In fact he doesn't know anything about you at all. 57

After Joe is rebuffed by Lorna, Odets uses the diction to reveal the fighter's decided turn toward the materialistic.

56 Ibid., p. 265. 57 Ibid.
In consecutive speeches the sudden, though rather general, desire to purchase an automobile is followed by the specific attraction to that type of vehicle which is symbolic of financial success—the same model car driven by a wealthy movie star. Finally Joe's concluding explosive exclamation links the desire for wealth and security with his decision to fight aggressively:

JOE: Go home, Lorna. If you stay, I'll know something about you...  
LORNA: You don't know anything.  
JOE: Now's your chance--go home!  
LORNA: Tom loves me.  
JOE (after a long silence, looking ahead): I'm going to buy a car.  
LORNA: They make wonderful cars today. Even the lizzies--  
JOE: Gary Cooper's got the kind I want. I saw it in the paper, but it costs too much--fourteen thousand. If I found one second hand--  
LORNA: And if you had the cash--  
JOE: I'll get it--  
LORNA: Sure, if you'd go in and really fight!  
JOE (in a sudden burst): Tell your Mr. Moody I'll dazzle the eyes out of his head.\(^{58}\)

As Joe continues to express his fascination with the automobile and its speed, the diction modulates the mood in accompaniment to his aroused emotions. Evoking former allusions to death by automobile with the admission that "Those cars are poison in my blood,"\(^ {59}\) his words establish an aura of violence about his decision to pursue material profits. His allusion to the insulating effects of speed,

\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 266.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
"When you sit in a car and speed you're looking down at the world. Speed, speed, everything is speed--nobody gets me!" prefigures his forthcoming spiritual isolation.

Yet this scene concludes with a mood of doubt and lingering apprehension which deliberately parallels Joe's mental indecision. "Something's wrong somewhere," Lorna senses as the curtain begins to fall. "I know...," Joe murmurs ominously as they slowly walk out.

As scene five opens in the Bonaparte home two weeks later, the drunken Siggie, in describing Joe's unsuspected aggressiveness, likens the boxer to a "man with germs" who suddenly undergoes "a crisis":

SIGGIE: I was fit to be knocked down with a feather when I heard it. I couldn't believe it until I seen him fight over at the Keystons last week. You never know what somebody's got in him--like a man with germs--suddenly he's down in bed with a crisis!

The implicit comparison of Joe's new viciousness in the ring to the unsuspected germs of a possibly "fatal disease" seems to carry a double meaning: a general foreshadowing of Joe's death but also a specific comment on the immediate psychological effects of his decision to fight. The diction nonetheless continues the air of uncertainty which concluded scene four, as Joe again wrestles with the question of artistic sensitivity.

60 Ibid.  
61 Ibid., p. 267.  
62 Ibid.  
63 Ibid.
Handling the violin which his father gives him, Joe utters two simple words which evoke a softened and gentle mood:

MR. BONAPARTE (of violin): Take him with you, Joe.
JOE: It's beautiful...

The boy's stage action, as he plays the delicate instrument, followed by his hushed and carefully restrained comment, "Return it, poppa," illustrate further his sensitive love of music. As Joe attempts to break with the family, the impassioned speeches build in intensity, again suggesting that the boy is not completely settled in his decision to fight:

JOE: I have to do this, poppa.
MR. BONAPARTE (to JOE): Be careful fora your hands.
JOE: Poppa, give me the word--
MR. BONAPARTE: What word?
JOE: Give me the word to go ahead. You're looking at yesterday—I see tomorrow. Maybe you think I ought to spend my whole life here—you and Carp blowing off steam.
MR. BONAPARTE (holding himself back): Oh, Joe, shut your mouth!
JOE: Give me the word to go ahead!
MR. BONAPARTE: Be careful fora your hands!
JOE: I want you to give me the word!
MR. BONAPARTE (crying out): No! No word! You gonna fight? All right! Okay! But I don't gonna give no word! No!
JOE: That's how you feel?

The boy's choice of career—an intellectual decision at this time and not a completely moral one until late in Act II—is indicated by rhetorical pleading for parental permission

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64 Ibid., p. 271.  
65 Ibid.  
66 Ibid., pp. 271-272.
to continue the fighting career. The scene and act conclude in a mood which parallels Joe's unsettled state, as Mr. Carp's final lines call quietly and sadly for a definition of man: "Yes, my friend, what is man? As Schopenhauer says, and in the last analysis..." (slow fadeout). 67

The dramatic dialogue of the first five scenes establishes moods which reflect both the sensitive and the materialistic aspects of Joe's personality. Joe's words, as well as speeches by certain minor characters, often evoke a relaxed, quiet atmosphere whenever the conversation reveals his attraction to music and to an artistic career. Yet, in contrast, the argumentative, explosive speeches of both Joe and secondary personages establish harsh, severe moods as he inclines toward a career as a fighter. The dramatic undercurrent of references to death and destruction, particularly associated with allusions to the automobile and to its speed, further builds up an atmosphere of violence which prefigures Joe's eventual annihilation. By using diction, speech rhythm, and word choice to suggest contrasting relaxed or tense atmosphere reflective of Joe's aesthetic or mercenary moods, Odets achieves a flowing yet alternating rhythm through the individual scenes, which implicitly dramatizes the successive changes in the boy's temperament. The final quizzical mood in which the act closes is a significant one.

67 Ibid.
for it specifically suggests the wavering indecision and unsettled mental state of the protagonist.

Moreover, the dialogue in Act II picks up and continues a lingering mood of uncertainty through three of its four scenes, tracing Joe's concern about his decision to risk his hands in fighting. At the conclusion of the act, Joe, having decided against an artistic career, asserts his deliberate choice of the mercenary world of prize fighting. At that moment, Joe's exultant speeches resolve the uncertain and questioning moods into one of harsh violence.

Permeated by a sense of activity, scene one opens in the energetic atmosphere of the gym, as fighters enter and exit and Joe spars off stage. The conversations of Roxy, Tokio, Moody, and Lorna establish the initial mood as a happy one, for Joe, fighting aggressively, has been winning impressively. Yet here the diction is implicitly suggestive: Moody's rimed ditty not only expresses his exuberance but illustrates his interest in future security; Roxy's phrase, "I'm tickled to death," links an allusion to death (though a "happy" one) to Joe's hard fighting; and Tokio's description of Joe as "king" not only directly refers to the boy's boxing ability but also subtly connotes a person of proud and haughty temperament:

MOODY (rubbing his hands enthusiastically): "Let it rain, let it pour! It ain't gonna rain where we're headed for!"
ROXY: I'm tickled to death to see the canary birds left his gloves.
TOKIO: He's the king of all he surveys. 68

Beneath the apparently happy and unconcerned atmosphere, however, the dialogue re-establishes the mood of doubt and uncertainty about Joe's fighting ability:

MOODY: Boy, oh, boy, how he surprised them in the Bronx last night!...But one thing I can't explain—that knockout he took in Philly five weeks ago. 69

Tokio's expository comments then specifically identify the reason for their doubt to be the fighter's ever-present concern with a musical career:

TOKIO: Here's what happened there: we run into some man when we're leaving the hotel. Joe goes pale. I ask him what it is, "Nothing," he says. But I see for myself—a man with long hair and a violin case. When we turn the corner, he says, "He's after me," he says. As if it's cops and robbers! . . . .70

Though the fighter is still offstage, the dialogue continues to reflect uncertainty concerning his decision to fight. When Joe does appear, however, he makes no mention of a musical career. Instead his nine brief speeches display an ever more belligerent attitude. Once more Odets uses here the dialogue of minor characters to anticipate a major change in Joe's temperament, for their speeches quickly dissipate the air of doubt and assert a more positive mood, suggestive of Joe's callous feelings. To this end, Odets introduces

68 Ibid., p. 273. 69 Ibid. 70 Ibid., p. 274.
gangster Eddie Fuseli, a visual symbol of Joe's increasing spiritual isolation, since he represents, as Baird Shuman notes, "the materially oriented and motivated person . . .".71 The gunman's presence creates a certain tension in the other characters, and his repeated emotionless offers to "buy a piece" of the fighter as though he were a simple commodity evoke a sense of impersonality:

EDDIE FUSELI (approaching the group): Hello.
ROXY (nervously): Hello, Eddie.
MOODY (turning): I haven't seen you for a dog's age, Fuseli.
EDDIE (pointing off left): You got this certain boy--Bonaparte. I like his looks. American born?
EDDIE: Could I buy a piece?
MOODY: No.
EDDIE (coolly): Could I?72

Following Fuseli's appearance, the mood is continued through an exchange of comments about Joe's purchase of a Deusenberg, the symbol, says Baird Shuman, of the "type of materialistic goal which is driving Joe on so forcefully . . .".73

At the mention of the car, the manager flares up. The short, sharp phrasing and the metaphorical image "lost my scalp," establish the aura of callous violence surrounding the fighter and, at the same time, subtly associate the purchase of the Deusenberg with Joe's attraction to destructive

71 Shuman, Clifford Odets. p. 85.
73 Shuman, Clifford Odets. p. 84.
speed, again prefiguring his final catastrophe:

**MOODY**: He drives like a maniac! That time we drove to Long Beach? I almost lost my scalp! We can't let him drive around like that! Boy, he's getting a bushel of bad habits! We gotta be careful . . . .

Fuseli's impersonal words, the reference to the purchase of the Deusenberg, and comments about Joe's wild driving with their suggestion of impending violence all work to create an atmosphere of hard inflexibility around the fighter even before his appearance on stage.

Upon Joe's arrival, Odets makes use of the fighter's diction to continue further the sense of tension. The forceful exclamation, the repetition of explosive sounds, and the two guttural demands ("Get me some fights...Get me some main bouts") point to the hardened egotism of his new temperament:

**JOE** (shaking off MOODY's arm and saying what is really on his mind): If you're vitally interested in my future, prove it. Get me some fights—fights with contenders, not with dumb-bunny club fighters. Get me some main bouts in the metropolitan area!—

Moody's heated explosion re-establishes in this act the earlier atmosphere of personal conflict between the two—an argumentative mood which Odets heightens subtly by the addition of background fight sounds:

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MOODY (losing his temper): For a kid who got kayoed five weeks ago, your mouth is pretty big!
(The general bell sounds; the din begins.)

A series of sharp, angry retorts sustain the taut atmosphere as well as reveal the fighter's impatient desire for public recognition:

JOE: That won't happen again! And how about some mention in the press? Twenty-six bouts--no one knows I'm alive. This isn't vacation for me--it's a profession! I'm staying more than a week. Match me up against real talent....

Whereas earlier in this same scene dialogue has pointed to Joe's attraction to family and music, the fighter's speeches now indicate only his attraction to material gain. Joe himself makes no mention of music or of his family in this scene, yet these attractions are suggested by the dialogue near the scene's close, where Moody pleads with Lorna to keep Joe away from his family:

MOODY: Peace, for chri' sake, peace! Lorna, we're in a bad spot with Joe. He's getting hard to manage and this is the time when everything's gotta be right. I'm seeing Lombardo's manager tomorrow! Now that gunman's on my tail. You have to help me. You and I wanna do it like the story books, "happy ever after"? Then help me.

LORNA: How?

MOODY: Go after the boy. Keep him away from his folks. Get him away from the buggies--

The scene concludes with Moody alone, exclaiming in confusion, "Boy, I still don't know anything about women!..." Though these words refer to his bewilderment about Lorna, they

76 Ibid.  77 Ibid.  78 Ibid., p. 280.  79 Ibid., p. 281.
nonetheless establish an atmosphere of puzzlement and uncertainty at a time when the protagonist is similarly troubled.

Joe's speech opening scene two, filled with excited, half-articulate phrases, reveals his mental agitation. His second speech associates this confusion with his attraction to Lorna, and the quiet tone of his simple declaration brings forth a momentarily gentle atmosphere expressive of his remaining tender feelings:

JOE: Some nights I wake up--my heart's beating a mile a minute! Before I open my eyes I know what it is--the feeling that someone's standing at my bed. Then I open my eyes... it's gone--ran away!

LORNA: Maybe it's that old fiddle of yours.
JOE: Lorna, maybe it's you....

Yet when Lorna mentions Joe's music, Odets introduces a quick series of angry rhetorical questions to explode the calm atmosphere and makes use of Joe's sardonic reference to the small child with a violin to show the fighter's movement away from his former identification with music:

LORNA: Don't you ever think of it any more--music?
JOE: What're you trying to remind me of? A kid with a Buster Brown collar and a violin case tucked under his arm? Does that sound appetizing to you?

The author uses the alternating currents and moods throughout this scene to illustrate that Joe still retains a sensitivity of character, even though this sensitivity is no

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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
longer identified with the artistic inclination. The quiet, sincere words and the hesitant pauses in Joe's speech slow the pace of the action and soften the mood to parallel his tender declaration of love for Lorna:

JOE: What's on your mind, Lorna?
LORNA: What's on yours?
JOE (simply): You...You're real for me—the way music was real.82

The calm atmosphere continues as Joe states his dissatisfaction with fighting. The diction makes explicit his realization that as a boxer, his life is barren and unproductive:

JOE: I develop the ability to knock down anyone my weight. But what point have I made? Don't you think I know that? I went off to the war 'cause someone called me a name—because I wanted to be two other guys. Now it's happening. ...I'm not sure I like it.83

Then, after Joe acknowledges that he is losing his personal identity (exclaiming resentfully that Moody "treats me like a possession!"),84 a sequence of pleading questions presents a softened mood in accompaniment to his romantic desire for a new life through love:

JOE: ... Why don't you belong to me every night in the week? Why don't you teach me love? ...Or am I being a fool?
LORNA: You're not a fool, Joe.
JOE: I want you to be my family, my life—Why don't you do it, Lorna, why?85

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., p. 282.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
But Lorna's brief reply "He loves me," momentarily shifts the current to indicate the real cause of her indecision in her relationship with Joe: she is attracted to Moody because as she exclaims: "He loved me in a world of enemies, of stages and bulls!...and I loved him for that . . . ." The sudden appearance of images of primitive violence and elemental passion reflects Lorna's basic attitude toward existence. The words also anticipate how Joe, later lacking in love, turns to the same type of life.

At the conclusion of the scene, Lorna's words spoken in a "low voice" continue the softened mood, as she admits her attraction to Joe, "You make me feel too human, Joe." And when she declares her love the images suggest a rebirth from a life of suffocation ("I've been undersea a long time!") through love ("... Joe, I think you're it! I don't know why, I think you're it!") And it is this same hope of love which represents the one remaining opportunity of sensitive expression for Joe.

The final speeches of the scene, however, add an undercurrent of doubt to the atmosphere. Immediately following her unreserved declaration of love for Joe, Lorna reveals her still-persisting concern for Moody through the simple exclamation, "Poor Tom!" With Lorna's final words, Odets

86 Ibid. 87 Ibid., p. 283. 88 Ibid., p. 284.
89 Ibid., p. 285. 90 Ibid. 91 Ibid.
achieves a two-fold effect: they not only foreshadow an impermanent relationship with Joe, but they also provide an important tonal link between scenes two and three. In scene three the dramatic dialogue establishes an identical mood of shifting uncertainty about Lorna's attraction to Moody, resolving it momentarily as she tells the fight manager that she will not leave him.

When Joe and Fuseli enter and see Lorna and Moody embracing, Odets uses the brief stichomythic lines to convey the mood of conflict. The sentences build toward Joe's sudden outburst, creating an atmosphere of gradually heightened tension, as well as moving the action forward with impetus:

Joe: The first time I walked in here that was going on. It's one long duet around here.
Mooney: Hello.
Eddie (sardonically): Hello, Partner... (Lorna is silent and avoids Joe's looks.)
Joe: How about the fight with Lombardo?
Mooney: Six weeks from tonight.
Joe: He's gonna be surprised.
Mooney (coolly): No one doubts it.
Joe (sharply): I didn't say it was doubted!  

The words, "He's gonna be surprised," are used here with subtly ironic implication, for Joe himself is somewhat dumbfounded by Lorna's presence with the manager. The fighter's confusion is expressed when he abruptly questions Lorna, "Why did you kiss him?"

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92 Ibid., pp. 289-290.
93 Ibid., p. 291.
The sharp staccato accents of Moody's instantaneous reply further tighten the atmosphere of conflict:

MOODY (to JOE): It's about time you shut your mouth and minded your own goddam business. Also, that you took some orders. 94

Joe's sarcastic question, "Who are you, God?" 95 sustains the violent clash of personalities; and Moody answers in a series of short, explosive exclamations which build up rhythmically through a catalogue of insults to a final cynical challenge:

MOODY: Yes! I'm your maker, you cock-eyed gutter rat! Outa sawdust and spit I made you! I own you--without me you're a blank! Your insolence is gorgeous, but this is the end! I'm a son of a gun! What're you so superior about? 96

Odets's handling of the diction in Moody's speech is particularly skillful. The insults, of course, sustain the conflict of temperaments by illustrating how Moody, when challenged for Lorna's love, instinctively battles for her. Moreover, the repeated phrases ("I'm your maker...I made you...I own you") suggest Moody's impersonal handling of the fighter--words which sustain Joe's earlier complaint that he was treated like a "possession." The sharp images "outa sawdust and spit" and "you're a blank" point to the de-humanizing aspect of boxing. And finally, Moody's sarcastic reference to Joe's optical affliction ("you cock-eyed gutter rat"), when unanswered by the fighter, demonstrates how as

94 Ibid. 95 Ibid. 96 Ibid.
the play progresses Joe becomes, Baird Shuman suggests, "less and less sensitive about his eyes and, correspondingly, he loses that sensitivity which an artist must have in order to achieve success."97

Moments later, the remnants of Joe's sensitivity are shattered as Lorna professes her love for Moody before the fighter. Odets makes effective use of the boy's frigid silence at this point, for the quiet, though still intensely charged, atmosphere places a heightened dramatic focus upon his stunning hurt.

At the conclusion of the scene, however, Lorna's, "I feel like the wrath of God," suggests still a deep feeling for the fighter, and her final words explicitly reveal her affection:

MOODY: What's wrong, Lorna? You can tell me...
LORNA: I feel like the wrath of God.
MOODY: You like that boy, don't you?
LORNA: I love him, Tom.

Slow Fadesout98

Thus the scene ends with an air of uncertainty and suspense, arising from Lorna's indecision and from the tension of Joe's psychological state.

However as scene four opens six weeks later in a dressing room before the Lombardo fight, beginning the scene with "the

97 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 86.
distant Roar of THE CROWD and the clanging of the bell," Odets creates a turbulent atmosphere in expressive contrast to the unresolved mood which preceded. Though stage effects could not be properly considered diction, it is nonetheless interesting to note that here as well as later Odets makes similarly effective use of the roar of the raucous crowd and the clanging of the fight bell to produce tension and violence suggestive of Joe's new world and change in personality. Also in this scene Odets once again employs an alternation of explosive speeches with quiet comments to build an intensity of mood finally climaxing in Joe's exultant dedication to boxing.

A brief conversation between Pepper White, another fighter using the dressing room, and Mr. Bonaparte, who represents Joe's former way of life, is ominously suggestive of impending violence:

PEPPER . . . (to MR. BONAPARTE): So you're Bonaparte's little boy, Buddy? Why didn't you say so before? Come over here and shake my hand. (MR. BONAPARTE does so.)
PEPPER: Tell Bonaparte I like to fight him.
MR. BONAPARTE: Why? 100
PEPPER: I like to beat him up.

But when the father speaks with Lorna, their calm speeches provide an interval of quiet, as the father reveals his genuine concern for his son:

MR. BONAPARTE (glad to see a familiar face): Hello, hello, Missa Moon! Howa you feel?
LORNA: What brings you to this part of the world?
MR. BONAPARTE (somberly): I come-a to see Joe...
LORNA: Why, what's wrong?
MR. BONAPARTE (with a slow shrug): He don't come-a to see me...
LORNA: Does he know you're here?
MR. BONAPARTE: No. (LORNA looks at him sympathetically.)

MR. BONAPARTE: I gonna see how he fight.
LORNA: I owe you a report. I wish I had good news for you, but I haven't.101

In sharp contrast to this quiet scene, as Joe suddenly enters the room, his brief greeting to his father is followed by an abrupt order:

JOE: Hello, poppa.
MR. BONAPARTE: Hello, Joe...
JOE (turning to TOKYO): Throw out the girls--this isn't a hotel bedroom!102

Here Odets deftly uses the curt command and the sarcastic comment to illustrate the boy's hardened temperament, for without Lorna's love--the last stronghold of his sensitivity--Joe has given himself up without reservation to egocentric and materialistic desires. The quick series of short exchanges between Joe and the managers further demonstrate the fighter's changed manner. Each of Joe's agitated exclamations builds upon an initial phrase of egotism ("I talk," "I don't want," and "I'm important"), the grating repetition pointing to a tough, self-centered personality:

MOODY: That's no way to talk!
JOE (coolly): I talk as I please!

MOODY (angrily): The future Mrs. Moody--
JOE: I don't want her here!
LORNA: He's right, Tom. Why fight about it? (She exits.)
JOE (to MOODY): Also, I don't want to see writers again before a fight; it makes me nervous!
ROXY (softly, for a wonder): They're very important, Joe--
JOE: I'm important! My mind must be clear before I fight. I have to think before I go in . . . .

The taut atmosphere about Joe suddenly explodes into physical violence. Upon Pepper's reference to Joe's crossed eyes, Joe strikes out at him. Following the sudden silence at gunman Fuseli's appearance, Moody's explosive exclamations re-establish the strained atmosphere of conflict:

MOODY: Who the hell wantsa understand you! I got one wish--for Lombardo to give you the business! The quicker he taps you off tonight, the better! You gotta be took down a dozen pegs! I'm versus you! Completely versus!

Fuseli's "quiet deadliness" silences Moody, but the gangster's angry commands with their images of death and violence further intensify the undercurrent of destruction in this scene:

EDDIE: Forget that Miss Moon. Stop lookin' down her dress. Go out there and kill Lombardo! Send him out to Woodlawn! Tear his skull off!... as I know Bonaparte can do it! (EDDIE gives MR. BONAPARTE a sharp look and exits . . . .)

Although once again a quiet conversation between Joe and Mr. Bonaparte softens this mood of violence, Joe's hesitant pauses illustrate that there is no real communication between

103 Ibid., p. 296. 104 Ibid., p. 297. 105 Ibid.
him and his father. The fighter's reference to his father as "conscience," in fact, makes clear his present inner tension:

JOE (not quite knowing what to say): How is Anna, poppa?
MR. BONAPARTE: Fine.
JOE: Siggie watching the fights?
MR. BONAPARTE: Yes.
JOE: You look fine...
MR. BONAPARTE: Yes, feela good...
JOE: Why did you send that money back? (There is no answer.) Why did you come here? ...You sit there like my conscience...

When Joe declares his dedication to a boxing career, however, there are no hesitations--the phrases roll forth swiftly and positively:

MR. BONAPARTE: Why you say so?
JOE: Poppa, I have to fight, no matter what you say or think! This is my profession! I'm out for fame and fortune, not to be different or artistic! I don't intend to be ashamed of my life!

Joe's brusque explanation of his materialist goal (the trite "I'm out for fame and fortune") and the accompanying blunt rejection of the musical career ("...not to be different or artistic") demonstrate effectively the transformation of his character; for in Act I he had described with feeling these artistic desires as "Playing music...that's like saying, 'I am man. I belong here. How do you do, World--good evening!' When I play music nothing is closed to me."  

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., p. 298.
Mr. Bonaparte, suddenly aware of the materialistic ambition which grips Joe, understands that without the artist's sensitivity it is "too late for music" and sadly gives Joe permission to fight. Through placement of the father's quiet sadness against the oscillating roar of the fight crowd outside, Odets suggests the fighter's own pulsatory agitation:

**MR. BONAPARTE (standing up):** Yeah, I understanda you...
**JOE:** Go out and watch the fights.
**MR. BONAPARTE (somberly):** Yeah...you fight. Now I know...is'a too late for music. The men musta be free an' happy for music...not like-a you. Now I see whatta you are...I give-a you every word to fight...I sorry for you...
(Silence. The distant roar of THE CROWD climbs up and falls down; the bell clangs again.)

The author continues this dramatic device at the moment when Joe, left alone with the trainer, ponders his separation from his family and the artistic life. There is first the quiet atmosphere which accompanies Joe's uncontrollable breakdown, his body shaking with "silent sobs." Out of this intense silence, Joe's sharp, heavily-accented, monosyllabic words express an increasingly rigid mood of dedication to a life of materialism. Identifying his isolation, he ironically likens himself to an instrument of destruction, a deadly speeding bullet—a peculiarly appropriate image indicative of the transformation that has taken place. The frenzied,

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inhuman scream of the fight crowd in the background accompanies
his decision, adding symbolic vocal approval to the choice:

JOE: ....  . . . Now I'm alone. They're all against me—
Moody, the girl...you're my family now, Tokio—
you and Eddie! I'll show them all--nobody
stands in my way! My father's had his hand on
me for years. No more. No more for her either—
she had her chance! When a bullet sings through
the air it has no past--only a future--like me!
Nobody, nothing stands in my way! (In a sudden
spurt of feeling JOE starts sparring around
lightly in a shadow boxing routine. TOKIO
smiles with satisfaction. Now the roar of THE
CROWD reaches a frenzied shriek and hangs
there. The bell clangs rapidly several times.
The roar of THE CROWD settles down again.)

As Joe boxes offstage, Mr. Bonaparte returns to the
dressing room to talk to Pepper White, who symbolizes the
destructive aftereffects of the fight game. When Mr. Bonaparte
looks at the broken hands of the fighter, his sympathetic
questions modulate the hard mood, suggesting also a gentle
resignation to the inevitable results of Joe's decision:

MR. BONAPARTE: Broke?
PEPPER: Not broke, flat!—pushed down!
MR. BONAPARTE: Hurt?
PEPPER: You get used to it.
MR. BONAPARTE: Can you use them?
PEPPER: Go down the hall and look at Pulaski.
MR. BONAPARTE: Can you open thees-a hands?
PEPPER: What for?
MR. BONAPARTE (gently touching the fists): So strong
so hard.

But the quiet scene is suddenly interrupted by the roar of
the crowd as it gives its consent to Joe's violent battle in
the ring. Mr. Bonaparte recognizes in the crowd's roar that

110 Ibid., p. 299. 111 Ibid., pp. 301-302.
hypnotic appeal which so attracts his son, and he in turn reacts murderously against it:

MR. BONAPARTE (to himself): So strong...so useless...
(The roar of THE CROWD mounts up and calls for a kill. MR. BONAPARTE trembles. For a moment he sits quietly on the bench. Then he goes to the door of the shower room and looks around at the boxing paraphernalia. In the distance the bell begins to clang repeatedly. MR. BONAPARTE stares in the direction of the arena. He goes to the exit door. The crowd is cheering and howling. MR. BONAPARTE hesitates a moment at the door and then rapidly walks back to the bench, where he sits. Head cocked, he listens for a moment. The roar of THE CROWD is heated, demanding and hateful. Suddenly MR. BONAPARTE jumps to his feet. He is in a murderous mood. He shakes his clenched fist in the direction of the noise—he roars aloud. The roar of THE CROWD dies down. The door opens, PEPPER'S second, SAM, enters, softly whistling to himself. Deftly he begins to sling together PEPPER'S paraphernalia.)

However, as the roar subsides and as Mr. Bonaparte quietly questions Pepper's second, the tension is gradually relaxed.

MR. BONAPARTE: What's a happen in the fight?
SAM: Knockout.
MR. BONAPARTE: Who?
SAM: Lombardo's stuff. (MR. BONAPARTE slowly sits . . . .)[113]

Through the alternation of gentle and violent moods the scene builds toward a climactic release in Joe's joyous outburst at the conclusion. As anticipated by his father, Joe's victory (a spiritual defeat) is achieved at the expense of a broken hand; and, now giving reign to his

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[112] Ibid., p. 302.  [113] Ibid.
feelings, he gloats over his final parting with the artistic and aesthetic way of life:

JOE (holding the hand out proudly): Yes, it's broke... TOKIO slowly reaches for a knife. He begins carefully to cut the glove.

JOE: Hallelujah!! It's the beginning of the world! (MR. BONAPARTE, lips compressed, slowly turns his head away. EDDIE watches with inner excitement and pleasure: JOE has become a fighter . . . . JOE begins to laugh loudly, victoriously, exultantly—with a deep thrill of satisfaction.)

Slow Fadeout

The slow fadeout is used once again for heightening the effect, as it captures the full impact of Joe's triumphant, exultant laugh, closing the scene and act upon it.

With an economy, ease, and sophistication of technique not often surpassed in American drama, Odets has used dialogue, diction, as well as sound effects throughout Act II to create moods which either parallel or reflect the psychological ambiguity of the protagonist. Recurrent images of violence and destruction further illustrate the decreased sensitivity of the fighter as well as prefigure his eventual violent destruction.

In Act III the fighter's initial speeches re-create that violent and discordant atmosphere which reflects his state of spiritual degeneration. When he sharply addresses a sports-writer, Joe's over-confident words reveal his brash egotism:

\[114\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 303.\]
JOE (getting off the desk): Listen, Drake, I'm not the boy I used to be--the honeymoon's over. I don't blush and stammer these days. Bonaparte goes in and slugs with the best. In the bargain his brain is better than the best. That's the truth; why deny it?115

Indicating none of the former warm and genuinely human aspects of his temperament, his speeches throughout make obvious the growth of a belligerent attitude within the hardened personality. In the following speech, the quick series of heated rhetorical questions and the hard image of physical violence ("...breaking your face in") point to his toughened attitude. These words most vividly contrast with the phrase "... conscience and a meek smile" which is suggestive of his former quiet and peaceful way of life with music:

JOE: What good is modesty? I'm a fighter! The whole essence of prizefighting is immodesty! "I'm better than you are--I'll prove it by breaking your face in!" What do you expect? a conscience and a meek smile? I don't believe that bull about the meek'll inherit the earth!116

The atmosphere is sustained not only through Joe's callous speeches, although certainly this is the primary means, but also by the fighter's stage appearance (he is dressed like the gangster Fuseli) and by statements of minor characters which, since they are spoken with warmth of feeling, offer expressive contrast to Joe's hardened outbursts.

Tokio, the trainer, advises Joe to forget about Lorna, and

115 Ibid., p. 305. 116 Ibid.
he notes sympathetically the cause of the fighter's alienation—the fact that Joe is now driven by a bitter animosity towards life:

TOKIO: . . . Joe, you're loaded with love. Find something to give it to. Your heart ain't in fighting...your hate is. But a man with hate and nothing else...he's half a man...and half a man...is no man. Find something to love, or someone . . . .

Lorna, too, remarks on this unfeeling element of Joe's character, comparing his changed attitude to that of the gunman Fuseli's. Her aroused speech is filled with phrases of death and self-extinction, "getting to be a killer," "like Fuseli," "you murdered," and "hid the body." The speech is literally correct, as well as ironically prophetic, for Joe has "murdered" his artistic self, and later he does "kill" both himself and Lorna in a car wreck. With further ironic contrast, Lorna's comment, "You're not the boy I cared about, not you," parallels Joe's earlier comment, "I'm not the boy I used to be"—a statement indicative of the transformation of his temperament from artistic sensitivity to egocentric materialism:

LORNA: I know I could do worse when I look at you. When did you look in the mirror last? Getting to be a killer! You're getting to be like Fuseli! You're not the boy I cared about, not you. You murdered that boy with the generous face—God knows where you hid the body! I don't know you.

117 Ibid., p. 306.  
118 Ibid., pp. 307-308.
Joe's words carry this atmosphere of violence even further. In a brief moment of self-examination, he angrily likens his barren existence to that of a mechanical object ("What the hell do you think I am? A machine?").

Ironically, he compares his well-trained boxer's body to a deadly weapon, gangster Eddie Fuselli's gun:

JOE: I want some personal life.
EDDIE: I give Bonaparte a good personal life. I got loyalty to his cause...
JOE: You use me like a gun! Your loyalty's to keep me oiled and polished!

Thus Odets makes use of a deliberate sequence of images to indicate Joe's successive changes in personality and, at the same time, to suggest the destructive course of his life. In Act II Joe claimed that he was used as a "possession" and later defined his isolation by comparing himself to a "bullet"; now in Act III he likens himself to an unfeeling "machine" and, finally, to a well-oiled "gun."

Odets again illustrates his mastery of dramatic technique in scene two, combining stage sound effects with dialogue to heighten the tension and to carry the action toward its second dramatic climax at the conclusion of the scene. The air in the empty dressing room is charged ominously by the crowd's roar and the bell's clanging "menacingly," as Joe battles in the ring offstage.

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119 Ibid., p. 309.  
120 Ibid.  
121 Cf. p. 111.  
122 Cf. p. 121.
The atmosphere within the room changes from the intense silence of the scene's opening moments to Eddie's violent outbursts of rage against Lorna. Fuseli's speeches become more vehement and threatening as the delirious roar of the fight crowd builds in intensity calling for a "kill" of his fighter. The deliberate use of such words of destruction and death as "slaughtered," "murdered," "coffin," "sold him down the river," and "bleeding" further intensifies the violent mood. As the dialogue brings the atmosphere inside the room to a peak, the mood is carefully timed to parallel Joe's destructive release of aggressive fury in the fight ring outside:

EDDIE: Get outa town! (THE ROAR of THE CROWD mounts to a demand for a kill.)
EDDIE (listening intently): He's like a bum tonight.... and a bum done it! You! (The roar grows fuller.) I can't watch him get slaughtered...
LORNA: I couldn't watch it myself.... (The bell clangs loudly several times. THE ROAR of THE CROWD hangs high in the air.) What's happening now?
EDDIE: Someone's getting murdered....
LORNA: It's me...
EDDIE (quietly, intensely): That's right...if he lost... the trees are ready for your coffin. (THE ROAR of THE CROWD tones down.) You can go now. I don't wanna make a scandal around his name.... I'll find you when I want you. Don't be here when they carry him in.
LORNA (at a complete loss): Where do you want me to go? EDDIE (suddenly releasing his wrath): Get outa my sight! You turned down the sweetest boy who ever walked in shoes! You turned him down, the golden boy, that king among the juveniles! He gave you his hand—you spit in his face! You led him on like Gertie's whore! You sold him down the river! And now you got the nerve to stand here, to wait and see him bleeding from the mouth!—-
LORNA: Fuseli, for God's sake--
EDDIE: Get outa my sight!
LORNA: Fuseli, please--
EDDIE: Outa my sight, you nickel whoore! (Completely enraged and out of control, EDDIE half brings his run out from under his left armpit. JOE appears in the doorway. Behind him are ROXY, MOODY, and a SECOND.)

But the violent mood sparked by Eddie's uncontrolled rage is quickly shifted. Following a sudden silent pause at Joe's victorious entrance, Roxy's happy words are exuberant, and his description of Joe as "the monarch" is ironically fitting, in the light of the fighter's proud bearing:

LORNA (quietly): What happened?
ROXY: What happened? (He darts forward and picks up JOE's arm in the sign of victory. The arm drops back limply.) The monarch of the masses!

Joe's remarks maintain the hilarity, while revealing his unrestrained egotism:

JOE: 'Twas a straight right—with no trimmings or apologies! Aside from fouling me in the second and fifth--
MOODY: I called them on it--
ROXY: I seen the bastard--
JOE: That second time I nearly went through the floor. I gave him the fury of a lifetime in that final punch! (EDDIE has taken the soggy boxing gloves for his own property. TOKIO is daubing the bruise under JOE's eye.) And did you hear them cheer! (Bitterly, as if reading a news report) Flash! As thousands cheer, that veritable whirlwind Bonaparte—that veritable cock-eyed wonder, Bonaparte—he comes from behind in the eighth stanza to slaughter the Chocolate Drop and clinch a bout with the champ! Well how do you like me, boys? Am I good or am I good?

123 Ibid., pp. 310-311. 124 Ibid., p. 311. 125 Ibid., p. 312.
The comments are, of course, again ironic, for the punch which Joe describes as containing the pent-up "fury of a lifetime" does actually cause the "slaughter" of his opponent. Joe's vehement exclamation, "I'd like to go outside my weight and beat up the whole damned world!" shows also that he is, as Baird Shuman notes, "more and more consumed by resentment of the society which has driven him into boxing . . . ."]

Although the boisterous mood is suddenly checked as a fight official brings news of Chocolate Drop's death in the ring, tension is quickly re-established as Barker, the dead fighter's manager enters, hysterically accusing Joe of murder:

BARKER: You murdered my boy! He's dead! You killed him!
TOKIO (getting between JOE and BARKER): Just a minute!
BARKER (literally wringing his hands): He's dead!
Chocolate's dead!
TOKIO: We're very sorry about it. Now pull yourself together. (EDDIE crosses the room and slams the door shut as BARKER points an accusing finger at JOE and screams):
BARKER: This dirty little wop killed my boy!
EDDIE (coming to BARKER): Go back in your room.
BARKER: Yes he did!! (EDDIE's answer is to shove BARKER roughly toward the door, weeping): Yes, he did!!

Barker's outbursts, filled with allusions to death and

126 Ibid., p. 313.
127 Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 86.
destruction ("murdered," "dead," "killed"), and Fuseli's threat of violence ("Get out before I slug your teeth apart!")\textsuperscript{129} set off Joe's thoughtful, "That poor guy...with those sleepy little eyes...."\textsuperscript{130}

Left alone in the dressing room with Lorna, Joe expresses his concern in muffled words which continue the calm, though charged, atmosphere. "Gee, that poor boy..."\textsuperscript{131} he murmurs. But when he realizes the waste of his own life, the sharp accents and the short terse sentences communicate his nervousness and excited confusion:

LORNA (holding herself off): But it wasn't your fault.
JOE: That's right--it wasn't my fault!
LORNA: You didn't mean it!
JOE: That's right--I didn't mean it! I wouldn't want to do that, would I? Everybody knows I wouldn't want to kill a man. Lorna, you know it!
LORNA: Of course!
JOE: But I did it! That's the thing--I did it! What will my father say when he hears I murdered a man? Lorna, I see what I did. I murdered myself, too! I've been running around in circles. Now I'm smashed! That's the truth. Yes, I was a real sparrow, and I wanted to be a fake eagle! But now I'm hung up by my finger tips--I'm no good--my feet are off the earth!\textsuperscript{132}

The diction of Joe's last speech reveals most poignantly his mental bewilderment. The reference to his father at this moment ("What will my father say...") illustrates the instinctive concern arising from both fear and love for the

\textsuperscript{129}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p. 315.
\textsuperscript{132}Ibid.
old man's judgment, since earlier Joe had referred to his father as "my conscience." His excited "I murdered myself, too!" not only echoes Lorna's accusation from the previous scene but also demonstrates his penetrating self-analysis. The comment "I've been running around in circles" acknowledges the futility of his non-creative life as a fighter; and his comparison to a "real sparrow" who "wanted to be a fake eagle" discloses his new self-awareness. Finally, in the concluding image ("But now I'm hung up by my finger tips...my feet are off the ground."). Joe laments his present isolation from the human community.

Lorna, moved by Joe's acute suffering, suddenly reveals her love in curt monosyllabic words which further sustain the mood: "Joe, I love you! We love each other. Need each other!" Odets then uses an antiphonic series of stichomythic exchanges to project their expanding awareness and excitement:

JOE: Lorna darling, I see what's happened!
LORNA: You wanted to conquer the world--
JOE: Yes--
LORNA: But it's not the kings and dictators who do it--it's that kid in the park--
JOE: Yes, that boy who might have said, "I have myself; I am what I want to be!"
LORNA: And now, tonight, here, this minute--finding yourself again--that's what makes you a champ. Don't you see that?
JOE: Yes, Lorna--yes!

133 Ibid., p. 297 (See thesis footnote number 106.).
134 Ibid., p. 315.
LORNA: It isn't too late to tell the world good evening again!
JOE: With what? These fists?
LORNA: Give up the fighting business!
JOE: Tonight!
LORNA: Yes, and go back to your music—

Though Joe's despondent reply, "But my hands are ruined. I'll never play again. What's left, Lorna? Half a man, nothing, useless..." momentarily slows the rhythm of the scene, Lorna's excited declaration of hope quickly restores it:

LORNA: No, we're left! Two together! We have each other! Somewhere there must be happy boys and girls who can teach us the way of life! We'll find some city where poverty's no shame—where music is no crime!—where there's no war in the streets—where a man is glad to be himself, to live and make his woman herself!

Joe's question, "No more fighting, but where do we go?" reflects once more his inner uncertainty and confusion.

Lorna's suggestion of a wild ride into the night is immediately seized upon by Joe. The fighter's short sentences, spoken in rapid, nervous succession, mirror his emotional tension and carry the action forward to a heightened climax.

JOE (taking LORNA's arms in his trembling hands): Ride! That's it, we ride—clear my head. We'll drive through the night. When you mow down the night with headlights, nobody gets you! You're on top of the world then—nobody laughs! That's it—speed! We're off the earth—unconnected! We don't have to think!! That's what speed's for, an easy way to live! Lorna darling, we'll

135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., p. 316.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
burn up the night! (He turns and as he begins to throw his street clothes out of his locker)

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Medium Fadeout 139

The earlier recurrent images of violence and allusion to death by automobile are now linked explicitly to Joe's wild ride by such phrases as "mow down the night" and "burn up the night," which not only prefigure his death but also associate it with his fatal attraction to speed. Thus the repetition of "speed" is of significance, for it is through rapid flight that Joe seeks isolation ("... nobody gets you! You're on top of the world then--nobody laughs!... We're off the earth--unconnected!") and avoidance of responsibility ("We don't have to think!! That's what speed's for, an easy way to live!") On this atmosphere of violence and excitement, the curtain closes.

Odets uses the calm dialogue in the final scene to ease the tension of the preceding episode, as Eddie, Moody, and Roxy quietly celebrate Joe's victory in the Bonaparte home. The presence of Frank Bonaparte contributes also to an atmosphere in direct contrast to that surrounding Joe, for Frank's speeches reveal modesty and a sense of responsibility:

EDDIE (to FRANK): You got a good build--you could be a fighter.
FRANK: I fight...
EDDIE: Yeah? For what?
FRANK: A lotta things I believe in . . . .

139 Ibid.
EDDIE: Whatta you get for it?
ROXY (laughing): Can't you see? A busted head!
FRANK: I'm not fooled by a lotta things Joe's fooled by. I don't get autos and custom-made suits. But I get what Joe don't.
EDDIE: What don't he get? ...
FRANK (modestly): The pleasure of acting as you think! The satisfaction of staying where you belong, being what you are....at harmony with millions of others! 140

Yet Mr. Bonaparte's words anticipate the announcement of his son's death by adding a note of foreboding, as he suddenly comments, "Maybe Joe don't gonna fight no more, after tonight..." 141

Although the subdued tone of the atmosphere seems momentarily threatened by Moody's concern for Lorna and by an argument which arises between Eddie and Moody, only once does the dialogue burst forth into violence in this scene, the eruption coming when Frank received the news of the couple's death. "You're all killers!" 142 Frank explodes, bringing the epilogue to its highest peak. Odets then brings the drama to a controlled conclusion, as each character is struck by a personal sense of grief:

MR. BONAPARTE: Frank...is it...?
FRANK: I don't know how to tell you, poppa...
MR. BONAPARTE (hopefully): Yes?...
FRANK: We'll have to go there--
EDDIE: Go where?
FRANK: Both of them....they were killed in a crash--
EDDIE: Who?! What?!
FRANK: They're waiting identification--Long Island, Babylon.
EDDIE (moving to FRANK): What are you handing me?!

140 Ibid., p. 318. 141 Ibid., p. 319. 142 Ibid., p. 320.
(EDDIE, suddenly knowing the truth, stops in his tracks . . .)

MOODY: I don't believe that! Do you hear me? I don't believe it—

FRANK: What waste!...

MOODY: It's a goddam lie!!

MR. BONAPARTE: What have-a you expect?...

MOODY (suddenly weeping): Lorna!...

MR. BONAPARTE (standing, his head high): Joe...Come, we bring-a him home...where he belong...

Slow Fadeout

Throughout Act III, as in the entire drama, Clifford Odets has demonstrated skill in the handling of diction, dialogue, and sound effects to create alternating moods of violence and calm which mirror the stages in Joe's spiritual alienation. Images of death and destruction amplify further the implicitly ominous foreshadowing of disaster by exemplifying his increased egocentricity and insensitivity. The tragic and seems inevitable.

Thus through his continuous command of dramatic language, Odets has proved himself to be a flexible artist, capable of adapting his creative energy to a new and different method of theatrical presentation. Through selection and arrangement of his diction to evoke moods which parallel and prefigure the psychological degradation and spiritual isolation of the protagonist, and through creation of a dramatic dialogue which rhythmically alternates these moods, Odets reveals his instinctive dramaturgy and mastery of theatrical effect.

Ibid., pp. 320-321.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The drama of Clifford Odets unquestionably reflects his concern with the immediate issues raised by the Depression and by the rise of Fascism. In the 1930's, when he addressed the themes of his plays to the social, political, and economic difficulties of the poverty-stricken and of the destitute middle class, Odets wrote, of course, for a theatre much more relevant to its social context than is the theatre today. It was a period of the proletarian play, of the Federal Theatre, of acting troupes calling themselves "collectives" or "unions," and of the slogan "Theatre is a weapon." It seems apparent, then, that Odets's social awareness in this decade was both timely and topical.

Odets, moreover, succeeded where other revolutionary playwrights failed. With his ability to create warm and memorable characters through dynamic stage language, Odets achieved wide-spread acclaim and the recognition of Broadway critics, as well as Marxist. These professional theatre critics were so much impressed with Odets's early skills in diction, dialogue, and character creation, that in the thirties he gained renown as one of the most exciting and promising new dramatists of the decade.
It is ironic, therefore, that Clifford Odets actually outlived his reputation as versatile dramatist, since by the time of his death in 1963 most modern commentators remembered him only as a social critic and minority spokesman. In fact, due to his lack of success in the fifties and the sixties, the present reputation of Clifford Odets, based mainly on the four or five dramas of the 1930's, has come to be that of leftist reformer of Depression society.

The present study contends, however, that the current judgment of Clifford Odets only as a social reformer is inadequate and that because of his skillful use of diction and dialogue he deserves re-evaluation as a playwright. To support this point, the author's handling of dramatic language in two plays from the Depression period, *Awake and Sing!* (1935) and *Golden Boy* (1937), has been examined through close textual analysis. From this analysis it seems evident that Clifford Odets offers an enduring aesthetic, as well as social, contribution to the American Theatre.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that in his later work Odets limited himself to those themes which he had already treated so successfully in the thirties and that his acute social awareness and class consciousness failed to adjust to the changing present. His later efforts continued to wane in relevance to the times, until after 1954 he could give nothing at all to the stage, although he vigorously prophesied his return.
Such thinning of a once-considerable talent eliminated one of the most fertile contributors to American drama. Indeed, Odets's earlier plays, like O'Neill's, portray effectively the psychological maladjustments of his characters. And it seems probable, as Baird Shuman notes, that Odets's "poetic use of language, his accurate capturing and reproduction of the vernacular, as well as his keen understanding of human motivation, have led the way to such modern playwrights as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Truman Capote."¹ Yet in spite of his innovations in the use of language, Odets has failed to receive the recognition that he so rightfully deserves.

Odets's instinctive blending of dynamic, evocative language with the themes of social significance was hailed by the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello, who insisted in 1935 that Odets's plays were good, "not because they are social, but because they are artistic."² The present study re-affirms Pirandello's early judgment, for it demonstrates that as he manifests his creative talent in Awake and Sing! and Golden Boy, Clifford Odets, the poet-lyricist, the creator of sharp, true diction and dialogue, remains a living part of our theatrical heritage today.

¹Shuman, Clifford Odets, p. 148.
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