Levin, Meyer (1905-1981) Encyclopedia Article

Levin, Meyer (1905-1981)

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Jewish-American novelist, journalist, and filmmaker Meyer Levin contributed several books to the proletarian social fiction movement of the 1930s and early 1940s. His two best known literary works are the Chicago-based novels *The Old Bunch* (1937), about the Jewish Ghetto and *Citizens* (1940), which dealt with the killing of ten steel-mill strikers on Memorial Day in 1937. The latter earned him the praise of Ernest Hemingway who proclaimed it "a fine and exciting American novel." In his proletarian fiction, Levin eliminated the notion of the central character and adopted multiple viewpoints, holding that such a device was in itself an affirmation of democracy and allowed him to carry out a more complete social analysis. After the Second World War he directed the first full-scale feature film to be produced in Palestine—*My Father's House* (1947)—before going to Europe, where he filmed the underground Jewish exodus to Israel. In 1957, he published *Compulsion* (1957), one of the first examples of a "nonfiction novel" based on the Leopold-Loeb murder case, which inspired the homonymous movie starring Orson Welles.

Further Reading:

Foley, Barbara. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941.* Durham, Duke University Press, 1993.

Klein, Marcus. *Foreigners: The Making of American Literature 1900-1940.* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.