



BROWSE

 **James T. Farrell by Edgar M. Branch (review)**

Don Graham

Studies in American Fiction

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REVIEW

[View Citation](#)**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

112Reviews Edgar M. Branch. James T. Farrell. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971. 192 pp. Cloth: \$7.50. James T. Farrell's career has closed at least once before its close. In 1952 and 1953 he completed the Bernard Carr and O'Neill-O'Flaherty cycles. These eight novels, plus the Studs Lonigan trilogy, plus novels outside the cycles, like *Gas-House McGinty* (1933) and *Ellen Rogers* (1941), plus a raft of critical-polemical writing collected in numerous books, plus hundreds of short stories—indeed all this work constitutes a career sufficient for most writers. But certain critics quit reading Farrell before the Fifties even. The Lionel Thrillinglys, as Nelson Algren once called them, by the late Forties had pretty much given up on Farrell's tradition. In 1961 Farrell began again and in the next eight years published seven new volumes of fiction. These have not been dismissed so much as simply ignored. Thus Alfred Kazin's magisterial survey of post-war American fiction in *Bright Book Of Life* does not trouble to mention Farrell. Hardly any of Farrell's fiction is overlooked in Edgar M. Branch's comprehensive survey for the Twayne series. Branch's effort to cover all the fiction leads to a nice Farrellian openness. The last book he takes up, the twenty-third novel, was still in

manuscript when Branch read it. (*Invisible Swords* appeared on schedule in 1971; followed by *Judith And Other Stories* in 1973.) *Invisible Swords* yields a quotation that might serve as epigraph for the Farrell post-war output: "Younger people feel that realism, naturalism is shallow—it isn't for them. They've gone beyond it" (p. 158). Branch quietly covers the essential ground that we expect of an introductory study. Plot summaries and balanced judgments call to attention works one will want to read in addition to the essential Farrell of *A World I Never Made* (1936), *Father and Son* (1940), and of course *Studs Lonigan* (1935). Citing Thomas Mann's praise for Ellen Rogers, Branch then convinces me that here is a novel I should know. Equally helpful is his judgmental perspective on the less successful work. He demonstrates, for example, that in the Bernard Carr trilogy two major defects are the abstract conceptualizing of the artist-hero and a fatal vagueness of specification in the depiction of the radical Thirties. The usefulness of the survey method precludes other kinds of critical approaches, with one exception. In the two chapters on *Studs Lonigan* Branch for once can assume that his audience knows the works at hand. The result is some detailed textual analysis refreshingly different from the necessary concentration on plot and characterization which dominates discussion of the lesser-known works. An examination of water imagery, for instance, reveals *Studs's* interior, unknown self, thereby illustrating that Farrell's "objective method" does not cancel the kind of interior revelation prized in more overtly psychological fiction. Farrell's work deserves more such close inspection. New Criticism still has something to tell us about works miraculously untouched over the years. Or, taking our cue from Robert Penn Warren on Dreiser, we can look to larger structural and rhetorical elements than the sentence, the reverberating image, in writers like Farrell. The Farrell that Branch outlines is less the artist than the fictional inheritor of the pragmatic tradition in American thought. As Branch indicates here (and documents thoroughly in "Freedom and Determinism in James T. Farrell's Fiction," *Essays on Determinism in American Literature*, ed. Sidney J. Krause, 1964), Farrell converts the ideas of William James and George Herbert Mead into useful fictions of the self in complex interaction with the environment. *Studs Lonigan* is a self betrayed through the repetition of bad habits; Danny O'Neill is a self developed through change, flexibility, intelligence, and openness to experience. A summary statement of Branch's with reference to Bernard Carr *Studies in American Fiction*<sup>113</sup> can stand as the essence of Farrell's beliefs: "a democratic social philosophy, a pragmatic trust in experience, a naturalistic metaphysics, and an ethics of self-fulfillment in one's personal and occupational lives" (p. 114). John Dewey would, and did, approve. Branch's book is helpful, then, in three ways: for a broad...

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James T. Farrell's career has closed at least once before its close. In 1962 and 1963 he completed the Bernard Carr and O'Neill-O'Wherty cycles. These eight novels, plus the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, plus novels or parts of cycles, like *Gun-House Mystery* (1933) and *Ellen Rogers* (1941), plus a rash of critical-poisoned writings collected in numerous books, plus hundreds of short stories—judged all this work constitutes a career sufficient for most writers.

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Evans, Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates (Book Review, since the plate ceased to converge, the contemplation of the object enters the planar law.

Bare-Assed and Alone: Time and Banality in Farrell's A Universe of Time, the beam, especially in the conditions of social and economic crisis, homogeneously neutralizes the effective diameter

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