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Author
Isokawa, Katherine Osako

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The Surprising Times of the Modernist Novel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in
English

by
Katherine Osako Isokawa

2014
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Surprising Times of the Modernist Novel

by

Katherine Osako Isokawa

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Michael North, Chair

This project looks at representations of the daily newspaper in the modernist novel, focusing on the newspaper’s frequent role as the agent of shock, surprise, or discontinuity. My central contention is that time in modernist novels is not, as some have asserted, simultaneous. Moments of stoppage and sudden recognition predominate in the modern novel, and its uneven temporality challenges accepted accounts of how novel and newspaper readers imagine the nation based on simultaneous time. In answer to two lines of recent questions in modernist criticism: one about the role of shock and the other about the relationship of modernism to nation, this dissertation illuminates the alternative communities produced by non-simultaneous, surprising time in the modern novel.

I begin with a brief discussion of Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts (1939), a novelistic testament to the constancy of British village life against the shock of war that figures the newspaper as part of that shock. I then turn to Joseph Conrad’s The Secret Agent (1907), which contests the ground the novel has ceded to New Journalism by itself
staging some of the New Journalism’s terroristic assaults on readers. Chapter two looks at Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922), works that offer a version of nationalism that makes other times instead of other places simultaneous, undermining the imperial simultaneity of Greenwich Mean Time. My last chapter considers the Newsreels of John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy, which I will argue index Dos Passos’s increasing resistance to the rising tide of public relations. I argue that *U.S.A.* valorizes a common, anonymous American body over a corporate Americanism symbolized by simultaneous consumption. My coda considers Jennifer Egan’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), drawing a comparison between newspapers in the early twentieth century and social media in the early twenty-first.
The dissertation of Katherine Osako Isokawa is approved.

Jonathan Grossman

Louise Hornby

Irene Tucker

Michael North, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014
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VITA

2004  B.A. English & Comparative Literature, U.S. History
      Columbia College
      New York City, New York

2005  Dean’s Humanities Fellowship
      University of California, Los Angeles

2007  Summer Research Mentorship
      Graduate Division
      University of California, Los Angeles

2006-2010 Teaching Assistant
       Department of English
       University of California, Los Angeles

2008  M.A., English
      University of California, Los Angeles

2008  Dean’s Humanities Fellowship
      University of California, Los Angeles

2011  Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award
      UCLA Academic Senate
      University of California, Los Angeles

2011-2012 Dissertation Year Fellowship
      Graduate Division
      University of California, Los Angeles

2012-2013 Dissertation Research Fellowship
       Department of English
       University of California, Los Angeles

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

“Detonating the Novel: Forms of Shock in Conrad’s The Secret Agent.” Paper presented
 at The Louisville Conference on Literature and Society After 1900, February 2014.

“Defoe’s Captain Singleton and the Oriental Tale Ascendant,” Paper presented at the

“The Motor’s Come to Stay: Motion and Perspective in Howards End.” Paper presented

“Writing Your Way to the Ph.D.” Invited talk presented at:
Universities of California at San Francisco and Los Angeles (2007-2014)
University of Texas at San Antonio (2012-2014)
California State University- Long Beach (2012)
For her generation, the newspaper was a book…
Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*

Two scenes of reading in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1939) illuminate my epigraph, and by extension, my dissertation’s central question. In the first, old Mrs. Swithin spends two leisurely hours in bed reading an “Outline of History,” becoming so deeply absorbed in the work that she cannot differentiate the maid who enters the room with the tea tray from the mastodons, iguanodons, and mammoths in her book (7). This kind of literary absorption and transport is completely unavailable to another reader. Isa Oliver, a generation younger than Mrs. Swithin, considers everything in the library from “Keats and Shelley; Yeats and Donne” to “Eddington, Darwin, or Jesus” without finding what she is looking for: “What remedy was there for her at her age – the age of the century, thirty-nine – in books?” (14). Here, books have curative properties – as an analgesic soothes a toothache, so a book could transport Isa from her father-in-law’s ribbing (14). But Woolf presents Isa’s reading and Mrs. Swithin’s reading as the opposites of each other. Finding nothing in the library, Isa concludes: “For her generation the newspaper was a book” (14).

In the second scene of reading, the inability of newspapers to substitute for books comes into discomfiting focus as Isa picks up the *Times*. There she reads of a woman assaulted by a group of soldiers: “That was real; so real that on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall; through the Arch the barrack room; in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him about the face, when the door (for in fact it was a door) opened and in came Mrs. Swithin carrying a hammer”
Isa’s reading is “real; so real” (15), that is, she is not “thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly” like her husband’s aunt but instead actually seeing the entire horrifying scene from the *Times*. For both Lucy Swithin and Isa Oliver, the experience of reading blurs the bounds between text and life. But Isa’s reading is more shocking, more difficult to assimilate into the experience of everyday life: for Mrs. Swithin to see the maid as a mastodon is just an imaginative flight, but the scene of rape in the barrack room flashes into Isa’s consciousness unbidden. Woolf restages this intrusion throughout *Between the Acts*: as the novel ends, just hearing the paper crackle in Bartholemew Oliver’s hands elicits this sudden interpolation: “The paper crackled. … The girl had gone skylarking with the troopers. She had screamed. She had hit him. … What then?” (147). Isa’s reading experiences consist of living the newspaper, being subject to its recurrent shocks, its assault on the senses. In Woolf’s novel, a book locates a reader in time, but a newspaper creates a disorienting experience of time.

My dissertation investigates how the modernist novel, by 1939, arrived at this point, and what solutions it offered to the disorienting experience of reading the modern paper. It asks why newspapers so often appear in the novel as ruptures, and what the modernist novel does to stabilize these ruptures. To answer this question my dissertation examines representations of the daily newspaper in novels by Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, and John Dos Passos, all published between 1907 and 1936. I track a variety of novelistic reactions to the incursions of the daily news in order to argue that the modern novel buffers these shocks in a variety of ways, not necessarily as a purely oppositional reaction to the newspaper but in order to claim for itself some of the newspaper’s power to surprise. At stake here, I am arguing, is the modernist novel’s representation of
newsreaders as a distinct community, and the modernist novel’s attempts to, through its own form, correct or amend that community.

The comparison that Woolf draws between Mrs. Swithin’s and Isa’s reading becomes particularly interesting in light of the novel’s alignment of the reader’s space with national space. The remoteness of Pointz Hall, where Between the Acts takes place, can be measured in a reader’s units, not a surveyor’s: “For as the train took over three hours to reach this remote village in the very heart of England, no one ventured so long a journey without staving off possible mind-hunger, without buying a book on a bookstall” (12). One measures the journey not just by hours, but also by the necessity for books – that is, the space from London to “the very heart of England” seems to require a book, not a newspaper. Between the Acts is itself an attempt to imagine England itself through a work of art – both through Miss La Trobe’s play, which begins with a little girl stepping out and declaring “England am I,” and through Between the Acts itself, which ends by implying that the village life the novel presents is itself the play.

Critics have tended to disagree, though, over exactly what kind of England Between the Acts is offering. Having locating the real-life source for Between the Acts’s central pageant, Melba Cuddy-Keane emphasizes the source material’s praise for the audience members who stayed put throughout the pageant, despite the very real danger of bombs. Even as sirens wailed, “the play went on” (xxxvii), the newspaper source reports, and Woolf’s version of this scene similarly celebrates the dignity of everyday life in the face of “pettiness, infidelities, prejudice, greed, and a disturbing undercurrent of violence” (xxxix). By contrast, Marina MacKay reads Between the Acts as part of a middlebrow “rebranding of Britain” that undermines our current critical reassessment of
Woolf as a leftist writer (23), arguing that the novel’s valorization of rural England was part of “the search for a serviceable Englishness to send across the Atlantic” to enlist the United States on the Allied side (25). And Jed Esty sees *Between the Acts* as an example of late modernism’s “anthropological turn,” that is, its interest in Englishness that begins to replace the insistent binarism of home/abroad, metropolis/colony that Esty attributes to high modernism. The pageant play in *Between the Acts* is a confrontation with “a national history increasingly cut free from its moorings in colonial modernity,” a civic ritual that prevails over “the universally significant but privately rendered mind” (17).

Like these readings of *Between the Acts*, this dissertation seeks to articulate a few ways for the modern novel to represent collectivity, and to name some of the forms that collectivity might take. My dissertation contends that the modern novel represents collectivity by foregrounding interactions between plots, examining the way different plots collide with each other or repeat each other, and it goes on to consider the effects that such coincidences have on these characters and these plots. Because different plots correspond to different characters, focusing on the means by which plots coexist is also a way of discussing the ways that fictional characters coexist. In *Ulysses*, for example, Leopold Bloom’s plot continually collides with others in a way that highlights the multi-plot novel’s power to represent a community – asking what its insiders, outsiders, and constitutive exclusions are.

The modernist novel uses representations of the newspaper as the site for asking and answering such questions. Throughout the works I discuss, the novel provides a model for a different kind of multi-plot narrative than the newspaper. As Alex Woloch writes, every novelistic character has dual destinies, namely “his or her fate as an implied
person within the plot or story-world itself and his or her fate as a potential narrative site of attention with a precarious, contingent, and always dynamically developing space in the narrative discourse” (293). Woloch calls the opposition between realism and modernism “the most entrenched partition in the history of the novel” (322) but asserts that “the referential dimension of the implied person… within the larger construction of character-space” remains important through that transition. This is because, as Woloch explains, novels of both centuries address the questions about “distribution, instrumentality, and stratification” that are central to the dynamics of nineteenth-century character-space (322). I am arguing here that the distribution of narrative attention has consequences for the novel’s ability to portray collectivity.

When looking at the newspaper as a multi-plot narrative, my readings are grounded in the important styles and developments in journalism of the day, such as the so-called New Journalism that changed British reporting at the end of the nineteenth century. Such developments help contextualize modernist authors’ responses to the incursions of time and invasions of the newspaper. Each chapter of the project focuses on a different kind of disruption to the supposedly smooth fabric of novelistic time. But what these disruptions have in common, despite their ostensible differences – in Conrad, it is terrorism, in Dos Passos, it is publicity, in Joyce it is the imposition of English temporality

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1 See David S. Landes’s horological history *Revolution in Time*, especially 304-7, for a discussion of how standard time emerged in different nations. The United States established time zones in 1883, and the prime meridian was marked at Greenwich in 1884 (304).
**Imagining the nation**

Almost every critical consideration of newspapers in the modern novel eventually circles back to the powerful and durable thesis of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1982). Anderson argues that the parallel structure of the daily newspaper and the multi-plot novel help readers to conceive of the relationship between protagonists who, without being able to see each other, can understand themselves as part of a whole – in fact, as he pithily puts it, the structure of the multi-plot novel is “a complex gloss upon the word ‘meanwhile’” *(IC 25)*. This whole, as Anderson writes, is the imagined community of the nation. A reader of newspapers and multi-plot novels cannot possibly meet every other member of her nation, but this reader can still have “complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” because these forms have modeled it for her *(IC 26)*.

My goal here is to suggest that the modernist multi-plot novel works differently than this oft-cited model from *Imagined Communities* would have it. In so asserting I am in good company – in 1998’s *The Spectre of Comparisons*, Anderson nuances some of his earlier arguments, writing that part of the project of early modernism was itself to “transcend or disrupt ‘homogenous, empty time’” *(335)*. Certainly the staggered temporality of knowledge in Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*, and Stephen’s and Bloom’s parallel plots in *Ulysses*, to name just a few, all break up homogenous, empty time. My focus here is instead on the idea that novelistic plotting can exemplify “steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.” As the example of *Between the Acts* suggests, newspaper clippings can invade the minds of novelistic characters. *Between the Acts*’s Isa Oliver cannot relegate the story she reads in the *Times* into an
unseen “meanwhile” because of how visceral it is, and the other fictional newspapers that I’ll discuss in this project are similarly striking.

In the novels I discuss, newspapers are so full of shocks, accidents, and disjunctions that they lose their ability to surprise, allowing novelists to claim the power to shock through narrative twists, sudden identifications, and changes in narration – in short, defiantly novelistic techniques. In other words, I argue here that the modernist novel represents its own temporal rhythms as estranged from those of the newspapers. Scenes in which characters read the paper, or the inclusion of newspaper forms within the novels themselves are places for modernist writers to encourage readers to read both the novels and the news differently. My project demonstrates that the realization of shared time in these novels occurs in a way more aptly described by “suddenly” than “meanwhile.”

Among the most interesting revisions of Anderson’s account of the way that print capitalism underlies ideas of nationality are those that focus on, as I have, the difficulty of capturing simultaneity. In some cases, the difficulties are technological – as Trish Loughran explains in The Republic in Print, the material circumstances under which the American colonial writings she studies were conceived, written, and received display “profound non correspondence and nonsimultaneity” (9). For example, a eighteenth-century newspaper could not be expected to print equally fresh news from Massachusetts, New York, Montreal, Grenada, and London all at once (11). For Loughran, then, the newspaper actually presents the nation’s “sense of scatteredness, or dispersion across-space” even as it presents “simultaneity-across space” (11).
In “International Whiggery,” Irene Tucker points out that Anderson does not differentiate the way the newspapers work “among citizens of a single nation” from “the connectedness and mutual obligation produced in newspapers among different nations” (689), leading him to articulate an idea of national culture as “omnipresent and inescapable.” Against this, she poses the works of mid-Victorian historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose writing, with its emphasis on language’s power to constitute, not just represent, political institutions and acts, offers a model of writing as “insistently diachronic, transforming the world it engages as it unfolds” (695). With this version of culture in mind, Tucker suggests that the late Victorian novel in particular is better understood as “implicitly international” (696), that is, taking for granted the independent movement of persons, languages, and pasts that we see in, for example, *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891). The latter, for example, is populated by “characters who alternately lose track of, cast off, and find themselves pursued by their own elsewhere lives” (697). This characteristic highlights the ability of a diachronic account to include things that happened “elsewhere.”

Fredric Jameson sees simultaneity as a post-war, postmodern version of time that replaces “older habits of clock time” (“The End of Temporality” 707). The “end of temporality” of his article’s title refers not to the exhaustion of time as a way of understanding the world but instead to our new, post-war inability to see ourselves classically, fate-bound, possessed of a distinct past, present, and future. Instead, we embrace simultaneity aggressively – as Jameson points out, even our televised news programs have news tickers at the bottom supplying yet more news (“The End of Temporality” 707). Where diachronic time permitted the “security of the ego or the
unique personal self,” synchronic time renders the self “anonymous,” no longer affiliated with any “identifiable biographical self or private destiny” (“The End of Temporality” 710–12). Taken together, these challenges to accounts of nation that put simultaneity or synchronic time at their center suggest that nation, while still imagined, might productively be re-imagined in different temporalities.

“Sudden holes in space and time”

The adverb “suddenly” itself pops up innumerable times across modernist fiction: about to leave her family home to take a governess position, Pointed Roofs’s (1915) Miriam Henderson longs “suddenly” to be gone, and just as “suddenly” wishes to stay after visiting the little church (Richardson 74). Like Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield foregrounds changes in interior states by emphasizing their suddenness. In “Bliss” (1920), the narrator describes Bertha thus: “you are overcome, suddenly by a feeling of bliss—absolute bliss!—as though you’d suddenly swallowed a bright piece of that late afternoon sun and it burned in your bosom” (145). I seek here to distinguish between the kinds of suddenness common to modernist representations of fictional consciousness and the suddenness that comes from the intrusion of another plot – or what the narrator of The Secret Agent calls “unexpected solutions of continuity,” the “sudden holes in space and time” that result from being unable to track the locations of other characters (62).

In Suddenness, Karl Heinz Bohrer credits Kierkegaard and Nietzsche with noting that “the sudden” is “a central perceptual category of modern consciousness” (45), and goes on to add his own definition of the sudden: “an expression and a sign of
discontinuity and nonidentity, as whatever resists aesthetic integration” (vii) or that which constitutes “a denial of the continuity of temporal consciousness” (39). Sue Zemka, however, refers to the valorization of suddenness as an unthinking acceptance of “precisely those historic forces that are often objects of critical suspicion – technological shock, economic commodification, and sacralized violence” (14) and calls for a re-situation of the moment within the technological and economic conditions it came from (2).

In trying to re-contextualize shock, I follow the good example of Adam Parkes, whose A Sense of Shock puts discussions of literary impressionism, which often focus on the aesthetic and explain impressionism solely as in terms of modernist psychology, back into touch with the historical circumstances surrounding them (x). Parkes’ articulation of literary impressionism includes “achronological narration, limited point of view, centers of consciousness, multiple narrators, and the intensely visualized image” (ix), contesting the association of this style with “authorial desire for an elite cultural space” or avoidance of the political. Zemka, on the other hand, writes that Time and the Moment is sympathetic with other recent work that recovers “an aesthetic of slow or uneventful time” (11)- it “shares in the suspicions of epiphanies, climaxes, and sensations” and would rather “reestablish the importance (in literary history and culture generally) of slow, uneventful, perhaps meditative time” (11).

My project lies somewhere between these engagements with suddenness – it focuses neither on cataclysmic shock nor on uneventful time, but instead on smaller shocks. I see the modernist novel as embracing regular surprises, shocks that are already part of the fabric of everyday time. As Conrad writes in The Secret Agent, “Murder is
always with us. It is almost an institution” (25). Such surprises aren’t, say, habitual, but they are to some extent assimilated into the everyday. So my question now becomes: if the sense of modernist time I’m tracing is about serial, minor shocks and peculiarities, instead of simultaneous anonymity, in what way can we say that the modernist novel helps us conceptualize the nation?

**Varied affiliations**

My effort to illuminate modernist conceptualizations of community that transcend the nation and the role of the print media in construing them has led me to these particular works regardless of where they or their authors came from. It is true, though, that the three writers I treat in depth here had vexed national affiliations: Joseph Conrad was born to descendants of Polish nobility in present-day Ukraine, into a mixed ethnic society where writers wrote – as he eventually did – in different languages than their native ones (Meyers 89). James Joyce left his native Dublin at the age of 22, but still wanted to give the city to the world through *Dubliners*, and later through *Ulysses*. And though John Dos Passos was born in Chicago, he spent much of his childhood in Europe, and some of the war years there as an ambulance driver. At least in his early days of left-wing political radicalism, he did not feel much at home in America.²

A heightened attention to the complicated nationalities of these authors can help us attend to representations of nation within their works- that is, one never imagines

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² See *The Best Times* 166-8. Though Dos Passos’s father, John Randolph Dos Passos, authored the extremely xenophobic tome *The Anglo-Saxon Century* (1903), the son was sympathetic to outsiders like Sacco and Vanzetti, recalling in his memoir that his partial Portuguese heritage had sometimes marked him as “a wop or a guinea or a greaser” (166).
one’s nation in total isolation from other nations. One cannot, for example, separate
Leopold or Molly Bloom’s time consciousness from their constant references, whether
spurred by advertising or by the ringing of the angelus, to the Orient. Similarly,
England’s idea of itself in *Between the Acts* encompasses Bartholemew Oliver’s imperial
fantasies: he dreams of himself as “a young man helmeted” (13), and when his daughter-
in-law speaks to him he blames her for “destroying youth and India” (13).

Another element that helps put these three writers into conversation is their shared
status as great chroniclers of their respective cities: the London of Conrad’s *The Secret
Agent*, the Dublin of Joyce’s *Ulysses* and the Manhattan (and Hollywood) of Dos
Passos’s *U.S.A*. The antagonism between the city and the collective forms of
consciousness I have been describing rings as true for Conrad’s London as it does for
Joyce’s Dublin. Raymond Williams likens the disconnection between characters in
*Ulysses* to the disconnection between city-dwellers, who search in myth and history for a
unified past: “The only knowable community is in the need, the desire, of the racing and
separated forms of consciousness” (245).

By considering the novels in this dissertation together, I hope to illumine a
small part of what Genevieve Abravanel calls the surprisingly unexplored space of
British and American literary relations during the modernist era. Abravanel writes that
most transnational approaches to modernism fall into two camps: they either triangulate
Anglo-American literary relations by introducing a third literary tradition or a third
country, or they rely on “the expatriate model of modernism,” which focuses on the
migrations of individual writers or the influence of disparate artistic groups on each other
(“American Encounters” 156). By contrast, *Americanizing Britain* retrained our attention
to the relationship between Britain and America themselves, especially to Britain’s reaction to evidence that the twentieth century was, indeed, going to be the “American century” (9).

Even though my project considers the spaces between Britain and America, it also hesitates around the category of nation itself. As I will discuss, Conrad, Joyce, and Dos Passos were more interested in the social dynamics inherent to the act of reading than they were in governmental or political forms of collectivity. My readings of these novels, therefore, do not focus exclusively on nation. Instead, they are about the novel’s ways of interacting with an increasingly connected world in which the illusion of collectivity comes from technological improvements (such as the lowered costs for printing newspapers in turn-of-the-century Britain). One of these technologies, of course, is the modernist novel. This project therefore participates in what Rebecca Walkowitz and Douglas Mao call the new modernist studies’ reconceptualization of nationality, a project which recognizes “a variety of affiliations within and across national spaces” (743). In Walkowitz and Mao’s conception, such a variety is produced partly by the influence of new information technologies (such as new journalistic forms) on modernist writing (742).

**Negotiations with the news**

These questions seem increasingly worth asking in light of a number of recent studies that have addressed modernism’s relationship with the news. Mark Morrisson’s *The Public Face of Modernism* (2001) looks at the implication of “mass media culture” within the high “art novel,” contending that modernist works were engaged in
“appropriating some of the institutions of the newly emerging mass publishing world to create counterpublicity, counterpublic spheres” (11). Patrick Collier’s *Modernism on Fleet Street* (2006), calls the newspaper the “most controversial medium of the age of modernism” (1), and through his discussion of T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Rose Macaulay and Rebecca West, outlines the range of reactions that modernist writers had to the press, focusing on such forms and issues as the press’s relationship to spoken and written language, book reviewing, privacy, and notions of the public and democracy (*Modernism on Fleet Street* 7). These studies exemplify in different ways what Sean Latham and Robert Scholes called “the rise of periodical studies,” a field enabled by the increasing online availability of all periodicals, not just newspapers (519).

However, my study departs from the works I have mentioned by treating novelistic representations of newspapers, even as it tries to articulate its discussion of newspaper form in terms of historical developments in the press. Newspapers were, I will argue, the ground on which the novel stakes out its historical and national claims, and identifies its difference and uniqueness. Hence, the project is not so much concerned with any reciprocal relationship between journalism and literature as it is with the way the novel engages with journalistic representations of time. In this, I look to Matthew Rubery’s study of the relationship between the nineteenth-century novel and the newspaper, *The Novelty of Newspapers* (2009). Rubery’s focus on the influence of individual journalistic forms: “the shipping intelligence, personal advertisement, leading article, personal interview, and foreign correspondence” (15) reveals his commitment to viewing newspapers not just as an alternate way of presenting content, but as a set of forms that the novel can write through and about.
David Rando’s *Modernist Fiction & News: Representing Experience in the Early Twentieth Century* (2011) takes up Walter Benjamin’s hope for a “revolutionary language that would provide counter-shock, thus reawakening experience,” and locates it in the modernist novel (11). *Modernist Fiction & the News*, like *The Novelty of Newspapers*, focuses on different sites of negotiation between the newspaper and the modernist novel, devoting a chapter each to five different sites of the modernist novel’s negotiation with the news: nearness, scandal, character, identity and war (17). Rando’s study is also more tightly temporally focused, looking mostly at works from the 1930s under the supposition that modernist texts from the first decades of the twentieth century “have not, for the most part… developed the consistent strategies of intimacy and difficult nearness that emerged as their mature response” (21).

By distributing my analysis over a longer period of time, and by considering texts from both sides of the Atlantic, I have intended to trace one line of thought as a prehistory to some of the texts that Rando considers. What I want to add to these accounts is a way of accounting for a narrative principle that pervades both the modern novel and its representations of the newspaper therein: and that is the experience of surprise. I actually see modernism providing continuity instead of shock, offering alternate structures that can contain surprise and showing that surprises are, if not expected, at least serial – part of a fictional world that anticipates shocks, and already has particular surprises inscribed in it as a way of absorbing them.

Chapter One addresses Conrad’s novel of domestic terrorism, *The Secret Agent*, arguing for the influence of the New Journalism on Conrad’s narrative technique. While the New Journalism came under fire as the “journalistic barbarism” that invaded its
readers’ minds and shocked them with indecent stories, Conrad espoused his own form of barbarism – a novelistic kind that used free indirect discourse to invade his readers’ minds. In his critical writings, some of which I will discuss in this chapter, Conrad constructs an aesthetics of surprise that provides the theory of what he puts into practice in *The Secret Agent*. If the New Journalism appalled readers by the intimacy it created between readers and characters, Conrad harnesses that power to further his political aim of reminding readers that faraway news could matter to them.

My second chapter looks at Joyce’s *Ulysses*, reading the “Aeolus” episode against the “Wandering Rocks” episode. I will describe the way that the former, which is set in a newspaper office, engineers personal associations differently than the latter, itself a miniature version of *Ulysses*. Against the dislocations of the “Aeolus” chapter, in which the newspaper is too serial to be simultaneous, the “Wandering Rocks” chapter offers reassuring repetitions. At stake in the way that “Wandering Rocks” constructs Dublin is Joyce’s attempt to evoke an Irish sense of time separate from Greenwich Mean Time, which Ireland adopted in 1916, between Bloomsday (1904) and the publication of *Ulysses* (1922). In *Ulysses*, Joyce evokes a ghostly and haunting community between Irishmen who have lived at different times in order to demonstrate the importance of unseen plots.

Finally, I turn to John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.*, which many critics of Dos Passos’s day saw as a response to *Ulysses*. I trace the parallel development of the Newsreel sections, which, despite their name, are composed of newspaper clippings, against the narrative development of a character named J. Ward Moorehouse. Moorehouse’s public relations work simultaneously makes readers believe the news is about them while
manipulating them from afar. U.S.A. depicts a United States ready to understand the nation as the collective force of its imaginings. However, because of Moorehouse’s influence, the American imagination is scripted by advertisement, movies, and celebrity gossip. Given this, the trilogy sets out to represent the nation while still maintaining a deep ambivalence about the autonomy of the individual in that nation. Tracking the way that the Newsreels devolve across these three novels indexes the narrative’s increasing resistance to the discourses of advertisement and celebrity, and my reading concludes by arguing that Dos Passos offers the compensatory symbol of the Body of an American – a collective of anonymous individuals writ large onto the body of one individual.

My coda looks at the legacy of mediated suddenness in the multi-plot modernist novel by briefly turning to Jennifer Egan’s 2011 Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Commentators on Egan’s work, including Egan herself, have been quick to note its indebtedness to Marcel Proust’s and James Joyce’s representations of time as well as its reflection of the early twenty-first century media landscape. The text’s most famous chapter is written in Microsoft Power Point, and its final episode, “Pure Language,” imagines text messages so brief that they would make 140 characters look positively prolix. Egan’s subsequent work, *Black Box*, was published on *The New Yorker*’s Twitter feed. In particular, I will look at the way *A Visit from the Goon Squad*’s posits Google as the preeminent form for knowing others, and ask what consequences for imagining community ensue from internet culture’s often surprising revelations. One hundred years after *The Secret Agent*, do we have a different way of talking about shocking experience, and can the novel help us do that?
On the morning of November 8, 1892, French anarchist Emile Henry carried an unusually wrapped bomb to the Paris doorway of the Carmaux Mining Company. The bomb killed five when, after having been brought to a local police station, it unexpectedly detonated. Investigators on the scene found that the bomb had been wrapped in an issue of *Le Temps* dated June 1, 1892 – five months before the explosion in the police station. Henry had chosen to use this particular edition as a sort of calling card. The June 1, 1892 edition, in fact, contained a report of his arrest for a different crime (Merriman 103–104). As Henry was already a suspect in the November police station bombing, the suspicious edition of *Le Temps* led to his identification, conviction, and execution. The paper’s presence established Henry’s authorship of what had previously seemed an anonymous act of frustration against the stratification of Parisian society. Thus, *Le Temps* was but one link in a complicated relay: by reporting on crime, it became material evidence in another crime. Though it seemed like an anonymous, ubiquitous item, it led to one specific man’s execution. Such links look like coincidences, but actually speak to the tenuous connection between reporting on terrorism and participating in spreading terror that is the subject of this chapter.

Two years after Emile Henry’s newspaper-wrapped bomb, his acquaintance Martial Bourdin died trying to detonate a bomb at London’s Greenwich Observatory in 1894. This incident became the basis for Joseph Conrad’s 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*. After its serialization in an American publication called *Ridgway’s: A Militant Weekly for God and Country* between October and November of 1906, *The Secret Agent* was heavily
revised and expanded before its 1907 publication. In 1910, Conrad serialized the novel again – in *Le Temps*, no less. Translated and abridged, it drew such readers as Claude Debussy, who described the final scenes thus: “It is described in the most calm and detached way and it is only after thinking about it that you say to yourself: ‘But these people are monsters!’” he wrote to a friend (qtd in Meyers). *The Secret Agent’s* plot is structured around a surprise, but then so is the novel itself. Verloc’s murder at the hands of his wife, the novel’s chief monster, is just as shocking. The novel’s repeated surprises, I will argue, reflect both its obligation to and its apprehension about the press and its ability to shock its readers.

This chapter asks how *The Secret Agent* handles the threat of the New Journalism. Though Mallios and others have addressed the way that representations of the newspapers in *The Secret Agent* present this shock, here I turn to the way that Conrad’s version of the novel form deploys surprise as a critique of the newspapers’ construction of anarchist threats. Newspaper reportage in *The Secret Agent* makes terror seem a viable, constant threat, and Conrad demonstrates that anarchists rely on this sense of time to control the public imagination. But Conrad also goes so far as to adopt elements of journalistic form in order to problematize them, ultimately faulting newspapers for their complicity with terrorism.

In doing so, I follow the lead of recent criticism on *The Secret Agent*, much of which focuses on whether *The Secret Agent* perpetuates the same shocks that it purports

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3 See also Wollaeger and Nohrnburg.
to censure. Peter Mallios demonstrates the importance of newspapers to the novel, holding that they construct terroristic threats instead of merely reflecting them: “Information… is an aggressive, colonizing, preemptive producer of ‘blunted sensibilities’ whose purpose is to explain the world in advance and render the experience of shocks to the social order impossible” (168). More recently, Adam Parkes has contended that Conrad’s impressionism “emerges from – and in certain ways remains inextricable from – the same cultural dynamics as the modern newspaper” (100). In “the impressionist’s fleeting sensation” Parkes finds echoes of the transience of news (101): “The press, Conrad suggests, may be nothing but an accelerated impressionism, or a medium for forecasting impressionism’s ineluctable fate” (101). According to Parkes, *The Secret Agent* demonstrates that readerly indifference is the result of overexposure to distracting forces (103), but I will focus instead on the readerly indifference that comes from keeping one’s distance from the news.

In this chapter, I will contextualize Conrad’s aesthetics of surprise within a discussion of the New Journalism. Detractors of these new forms and reporting techniques accused their practitioners of “journalistic barbarism,” or gross invasions of both their subjects’ and readers’ privacy. I will suggest that Conrad forwards a kind of “novelistic barbarism,” a form of surprising and sudden identification between plots. Conrad’s “novelistic barbarism” counters the “journalistic barbarism” that detractors of the New Journalism decried. I will focus on the two most shocking moments in *The

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4 For another approach to *The Secret Agent*, see Jonathan Arac, “Romanticism, the Self, and the City: *The Secret Agent* in Literary History,” which reads the novel an attempt to re-integrate “motive and consequence and feeling” into the “quintessential shock, the explosion at Greenwich” (84).
Secret Agent, and the way that narrative technique heightens them. Both of these shocks – the first being the revelation that Stevie is the Greenwich Observatory bomber, and the second being Winnie’s sudden murder of her husband – both prominently figure newspapers. In The Secret Agent, both newspapers and novels refuse to allow those they describe to proceed unaware of each other. In particular, the novel’s narration uses free indirect discourse to invade a character’s consciousness just as the newspaper might invade his privacy, and in doing so demonstrates how quickly characters can go from anonymous to identifiable. The Secret Agent offers its own public, one that exists in uneven time, and in doing so suggests the centrality of surprise to the modern novel’s conception of the public it represents and the public it speaks to.

Journalistic barbarism

In The Soul of London, Ford Madox Ford writes: “You cannot in London read a book from day to day, because you must know the news, in order to be a fit companion for your fellow Londoner” (The Soul of London 134–5). Not only does Ford make it clear that knowledge of the news makes you a Londoner, a resident of the national epicenter, but he also points to the problem that The Secret Agent sets out to answer: what is the point of books – or more particularly, the novel – when the newspaper is the public reading sphere’s currency? Though they were obviously both authors, Conrad and Ford were aware that certain books could do very little: the protagonist of their very peculiar 1901 novel The Inheritors is himself an author “uniformly unsuccessful… absolutely unrecognized” (14) and therefore seen as “the portrait of a man—of a man who has been dead—oh, a long time” (114). Indeed, the novel’s villain – the power-hungry Duc de
Mersch – requires a newspaper – not books – within in his nefarious portfolio, and thus adds a paper called *The Hour* to his All Round the World Cable Company and Pan-European Railway, Exploration, and Civilization Company. The very name of the paper demonstrates that the imaginative control of time and space is key to control of the public.

Ford and Conrad’s equation of the public and the reading public is a natural one given the vast expansion of British newspaper readership at the end of the nineteenth century. The reduction of prohibitive taxes (on stamps in 1836, penny newspaper stamps in 1855, and paper in 1861) led to an efflorescence of journalistic activity, and one historian called Fleet Street’s increased productivity the greatest source of London’s influence over the entire nation (Jones 87). At century’s end, the halfpenny *Daily Mail* had a circulation figure of nearly a million, a figure that speaks to several shifts from the start of the nineteenth century, when even *The Times* had an average circulation of under 7,000 (Rubery, *Novelty* 8).

Aled Jones writes that the most pressing question raised by the expansion of Victorian newspaper readership was whether “the press reflected or created public opinion” (87), a question of particular import when the subject is terrorism, as we will see. Other critics concur, writing that the press attempted to increase dependence on itself as a means of insuring its own survival. However, editor Cowen’s description of the public created by the news takes a more sinister turn when he writes that the newspapers are “as if the penny post sent letters open that all might be read by all” (qtd in Jones 49). Cowen’s characterization shifts our attention from the rise in newspaper readership to the

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5 See Mallios 158-161.
way in which the expanded reach of journalism reconfigured ideas of publicity and privacy.

Such questions about impingements on the domestic sphere were part of the discussion around the New Journalism, whose boosters and detractors saw it as a major shift in journalism in the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century. However, some critics now credit the New Journalism for drastically increasing circulation rather than pioneering any truly new forms. But at the time, the New Journalism was seen as imparting what proponent T.P. O’Connor called “a more personal tone” in the shape of new investigative reporting techniques and forms like the interview (361–362). *The Secret Agent* is full of such newspaper stories, but as part of his critique, Conrad takes the “personal tone” to its logical extreme. In the novel, the newspapers’ attempts to make eyewitnesses of their readers are all presented as extreme invasions of bodily integrity and privacy. Winnie, for example, cannot forget a report about a hanging that records the exact length of the condemned man’s drop. The phrase feels as if it had been “scratched on her brain with a hot needle” (196).

This focus on journalistic embodiment highlights the aptness of O’Connor’s metaphor for the New Journalism’s approach: “Statesmen are not ciphers without form or blood or passion. Their utterances and acts are not pure intellectual secretions” (361–2). The very details that energize dry news reports are the same “blood or passion” that invite absolute, even bodily, identification. This invasion of privacy needled some readers. One American printer’s journal sharply criticized the “journalistic barbarism” which gave the press license to invade formerly sacred territory, and an English paper reprinted the same piece without comment: “One may as well live with open doors and
windows, or have repeating speaking tubes leading from every room into the street that all who desired might listen ” (qtd in Jones 136). Tellingly, the incursion is all the worse because it intrudes on domestic space, dramatizing what Karen Chase and Michael Levenson refer to as “the double rhythm of Victorian domesticity… its daily obscurity and sudden notoriety” (17). The developments of the New Journalism demonstrate how publicity could trouble the distinction between individuals and community. It also showed that the threat of publicity could accompany the supposed democratic widening of the journalistic audience.

**Intolerable visibility**

If Conrad shared the Professor’s fear about the London masses: “What if nothing could move them?” (61), he might have been pleased at the extent to which contemporary reviewers were shaken by his novel. “Mr. Conrad’s pictorial gift is diabolical. He makes you see the whole scene. The moment of the crime is intolerably visible,” complained *The Star*’s unsigned reviewer (Sherry 198). Others found their vision similarly affronted. The *Guardian* reviewer writes that “We are shown the seamy side of a preposterous world,” and the *Glasgow News* calls Conrad’s “complete and impassive sincerity” a “dry north light which nothing escapes” (Sherry 195–197). The anonymous *Country Life* reviewer suggests that he and his kind object less to the presence of crime itself in fiction than to the direct presentation of that crime: “… what we call indecent is that the whole inception, process and accomplishment of a murder should have been planned as it were, on the stage and in sight of the spectators” (186–189).
By voicing the expectation that an unspoken code of novelistic decorum would keep Conrad from directly presenting the entire trajectory of a murder, the *Country Life* reviewer complains that the story has been brought too close. This is the very source of *The Secret Agent*’s power: the context of the killing (“inception… and accomplishment”) is the most shocking, for it is accomplished by that most domestic of characters, Winnie Verloc. It suggests that the surprise lies in the reaction of readers to scenes that they expected to happen elsewhere, in invisible paragraphs that begin with “meanwhile.” Instead, *The Secret Agent* imposes these scenes onto their fields of vision.

The reviewers’ outrage at seeing these murders serves as the background for Conrad’s contention in *The Secret Agent*’s “Author’s Note” that he meant only to tell a story, not to gratuitously shock his readers. But his collaborator, Ford, seemed to have other ideas, writing that he agreed with Conrad that “the one quality that gave interest to Art was the quality of surprise” (*Personal Remembrance* 202). Ford’s definition of surprise takes up the very categories of domestic and public that *The Secret Agent* interrogates. He likens surprises to news that can interrupt the dreariness of, say, small talk with one’s neighbor or the squabbles one has with one’s teenage daughter. Thus, the “interest” of “Art” corresponds to its ability to disrupt one’s quotidian routine, again aligning art with the shocking and invasive power of the news.

The “Author’s Note” focuses on Conrad’s shocked reaction to news of the bombing, suggesting that surprise is central to the very genesis of *The Secret Agent*. But it is not just the story of the bombing that surprised Conrad into writing. Conrad’s “Author’s Note” emphasizes that he was compelled to write because two different stimuli corresponded: Ford told him of the bombing, and it reminded him of a remark by Sir W.
Harcourt. The report of the bombing elicits a strong reaction – “extreme surprise at this unexpected piece of information kept me dumb for a moment” (230), but Harcourt’s complaint to an official that “your idea of secrecy over there seems to consist of keeping the Home Secretary in the dark” – led to another sudden, intense reaction. “There must have been, however, some sort of atmosphere in the whole incident, because all of a sudden I found myself stimulated,” Conrad writes (231). “Atmosphere” itself is more surprising than the surprising event, and here context fails to assimilate the bombing into a wider field of experience. Instead, it offers unexpected connections of its own. A singular event may not shock as much as the unexpected relationship between two individually surprising events does.

Conrad’s aesthetic of surprise demands this emboldening of things once hidden. In an “appreciation” of Henry James written in 1905, Conrad defines art as “evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising” (“Henry James” 13). The unseen takes a few forms in Conrad’s description of James. It lays in the shadows and secrets that James’s characters, with their finely and extensively rendered minds, do not inhabit (18). It is also what mankind, engaged always in the “earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality” does not see except in James’s fiction (18). Conrad also praises the capacity of James’s prose to give, even when The Ambassadors is over, “the sense of the life still going on… even the subtle presence of the dead is felt” (19). What Conrad admires about James is his ability to evoke that “sense of the life still going on” – in other words, to maintain the illusion that other plots go on behind readers who may only be concerned with the quotidian.
Conrad more directly addresses journalism in “Autocracy and War,” written concurrently with The Secret Agent, and the essay bemoans the limitations of the individual reader’s point of view. The problem is the same as that identified by the New Journalism – the coldness of journalistic writing fails to engage its audience – but here “temperament,” or re-embodies a voice or a story, can be equally deleterious if it keeps readers from looking beyond their own experience or identification with an event. Conrad writes of reading newspaper reports from the Russo-Japanese War: “An overworked horse falling in front of our windows, a man writhing under a cart-wheel in the street, awaken more genuine emotion, more horror, more pity, and indignation than the stream of reports, appalling in their monotony, of tens of thousands of decaying bodies tainting the air of the Manchurian plains” (“Autocracy and War” 84). Walter Benjamin makes a similar distinction in “The Storyteller,” where he remembers the Villemessant of Le Figaro saying that, to the citizens of Paris, “an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid” (88). Both decry the myopia of contemporary newsreaders by contrasting their intense interest in local occurrences with their removed attitude towards faraway ones.

The Secret Agent criticizes its characters for their intense and exclusive attention to the domestic. The events that empty “the humble abode of Mr. Verloc’s domestic happiness” (111) are “a domestic drama” (163) featuring a “thoroughly domesticated” protagonist (186), and the house on Brett Street is “in all essentials of domestic propriety and domestic comfort a respectable home” (143). Outside of the home, Conrad’s characters are cast into a much more public milieu: Soho, for example, is “at the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets” (157) This description demonstrates
that actions outside the home can come back to trouble Victorian domesticity, both on the local and international scale. *The Secret Agent*’s threat is less tangible – it is nothing less than forceful, omnipresent information.

In the oft-cited preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad writes that art’s duty is to convey the “subtle but invincible, conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts,” connecting “the dead to the living and the living to the unborn” (“Narcissus” xlviii). To do so, Conrad’s art prioritizes the immediate, even the shocking: “To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life is only the beginning of the task” (“Narcissus” xlix). In other words, art takes place when a shared sense of time halts. Interestingly, Conrad poses art as the opposite of work – the artist’s task being “To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth” (“Narcissus” li). It is not new to state that modernist art shocks its audience, but Conrad’s example points out that shocking art can relate individuals to the group. According to this preface, the goal of Conrad’s fiction is to connect characters by making visible what had previously been occluded. It dispenses with any idea of anonymous simultaneity in favor of the sudden revelation of commonality. *The Secret Agent* in particular pulls this off by using an invasive point of view borrowed from journalism.

Conrad’s insistence in the “Author’s Note” that follows *The Secret Agent* that “there had been moments during the writing of the book when I was an extreme revolutionist” (232) seems at odds with a letter to a friend in which he insisted that he wrote on anarchy because such stories sold better than his sea stories (“To J.L. Garvin. 11 January 1906” 300). *The Secret Agent* was preceded by two other short stories on
anarchist topics, and Conrad wrote to his publisher, J.B. Pinker, that his “mind runs very much on popularity just now” (“To J.B. Pinker. 18 May 1907” 439). Just as Conrad refused the *Outlook*’s invitation in order to distance himself from the “practical” side of things, he disavowed any insinuation that *The Secret Agent* had any political meaning. In a letter to his friend John Galsworthy he writes: “I had no idea to consider Anarchism politically—or to treat it seriously in its philosophical aspect” (“To John Galsworthy. 12 September 1906” 355) and to Pinker he adds that the story musn’t be “misunderstood as having any sort of social or polemical intention” (“To J.B. Pinker. 1 June 1907” 446). Instead, he wanted to treat a popular subject “from a modern point of view” (“To J.B. Pinker. 18 May 1907” 440). With this background on the late Victorian press and on Conrad’s views of it in mind, we can turn to the question of how newspapers in *The Secret Agent* nuance the “subtle but invincible, conviction of solidarity” that Conrad upholds.

**Terrorized readers**

The anarchists of *The Secret Agent* aim to garner attention by baffling journalists instead of attacking a public place. Vladimir dismisses more obvious plans such as assassinating a chief of state or bombing a church because “Every newspaper has ready-made phrases to explain such manifestations away” (24). The police, too, see the anarchists as threats to public opinion, not threats to the lives of citizens. Inspector Heat’s disgust at the Professor articulates the sizable stakes of such a debate: “It was all foolishness, but that foolishness excited the public mind, affected persons in high places, and touched upon international relations” (72). Terrorism in *The Secret Agent* relies on
the supposition of simultaneity. It assumes that unseen events can have profound effects when they are reported in the papers, yet as Conrad writes in “Autocracy and War,” readers’ interests rarely extend beyond their windowsills.

Given Conrad’s skepticism of the newspapers’ limitations, it is curious that characters in *The Secret Agent* are like Ford’s Londoners: they see themselves as invisibly linked to other readers of the paper, and the paper helps them locate themselves in time. The most asocial characters are the ones who cannot read the news fast enough. Stevie’s slower development is evident from the mismatch between his child-like trustfulness and young man’s body, but also from his glacial reading pace: “‘He’s always taking away those newspapers from the window to read… We don’t get rid of a dozen numbers in a month,’” complains Winnie (44). The anarchist Michaelis is asocial precisely because he has lost the sense of time that the constant rhythm of the newspapers engenders. Even though Verloc and Stevie departed for the Observatory from his house, Michaelis is last to learn of the bomb attempt: he “never looks at the newspapers” (221). He seems to have lost all sense of time: he “could not tell whether the sun still shone on the earth or not” (89). Distanced from a consistent temporal rhythm, Michaelis even loses the ability to write his own autobiography: he has “no logic” because he is unable to “think consecutively” (221). The novel blames the newspapers, in addition to Verloc, for failing to inform Winnie of her brother’s death: “The newsboys never invaded Brett Street. It was not a street for their business” (150).

The discourse of the press is so pervasive that many of *The Secret Agent*’s characters see themselves as subjects of the news that they read in the paper, or use the paper to understand what has happened to them. After reading in an anarchist paper of a
police officer tearing off the ear of a recruit, Stevie is ruined – as Winnie puts it, “I
couldn’t do anything with Stevie that afternoon. The story was enough, too, to make
one’s blood boil” (44). Reacting with “blind docility” and “blind devotion” to such
stories, Stevie is a completely embodied reader. His inability to separate the stuff of the
story from either its reportage or his own reaction to it foreshadows Winnie’s and
Inspector Heat’s reactions to actual traumas, whose interpretations become blurred with
the representation of similar events in the press. By reporting on terrorist crimes and their
punishments, the papers themselves become instruments of terror. Thus, Conrad’s
journalistically constituted characters serve as critiques of the way that newspapers
personalize their words.

Another consequence of this changed journalistic tone is that the solitary
experience of reading becomes part of a public, disciplinary discourse. For example,
Winnie’s phenomenological sense of time is subject to the verification of the newspapers.
Winnie “seemed to have heard or read that clocks and watches always stopped at the
moment of murder for the undoing of the murderer,” which explains why time seems to
have stopped after she murders her husband (197). Only the narrator controls the story
here, discrediting Winnie’s lapses with dry free indirect comment: “As a matter of fact,
only three minutes had elapsed from the moment.” If New Journalism suggests that
publicity consists of myriad disruptions of privacy, this report of Winnie’s thoughts takes
this one step farther by suggesting that all actions have already been written by the
papers. The collapse of simultaneous time requires a moment of terrible particularity,
whether that is the “undoing” of Winnie as the murderer, or of Stevie as the accident
victim.
The dangerous potential of readerly identification as a means of explaining the news is even clearer when Inspector Heat encounters Stevie’s remains. Vladimir wants Verloc to stage an incident that the papers cannot explain, so Inspector Heat’s immediate recourse to a remembered newspaper story when encountering direct evidence of the accident directly rebukes Vladimir’s notion that certain things can evade representation. Even though *The Secret Agent* obscures the actual scene of the bombing, in Inspector Heat’s mind the accident becomes more frightening because it coalesces with other related horrors: “He remembered all he had ever read in popular publications of long and terrifying dreams dreamed in the instant of waking; of the whole past life lived with frightful intensity by a drowning man as his doomed head bobs up, streaming, for the last time” (65). The fact of the bombing is not as frightening as the possibility of imagining oneself into it. The scene suggests the terrifying consequence of a reading practice dependent on sympathy, which the narrator describes as “a form of fear” (65): one cannot read the papers in this novel without becoming subject to their shocks and discontinuities. For the reader, the potential to identify with or even imagine the mental report of a man whose death is imminent indicates the narrative contortions and impossibilities that Conrad attributes to the papers. Moments dilate into “long and terrifying dreams,” and time no longer passes in a uniform way.

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad dramatizes the inevitable prolepses or analepses that are written into other forms. The newspaper report explains things only belatedly, and the police reports can be disastrously wrong about the future. In terms of any temporal lag between event and representation or representation and event, Conrad tries to make his fiction as close as can be to the Professor’s “perfect detonator”: “I walk always with my
right hand closed round the India-rubber ball which I have in my trouser pocket. The pressing of this ball actuates a detonator inside the flask I carry in my pocket. It’s the principle of the pneumatic instantaneous shutter for a camera shutter for a camera lens” (50). Importantly, Conrad emphasizes that such an action isn’t actually instantaneous – the Professor tells Ossipon that there is a twenty-second lag. Terrorism depends on the quick, if not instantaneous, relationship between event and representation. It has a new place, the novel argues, in the media ecology born of quick visual impressions: the illustrated evening paper, “intolerably visible” descriptions, and the camera.

**Reporting on the Verlocs**

While the newspapers in *The Secret Agent* imply that everyone lives in the same present, just separately and simultaneously, the project of the metropolitan police is to account all at once for all of the city. This would not be possible without the kind of public time that the newspapers make possible. Inspector Heat insults the Professor by declaring that the police are “too many for you” (71), and one anarchist complains about the people he passes on a city street: “every other person an obvious ‘tec” (106). Even those that are not obvious “‘tecs” help extend the vision of the police. Against Verloc, Heat and his colleagues marshal the observations provided by a housekeeper (66) and a train porter alike (75). Heat goes so far as to claim that *everyone* is with him: “All the inhabitants of the immense town, the population of the whole country, and even the teeming millions struggling upon the planet, were with him—down to the very thieves and mendicants” (71). This massive and anonymous crowd is a fiction, as the novel demonstrates, and the newspapers participate in constructing it as such.
The novel’s police are confident in the efficacy of their surveillance, believing that they know all that happens in London “hour by hour” (63). Inspector Heat believes he can predict the future, thinking of the Greenwich Observatory attack: “He had affirmed that nothing of the sort could even be thought of without the department being aware of it within twenty-four hours” (63). Another anarchist holds that the police are in a position to give anarchists who did not participate in the bombing a “testimonial of good conduct” (58). Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner manifest what Mark Seltzer calls “spy mania”: “The realists share, with other colonizers of the urban scene, a passion to see and document ‘things as they are,’ and this passion takes the form of a fantasy of surveillance, a placing of the tiniest details of everyday life under scrutiny” (529).

The Secret Agent shows how the proleptic police report cannot achieve true simultaneity because it relies on small facts whose usefulness is quickly dispensed with. The speaking tubes that convey anarchists’ locations to the Assistant Commissioner, reassuring him of the city’s safety, are like snakes whose “gaping mouths seemed ready to bite his elbows” (72). Prey to the snakes’ insatiable appetite instead of the most avid consumer of their information, the Commissioner is enervated by the effort (72). As if he were “worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal,” he is able to move only his heavy-lidded, creased eyes (72). The narrator’s reminder of certain uncertainty acts against any aspiration to public, universal time regulated evenly by the police. But, despite all that the Assistant Commissioner learns from these tubes, he apparently cannot learn it soon enough to prevent the attempted bombing, which gestures
at Conrad’s critique of a policing system in which information quickly loses its ability to surprise.

From its opening scenes, which detail a generic day in the Verloc household as if from the eye of an observant detective, *The Secret Agent*’s narrative voice adopts this kind of surveillance. The comprehensiveness of the narrator’s account comes from the attempt to account for all bodies in space at all times as opposed to precisely rendered physical descriptions. The predominance of the verb “would” suggests the narrator’s familiarity with the workings of the household: at a patron’s entering the store, “Mr Verloc would issue hastily from the parlour at the back” or “it was Mrs Verloc who would appear at the call of the cracked bell” (4). Events in this description are those that happen “Sometimes” (4) or “from time to time” (8), or reports of what Verloc “generally did” (5). “Would” includes not only the most recurrent actions, but also the possibility that other ones might occur (Jones 136). This demonstrates that the privacy of the Verloc household depends on the existence of a public eye that can verify it. In this way, “spy mania” mirrors the “journalistic barbarism” that detractors of the New Journalism decried, invading domestic spaces and describing them to curious bystanders.

Inspector Heat believes that accounting for all of the anarchists at all times can prevent a bombing, and at times the novel itself takes up this impulse towards complete temporal accounting. Spy mania and journalistic barbarism require as full an account as possible, though completeness has a different meaning for the novel form. Elaine Freedgood argues that the realist novel attempts to neutralize perceived threats within Victorian society by representing these threats, which accounts for the realist novel’s drive towards comprehensiveness. The “human condition” that we take the Victorian
“Murder is always with us”

Verloc explains the largest surprise in the novel—Stevie’s death—as an accident, but even Verloc’s definition of accident is suspect. He likens it to “slipping on a bit of orange peel in the dark and breaking your leg,” but such an accident requires there to be an errant piece of orange peel, and a dark space (174). Unlike, say, being struck by lightning, such an accident has to happen to someone in order for it to happen at all, making the surprise the sudden identification of the victim instead of the accident itself. Hence Winnie’s shock at realizing, after Verloc’s death, that her act of “hazard” (193) has meant that she has become a murderer like her late husband: “The only murderer that would be found in the room when people came to look for Mr Verloc would be—herself!” (195). The role of “murderer,” like Verloc’s errant orange peel, exists in an abstract and threatening way somewhere beyond the character’s immediate consciousness, representing the potential for a public threat to disrupt the domestic sphere.

Terror in *The Secret Agent* is not necessarily about the existence of an abstract threat. In Conrad’s novel, terror involves reading the news with the understanding that the threat specifically applies to you: that is the news is no longer a blank, anonymous expanse. In *Terror from the Air*, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk describes terrorism as the “willingness and readiness of partners in conflict to operate in an expanded zone of warfare” (27). His example—World War I’s first chlorine gas attack, launched by
German soldiers on French Canadian ones in 1915 – demonstrates that a space previously thought to be neutral can become concretized and objectivized. Thus, the process of seeing the unseen central to Conrad’s aesthetics can also be described as “explication,” Sloterdijk’s term for what happens when a combatant “breaks open the implicits and transforms the harmless into a combat zone” (28), the process by which air “lost its innocence” (108).

This is in accord with Ford Madox Ford’s description of Conrad’s principle of plotting: “… that which happens in it must seem to be the only thing that could have happened … it must be inevitable” (Ford, Joseph Conrad 221). He and Conrad called this “justification.” The temporally anarchic structure of the novel suggests that it is about random accident, but this emphasis on “justification” emphasizes instead that the novel is about the forces that underlie a system of predictable coincidences. Mr. Vladimir, for example, declares that “Murder is always with us. It is almost an institution” (25). Throughout The Secret Agent, events that might otherwise appear surprising are presented as matters of course. The piano at the Silenus, for example, where the Professor and Ossipon meet twice, regularly breaks into song at unexpected times (25-48, 227).

Conrad takes up this idea of omnipresent risk by making his narrative itself a dangerous thing to be a part of. His characters are victim to their fictional circumstances and also to savage, ironic prose that constantly anticipates their demise. Dubbing this “the violence of thematization,” Mark Wollaeger writes that “characters are endowed with the illusion of autonomous existence only to be violently processed into expressions of a theme” (56). Among Wollaeger’s examples is the novel’s comparison of Stevie’s
mangled body to “an inexpensive Sunday dinner” in close proximity to Verloc’s beef dinner “laid out in the likeness of funereal baked meats for Stevie’s obsequies” (56).

Other images that hover close to the surface of the narrative are brought alarmingly to life, but what is particularly interesting about them is their seemingly arbitrary subject. Conrad writes of Mr. Verloc “Something wild and doubtful in his expression made it appear uncertain whether he meant to strangle or to embrace his wife” (144), even though Verloc is to be the victim, not the perpetrator, of murder at his spouse’s hands. And when a knife first appears in the novel, it is in Karl Yundt’s hand instead of Winnie’s: “When he rose painfully the thrusting forward of a skinny groping hand… suggested the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab” (32). While irony works on a temporal scale – with the audience’s knowledge preceding the characters’ knowledge – Conradian “justification” works along the axis of anonymity or identification. The surprise lies in sudden identification, not in full-scale destruction.

With this definition of “justification” in mind, Conrad’s seemingly off-hand vacillations in point of view come into clearer focus. Levenson reads the shifts from third to first person in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* as deployments of the more individualistic “temperament” that Conrad mentions in his preface. By highlighting the narrator’s presence, the novel insists that an individual point of view “effects the passage from event into sanctifying memory, from fact into consciousness ” (3–4, 10). And during Verloc’s walk across Hyde Park, the first-person narrator intrudes for the first and last time by likening Verloc’s expression to that of criminals and charlatans. “But of that last I am not sure, not having carried my investigation so far into the depths. …What I want
to affirm is that Mr Verloc’s expression was by no means diabolic” (10). The resonance between the personal nature of the New Journalism and what Levenson figures in *A Genealogy of Modernism* as a late Victorian turn to prioritizing individual experience suggests a new model for the public: one founded on readerly identification made possible by a voyeuristic reading practice.

*The Secret Agent* dramatizes this effect by making its narrator the agent of sudden acts of identification. The novel’s use of free indirect discourse to create an ironic effect allows for a sustained exploration of the influence of public discourses on private minds. This suggests that forceful representations of a character’s interiority are the narrative correlate to journalistic barbarism. After Heat’s declaration that the police always know where the anarchists are, the narrator shifts to the point of view of the “high official” he is speaking to: “His wisdom was of an official kind, or else he might have reflected upon a matter not of theory but of experience that in the close-woven stuff of relations between conspirator and police there occur unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time” (62). The narrator’s condescension to Heat criticizes the Inspector’s arrogance, as this privileged knowledge is not the narrator’s – it is Heat’s, though he is unable to apply it.

The certainty of these acts of terrorism is always paired in the novel with the expectation of anonymity, as the characters expect these acts to happen to someone else. Conrad writes of Winnie: “She was alone longer than usual on the day of the attempted bomb outrage in Greenwich Park, because Mr. Verloc went out very early that morning and did not come back till nearly dusk. She did not mind being alone” (a line recalled by the titles to Alfred Hitchcock’s 1936 adaptation of *The Secret Agent*, released as both
Sabotage and The Woman Alone). Because all characters believe they live in simultaneous anonymity, they rarely expect the news to happen to them. This instance of irony exemplifies the narrative shifts that characterize Conrad’s distinctive approach to novelistic time: irony and timing put off the realization that the public event has a very private import for Winnie. The most stirring and upsetting surprises in the novel are a result of the sudden conflation of the public and the private.

Ultimately, The Secret Agent concludes that anonymity is difficult, and that in this all-seeing press environment nobody can be part of the anonymous mass (hence the final description emphasizes, among other things, the Professor’s singularity: “like a pest in the street full of men” 227). The characters exist in a single house, or, as Conrad puts it, the encounter between the Professor and Heat is “a sudden meeting in a side corridor of a mansion full of life” (62). When the Commissioner encounters Mr. Vladimir at the Great Lady’s home, he is unsurprised: “He was thinking meantime to himself that in this house one met everybody sooner or later” (164). Compared to time for the police, which can be tracked “inch by inch and minute by minute” (63), time in the house of fiction passes in the comparative leisurely fashion alluded to by “sooner or later.” This throws into relief the uneven, syncopated rhythm of novelistic time. The characters’ “sooner or later” refers to the deferred identification and sudden recognitions that characterize human relationships when mediated by omnivorous publicity.

In describing Chief Inspector Heat’s entrance into the Great Lady’s home, the narrator maintains the anonymity of Heat’s fellow guests only to disrupt it suddenly for both Heat and for the reader. Describing the assembled only in the most vague terms: “two thick men whose backs looked old, and three slender women whose backs looked
young,” the novel stints even further on description when adding that the hostess is accompanied by “a man and a woman” (164). There is no hint here that the man is Vladimir, no delayed visual decoding process the likes of which Ian Watt identified as one of Conrad’s strains of impressionism (176–177). When the man turns out to be Vladimir, the focalization shifts abruptly to Vladimir’s attempts to eavesdrop on Heat’s conversation: “Mr Vladimir, affecting not to listen, leaned towards the couch… Mr Vladimir asked himself what the confounded and intrusive policeman was driving at” (164). In taking up Mr. Vladimir’s idiom, the narrator is but one link in a relay of intrusiveness. He overhears Vladimir overhearing Heat, who is, after all, recounting second or third-hand information.

**Sudden identifications**

*The Secret Agent*’s novelistic barbarism connects characters to the extent that the narrator can invade their minds. The public they experience is the exposure that the narrative provides. In other words, the novel is less interested in the narrator’s ability to comment on characters than it is in the way that narrative technique can mediate the boundaries between inside and outside, private and public. As with the scene in the Great Lady’s home, anonymous public personages (policeman, anarchist) suddenly come into focus as the very characters whose innermost thoughts we are well acquainted with. This effect is a matter of narrative technique, and an opportunity to examine Conrad’s difference from his realist predecessors. Here, the dynamic between narrator and character seems of the most interest. The narrator of *The Secret Agent* still comments on his characters from a distance, using a shift in point of view to indicate approval or
distaste. However, his narrative dilations or constrictions emphasize the distance between the characters’ private thoughts and their public presence.

This allows the novel to interrogate the difference between identification and anonymity. In a deserted alleyway, the Professor sees Heat from a distance: “The only human being making use of the alley besides the Professor, coming stalwart and erect from the opposite direction, checked his swinging pace suddenly” (62). Though Heat has been previously introduced (to the Professor as well), the description maintains the detective’s anonymity, presenting him from a distance and then eventually as a disjointed set of visual impressions. This, by contrast to the coincidence in the Great Lady’s house, is an example of Watt’s delayed visual decoding: the narrator presents Heat’s facial features one by one, heightening the sense of surprise when their possessor is identified. “The eyeballs glimmered piercingly. Long drooping moustaches, the colour of ripe corn, framed with their points the square block of his shaved chin” (62). If the Professor is to be believed, he encounters Heat once before and once after he meets Ossipon at the Silenus to discuss the bungled bombing (52, 62). Events repeat themselves, and time slows around these moments of identification, which challenge the smoothness of novelistic time.

After conveying this scene from the Professor’s point of view and indulging through description his “haunting fear of his sinister loneliness,” the narrative suddenly shifts to describing the man solely as a stranger might perceive him. As the Professor walks away from Heat, the narrator’s sympathy for the Professor dissipates: “It was a sad faced, miserable little man who emerged from the narrow passage… He walked with the nervous gait of a tramp going on, still going on, indifferent to rain or sun in a sinister
detachment from the aspects of earth and sky” (71). Similarly, on the street the Assistant Commissioner’s anonymous aspect is also striking, partly because it is denationalized. It seems to lack content despite our having deeply inhabited his consciousness in earlier scenes. He “might have been but one more of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about there flitting round the dark corners” (108). These shifts dramatize narrative’s ability to disrupt notions of identification and anonymity.

*The Secret Agent* belittles a character’s individual experience yet presents him as part of anonymous, collective experience. This provides additional support to Wai Chee Dimock’s claim that novelistic time is fractal and irregular. For Dimock, time in the novel is composed of individual events that, because they are repeated, gesture at the universal. Dimock writes of *The Portrait of a Lady* that the failure of Isabel Archer’s marriage may be “commonplace and unremarkable” on the scale of pre-national and national time, but its slightness does not keep it from being “an entry nonetheless, to a large fact. Scale enlargement here undoes human singularity and preserves it through that undoing” (88). This alternation between subjective (“commonplace”) experiences and the larger facts of universal experience is exactly what Conrad is working with here, and his use of surprise illuminates such moments. It suggests that shock alone has the power to make these entries to the aforesaid “large fact.”

This shift from anonymous character to identifiable character works the other way as well. Out and about in the city, where they are no longer ensconced in domestic circumstances, Conrad’s characters become public, their outlines blurrier. Their points of view become less stable. Institutions join the narrator in watching Winnie and her mother go to the almshouse in a rickety horse-cart: “all visual evidences of motion became
imperceptible. The rattle and jingle of glass went on indefinitely in front of the long Treasury building” (115). To emphasize this estrangement, the narrative delves into comparisons completely foreign to the characters’ idiom or consciousness. It reduces Winnie and her mother to a state of addled helplessness: as they ride through the streets, “the effect was of being shaken in a stationary apparatus like a medieval device for the punishment of crime, or some very new-fangled invention for the cure of a sluggish liver” (13). The very domestic drama of Winnie’s bringing her mother to the poorhouse turns into a collective, anonymous interrogation of movement in the time between trains and automobiles.

In front of the Treasury, “time itself seemed to stand still” for the cart’s passengers (115), an example of private time being mediated, disrupted, even broken by public, institutional time. The surprise that predominates in The Secret Agent has a more thoroughgoing purpose than merely shocking, thrilling, or titillating its readers. It accomplishes, somehow, what the attempt on the Greenwich Observatory cannot by demanding a pause, disrupting the illusion of anonymous simultaneity. Surprise, lying as it does in the sudden collapse of public and private categories, points to a way to revise our idea of how this novel and those like it create a public for their readers.

Reading of the death of a “Lady-Passenger” from a cross-channel ship, Ossipon easily identifies the passenger as Winnie, but does not make the extra connection of realizing that he stood in reflection on the river at the very moment of her death. Only the novelistic narrator can illustrate this, specifically via the kinds of temporal modifications that Conrad’s novel pioneers. The newspaper claims that, after boarding the ship at midnight, Winnie soon (“the next the stewardess knew”) left the ladies’ cabin, only to be
found sitting on the deck. “Less than five minutes later,” she went overboard (225-226). This makes sense of the narrative’s having lingered so long on Ossipon, crossing the bridge after deserting Winnie on the train:

The river, a sinister marvel of still shadows and flowing gleams mingling below in a black silence, arrested his attention. He stood looking over the parapet for a long time. The clock tower boomed a brazen blast above his dropping head. He looked up at the dial… Half-past twelve of a wild night in the Channel (21).

When standardized time, the very thing Verloc’s act of sabotage had struck against, asserts itself, it brings together two plotlines that the newspaper had ostensibly kept separate. A mysterious woman drops overboard, an anonymous man takes a walk – and the novel puts these events into striking and even causal relation.

In tracing the increasing distance from individual point of view that Conrad’s narrative technique takes here, we might finally turn to Ossipon after crossing the bridge. “Later on the towers of the Abbey saw in their massive mobility the yellow bush of his hair passing under the lamps. The lights of Victoria saw him too, and Sloane Square, and the railings of the park” (219). These London landmarks watch Ossipon closely, which almost makes the scene seem like a critique of the constant state of police surveillance in the city. But Ossipon, at this point, is not a private citizen under police surveillance – because his actions precipitate Winnie’s suicide, he is something of a public figure. The narration in this scene suggests that the public is narrating Ossipon’s movements. “His
robust form was seen that night in distant parts of the enormous town slumbering monstrously on a carpet of mud under a veil of raw mist.” But the language in both of these descriptions: the synecdoche of “yellow bush of his hair” and the triple metaphor of slumbering town, carpet of mud, veil of mist – suggest not the bare bones, detail-scarce prose of the newspaper but the heightened artistry of the novelist. At the moment when Ossipon is most deeply related to others, his actions most directly causing the actions of others, he is most acutely the product of Conrad’s novelistic barbarism.

This brings us back to Emile Henry’s copy of Le Monde, to the newspaper whose seemingly arbitrary assortment of stories actually provided the dangerous connective tissue that makes terrorism possible. This is different than the usual reading of the newspaper as a figure for fragmentation, containing as it does a group of seemingly unrelated stories. The wider argument about the illuminating limitations of the newspaper-novel analogy might be as follows: the novel’s flexibility exceeds that of the newspaper. The newspaper, limited by its nominal objectivity, remains theoretically at the level of the public. The novel, by contrast, modifies its narrative voice in order to present the coincidences that most emphasize the intersections of the private and public. Thus, perhaps novelistic time can be seen not as a gloss on “meanwhile” but instead as a gloss on “suddenly,” reflecting the instantaneous time of news and its effects on the novel.
CHAPTER TWO
Turn Now On: *Ulysses’s* National Consciousness

How seriously should we take Leopold Bloom’s declaration that “A nation is the same people living in the same place… – Or also living in different places” (272)? The characters assembled with him at Barney Kiernan’s laugh, mocking the idea that they could base something as powerful as the nation on something as transient as where they live. But Bloom’s definition does not actually require a nation’s members to be “living” in the same place. For James Joyce, defining nation thus was a way of addressing the problem of Ireland’s dwindling population at the start of the twentieth century. In a newspaper essay, Joyce puts the population of Ireland itself at four million, with the number of “Irish scattered throughout the world” at twenty million (“Ireland at the Bar” 146). He additionally claims for Ireland the achievements of the Irish abroad, an accomplished number that includes leaders in science, politics and the military, and the agents of British imperialism in South Africa, India, and Afghanistan (“Saints and Sages” 124). The power of Bloom’s definition lies in its ability to substitute the temporal specificity of simultaneously “living” for the geographic rootedness of “the same place.” It also squares with Joyce’s rejection of the Irish Revival’s cultural nationalism, insisting that Ireland’s salvation lies in improving current conditions to avert further emigration as

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6 Perhaps those assembled also laugh because they do not like being told what their nation is by someone whose own national origins they find suspect. Bloom is born of an Irish mother and a Hungarian Jewish father who converted to Protestantism, and has been baptized thrice, but many of the novel’s characters refer to him as “the Jew.” This is why the citizen is so accusatory: “What is your nation if I may ask?” (272).
opposed to celebrating Ireland’s past achievements (“Saints and Sages” 123–4). Bloom’s focus on the simultaneous activity of all the members of the Irish nation, unified into a singular present, compensates for the dispersal of Ireland’s “Wild Geese.”

But Emer Nolan cautions us against a over-quick valorization of a modernist present against a nationalist past (xii), asking us to pay greater attention to characters in “Cyclops” that are not Bloom. The talk and jokes of the men in the bar have a political valence that can cut through the platitudes about nation presented in “Cyclops” (118–9). Rebecca Walkowitz also reads this scene from “Cyclops” as favoring neither the Citizen’s “continuous and heroic national past” nor the narrator’s “preference for ideas that require no thought and no elaborate conversation,” nor even Bloom’s “utopian platitudes.” Instead, the “living, contested present” of the conversation in Barney Kiernan’s is the true site of Ulysses’s discussion of nationalism (75). Consistent with Walkowitz’s project of drawing our attention to “critical cosmopolitanism,” or the way that literary works present differing versions of transnationalism, this emphasis on

7 Helpful recent criticism on Joyce’s representation of Ireland has tended to pay careful attention first to the forms and structures of British imperialism, and then to Joyce’s negotiations with or subversions of them. Such critics have largely heeded Attridge and Howes’s warning in Semicolonial Joyce against searching simply for a work’s complicity or resistance with imperialism (7). Paul Stasi updates this refusal of “the false binary of authenticity and collaboration,” arguing that for Joyce, a truly free Ireland “finds a way to turn a reliance on received traditions into the production of new ones” (94). Other compelling readings include Michael D. Rubenstein’s location of a “weak utopia” in “Ithaca,” where representations of civic finance like tax-paying signal an embrace of “normalcy” and the restoration of a city partially destroyed by the British response to 1916’s Easter Rising (297). Amy Feinstein convincingly argues that the “Circe” episode satirizes anti-Semitic rhetoric that associated Jewish mercantilists with or identified them as agents of British imperialism (46). Also see Mottolese for attention to Joyce’s use of ethnographic conventions in “Wandering Rocks.” Joyce, Mottolese argues, demonstrates that ethnography, like colonialism, “can only freeze and fragment the cultural object that it tries to represent” (259).
contestation summons the present vividly without extinguishing the possibility that the past can be part of it.

Bloom’s definition of nation as a consideration of those “living” points to *Ulysses*’s efforts at portraying the nation through simultaneity, through creating a shared sense of the present. Here I rely on Gerald Prince’s definition of simultaneism: “the concurrent rendering, through intercutting and interweaving, of two or more sets of situations and events occurring simultaneously” (89), and focus on two episodes of *Ulysses* where such intercutting and interweaving is most prominent. “Aeolus,” *Ulysses*’s seventh episode, is set in the offices of the *Freeman’s Journal* and *Evening Telegraph*, and features newspaper headlines that spontaneously interrupt the conversations and incidents there. These two episodes, the seventh and the tenth in *Ulysses*, can be seen as versions of each other. As R. Brandon Kershner notes, “Aeolus” is a rehearsal for “Wandering Rocks,” with both episodes focusing on neither Bloom nor Stephen exclusively but instead on a wider range of characters and subplots (111). Another important ground for comparing these two episodes is that both foreground the work of the written word in evoking a sense of a shared present. That is, there is a kinship between the Aeolian newspapers and the multi-plot form of “Wandering Rocks,” which critics have described as *Ulysses* in miniature. Read together, these chapters stage two different models by which the written word can engineer personal associations.

So a supposition of simultaneity lies at the heart of one of modernism’s most famous definitions of nation, and indeed, in discussions of the modernist novel more
generally. However, in this chapter I will argue that neither “Aeolus” nor “Wandering Rocks” conveys the kind of simultaneity that unites different places into a unified present. “Aeolus” depicts the newspaper’s stories colliding with each other, interrupting each other, and generally challenging the notion of newsworthiness in general. In “Wandering Rocks,” Joyce emphasizes a recursive form of time that is not beholden to the fast pace of the daily press. Here intercutting and interweaving unite different times into a more or less unified present, celebrating the small acts of deferral and repetition that truly constitute “living” in the same place. Doing so creates unexpected juxtapositions between plots, and these juxtapositions suggest that the interactions between citizens of a nation are more complex than Bloom’s emphasis on “living” side-by-side implies. Thus, *Ulysses* affirms the novel’s power to evoke a community different from that which the press provides.

Before turning to “Aeolus” and “Wandering Rocks,” I look more generally at representations of collectivity in *Ulysses* to establish what is at stake in Joyce’s evocation of a non-simultaneous Irish temporality. I argue that Joyce presents simultaneous activity through images of uniformity, forced regularity, and lost individuality, all of which *Ulysses* associates with the tyranny of British imperialism and Catholicism. I then look at Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), in particular, “A Painful Case” and “The Dead,” two stories in which the protagonists are subject to incursions of plots from the past. I will argue that in

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8 Stephen Kern characterizes the experience of simultaneity as “a major change in the experience of the present” (67–8). One consequence of this shift, he adds, “was a growing sense of unity among people formerly isolated by distance and lack of communication” (88). Such a present “embraced the entire globe and included halos of the past and future” (88).
*Dubliners*, Joyce uses elements of surprise to undermine his characters’ sense that they are merely “living” alongside each other at the same time. *Dubliners* presents similar shocks to its readers as well, manipulating the pace of its characterizations so that we, as well as Joyce’s characters, find ourselves intensely drawn into or shut out of various plots. Approaching *Ulysses* with these effects in mind helps reveal Joyce’s creation of a different kind of novelistic nation, one in which imagining the simultaneous and anonymous activity of others is impossible.

**The clock and the timeball**

Despite Bloom’s hope that a shared sense of time can unite a scattered nation twenty million strong, *Ulysses* is full of nightmarish scenes of simultaneous collectivity. The public house in “Lestrygonians,” for example, offers no conviviality or companionship: in “Cyclops,” the assembled drinkers mock Bloom as a group, and while the musical “Sirens” unites its characters’ minds polyphonically, the “Jingle jaunty jingle” of Blazes Boylan’s approach haunts Bloom (215). “Lestrygonians,” set at the Burton, is the most visceral in its rejection of collectivized existence. Joyce emphasizes the diners’ lack of individuality: they are but “[m]en, men, men” “wiping wetted moustaches,” trying to “chewchewchew” “gobfuls of sloppy food,” “gurgling soup” and “halfmasticated gristle” (138). Simultaneously performing the same action, these characters become as sticky and undifferentiated as their food. What antipathy “Lestrygonians” evidences for the necessary processes of human life is deepened by the presence of so many characters, and in a dizzying turn, Bloom imagines the future as a “communal kitchen,” with everyone from Parnell’s brother to the provost of Trinity
“trotting down with porringers and tommycans to be filled” (140). Although everyone from “women and children” to “cabmen priests parsons fieldmarshals archbishops” alike waits in the communal kitchen, the overall effect is not one of camaraderie. Rather, surrounded by so much humanity one cannot help but “[h]ate people all around you” (140).

_Ulysses_ also chafes at the simultaneity enforced by religious belief. Watching worshippers take communion, Bloom thinks: “Wonderful organization certainly, goes like clockwork. Confession. Everyone wants to” (68). For Bloom, Catholicism is laudable for its efficiency, for its universal appeal. It is not, to his mind, a system of belief so much as an “organization.” “They feel all like one family party, same in the theatre, all in the same swim. They do. I’m sure of that. Not so lonely… Blind faith. Safe in the arms of kingdom come. Lulls all pain” (66). Bloom’s view of the worshippers “all in the same swim” recalls one of Stephen Dedalus’s hesitations about the priesthood: “To merge his life in the common tide of other lives was harder for him than any fasting or prayer” (_A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man_ 128). The “common tide” of humanity in “Lestrygonians,” so disgusting to Bloom, and the inconvenience of others, which strikes Stephen as more arduous than even the solitary mortifications of the priesthood, speak to Joyce’s general hesitation around conceiving of community through simultaneous action.

And even at his most optimistic about inclusion, Bloom is the most excluded. His definition of “life for men and women” as “Love… the opposite of hatred” (273) meets with a sharp retort in “Cyclops”: “Love loves to love love… Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly. … M.B. loves a fair gentleman… Li Chi Han
lovey up kissy Cha Pu Chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant” (273). The tongue twisting “Love loves to love love” mocks the slipperiness of a word that can be a proper noun, a verb, and a noun itself. Bloom champions love, but “Cyclops” itself undermines him by offering incongruous pairs that love each other. It includes the familiar (M.B. might stand in for Molly or Milly Bloom), foreign (Li Chi Han and Cha Pu Chow), and animal (Jumbo and Alice the elephants). Though Bloom may declare that love is life for men and women, the derisive response from those assembled proves otherwise. Even though Ulysses presents these characters in an unflattering light, their boorishness towards Bloom shows that his utopian ideas are far from coming to fruition. The universality that makes Bloom’s definition so appealing actually weakens it, demonstrating Joyce’s dismissal of universalizing rites or sentiments.

Furthermore, Ulysses demonstrates it can be difficult for members of the Irish nation to synchronize their movements with others when they quite literally live at different times. Bloom’s illustrative confusion between two methods of timekeeping on Dublin’s Ballast Office – the clock, which is wired to Dublin’s Dunsink Observatory, and the timeball, which drops at 1 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time – speaks to the problem of articulating a sense of Irish specificity on its own terms, as opposed to defining it based on its difference from England’s time. Because personal timekeeping was unreliable...

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The clock on the Ballast Office is also importantly the basis for Stephen Dedalus’s explanation of an epiphany in Stephen Hero. While he and his fellow Dubliners might pass the clock day after day and look at it only to read the time, the epiphany – that “sudden spiritual manifestation” – comes from actually seeing it instead of reading it: “Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany” (98). Like Conrad’s attempts to “make you see,” Joyce’s epiphanies represent dilations of the present moment, shifts in the individual’s perception of being.
Bloom’s watch stops in “Nausicaa,” and we only know that because Cissy Caffrey, who also does not know the time, asks him for help), the clock and the timeball would have been universal landmarks for Dubliners in 1904 (Gifford and Seidman 160). Bloom’s confusion, therefore, draws attention to the two landmarks and their difference. He initially assumes he should look to the timeball for the correct time, but has to correct himself later: “Now that I come to think of it that ball falls at Greenwich time. It’s the clock is worked by an electric wire from Dunsink” (137).  

The small difference between Dunsink and Greenwich time epitomizes the paradox of Ireland’s national position. Ireland has its own sense of time, but Irish time is derived from its difference from England’s time, a constant reminder of its imperial status. For modernist writers, Adam Barrows writes, Greenwich Mean Time was “a powerful symbol of authoritarian control from a distance and of the management of diverse populations” (101). While Joyce’s inclusion of the twenty-five minute lag between Dublin and London was a matter of historical accuracy (in 1916 Ireland adopted Greenwich Mean Time), it also privileges an Irish relationship to Irish time.

Some of Joyce’s ideas about Ireland can actually be inferred from his works’ discussion of nations other than Ireland. In Ulysses, Irish representations of America can be read as critiques of British imperialism in Ireland. Genevieve Abravanel makes a compelling case for an “American Joyce” who saw the United States as “a model of postcolonial existence for Ireland, as the site of imaginative identification with a nation freed from the constraints of the British Empire” (154). Abravanel notes that the

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10 For a discussion of parallax in this scene, both as a scientific and a linguistic principle, see Barrows 116-118.
recapitulation of the English language’s evolution in “Oxen of the Sun” ends with American English, and suggests that Joyce saw an affinity between American English and his own project of productively deforming the English language. Ireland’s “imaginative identification” with America is complicated, though, and Joyce makes clear the role the press plays in creating those identifications.

In “Wandering Rocks,” Father Conmee reads reports of the General Slocum fire on New York’s East River, which claimed the lives of 1,024 of its 1,342 passengers: “In America those things were continually happening.” (182). Crisis in America is the order of the day, that is, it is “continually happening.” The phrase undermines itself, for how can something continuous also enjoy the constant novelty implied by “happening”? But imagining America as the site where accidents are serialized is less ridiculous given Conmee’s source: the daily newspaper. Mr. Kernan, who discusses the accident with a barkeep in “Wandering Rocks,” seems to have read the same news reports as Father Conmee: “Terrible affair. … Terrible, terrible! A thousand casualties. And heartrending scenes. Men trampling down women and children. Most brutal things. … Spontaneous combustion. Most scandalous revelation” (196-7). These clipped phrases sound like they come from a newspaper, and their brevity makes sure that disaster is also “continually happening” in Kernan’s description. Because the newsboards and newspapers report the news, and news is usually bad (no newspaper reports that a country’s citizens safely go through their lives day after day) a naïve reader will find the paper full of nothing but bad news.

By portraying America as a place where terrible things are “continually happening,” Joyce echoes a critique he made years before about press coverage of
Ireland: “Abroad, Ireland is not spoken of except when some trouble breaks out there such as that which has set the telegraph lines jumping in the last few days. Skimming over the dispatches from London… the public conceives of the Irish as highwaymen with distorted faces, roaming the night with the object of taking the hide of every Unionist” (“At the Bar” 146). Reading only of the riots in Belfast and protests over anti-grazing measures, “the public” gains a distorted view of the Irish and the causes they fight for.

“Ireland at the Bar” specifically faults the press for oversimplifying Irish actions. Joyce likens the press to an English interpreter at the murder trial of Myles Joyce, who translates the elderly, Irish-speaking defendant’s long-winded responses as either “yes” or “no” (“At the Bar” 146). If the press sets the language for imagining other places, Joyce demonstrates, only the most oversimplified visions would be possible, and Joyce’s fiction reveals the cost of stripping away the nuances of Irish language and life.

“Wandering Rocks” is full of the quieter, more slowly-moving difficulties that do not make the news: the one-legged sailor begging on the street, the Dedalus sisters pawning their family’s possessions, Cowley hiding from the moneylender’s baliffs, young Dignam’s memory of his father’s undignified death.

Ulysses attempts to unify the “Wild Geese” without enforcing the absolute sameness of lockstep simultaneity. In doing so, it constructs a sense of Irish national temporality based on Irish time’s small but important difference from Greenwich Mean Time. Even more than that, Ulysses sets out to convey a sense of national temporality that doesn’t presume that events we cannot see are proceeding smoothly. Louise Hornby’s discussion of “Proteus” and Eadweard Muybridge’s motion studies offers one such helpful paradigm for temporality. Vision in “Proteus,” Hornby writes, as in Muybridge’s
photographs, exhibits a “stuttered rhythm” that exemplifies the “the tense of photography: the imperfect tense that points both to continuity and to its pointed interruption by a repeated instant” (60). Rather than labeling each photograph, or each moment of “Proteus” as arrested time, Hornby cites Ann Banfield’s phrase – “this was now here” – to establish that “Proteus” shows serial stops along a continuous whole, stops that were themselves fleeting instances of the present moment (54). “Proteus,” therefore, is a series of instants, offering “a visual economy that thematizes interruption and arrest” (63).

If *Ulysses*’s multi-plot universe does not exemplify simultaneous continuity, as I have been arguing here, perhaps its narrative economy instead “thematizes interruption and arrest” (Hornby 63). Returning to Prince’s definition of simultaneism, with its focus on intercut, interwoven sets of situations that occur concurrently, helps to identify moments of interruption and arrest as the punctuation between sentences formed by plots. To make this point less abstractly, I turn to *Dubliners*, which refuses to allow its characters to exist merely “living” alongside each other. Each of my examples from *Dubliners* centers on some instance of interference or intervention between concurrent plots. Focusing on “A Painful Case,” in which a coincidental encounter between strangers leads to death, I will argue that Joyce implicates the newspaper as the agent of interruption and arrest. Before turning back to *Ulysses*, I will look at “The Dead,” which exemplifies the tendency of Joycean narrative to situate interruption between plots within a redemptive temporality of co-presence without imposition.

*Dubliners*’ painful cases
There is a tension in *Dubliners* between the thinness of these stories’ plots and the intensity with which their protagonists are characterized, and I will be suggesting in this section that Joyce is implicitly comparing the way a newspaper and a narrative express a story. “The Boarding House,” for example, centers on a confrontation that does not even occur in the story, focusing largely on the personalities of those involved. One such descriptive paragraph begins “Mrs. Mooney was a butcher’s daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman” (“The Boarding House” 56). Mrs. Mooney’s daughter Polly receives a similar treatment, but the idiom is different enough to emphasize the separation of their plots: “Polly was a slim girl of nineteen; she had light soft hair and a small full mouth” (57). One could easily imagine Mrs. Mooney describing herself in the narrator’s words (“I am a woman quite able to keep things to myself”), as the declarative statements that describe Mrs. Mooney’s temperament are quite different than the limply paired adjectives that describe Polly. This excess of identifying information bears out what another character, Mr. Doran, thinks as he ponders the consequences of his affair with Polly: “Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else’s business” (61). Thus, the richness of identifying detail that Joyce presents replicates Dublin’s density, demonstrating the novel’s facility with the granular level of detail that comprises “everyone else’s business.”

Before another *Dubliners* protagonist, the hapless Eveline, makes her final decision on the dock, “Eveline” has turned her into a familiar character, revealing in thirty minutes of story-time the lifelong habits of action and mind that have led Eveline to the point of running off to Buenos Ayres. Eveline’s thoughts span her entire life, though they pass in under an hour or so of story-time: the customs of her childhood (29), her
fantasies about the future (30), her regret at breaking her promise to “keep the home together” (33). “Eveline,” however, ends quite literally with a sudden lack of recognition: incapable of boarding the boat to Buenos Ayres with Frank, Eveline’s “eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (34). She presents her “white face… passive, like a helpless animal” (34), and seems a different person than the love-struck protagonist whose mind we occupied before. At the moment when Eveline’s life is most intensely a story, her consciousness is the most extensively foreclosed.

This paradox is at the core of “A Painful Case.” However, critics who have engaged with the story’s representation of newspapers tend to be more interested in the newspaper story that breaks the news of Emily Sinico’s death to Duffy, who had ended an intense but platonic affair with her four years earlier. Patrick Collier contextualizes the newspaper story within the public uproar about the increasingly lurid divorce court stories beginning to fill turn-of-the-century Dublin newspapers. Collier argues that the story, “DEATH OF A LADY AT SYDNEY PARADE: A PAINFUL CASE,” which includes lurid details about Sinico’s recent turn to drink and habitual crossing of the train tracks late at night, registers Joyce’s objection to an increasingly invasive press whose reporting enforced repressive social norms (122). Stephen Donovan, on the other hand, focuses on the analogy between the shock Duffy suffers while reading the paper and the discontinuous experience of a late nineteenth-century train ride, which he refers to as “the shock of the news” (31).

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11 See Donovan, “Dead Men’s News” 29-36, for a discussion of the relationship between train accidents, newspaper coverage of them, and journalistic form.
While both of these readings are compelling, I want to draw our attention not so much to the article “A PAINFUL CASE” but to Duffy’s experience of reading the article. Duffy’s most notable characteristic is his belief that he exists separately from other characters, as reflected by his choice of residence (“as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen” 103), his choice of restaurant and meal (“safe from the society of Dublin’s gilded youth” 104, with “the evening paper for dessert” 108) and his social isolation (his visits to his relatives are limited to Christmas and “escorting them to the cemetery when they died” 105). The doings of others are so extraneous to him that any report of them is but “dessert” (108). Duffy leads a fairly anonymous life, estranged even from himself:

He lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful side-glances. He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense (104).

Even as his friendship with Sinico progresses, Duffy “still heard the strange impersonal voice which he recognized as his own, insisting on the soul’s incurable loneliness. We cannot give ourselves, it said: we are our own” (107). Duffy’s isolation is so complete that he narrates himself impersonally, which makes the implication of his almost deliberately anonymous character in a sensational newspaper story all the more surprising.
The “shock of the news” doesn’t come from the subjects of the news exhibiting striking amorality, or from the papers presenting news in a startling fashion, but from the way that “A Painful Case” disrupts Duffy’s illusion of simultaneous anonymity. The *Dublin Evening Mail* story that tells of Sinico’s death possesses him bodily – as he is eating “his hand stopped. His eyes fixed themselves on a paragraph in the evening paper …” (108-109). The shock comes from feeling Mrs. Sinico threaten his carefully maintained isolation, even though she is dead: “As the light failed and his memory began to wander he thought her hand touched his. The shock which had first attacked his stomach was now attacking his nerves” (112). Not until Duffy absorbs these shocks does he begin to imaginarily engage with the shade of Mrs. Sinico: “She seemed to be near him in the darkness. At moments he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his. He stood still to listen. Why had he withheld life from her? Why had he sentenced her to death?” (113). The newspaper, once Duffy’s dessert, has now invaded his consciousness. No longer does the paper offer the assurance of simultaneous anonymity, instead, the supposedly “commonplace vulgar death” it reports locates and implicates Duffy in the very discourse he used to consider extraneous. The newspaper’s disjunctive shocks remind us, that as Duffy thinks, “we are our own.”

Emily Sinico emerges from *Dubliners* as a spectral reminder that plots from long ago or faraway can be closer than they appear. Indeed, when Mrs. Sinico reappears in *Ulysses* (like a number of other minor *Dubliners* characters) she occasions a strange reflection on Bloom’s part, one that suddenly unifies a number of disparate plotlines. After asking Stephen whether he knew Mrs. Sinico and being answered in the negative, Bloom stops himself from making what he knows is an “inchoate” statement
“explanatory of his absence on the occasion of the interment of Mrs. Mary Dedalus (born Goulding), 26 June 1903, vigil of the anniversary of the decease of Rudolph Bloom (born Virag)” (570). As an example of what Margo Norris, citing Gerald Prince, calls “the disnarrated,” i.e. parts of a narrative that name something that does not happen, Bloom’s decision not to articulate this awkward connection serves only to draw the reader’s attention to it (41). Sinico’s death synchronizes a number of plotlines through its novelistic presentation, through its role as a disnarrated utterance that reveals strange attractions between plots. Mary Dedalus haunts Stephen throughout the novel as Emily Sinico haunts Duffy throughout “A Painful Case,” and Sinico’s death has the air of a suicide, whereas Bloom’s father was explicitly a suicide. Thus, Joyce creates friction between plots that had previously existed in orderly, parallel relation to each other.

Like “A Painful Case,” “The Dead” revolves around an unexpected offstage death, a plot from the past that intrudes into the present. The toast that Gabriel gives at his aunts’ Christmas dinner emphasizes that memories of the past can be indulged in only as “a brief moment from the bustle and rush of our everyday routine,” as they are secondary to “living duties and living affections” (204). But those gone before are not so easily stricken from the present. In “The Dead,” they are woven into the fabric of everyday routine. They appear not as ghostly hands or unseen whisperers but instead as a natural part of the scenery of “The Dead.” The Misses Morkan’s home is filled with artwork from Gabriel’s elderly aunt’s school days (186), and decorated with a photo of Gabriel’s dead mother that evokes the past vividly for Gabriel – “A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage” (187).
Both the past and the future are latent in any moment of the present in “The Dead.” As he looks at Gretta’s sleeping face, Gabriel “knew that it was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death” (223), and upon reflecting on Aunt Julia’s performance of “Arrayed for the Bridal” Gabriel remembers seeing “that haggard look upon her face for a moment” (224), concluding “She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse… One by one they were all becoming shades” (224). Patrick Morkan’s horse represents not just a circular sense of time – it embarrasses Morkan by pulling his carriage in circles around a statue of King William – but also the way that the past is legible within the present. The horse only walks in a circle because he has been trained to drive Morkan’s starch mill (208). Thus, Joyce invents a model for simultaneous narration that relies not on synchronizing different places but on revealing the synchronicities that can draw plots together in the present.

For example, three of the most notable moments of interruption and arrest in “The Dead” originate from the same sound – a tapping on the window. In the story’s present, Gabriel’s “warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window” (192), and in the past, the sound of “gravel thrown up against the window” alerts Gretta to Gabriel’s presence (221). Thus, the eerie “light taps at the pane” that Gabriel hears at the end of “The Dead,” which are ostensibly snow, resonate with sounds heard before (225). These taps at the window actually unify the three seemingly separate plots whose coincidence provides both the conflict and the resolution of “The Dead”: Gabriel’s reluctance to give the toast at his aunts’ party, Gretta’s long-lost love, and the snow blanketing Ireland, falling “upon all the living and the dead” (225). Each of these plots undergirds the present, just as Gabriel sees the shadow of Gretta’s girlish beauty in her sleeping face and
the shadow of death on Aunt Julia’s. Indeed, when Bloom inverts a line from the burial service at Dignam’s funeral – “In the midst of death we are in life” (89) – he articulates what Gabriel does not learn until the end of “The Dead.” The mourners at Dignam’s funeral are life in death, but Gabriel and Gretta, with their “years of … dull existence together” seem to be dead in life (215).

So the sense of time in “The Dead,” as in “A Painful Case,” serves to bring back a ghostly sense of something else or someone else being there. The purpose of engineering collisions between plots is to show us that those ghostly presences are always there, just as hearing “The Lass of Aughrim” has a deep effect on Gretta Conroy. The same is true of the trains in “A Painful Case”: knowing that Mrs. Sinico died on the train tracks makes every appearance of the train thereafter more sinister. On his walk home after reading of Mrs. Sinico’s death, Duffy seems to encounter an unusual number of trains: “Now and again a tram was heard swishing along the lonely road outside” (112), and a little later “he saw a goods train winding out of Kingsbridge Station” (113). The train has always been there, but once Sinico’s plot arrests the smooth, separate progression of Duffy’s, the train leaves the background and becomes a recurrent source of shock. In other words, Joyce’s narrative machinations draw the unseen out of “meanwhile” and into the realm of “suddenly.”

“A COLLISION ENSUES”

“Aeolus” begins and ends near the tram station in front of Nelson’s Pillar, with the same trams that rushed about at the start of the chapter halted in short-circuit at chapter’s end. The episode begins with a list of tram names: “Before Nelson’s pillar
trams slowed, shunted, changed trolley, started for Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey, Clonksea, Rathgar and Terenure …”– and continues with enough names that the United Tramway Company timekeeper who “bawled them off” becomes hoarse (96). The inclusion of so many trams is a nod to readers familiar with those place names, and it emphasizes the activity of a system that by 1904 was “regarded as the most efficient and ‘modern’ in Europe” (Gifford and Seidman 128). The noise and movement also set the scene for the tumult of “Aeolus,” an effect which Joyce heightened by adding additional rhetorical figures before the episode went into the Little Review in October 1918 (Gifford and Seidman 635). Despite the bustle, the movement of the trains is orderly and above all, separate: “Right and left parallel clanging, ringing a double-decker and a single deck moved from their railheads, swerved to the down line, glided parallel” (96). Like Stephen and Bloom’s parallel plots, these trains run proximately but separately, and their near but failed collision is an important analogue for the way “Aeolus” treats Ulysses’s multiple plots.

“Aeolus,” however, is as much about stoppage as it is about constant motion. When it ends, the same tramcars (and again Joyce enumerates all of their final destinations in a list similar to the list at the beginning) “stood in their tracks… all still, becalmed in short circuit” (122). This reversal mirrors the false resolution of Odysseus’s trip home. As the Aeolian winds blew Odysseus off course when he was closest to home, so the activity and frenetic movement of the trams in “Aeolus” serves only to return them to Nelson’s Pillar, where they began. But the stopped trams also illuminate the importance of pauses or collisions between parallel plots. Joyce engineers such moments within another important system that has national reach – that of the daily newspaper. Set
in the *Freeman’s Journal* and the *Evening Telegraph* office, “Aeolus” is self-consciously about the nation, placing its action “IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS” (96). In this section, I will look at how the different plots of “Aeolus” are put together, arguing that sudden breaks in the sense that they are simultaneous are mediated by the kinds of motion and movement implied by the daily paper.

As Joyce researched *Ulysses*, newspapers offered a shape and a form for his knowledge of Dublin in 1904. Even before he began composing “Aeolus,” Joyce badgered relatives in Ireland for news. “Is there nobody in Ireland who will think it worth his or her while to make a bundle of any old papers that are lying about his or her house and send them to me? (“To Stanislaus Joyce. 18 October 1906” 182). That Joyce asked even for out-of-date papers suggests that his expatriated reading sought to appease an appetite for atmosphere, for a general sense of Dublin, as opposed to sating a genuine desire to keep up to date on the news. In his 1909 visit to Dublin, though, Joyce visited the offices of the *Evening Telegraph* (Ellmann 297), meeting editors and reporters who later became characters in “Aeolus.” For “Aeolus” itself, Joyce collected bits from a number of newspapers and magazines, including ones from June 16, 1904.12

In his decision to cultivate a sense of a place through the accumulation of its news, Joyce follows Ibsen, whom he greatly admired. A letter from Joyce to his brother favorably cites Ibsen telling an Italian interviewer “… you people can’t understand it properly” in reference to *A Doll’s House*, adding “You should have been in Norway

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12 For a fuller account of Joyce’s source material for “Aeolus,” see Kershner 88-9. See Majumdar for the claim that June 16, 1904 (the day Joyce met his eventual wife, Nora) was “as close as it could get to a perfectly ordinary day in the life of the contemporary Dubliner” (64).
when the Paris fashion journals first began to be on sale in Christiania” (“To Stanislaus Joyce. 25 September, 1906” 167). Both Joyce, living in Trieste and longing for Irish papers, and Ibsen’s Norwegian women longing for Paris fashion journals, find that print offers them entire other worlds. Joyce suggests that one can learn more about Norway from seeing Norwegian women react to Paris fashion journals than from, say, reading A Doll’s House in isolation, establishing a definition of nationality based more on contrast than on some innate national character.

However, throughout the start of the twentieth century Irish newspapers were becoming less synonymous with discussions about the nation than they were before. Patrick Collier writes that the Irish newspaper audience was fragmenting at the turn of the century, making it less likely that any two Irish citizens were reading the same papers. Ulysses is aware that newspapers no longer had national audiences: when Red Murray whispers to Bloom that William Brayden, editor of the Freeman’s Journal, resembles “Our Saviour,” Bloom wonders “[b]ut will he save the circulation?” (98). Newspapers were also beginning to feature less political coverage, focusing instead on “providing entertainment and energizing consumer desires” (Collier, Modernism on Fleet Street 124). Collier offers a second convincing argument about the limitation of papers-as-community: newspapers also “do the exclusionary work of identifying individuals and groups that lie outside the community’s boundaries” (124), and this can be seen through the way that discussions in “Aeolus” exclude or mock Bloom, for example. Following Collier’s lead, my reading of “Aeolus” focuses less on the chapter’s politics or use of newspaper form and more on its representation of the newspaper office as a setting, a
central convergence point for the many characters and stories that blow through the chapter like so many Aeolian winds.

Critics have asked whether the interrupting, uniformly capitalized phrases in Joyce’s “Aeolus” are headlines, subheadlines, or captions for absent illustrations or photographs, a debate which Kershner rightly finds less interesting than the stories between the headlines. Indeed, the material between the headlines is “relatively naturalistic” – full of conversations between characters and free indirect excursions into Bloom’s or Stephen’s thoughts as these conversations are happening (110). These stories seem even more naturalistic when viewed side-by-side with copies of the Freeman’s Journal from 1904: to a twenty-first century reader, these front pages look and read like the classified section. Their typographically dense pages are composed of lists, not narration – apartments to let, jobs available, banks advertising advantageous terms, a list of items missing, births, deaths, marriages and so forth.

In this reading of “Aeolus,” I focus on the moments between columns – the moments that most flagrantly violate Bloom’s definition of the nation. These include the sudden stoppages, collisions, and repetitions of the content of the news, all of which predominate in “Aeolus.” Just as Nelson’s Pillar is where tramlines cross, “Aeolus” is a notable site of multi-plot entanglement. It is the first time in Ulysses when Bloom and Stephen cross paths, though we later learn in “Ithaca” that they had met several times before. Their meeting in “Aeolus” is uneventful, and while it is clear that Bloom observes Stephen, Stephen does not register Bloom. But “Aeolus” is important because it is the first chapter that focuses on both protagonists, instead of just one or the other. The first

13 For a summary of this debate, see Kershner 110.
three episodes of the novel exclusively follow Stephen’s doings, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth episodes of *Ulysses* turn their attention to Bloom. In “Aeolus,” Stephen spends the first half of the chapter offstage, and Bloom spends the second half of the chapter offstage, only to reappear towards the end. Not until Bloom leaves does Stephen arrive (107-8), and Bloom’s attempts to come back are thwarted (upon calling the office he is told “go to hell” 112-3).

Bloom’s encounters in “Aeolus,” then, do not demonstrate the logic of separation and adjacency implied by his definition of nation. “Aeolus” presents his presence as an intrusion: others mock or exclude him, but his plots collide with theirs nonetheless. Though he enters the newspaper office quietly, his entrance invites comment from those inside. “The ghost walks,” says MacHugh, who later puts Bloom on by telling him that Dan Dawson’s speech, which is being discussed in the room, is Cicero. (102). Lenehan mocks the way Bloom walks (107) and even inanimate objects seem hostile to Bloom, for not long after his arrival “[t]he doorknob hit Mr Bloom in the small of the back as the door was pushed in” (103). The way this run-in is reported emphasizes Bloom’s outsider status, for he is not pushed by anybody in particular (though we later learn it was O’Molloy) but instead by a doorknob (103).

Bloom’s bumping into other plots is even more noticeable when a headline describes it: “A COLLISION ENSUES,” reads the headline right before Bloom runs into Lenehan (106). The real shock of the news, then, is that the headlines are about the very characters we know. Because they restrict themselves to reporting only the things happening in that very room, they undermine the idea of newsworthiness more generally. These headlines make very little sense until what is below them is read, though this is in
keeping with historical papers. To take a typical example, a report in a January 1917 edition of the *Freeman’s Journal* describes a meeting of the Irish Cattle Traders and Stockowners’ Association in several sections, each of which has its own mystifying subheadline: “DEMAND FOR AN IRISH AGRICULTURALIST” “IRISH MEAT” and “THE DEPARTMENT VICE PRESIDENT.” Similarly, Joyce’s headlines vaguely foreshadow – “GENTLEMEN OF THE PRESS” precedes a scene of Murray and Bloom at work (96) or describe – “HOUSE OF KEY(E)S” (99) is a verbal description of the ad (featuring a picture of crossed keys) that the merchant Alexander Keyes wants to place. Other headlines give pithier commentary: “SAD,” reads the headline when Bloom thinks of O’Molloy’s changed fortunes, and “? ? ?” reads the headline when Stephen Dedalus’s arrival prevents Lenehan from giving the answer to his riddle (109).

The bustle of the newspaper office animates Bloom’s collision with other plots. When Bloom does return, heralded by the headline “RETURN OF BLOOM” he is “breathless, caught in a whirl of wild newsboys near the office of the *Irish Catholic* and *Dublin Penny Journal*” (120). Stephen is there too, flanked by “[a] bevy of scampering newsboys” who “rushed down the steps, scattering in all directions, yelling, their white papers fluttering” (120). Bloom’s entrance is literally an interruption: the group is headed off for the pub, Stephen is in the middle of his parable of the plums, O’Molloy is asking Crawford for money – indeed, it is such an irritation that Crawford’s response to Bloom’s entreaty on Keyes’ behalf is “K.M.A./ -- Will you tell him he can kiss my arse?... K.M.R.I.A./ -- He can kiss my royal Irish arse” (120). The flurry of activity around both Bloom and Stephen is important because it is part of Joyce’s characterization of the newspaper office as a location where plots can cross, where bad news is the order of the
day: indeed, the newsboy who nearly collides with Bloom shouts “Terrible tragedy in Rathmines! A child bit by a bellows!” In “Aeolus,” newspapers promote a temporality of constant crisis.

The model of nationality that Bloom espouses, based on a humane live-and-let-live principle of “living in the same place” is not the model of nationality that his own presence embodies. Bloom as a character exists at the corners of the complicated, multi-plot structure of recognitions, near-misses, and collisions that makes up *Ulysses*, but Bloom himself still maintains a static but inclusive definition of Irishness. Latent in a later discussion with Stephen is the question of whether nation is something each individual defines for him or herself or whether it is a category that a person can be born into. Bloom bids Stephen support himself through art: “You have every bit as much right to live by your pen in pursuit of your philosophy as the peasant has… You both belong to Ireland, the brain and the brawn. Each is equally important” (527).

Stephen, on the other hand, sees nation as a personal fiction instead of a fiction for persons to participate in. Stephen’s assertion “… Ireland must be important because it belongs to me” (527) might be more than simple self-aggrandization. While it does imply that there is something special about Stephen that Ireland can belong to him, at the same time it asks us to accept that different characters can have different Irelands. That is, Stephen sees Ireland as something that he can invent – and indeed, the editor in “Aeolus” essentially asks Stephen to write Dublin, bidding him “Put us all into it, damn its soul!” (111). Bloom tries to see himself as a simultaneous cog in the machinery of his country’s imagining, but as we see from “Aeolus,” it is impossible for his plot to go on separately.
Indeed, the same winds that blow Bloom into other characters blow other characters past Stephen. In “Aeolus,” Simon Dedalus’s departure from Crawford’s office for a drink is noticeable not because he leaves for a drink before noon but because Stephen arrives immediately after Simon leaves (108). For the first half of the novel, neither Simon and Stephen nor Bloom and Stephen can seem to be in the same place at the same time. The coincidence is not lost on Crawford, who declares to Stephen “Come in. Your governor is just gone” (108). Bloom is just gone, but Simon is literally Stephen’s father, and which father Stephen follows is a central question for *Ulysses*. This incident is in keeping with an earlier missed connection, in “Hades,” where Bloom, riding in a carriage with Simon, spots “a lithe young man, clad in mourning, a wide hat” and tells Simon “There’s a friend of yours gone by… Your son and heir (73). The difference between “Aeolus” and “Hades,” though, is the extent to which that connection is mediated by textuality (the setting, for example, of the newspaper office) as opposed to the random, coincidental life of the streets.

While Bloom continuously bumps into other plots, Stephen feels the pressure of other plots as ghostly, indistinct premonitions, not full imaginings of the worlds of others. As he picks his nose on the beach, he feels that someone is watching him: “Behind. Perhaps there is someone. He turned his face over a shoulder, rere regardant” (42). Stephen looks back to see nothing except the schooner Rosevean, but the narrator’s description of him using the heraldry term “rere regardant” suggests that indeed, someone is there (even if it is just the narrator). Stephen’s turn recalls an earlier part of “Proteus,” when he imagines going to the Gouldings’ house. The disnarrated incident of Stephen’s arrival is also fraught with doubling: in his imagined journey to the Gouldings’, Walter
Goulding mistakes him for a dun and almost will not let him in: “We thought you were someone else,” he declares as he welcomes Stephen in (32). Stephen, in this case, is his own ghostly double. Both Stephen and his father imagine him to be somewhere he is not, and even within that imagining he is mistaken for someone else.

Despite the proximity that Joyce’s narrative structure puts them into, Bloom and Stephen feel each other’s plots only remotely until they meet in “Aeolus.” In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen senses instead of seeing Bloom: “About to pass through the doorway, feeling one behind, he stood aside/Part. The moment is now” (178). There are many forms of presence without physical presence in *Ulysses*: ghosts involuntarily recalled (Stephen’s mother appears to him unbidden); haunting memories (Bloom thinking of his father or son, both dead) and an entire episode, ‘Circe,” whose bizarre plot twists, talking objects, and impossible-to-stage physical transformations suggest that it takes place in a world beyond physical presence. But in this case, Bloom’s appearance to Stephen is a matter of understanding that there is always essentially someone else there, another story to be told.

Similarly, “Aeolus” meditates at some length on what additional stories the newspaper can tell if it is considered as a physical object instead of a means of conveying information. Joyce highlights newsprint’s usefulness for purposes other than conveying the news, undermining the news’s power to convey the most up-to-date information. Newspaper seems the most flexible, the most useful, when it isn’t read. The newsprint the news is printed on is destined, from the moment it is printed, to become something else. In the newspaper office, Bloom, who memorably uses a magazine in the outhouse at the end of “Calypso,” articulates some of those uses, watching “the obedient reels feeding in
huge webs of paper… Clank it. Clank it. Miles of it unreeled. What becomes of it after?
O, wrap up meat, parcels; various uses, thousand and one things” (99).

A “thousand and one things” gestures at the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*, another model entirely for multi-plot narrative. Joyce alludes to this work again at the end of “Ithaca,” with his references to Bloom having traveled with “Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler” and some two dozen others (607). The allusion points to a kind of storytelling that lets old stories persist in new ones, and indeed, many of the stories that Scheherazade tells to save her life center on characters who themselves tell stories to save their lives. The names in this series from “Ithaca” are barely substitutions for each other, but the playful replacement of one letter with another results in actual semantic change in these words. They become different jobs entirely (“sailor” to “tailor” to “jailer”). Perhaps, then, “Aeolus” models a form of narrative that perpetuates itself even after it is read.

A story that contains many stories, with these stories containing stories of their own, certainly cannot take place in parallel, simultaneous plots. Bloom’s description of the fickle allegiances of reporters and editors resonates here: “Weathercocks. Hot and cold in the same breath. Wouldn’t know which to believe” (103). Bloom criticizes the flexible allegiances of newspaper editors and reporters, but also speaks to the true temporality of the newspapers in “Aeolus.” “One story good till you hear the next,” he thinks, highlighting the transience of any given story’s newsworthiness. “Aeolus,” therefore, establishes some additional limitations to the newspaper’s ability to provide a national form: at least with *Ulysses*’s version of the paper, the news is intensely local and
not particularly timely, and ultimately it fails to do more than let stories careen off each other.

**Turn Now On**

In “Wandering Rocks,” a minor character named Tom Rochford proudly shows his friends a new invention for music halls and the theatre. His wooden machines are designed to flank the stage, and with a touch of the lever they display a metal disk with a painted number that indicates which act is onstage. These acts could be anything from a musical performance to a dramatic act, comic scene or exhibition by a trained animal (Gifford and Seidman 269). The real-life Rochford devised this invention to prevent what he referred to in his patent application as the “inconvenience and confusion” of the audience members arriving at odd times (such shows frequently ran for hours) and not knowing which turn was on. The machine would prominently display not only which act was onstage but also which acts had already concluded (Finn 1). Rochford’s machine, though, was not long for the stage. An enterprising theater manager realized that the disks were hard to see from the back of the hall and replaced them with an electronic sign. But Joyce, who likely met Rochford in 1909, was taken enough with the machine to give it dubious immortality in *Ulysses*.

Why did Joyce borrow this 1908 invention for a novel otherwise steeped in the particularities of 1904? Why does it turn up in “Wandering Rocks” in particular? Certainly Eamonn Finn is right to point out that Rochford’s device appears in the right section: it can be difficult to tell, in “Wandering Rocks,” which turn is on (1). But within the world of *Ulysses*, the phrase “Turn Now On” does more than mark our place in a
confusing and episodic narrative. In a novel that vividly renders its characters’ minds as suspended in past, present, and future at once, “Turn Now On” should also be read as an imperative: a command for Now to come into view, by the power of some technological or narratological feat. The interruptions within “Wandering Rocks,” by this light, draw the reader’s attention suddenly, disrupting the illusion that the plots of *Ulysses* proceed unknown to each other.

Of all the episodes of *Ulysses*, “Wandering Rocks” best epitomizes Bloom’s definition of nation as “the same people living in the same place… - Or also living in different places” (272). Over the course of its nineteen short sections, it includes almost every character in *Ulysses*. By Sam Alexander’s count, 108 characters appear in “Wandering Rocks,” 174 counting characters who appear only in thought or are mentioned in conversation (Alexander 448). Alexander makes the compelling argument that Joyce is deliberately inclusive here, imitating elements of the census throughout “Wandering Rocks” in order to repopulate Dublin, a subversive move given that Dublin’s population had been depleted by migration and conflict (448-50). Indeed, most characters in “Wandering Rocks” appear enough times and often enough in each other’s narratives to give the impression that they are circulating through a bustling city. All characters appear at first in their own sections, then as interpolations into other sections, and then a third time in the nineteenth part of “Wandering Rocks.” This final section takes the point of view of the viceregal cavalcade, which observes each character in turn, permitting us several views of each character.

The repeating descriptions of the same characters performing the same actions can make “Wandering Rocks” feel like a claustrophobic chapter: “a city of traps, a city of
irresolution, *culs de sac*, accidents, missed connections and missed streetcars, misread signs, wrong turns, indignities, and sheer labyrinthine terror,” writes Michael Seidel (*Epic Geography* 183). Joyce chose the organ of “blood” and the technique of the labyrinth for “Wandering Rocks,” so it stands to reason that the episode is a closed system full of movement. The whole episode thematizes reuse: meager bits of money circulate from hand to hand, Mr Kernan’s “Stylish coat” was purchased secondhand (“Some Kildare street club toff had it probably” 197), Miss Dunne’s copies of *The Woman in White* and sentimental novels by Mary Cecil Haye come from the Capel Street library, Dilly Dedalus buys a secondhand French primer, and Stephen browses the booksellers’ wares, thinking he may stumble upon “my pawned schoolprizes” – “Thumbed pages: read and read. Who has passed here before me?” (199). Stephen’s constant sense that someone has “passed here before me” or that “Behind. Perhaps there is someone” (44), articulates the way in which simultaneity is undermined, even by plots that have already happened or have yet to happen.

As Saikat Majumdar writes in *Prose of the World*, the rapidly shifting point of view in “Wandering Rocks” destabilizes the distinction between viewer and viewed, which also contributes to “the symbolic deconstruction of the self and the other that remains such a tantalizing part of the novel’s narrative consciousness” (66).¹⁴

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¹⁴ For a different perspective on the relationship between individuals and institutions in “Wandering Rocks,” see Stasi, who reads “Wandering Rocks” as “the overcoming of the individualistic subject by a subject communally constituted” (104), one made of the “shared cultures and public spaces” that come from an Irish audience’s familiarity with the Dublin detail Joyce includes (106). For Kenner’s classic reading, which treats the inclusion of such “lore” as the expression of the Arranger’s “sour xenophobic indifference” see *Ulysses* 65.
Majumdar’s larger conclusion, which is that “Wandering Rocks” celebrates Dublin’s provincialism and the very banality of Bloomsday as a statement against Ireland’s marginalization by England, revolves around the kind of sameness and recirculation that we see in both “Aeolus” and “Wandering Rocks.” “The narrative of Dublin can only be radically new because nothing happens here; nothing happens here because it is too far from the imperial center where the excitement of progress, history, and modernity is concentrated” (68). This raises the question, then, of what kind of nation we have when simultaneity is obscured – when the definition of “progress, history, and modernity” is set by a power outside of Dublin itself.

Jon Hegglund argues that “Wandering Rocks” recasts the cartographic imagination of the chapter, which Joyce had put together using British colonial survey maps. By making “the interlocking paths and overlapping itineraries of scores of Dubliners” (166) more prominent than the conventions of cartography, Hegglund writes, Joyce encourages the “detrimentalization and resignification” of space (189). By reading “Wandering Rocks” as Joyce’s reclamation of Dublin from its imperial rulers, emphasizing “the spontaneous performance of its citizens rather than the frozen tableau of abstract space” (177), Hegglund reminds us to look for “the emergence of spaces that might escape the objectified realm of the imperial archive” (182). We might also look for a similar kind of time: just as Joyce brought back pre-Greenwich Mean Time Irish time to undermine the shift that had occurred in 1916, “Wandering Rocks” permits mutations of time that destabilize Greenwich Mean Time.
Such repetitions are part of a larger dynamic of re-use and containment in “Wandering Rocks.” Having established that “Aeolus” undermines the very notion of newsworthiness, I want to pay special attention to the way that collisions between characters in “Wandering Rocks” serve only to circulate the same characters. Interruptions between plots are never truly surprises (as in “A Painful Case”), they are merely repetitions, events that have already happened or are about to happen. As Hugh Kenner writes, *Ulysses* exhibits an aesthetic of delay characterized by non-consequential coincidental alignments: “Its universe is Einstenian, non-simultaneous, internally consistent but never to be grasped in one act of apprehension” (81). That is, Joyce’s fiction defers the assemblage of pertinent facts, doing with art what life cannot by offering “a permanence to be revisited at will but not exhausted” (82). This is why “Wandering Rocks” in particular, and *Ulysses* in general, cannot exhibit simultaneity – they are already constantly embedded with small acts of seriality.

In this section, I want to describe the interpolations between plots in “Wandering Rocks” as examples of what Majumdar calls “irrational moments of history that cannot be integrated within the dominant, rational, teleological, and historicist narratives” (48). In providing this definition of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s term “subaltern pasts,” Majumdar highlights the way that temporality in Joyce’s fiction – in this case, these supposedly “irrational moments” – is often a site of resistance to colonial ways of knowing. In this

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15 *Ulysses* itself, of course, also demands repeated readings. Of *Ulysses*’s difficulty Joyce said: “Certainly any intelligent reader can read and understand it, if he returns to the text again and again. He is setting out on an adventure with words” (Seidel, *James Joyce 2*).
case, “Wandering Rocks” rejects Greenwich Mean Time as a dominant narrative of temporality, embracing coincidences that result from delay and repetition.

The temptation to over-read is very strong when looking for connections between scenes in “Wandering Rocks” and the interruptions that illuminate concurrent plots. However, no principle more consistent or overarching than simple contrast seems to unite event and background. Certainly it is an ironic twist for the scene of Bloom buying a pornographic novel for Molly (“A darkbacked figure under the Merchants’ arch scanned books on the hawker’s cart” 187) to interrupt the scene of Boylan buying her “ripe shamefaced peaches” (187). When Sweets of Sin, which Bloom is reading at the bookstall, writes of a young woman, Bloom no sooner thinks “Young! Young!” than Joyce suddenly supplies the opposite: “An elderly female, no more young” walking out of a court building (194). Or, just as Dilly Dedalus begs her father to give her money for food instead of spending it at the pub, someone more fortunate comes along: “Mr Kernan, pleased with the order he had booked, walked boldly along James’s street” (195). But by providing such a contrast, each interrupting plot promotes a particular kind of reading: it reveals that any plot has its opposite elsewhere. Through these interruptions, Joyce teaches Ulysses’s readers to value inconsistency, to imagine the opposite of what the novel directly offers. These interpolations emphasize the importance of the unseen.

For the most part, “Wandering Rocks” offers its interpolations in the exact same phrases. This seems like an obvious way to demonstrate that two seemingly unrelated events happened at the same time – i.e. we know Father Conmee sees the young couple emerge from a tumble in the fields at the same time as Ned Lambert and the clergyman visit St. Mary’s Abbey because both scenes are interrupted by the sight of the young
woman, who “abruptly bent and with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig” (184). We hear twice of Conmee’s “thinsocked ankles” tickled by Clongowes field (184, 186), and twice of the “grave deportment” of Mr Denis J Maginni, dancing professor (181, 194), and many times of “Marie Kendall, charming soubrette” (185, 189, 206). Father Conmee boards the tram several times:

On Newcomen bridge the very reverend John Conmee S.J. of saint Francis Xavier’s church, upper Gardiner street, stepped on to an outward bound tram (182)

At Newcomen bridge Father Conmee stepped into an outward bound tram for he disliked to traverse on foot the dingy way past Mud Island (182)

Father John Conmee stepped into the Dollymount tram on Newcomen bridge (185)

The similarity between each of these renditions is striking. While each provides slightly different details, such differences and the details are so minor as to be inconsequential. The first rendition contextualizes Conmee, the second offers a relatively petty characterizing detail and the third is a more neutral report. The importance of these repetitions, however, lies in the way that they represent intercessions from other plots, but offer no surprise. In *Dubliners*, as I have argued, Mrs. Sinico turns back up in “A Painful Case,” as does Michael Furey in “The Dead,” and both repetitions are eventful. But
there is no terror of recognition, no shock of the news in Conmee’s recurrence – he has already been accounted for in this episode and others. Thus, the novelistic narration of “Wandering Rocks” triumphs over the seemingly unruly impositions of one plot onto another.

In “Wandering Rocks,” the vacillating point of view is designed to evoke an “oscillation between events of imperial and local interest” (Wollaeger 214). The idea of “identification,” central to Mark Wollaeger’s reading of *Ulysses*, is apt here: throughout the novel, the reader is immersed in Stephen’s or Bloom’s consciousness and must “leap the gaps in the represented flow of their thoughts” which “produces a powerful illusion of moving in and out of intimate relation with autonomous subjects” (201). Joyce deploys this dynamic of identification as a means of clearing space within the individual’s consciousness to resist the entreaties of, among other things, British recruitment propaganda for World War I. The final section of “Wandering Rocks,” which tracks both the viceregent’s trip through Dublin, and what the Irish characters in the novel happened to be doing as he passes, bears out Wollaeger’s description of “Wandering Rocks” as a chapter about developing the points of view of autonomous subjects.

The viceregent, on his way to open the Mirius Bazaar, sees Dubliners of all ages going about their business. But what Joyce actually includes is what did not happen when the viceregent and his wife passed – he reports things that the viceregent did not see, and in doing so asserts the superiority of the narrator’s vantage point over the lord lieutenant’s. The small derelictions of respectfulness that the narrator reports resist the imperial eye.
… [L]ord Dudley’s viceregal carriages passed and were unsaluted by Mr Dudley White… From Cahill’s corner the reverend Hugh C. Love, M.A., made obeisance unperceived… John Wyse Nolan smiled with unseen coldness towards the lord lieutenant general and general governor of Ireland… By the provost’s wall came jauntily Blazes Boylan… His hands in his jacket pockets forgot to salute but he offered to the three ladies the bold admiration of his eyes and the red flower between his lips (208).

Neither Dudley nor Boylan salute, and Nolan’s cold smile is itself a refusal to salute. And only when he feels “the eyes of lady Dudley fixed on him” does Tom Rochford salute (208). The negation, though, of these verbs: “unsaluted,” “unperceived,” “unseen,” holds close another possible plot that contained these very acts of saluting, perceiving, and seeing. Finally, the viceregent “passed a blind stripling” and “a pedestrian in a brown macintosh, eating dry bread, passed swiftly and unscathed across the viceroy’s path” (209). Dublin’s total indifference to the viceregent’s procession is complete. His passage cannot even elicit a reflexive salute from Boylan, the blind stripling cannot see him pass, and the annoyingly ubiquitous man in the mac does not even look at him.

This procession through Dublin is itself an example of the past’s existence within Ulysses’s present. The viceroy notes “the salute of two small schoolboys at the garden gate of the house said to have been admired by the late queen when visiting the Irish capital with her husband, the prince consort, in 1849” (209), but what might have been fresher in the minds of those in Dublin in 1904 was a 1900 visit by Queen Victoria, which Joyce described in “Ireland: Land of Saints and Sages.” Having learned from her
first visit to Ireland some fifty years previous, during which the crowd lobbed a cabbage at the prince consort, Queen Victoria chose to have her carriage “tightly protected on all sides by an impressive bodyguard with bared sabres” (118). Joyce notes that the crowd in attendance is silent, comparing their chilly reaction to the whoops and cheers that usually greet renditions of “God Save the King.” The mute crowd turns “eyes of curiosity, almost pity” on Victoria (118). Within every act in “Wandering Rocks” is the trace of another one: to feel one behind, as Stephen does, is to sense the potential for a different action, for an alternate outcome that uses the circumstances at hand differently. “Wandering Rocks” dramatizes the process by which one’s idea of a totality is constantly undermined by acts of unseeing that are silently built into simultaneous forms.

As the chapter where Stephen and Bloom meet, “Ithaca” occasions some of *Ulysses*’s most explicit meditations on what it means to render two plot lines at the same time. Had this episode occurred at the start of *Ulysses*, “Ithaca” might merely be staging a narrative version of parallax. However, because the entire novel has built to this meeting between two characters who were previously so separate, “Ithaca” emphasizes the simultaneous existence of their two plots as a major plot point itself. “Ithaca” takes very seriously the obligation to articulate both plots. It will not report what Stephen saw without immediately asking what Bloom saw, or what scene a physical object suggests to Stephen without immediately describing what it suggests to Bloom. It asks “What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning? ... Were their views on some points divergent?” (544). Another constant source of interest in “Ithaca” is the extent to which Stephen’s thoughts and Bloom’s thoughts reciprocally shape each other: “What, reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Bloom’s thoughts about Stephen’s
thoughts about Bloom and about Stephen’s thoughts about Bloom’s thoughts about Stephen?” (558). The question doubles back on itself, restaging the drama of Stephen and Bloom’s meeting continuously by adding new layers of mediation.

The meeting between Bloom and Stephen yields little concrete result, but it does invite a huge influx of backstory into *Ulysses*. Not until this late point in the novel do we learn of Bloom’s and Stephen’s parentage (558), past meetings (556), and frustrated career ambitions (555). Such belated inclusions of backstory cohere with Barry McCrea’s conception of “Ithaca” as an episode “constantly revised and expanded to house ever more adjacent elements that have been occluded or excised” (85). For McCrea, “Ithaca” fosters relationships “not subtended by natural, automatic, or preapproved systems such as the family” (82), that is to say, what he calls a queer community, an alternative to nation. Similarly, Joyce’s inclusion in “Ithaca” of belated material acts as an important corrective to the regularity of Greenwich Mean Time. Like newspapers in “Aeolus,” like characters’ actions in “Wandering Rocks,” the stuff of thought in “Ithaca” is reused, mediated anew and sent out into the world only to be presented again. The thousand and one other purposes for the newspaper, the instances of disnarration at the end of “Wandering Rocks,” and the myriad inclusions of “Ithaca” do not aspire to an impression of completeness. Rather, they indicate that if so much is included, much more may be missing.

For this reason, it seems that the closer *Ulysses* comes to representing the simultaneous activity of its characters, the more still each character needs to be. “Ithaca” finally succeeds in evoking an image of simultaneity by gathering up a large number of characters into two synchronizing questions and answers. The first question asks where
each mourner that accompanied Bloom in Dignam’s funeral procession was – except for Dignam, who is naturally “(in the grave),” all eight mourners are “(in bed)” (578). The second question is quite similar:

Of what did bellchime and handtouch and footstep and lonechill remind him?

Of companions now in various manners in different places defunct: Percy Apjohn (killed in action, Modder River), Philip Gilligan (phthisis, Jervis Street hospital), Matthew F. Kane (accidental drowning, Dublin Bay), Philip Moisel (pyemia, Heytesbury street), Michael Hart (phthisis, Mater Misericordiae hospital), Patrick Dignam (apoplexy, Sandymount) (578-9)

Simultaneity, in “Ithaca,” is a dead letter, a series of halted plots. Upon imagining other characters elsewhere or at other times, Bloom can easily and accurately account for only plots that have ended. In other words, one can only truthfully ascertain what other characters are doing when they are either surely asleep or surely dead. Reminded of stories that have ended in “different places defunct” (578-9), Bloom does not at all feel himself to be living in the same place (or even in a different place) as the rest of his nation, on the contrary, he feels “lonechill,” the “cold of interstellar space” (578).

Imperial consciousness
What I have argued here is that in *Ulysses*, the imperative to “Turn Now On” goes unheeded. Isolating a moment in time, let alone within a transnational present, seems more difficult than ever before. The closest *Ulysses* gets to an absolute present is in “Ithaca,” the episode in which Bloom’s odyssey ends conclusively, his location in space fixed by a final, timeless typographical mark. But such a present requires a lengthy preceding exegesis that recognizes the past’s coexistence with the present. Critics have sought to align this kind of temporality with the Irish context in particular. Stasi describes the potato that sits next to the soap in Leopold Bloom’s pocket as he enters Nighttown in “Circe” as an example of “the persistence of the pre-modern into the very structure of the modern itself” (87), which is not to pathologize Ireland’s divergence from accepted narratives of capitalist development, but to emphasize Joyce’s construction of Irish agency from within the structures that seem hostile to it. Stasi’s formulation does not suggest that the past runs simultaneous to the present, but instead that sensing a presence behind you, as Stephen does on the beach in Proteus, is not an intrusion on the modern but part of its very structure.

As Fredric Jameson reminds us, in the London of E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* or the Manhattan of John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer*, coincidental encounters take on a different, more providential character than they do in Joyce’s Dublin. Of such coincidences, Jameson writes “Dublin is a classical city in which they are not merely normal but expected” (“Modernism and Imperialism” 166). This sense of expectancy comes not just from the compactness of the city – in the unexpected wisdom of *Dubliners*’ Doran, “Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else’s business” (61) but also from the omnipresent reminders of Britain’s imperial dominance.
Jameson argues that events like a viceregal procession, occupation by foreign soldiers, or a discussion of nationalism at a pub are “already part of the urban fabric” of Dublin. While my focus has been on smaller ruptures in the urban fabric – surprises to the individual, sudden recurrences of forgotten plots – the scale is irrelevant to the overall sense of the past’s persistence.

Even if *Ulysses* does not exhibit the kinds of deformations of space that Jameson so famously describes in *Howards End*: “It is Empire which stretches the roads out to infinity, beyond the bounds and borders of the national state” (162), it still does not escape them entirely. Rather than gesture at infinity, Joyce renders Dublin full of felt but not perceived presences and repetitions, impositions from places and times long ago and far away. This multi-layered, palimpsestic sense of time is at odds with Bloom’s initial definition of nation, and demonstrates that basing a sense of the nation on a shared simultaneous present is utopian at best. At worst, it fosmodters the kind of unseeing, positivist cosmopolitanism that ignores the causes and legacies of the present day’s conditions in favor of “now.”
CHAPTER THREE
The Body of an American: Imagining the Individual in *U.S.A.*

Among the large cast of John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy are two disillusioned reporters who want to be novelists. In *1919* (1932) Jerry Burnham complains about covering World War I, saying "how a correspondent couldn't get to see anything anymore, how he had three or four censorships on his neck all the time and had to send out prepared stuff that was all a pack of dirty lies every word of it" (544). Mary French, one of the protagonists in *The Big Money* (1936), also finds she is expected to send out “prepared stuff” when a Pittsburgh *Times-Sentinel* editor fires her for a sympathetic article on striking millworkers (882). Like Burnham, French finds there is no place in the papers, which are filled with “prepared stuff,” for a true eyewitness account. Haunted by the deprivation she saw in the millworkers’ settlement, French insists to an unsympathetic friend: “If you’d seen what I’ve seen you’d talk differently” (882). For both characters, writing a novel seems an attractive alternative to reporting, a plausible venue for telling their truths about the people they have met and the events they have witnessed. As Eveline Hutchins tells Burnham, “when the war was over he ought to write a book like *Le Feu* and really tell the truth about it” (544).16 French, having moved to Boston to help free Sacco and Vanzetti, resolves to write a novel after the case is over (1147): “She bought some school copybooks in a little musty stationers’ shop and started

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16 Dos Passos, who volunteered to serve in World War I as an ambulance driver, admired *Le Feu*, and during his breaks on the front collaborated on a similar novel with a comrade. In particular, Dos Passos admired the eyewitness quality of *Le Feu*, telling an interviewer that it “gave a picture of the massacres of World War I” and demonstrated “a very good ear for the conversations of those involved” (Sanders).
right away taking notes for the novel… After this she’d observe life” (1147). By the novel’s end, both Burnham and French have observed quite a bit of life – with Burnham in a “daily alcoholic haze” (1148) and French alternating love affairs with committee meetings (1238) – but neither has written a novel.

Why does journalism set the stage for Burnham’s and French’s difficulties writing novels, and what might this tell us about Dos Passos’s own novels, which themselves bear the imprint of the news so heavily? Newspapers and characters who write for newspapers of all different persuasions appear throughout all four of the trilogy’s famous modes: omnisciently told narrative sections, second-person narrated Camera Eye sections, biographies of public figures like Woodrow Wilson and Rudy Valentino, and the Newsreels, which are composed of actual headlines and clippings from the Chicago Tribune (The 42nd Parallel) and the New York World (1919 and The Big Money).

For critics interested in Dos Passos’s representation of journalism, the Newsreels are a natural place to turn, despite their confusing provenance. To call these verbal collages “Newsreels” is something of a misnomer, and Dos Passos’s decision to do so is “one of the major mysteries of the composition of the trilogy” (North 143). 17 There are, however, some formal similarities between the short films shown in movie theaters and

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17 Dos Passos never mentions actual newsreels when describing his composition process for the Newsreels. Decades after the trilogy’s composition, he told an interviewer that he made the Newsreels of “little clippings” from the newspaper. Dos Passos kept these clippings in a drawer, and added them to his text when the collections seemed finished: “Then some of these collections of bits started to look so good to me that I put them in intact. Later, I started searching for apt headlines and collecting what would fit the story” (Dos Passos and Gado 24). The Newsreel newspaper excerpts, therefore, seemed to be chosen both for atmosphere and for their harmonization with each other – hence Dos Passos’s focus on what looked good or seemed apt – with little regard for the filmic form from which they took their name.
Dos Passos’s one-to-two-page long collections. A Newsreel popular in the late 1930s, which is when *The Big Money* was composed, might contain between eight or nine items and last for about as many minutes. The transitions between items were abrupt, and a “noisy musical score and a highspeed invisible narrator” heightened the sense of chaos (Seed 3–4). *U.S.A.*’s Newsreels mimic that sense of chaos. They are composed of a similar number of items, and they contain song lyrics that sometimes break partway through a line of the song, replicating the jagged transitions and musical score of real newsreels. It is easy to accept, then, that these verbal newsreels might be mimicking filmic newsreels. As David Seed argues, the Newsreels convey a particular style, not particular information, and they exist to dramatize “rival images of contemporary events” (191). By this light, and given that Dos Passos’s professed intent in creating these collages was to offer an idea of what his characters were “reading, seeing, [and] thinking,” it is possible that these collages were meant to show how the public mind absorbed news (Dos Passos and Gado 24). In other words, the Newsreels are a transcript of what the human mind sees when reading the news, recording the way that consciousness flits from music to news, for example, taking in different expressions of the same events.

But even if we accept that Dos Passos’s Newsreels are newspaper versions of a film form, Dos Passos’s consistently negative depictions of the press complicates his inclusion of newspapers within his novel. As Matthew Stratton asks: “Why would Dos Passos reproduce, rather than openly denounce or expose, many of the patently false newspaper headlines that were printed under the dictates of various censorships?” (424). Stratton holds that the Newsreels use paradox and irony to teach Dos Passos’s readers to
read more skeptically, to pay attention both to what is said and how it is said (428).

Alternately, Thomas Strychacz suggests that critics who see Dos Passos as using raw newspaper material only to undermine it are missing the point (145). The Newsreels, Strychacz argues, are put together in a way that thwarts readers’ attempts to assign them context. Their fragmentation and echoing “convince us that there are secret structures of power, some unconscious, some manipulative, that these fragments tap into, mask, and with the proper key, reveal” (146). For Strychacz, that key is in the hands of the professional reader (160). This chapter, though, tracks a different aspect of the Newsreel form, in particular its tendency to crowd out individual stories like Burnham’s and French’s, and its changing ability to represent the public’s political will, as well as its desires and interests.

Burnham’s and French’s trouble writing, then, is important because it is part of a general disenfranchisement of the individual point of view. Circumstances throughout U.S.A. consistently quash characters’ desire to offer such personal accounts. Sailing to war, Charley Anderson tries to make conversation with the French lookout, telling him in simple English their destination is very far from “‘My home Fargo, North Dakota.’ But the lookout just shook his head and put his finger to his lips. … At last he made Charley understand that he wasn’t supposed to talk to him” (356). These lines, which end The 42nd Parallel and mark America’s entry into World War I, demonstrate how war makes such self-accountings even less pertinent. This is why Joe Washburn prevents Daughter from investigating her brother’s death at training camp, which is ostensibly the result of a defective aircraft: “Individual lives don’t matter, this isn’t the time for lettin’ your personal feelin’s get away with you or embarassin’ the authorities with criticism” (599).
Washburn gives a rationale for why Burnham cannot write his war novel, and French cannot write her Boston novel: collective struggle is nobler than individual lives.

This struggle between ‘personal feelin’s” and social ideas, Malcolm Cowley writes, is the fundamental opposition in Dos Passos’s works: “If [Dos Passos] undertakes to depict the national life, he has to do so in terms of individual lives, without slighting either one or the other” (137). Cowley and other reviewers of Dos Passos’s time saw this opposition between the national life and individual lives as the major struggle in the author’s fiction. In a 1933 review, Gold compared Dos Passos’s ambition with *U.S.A.* to James Joyce’s in *Ulysses*, writing that *Ulysses* sets out to portray “the tortured consciousness of the bourgeois individual,” while Dos Passos has written a true collective novel (115). Michael Denning’s more recent assessment reveals that the matter has not yet been settled: “the most striking and unsettling aspect of *U.S.A.*, ” he writes, is the absence of connections, such as those offered by family, profession or town, between characters (82). The collective novel, however, is collective not because it is chorally narrated, but because it encompasses a collection of individuals. This is what Donald Pizer rightly calls a Whitmanian paradox in Dos Passos’s work: the attempt to write a novel about “a nation of individuals” (185).

These forms of collectivity work against one offered in the novel by J. Ward Moorehouse, another character who spends substantial time as a reporter. Moorehouse inverts Mary French’s passage from reporting to union work by becoming a wildly successful pioneer in the public relations field. The chapter will begin by tracing this character’s evolution, and demonstrating that Moorehouse’s characterization models the exploitation of the individual’s narrative. Moorehouse’s America, and his eventual
“campaign for Americanism” represent the America that *U.S.A.* is written against, and a reading of the Newsreels’ own narrative arc will establish that the Newsreels are not just portrayals of the popular mind, they are portrayals of Moorehouse’s effect on the news itself. The Newsreels in *The 42nd Parallel*, before Moorehouse’s ascendency, are defiantly multi-voiced, combining many stories into single headlines or sentences. Though the separation between stories is clearer, and their syntax tidier, in *The Big Money*, these are no longer news stories so much as advertisements. The trilogy, then, establishes news along a spectrum: on one end, a multitude of stories, messily presented but at least allowing for the free play of ideas – and on the other end, a single story, tidily presented but existing only to offer the reader goods and services, making the newsreader a consumer instead of a reader of material. The trilogy reacts to the confluence of journalism and public relations by refusing to acquiesce to their homogenization of individual stories.

In this chapter, I will argue that *U.S.A.* provides community without simultaneity or synchrony by problematizing the extent to which individuals identify with the news. Co-opting someone else’s plot as one’s own, or recognizing in another plot echoes of one’s own, can be a contact point between the individual’s story and that of the collective. What *U.S.A.* has taken from the newspapers, then, is an appreciation for the capacious vision of the public gestured at by the late nineteenth century’s encyclopedic

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18 For a different reading of Moorehouse’s use of language, see Strychacz. Moorehouse, according to Strychacz, “constructs systems of (mis)communication, elaborates protocols, controls and regulates the distribution of words. And he does so, failed songwriter though he is, by assimilating techniques that would normally be considered literary” (128)
newspaper, but also a deep wariness about what scrupulously separated plots mean for the increasingly self-interested public.

In questioning the newspaper’s role in keeping those plots far away from each other and faulting the related disciplines of public relations, advertisement, and eventually Hollywood for making these identifications one-sided, *U.S.A.* invents through its own multi-plot structure a way of disrupting the illusion of simultaneity. The novel’s use of coincidence makes the individual story more responsible to and for the whole, allowing Dos Passos to, as Cowley writes, actually “depict the national life” through individual lives (137). Thus, *U.S.A.* counters the general novelistic tendency to focus on the individual. It reminds us that the novel as a genre can actualize plots in a particularly vivid way, bringing stories into direct contact with readers. In this lies the novel’s potential to conceptualize a U.S.A. where we look for firsthand versions of other plots instead of assuming that they go on without us.

**The distant public**

Dos Passos’s likening of the fragmented human consciousness to a Newsreel puts him in the good company of Walter Lippmann, another skeptical Progressive era thinker. Against John Dewey’s faith in society’s ability to foster a reasonable, educated electorate, Lippmann deplored the reading public’s ignorance, arguing that the public had become nothing more than “busy men reading the newspapers for half an hour a day” (109). Even if Lippmann’s hypothetical citizen had enough time, “how much time could or would he spend watching the Sinking Fund Commission and the Geological Survey?” The man who keeps the radio on at all, Lippmann writes, would probably just “tune in on the
Prince of Wales” (33-4). Politics are too arcane to follow and individuals are too specialized in their own fields to understand the news, he argues, and his reference to ignoring the Sinking Fund Commission in favor of the Prince of Wales foreshadows the replacement of politics by personalities in The Big Money. Dos Passos’s complaints about the public are in Lippmann’s line: “all educated and intelligent Americans” read the New York Times as gospel, Dos Passos wrote to a friend, telling another that a warning reading “THIS IS ALL BULSHIT” should be appended to all “political phrasemaking” in printed material (Fourteenth Chronicle 75, 398).

U.S.A.’s Newsreels span the three decades from the dawn of the twentieth century to the stock market crash, a period in which newspapers themselves began to choose and arrange stories differently. Journalism historian Blake Nord compares two urban daily papers, the Chicago Times and the Chicago Tribune on these grounds, pointing out that the political views of the two papers determined not only what stories to print, but also the number of stories to print. The Chicago Times, which espoused an anti-government, individualistic editorial policy, offered many highly specific stories in an attempt to “provide something for everyone [...] individual items for individuals” (114–116). By contrast, the Chicago Tribune (the source of Dos Passos’s clippings for the Newsreels of The 42nd Parallel) editorialized in favor of Chicagoans’ helping each other, and reminded the city of its obligation to its citizens. This “pragmatic, collectivist urban vision” (Nord 121–122) led the Tribune to run fewer stories than the Chicago Times, and to favor in-depth reporting about issues that affected broader swaths of the readership as opposed to brief dispatches. As the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth century began, big urban daily and small town weeklies alike began following the Chicago Tribune by
winnowing down the number of stories on their front pages. U.S.A.’s Newsreels, the first of which are set at the dawn of the twentieth century (12) mirror this change. In other words, as the historical newspaper became less multi-plotted, so do U.S.A.’s Newsreels.

U.S.A. gradually diminishes the number and kind of stories that it includes in these news-inspired sections. In doing so, the Newsreels reflect a change that real papers underwent in the first decades of the twentieth century, a shift from including many stories to telling just a few. The Newsreels level a critique of journalistic form through their transformation over the course of U.S.A.’s three volumes. In particular, there are changes to the Newsreels’ architecture – the way stories are juxtaposed against each other, their pacing and number within the Newsreel. News stories in The 42nd Parallel’s Newsreels interrupt and occlude each other, but news stories in U.S.A.’s final volume, The Big Money, leave each other a wider berth than even the news stories in middle volume 1919. Offering a cracked mirror image of the news is a different kind of correction than that issuing from the traditionally novelistic sections of U.S.A., where scenes with corrupt editors, drunken reporters, and manipulative public relations men skewer the papers and those who write for them.

But U.S.A. also warns against this concentration of the public’s attention in just a few stories, a change that it attributes to the rising field of public relations. Dos Passos tracks this change by developing the character J. Ward Moorehouse, a reluctant city reporter turned inventor of public relations. Through Moorehouse, we see how deeply at odds the field of public relations is from the public itself. As a reporter, Moorehouse has to seek out such ordinary members of the public as “Mrs. Piretti whose husband had been killed in a rumpus in a saloon on Locust Street or Sam Burkovich who’d been elected
president of the Ukranian singing society, or some woman with sudsy hands whose child had been slashed by a degenerate” (216).

But in his capacity as public relations counsel, Moorehouse escapes from the public that he disdains. Far from Locust Street he makes speeches in hotel ballrooms (238) and schmoozes over boozy lunches in Nice (624) between brokering secret agreements between labor, industry, and the law (293). By having Moorehouse’s crony Rasmussen claim that “the public’ll damn well do what it’s told, and besides, like God Almighty it’s far away,” Dos Passos censures both the public relations man’s reliance on the public’s gullibility and his sense of superiority to a public he cannot see (617). Rasmussen, who later appears carrying a stuffed canary that sings at the turn of a key (619), represents the belief that the public can be tuned to sing in a particular key. Furthermore, through the character of Rasmussen Dos Passos demonstrates that Moorehouse’s power as a public relations impresario requires treating “the public” into an abstraction.

David Rando refers to modernist art’s “promise of nearness,” that is, its attempt to make the distant appear close, to draw the private into the public. Rando calls this modernism’s primary response to twentieth-century media, which he argues that modernist authors found overwhelming and inauthentic (22). These were the grounds for Dos Passos’s praise of John Howard Lawson’s *Processional* (1925), a play Dos Passos praises for its irreverence toward the fourth wall. Instead of observing the action of *Processional* from a lofty distance, viewers are surprised and shocked by the play to the point that it evokes bodily sensations: “*Processional* is aimed at people who like roller coasters,” Dos Passos concluded (“Is the ‘Realistic’ Theatre Obsolete?” 595).
*Processional* succeeds, Dos Passos argues, because it draws the viewer closer to the work of art.

Dos Passos’s attempt to evoke that same “promise of nearness” lies behind his praise of a visual artist’s work as well. In an essay, he praises the artist George Grosz for further shortening the gap between viewer and work of art. While the effect of “verbal” art is the result of a relay: the mind moves from work of art to the work of art’s title, and then to a feeling derived and determined by the title, itself a vertical artifact, Grosz’s art is effective because it is immediate. The lowness of his drawings’ subjects, heightened by the crudeness of Grosz’s pencil technique, has a jarring effect: it “makes you identify yourself with the sordid and pitiful object” (“Grosz” 615–7).

Dos Passos’s own trilogy attempts to engage an audience that escapes his own novelist characters. Joining the ranks of Lippmann’s busy men reading the paper for half an hour a day are a half dozen characters in *U.S.A.* who hardly have time to read at all. A farmwoman tells book peddler Doc Bingham “I like a mite o’ readin fine… but I don’t git much chanct for it, not till wintertime” (46), Eleanor Stoddard barely reads the paper declaring the United States’ entry into World War I before spending an afternoon strolling through the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and even *Le Feu*, the novel which Eveline Hutchins so strongly recommended to disillusioned journalist Jerry Burnham, literally puts Eveline to sleep (473). For Dos Passos, readerly disengagement can have tragic consequences, and is forever linked in his mind to the unjust execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. After their execution, Dos Passos calls for “writing so fiery and accurate that it will sear through the pall of numb imbecility that we are again swaddled in…”
(“Sacco and Vanzetti”). In other words, public disengagement requires new, more searing forms of writing.

The numbness of the public makes it an easy target for charlatans who put forth their own version of America. Doc Bingham, a recurring character who peddles pornographic literature in *The 42nd Parallel* and quack medicine in *The Big Money*, becomes Moorehouse’s pawn in a “campaign for Americanism” that defines the nation as its purchasing power. Bingham and Moorehouse become the mouthpieces for a cynical version of Americanism: they cater to what they see as American values of “selfservice, independence, individualism” (1184), encouraging consumers to buy Bingham’s medicines in order to avoid relying on doctors (1170). There are at least two critiques of public relations embedded in this portrayal of Bingham and Moorehouse: first, Moorehouse himself has hardly practiced “selfservice” or “independence,” because he is claiming credit for an ad campaign that he stole from Richard Ellsworth Savage (1184). Second, and more importantly, Moorehouse is asking consumers to assert their individuality, and even their Americanism, by making the same purchase as seventy-five million other people. Likening Americanism to quack medicine portrays darkly the possibilities for national collectivity.

Moorehouse may proffer Americanism, but *U.S.A.* offers America itself. As they evolve under Moorehouse’s influence, the Newsreels of *U.S.A.* hide stories of World War I detractors and those who are increasingly discontented with the post-World War I economic order, that is, stories that do not demonstrate Moorehouse’s Americanism. By contrast, *U.S.A.* treats these stories differently: its America is composed of the narratives of subversives like Ben Compton or ordinary foot soldiers like Mary French. These
stories are brought to the forefront in *The Big Money*, just as the Newsreels shove them into the background. Instead of allowing its readers to believe that the public is far away, the trilogy reminds its readers constantly that no plot is truly independent from another. Newspaper readers accept as a commonplace that the news tells them about stories they cannot see for themselves, but *U.S.A.* disillusion a gullible public of the erroneous belief that the paper tells them all they need to know. As long as we believe that our plots go on independently of those of others, we live in Moorehouse’s America.

**The multi-plot newspaper**

To some critics, the overfull character of Dos Passos’s Newsreels makes them “true miscellanies,” scattered collages that heighten the contrast between trivial and important news and in doing so reveal the thinness of most Americans’ understanding of American life (Pizer 81–83). In short order, Newsreel I ranges from the doings of President McKinley to the British defeat at Mafeking, and also includes a particularly un-newsworthy description of a lithograph that features a scantily clad woman holding a glass of wine in one hand and “rampant lobsters” in the other (12). But actual newspapers of the time were just as chaotic, suggesting that Dos Passos saw newspapers of his day not just as the raw material for his news collages, but also as a counter-model for his own narrative. The typical late nineteenth-century edition of the *Chicago Times* – the rival paper of the *Chicago Tribune* from which Dos Passos drew excerpts from the Newsreels – might encompass more than a thousand separate stories in its eight pages (Nord 115). The papers themselves had titles like the *Globe*, the *World*, and the *Times*, all of which gesture at the expansive scope of their coverage. The columns, by contrast, had titles like
“Slices of News” or “Local Skimmings.” Newspapers as a whole alerted readers to their universal aspirations, but simultaneously qualified the individual pieces of news they presented as but “slices,” or “skimmings,” for readers to take or leave.

The “News Nebulae,” a *Chicago Times* column that exemplifies a form popular in the late nineteenth century, assembles a very wide assortment of very short stories.

They have a chain gang in Fort Wayne.

Terra Haute is going to have a soup house.

An Indiana man has 17,000 cat skins for sale.

Here comes Greencastle, Ind., with the smallpox.

The crusaders of Keokuk will soon commence street work. (Nord 115)

Tellingly, the only detail each story contains (except the gruesome Indiana inventory) is a place name, so a reader looking for stories about his or her hometown can browse the news like an index. There is no relationship, nor is there an implied relationship, between Fort Wayne’s chain gang, Terra Haute’s soup house, Indiana’s cat skins and so forth. Nor is there any attempt to make an individual story indicative of regional trends, or national patterns, or to situate any story within any explanatory context whatsoever. Instead, the stratified form of the “News Nebulae” makes it easy for readers to find and digest only the news that they perceive as mattering to them.

By implicitly giving readers permission to choose only extremely local news, these columns imply that readers would be nonchalant regarding unread stories. Communications scholars Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone liken the turn-of-the-
century paper to one of the department stores that were emerging at the time, suggesting that each is: “a copious market made somewhat less chaotic under one roof of industry, representing an abundant social world for the selective appropriation of self-directed reader consumers” (115). The newspaper editor is also a consumer, claimed public relations pioneer Ivy Lee, the real-life model for Dos Passos’s public relation tycoon J. Ward Moorehouse (Pizer 126). An editor who unthinkingly prints unsolicited material, Lee argues, is like Lee’s wife buying everything in Wanamaker’s merely because it is presented attractively: “But you cannot deal with a problem like that by abolishing department stores. My wife must be taught to discriminate,” he writes (33). Since a glut of attractive but meaningless information can snooker an inattentive editor or naïve reader, Lee argues, the news should elicit the editor’s and the reader’s sense of choice.

But according to Lee, the editor’s decision regarding which stories to print is motivated by profit, not by public interest: “Someone has described the difference between English newspapers and American newspapers as this: that the English newspapers print what is important and the American newspapers print what is interesting” (42). Because its survival is dependent on accommodating its readers, the newspaper merely reflects its readership’s interests. Edward Bernays, who taught the first public relations class in 1923 at New York University, argues that the standard to which a news item must rise would be its resonance with readers: “The influence of any force

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19 Richard Terdiman makes a similar comparison in Discourse/Counter-Discourse, arguing that in nineteenth-century France, the department store and the daily paper had in common a “random disposition of unrelated articles” which “induce in the reader a tolerance for unorganic confusion,” “a logic which is incomprehensible in terms of anything the subject can know or feel” and primes the consumer/reader for submission (137).
which attempts to modify public opinion depends upon the success with which it is able to enlist established points of view” (87). Bernays’s description foregrounds the extent to which the news merely reifies established points of view instead of including new ones. As U.S.A.’s Jerry Burnham and Mary French found, stories that go against these entrenched views are unlikely to make it to print.

According to Lee and Bernays, then, newspapers ventriloquize the process of the public’s reading, not its activities; the newspapers capture the public’s news-consuming capacity, not its news-making capacity. To explain, Bernays approvingly quotes “What Else Happened That Day?” an ad in the New York Tribune that lists news stories that didn’t make the paper: a Paris murder trial, a mysterious shooting in a Long Island doctor’s office, a robbery in Yellowstone Park. The ad also describes the events that displaced these instances of “romantic crime, mystery crime, adventurous crime”: at the same time as the Paris murder trial, Austria declared war on Serbia, and Russia mobilized troops on the German border. The crime stories, the paper concludes, are forgotten. “As news, these events became as if they had never happened… Something else had happened.”

All the news that a newspaper prints is affected by what else happened that day. If an earthquake occurs the day you announce your daughter’s engagement her picture may be left out of the newspaper.…

… When real news breaks, semi-news must go. When real news is scarce, semi-news returns to the front page. A very great man picked out Sunday night to dine at a Bowery mission. Monday is usually a dull day
for news, although some big events, notably the sinking of the *Titanic*,
came over the wires Sunday night. (Bernays 112)

This *New York Tribune* ad tells us that when events are not covered on its front page, it is
“as if they had never happened.” It gives readers no credit for attending to, or wishing to
follow, events that are not in the paper. Like Rasmussen’s insistence that the public is
“far away,” like “God Almighty” (617), the *New York Tribune* ad suggests that the public
rarely considers events abroad important, preferring stories of society engagements to
stories of natural disasters abroad. In order to appear in the paper, even a “very great
man” must intentionally manipulate the news cycle, choosing a slow news night to
perform acts of charity. The *Tribune* captures the nearsighted state of newspaper readers
who believe only the news in front of them, and it highlights the dangers in Moorehouse
and Rasmussen’s conception of the public as “far away.” Instead of helping readers see
what happens meanwhile, in other times and places, a newspaper controlled by the likes
of Rasmussen would give readers leave to ignore what they do not see.

*The 42nd Parallel’s colliding plots*

By looking at the relationship between *U.S.A.’s* narrative sections and its
Newsreels, I will trace a gradual shift in the prestige of the individual’s story, a shift that
has consequences for the trilogy’s ability to imagine the nation. From the earliest
Newsreels of *The 42nd Parallel*, individual stories are nearly impossible to disentangle
from the jumbled headline fragments that surround them. If forms like the “News Nebulae” of the *Chicago Tribune* were tailored to the needs of harried readers who needed the most pertinent news quickly, one wonders who, exactly, would abide headlines like the ones in *The 42nd Parallel*’s Newsreels. Each headline contains pieces from an almost indeterminate number of stories, so any attempt to make sense of them requires a painstakingly slow reading.

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**Nation's Big Men Await River Trip** Englewood Clubwomen Move To  
Uplift Drama Evangelist's Host Thousands Strong Pierces Heart of  
Crowded Hushed Levee Has $3,018 and Is Arrested (56)

**Almost Motionless In Midsummer** Langour On Business Seas One  
Million See Drunkards Bounced (119)

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20 This is, I would argue, the major difference between Joyce’s headlines in “Aeolus” and Dos Passos’s in his Newsreels. Joyce’s, I have argued, are fairly faithful replications of the kinds of headlines one might see in the *Freeman’s Journal*, but Dos Passos’s early Newsreels are deliberately difficult to understand. Dos Passos’s letters do not contain any specific references to *Ulysses*, though he clearly admired *A Portrait of the Artist*: “pray God I shant start imitating it off the face of the earth … It is so wonderfully succinct and follows such curious byways of expression” (*Fourteenth Chronicle* 193).

21 In “Fast Books Read Slow,” Sam See argues that modernist spatial form, specifically that of Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), serves to “deaccelerate readerly speed and offer a psychic location where time moves slower than in the texts’ represented worlds.” In this space between statis and motion, See writes, one can reclaim “the present moment as one of deliberation, not instantaneousness – individualization, not automation” (345).
A lack of consistent punctuation also makes *The 42nd Parallel*'s Newsreels slow going, because often no more than a single space separates headlines that do not interrupt each other entirely. The resulting headlines are delightfully absurd (how did a million fit onto business seas?), their nonsensical combinations of words emphasizing the contrast that results from different kinds of stories crashing into each other mid-sentence. While the “News Nebulae” stories ran parallel to each other, stories in *The 42nd Parallel*'s Newsreels seem to transcribe the thoughts of a confused, harried reader who skims the page.

Additionally, Dos Passos interrupts the early Newsreels’ headlines at particularly gripping junctures: “Prof Ferrer… the principal instigator of the recent revolutionary movement has been sentenced to death and will be shot Wednesday unless/Cook still pins faith on esquimaux says interior of the Island of Luzon most beautiful place on earth” (99). This Newsreel mixes the newsworthy and the trivial, with the urgency of Ferrer’s story specifically interrupted by Cook’s declaration of his faith in the esquimaux. The possibility of clemency for Ferrer recedes behind Cook’s faith and recedes further still as the beautiful Island of Luzon comes into focus. By interrupting stories at their most suspenseful points, just as a spurious assertion was made, a scandalous revelation unearthed, and so forth, the Newsreels heightens interest in a particular story only to immediately introduce another.

panic in exodus from Carlsbad disappearance of Major reveals long series of assassinations decollete in broad daylight lingerie frocks that by no possible means could be associated with the tub What shall be worn next?
Paris cries choirboys go camping profession to tour woods Belgrade Falls.

(230)

Each story appears *in medias res*, and no story is allowed to come to a natural conclusion. Ferrer will be suspended unless an unspecified event occurs, the flight from Carlsbad seems to have no cause or result, and the unfortunate Major has already disappeared. Capturing the middles of all of these stories heightens the impression that the news is composed of events happening simultaneously. But unlike the “News Nebulae,” which kept stories scrupulously separate, the Newsreels of *The 42nd Parallel* foreground the extent to which the public perceives news as a chattering rush from story to story.

Newsreel XI, an account of the *Titanic*’s sinking, runs right into the beginning of a narrative section devoted to Janey Williams. The original historical account goes on for several additional paragraphs after Dos Passos abruptly truncates it for *The 42nd Parallel*’s Newsreel. The first-person narration of the *Titanic* excerpt (“since we left”) makes the passage more immediate. However, *The 42nd Parallel*’s sudden switch from Newsreel to *Janey* (her italicized name indicates the start of a point-of-view chapter centered on her) scuttles any attempt to follow this account of the great ship’s accident.

the Titanic slowly tilted straight on end with the stern vertically upward and as it did so the lights in the cabins and saloons which had not flickered for a moment since we left, died out, came on again for a single flash and finally went out altogether. Meanwhile the machinery rattled through the
vessel with a rattle and a groaning that could be heard for miles. Then with a quiet slanting dive

*Janey*

‘But it’s so interesting, mommer,’ Janey would say when her mother bewailed the fact that she had to work. (135)

The *Titanic* is to Janey what Professor Ferrer’s execution was to the esquimaux: a distant death that disobeys the parallelism of the “News Nebulae,” bringing startling events from one plot into the continuity of another. There is no narrative reason to begin Janey’s narrative in the middle of the *Titanic*’s sinking, for the *Titanic* makes no appearance in Janey’s narrative, nor does it appear to be a metaphor for events in her life. The break between sections, in fact, indicates how remote Janey Williams seems from momentous events of her day like the downing of the *Titanic*. Yet *U.S.A.* connects the two stories on a formal level because far away news can intrude on individual stories.

Thus, another way to approach Denning’s question about why the characters in *U.S.A.* do not connect is to ask why they often collide by coincidence. In her theory of coincidence plots, Hilary P. Dannenberg measures a coincidence plot’s sophistication by the extent to which the reunion of two characters is anticipated and by the intensity of the scene of recognition (408–15). These parameters highlight the extent to which encounters between characters in *U.S.A.* are seemingly random and fleeting compared to, say, scenes of recognition between family members in *Jane Eyre* or *Bleak House*, Dannenberg’s
other examples. But as Michael North argues, the world of *U.S.A.* is not truly random, but instead subject to “the disorientation inherent to capitalism,” “an order too large and impersonal to grasp” (158). North sees these intersections between plots as opportunities to undo the kind of individualistic spectatorship that the trilogy deplores. To this I would add that intersections between plots are opportunities to undo the kind of individualistic reading that lies at the heart of both Dos Passos’s and his contemporaries’ critiques of newspaper reading.

Dannenberg attributes the significance of the coincidence plot to the way that such plots spur “an overwhelming desire for explanation,” that is, for the revelation of kinship or other previous relationships between characters (423). *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), which is in many ways a precursor to *U.S.A.*, problematizes the search for such connections. When a minor character wonders that it is “surprising how everybody in the world is always in the same place at the same time” (*Manhattan Transfer* 154), the statement seems somewhat naïve. Having depicted characters posting over land and sea (or at least the Hudson River) in the train, *Manhattan Transfer* demonstrates that the elevated train provides a moving center to the novel. This is why Bud Korpenning spends the opening of *Manhattan Transfer* searching unsuccessfully for an explanatory system to the city, asking everyone he meets to direct him to “the center of things” (22), a place “where it’d be more crowded” (37). Bud’s attempt to find the city’s center is doomed because the only entity around which every character coheres is the L train. Even when he does head downtown, at the center of things all he finds is the train: “It was noon and his money was all gone. The Elevated thundered overhead” (50).
*U.S.A.* describes characters whose acquaintance we have made in the narrative sections as if they were strangers, and this descriptive style is both the cause and the symptom of the low level of connection between characters endemic to *U.S.A.*’s put-on journalistic style (422). In *The 42nd Parallel*, the narrator describes in Mac’s words a party where Mac meets Moorehouse and Janey: “J. Ward Moorehouse didn’t make up to the girls as Ben had hoped. He brought his secretary, a tired blond girl, and they both looked scared to death” (276). In *U.S.A.*, Janey is both “a tired blond girl” and the subject of narrated sections that render her a much fuller character. The journalistic descriptors used to describe characters stand in sharp contrast to the details of characterization that the narrative sections of the novel offer. Other subjects of their own narrated sections become mere types through the eyes of other characters. To Richard Savage, Anne Elizabeth Trent registers first as a “drawling Texas voice” and finally as a “pinkcheeked girl in a dark grey uniform” (667). Eleanor Stoddard is “a pale older woman in grey,” and J. Ward Moorehouse is just “a tall stoutish lighthaired man” (708). Positioning itself as an anti-“News Nebulae,” *U.S.A.* connects its characters frequently, drawing attention to journalistic ways of knowing that keep them from recognizing each other.

**“Over there” in 1919**

Unlike *The 42nd Parallel*’s Newsreels, which were difficult to parse and seemed in their urgency to crowd each other off the page, the headlines of *1919*’s Newsreels are more consistently punctuated and each comes to a complete stop before the next begins. Because they are presented more clearly than previous headlines, *1919*’s headlines can be
clearly sorted into two categories: stories about conflicts at home, and stories about the war abroad (313).


Clusters of headlines like these occur throughout 1919’s Newsreels and demonstrate a different approach to relating stories to each other compared to The 42nd Parallel’s colliding Newsreels. 1919’s Newsreels are time machines, zipping the reader from Washington to Paris to Rome and back again, but The 42nd Parallel’s were a centrifuge, staging the way that everything happens at once by allowing stories to interrupt each other. In other words, in 1919 other stories happen “over there,” whereas in The 42nd Parallel events overlap with each other, making all events appear to happen at the same time.

As 1919 unfolds, the Newsreels reveal that though the war happens “over there,” domestic dissent against the United States’s war effort is causing conflict at home. That domestic dissent is considered irrelevant, even dangerous is evident from Newsreel XXII’s bidding those who “don’t like your Uncle Sammy” to “go back to your land across the sea” (450). The Newsreels demonstrate that, in addition to stories from the front and requests for wartime sacrifice at home, there is a third narrative. This version of
events cuts through such jingoistic rhetoric, and is obscured by the efforts of Moorehouse and those like him. A speech from captain of industry John D. Rockefeller resonates with a request to the patriotic citizens of Essex County to participate in a staged photo for the troops, as well as a litany of criticisms against those who indulge in un-American “babblings” (445). While one Newsreel can offer an account of Eugene Debs’ thirty-year prison sentence, or the criticism by two Nationalist South Africans that “the British and American flags expressed nothing” (445-6), another might ask “…what will our war veterans think of the American who babbles about some vague new order, while dabbling in the sand of shoal water?” (363). The contrast between pro-war and anti-war stories, therefore, demonstrates the increasing stratification of the Newsreels. Such a contrast hints at the possibility that stories which adhere to the official account muscle out other stories that do not.

Dos Passos associates Moorehouse with this emphasis on international conflict over domestic dissent. Moorehouse becomes a mouthpiece for complaints about “proGermans working under the mask of pacificism and knockers and slackers always ready to carp and criticize …” (547). As Moorehouse makes clear, only one narrative can be in the public mind at a time – these criticisms keep people from knowing “what a valuable effort the Red Cross workers were making” (547). Entrenched power uses international news to obscure domestic unrest, including agitation against the war. Even as Moorehouse himself prepares to join President Wilson as public relations counsel, The Big Money presents his decision as a way of avoiding trouble at home. Despite having initiated a divorce suit against Moorehouse that would ruin him, his wife Gertrude
declares that it is her duty to “make our sacrifices,” cloaking her sacrifice in a desire to give something up for the war effort (309).

Even after the armistice is announced, 1919’s Newsreels demonstrate that discontent never really faded at home, it had only temporarily yielded its space to the conflict abroad. The joyful scene in Paris contrasts with continued domestic unrest in the United States:

with the gay sunlight and the resumption of racing Paris has resumed its normal life. The thousands and thousands of flags of all nations hang on dozens of lines stretching from mast to mast making a fairylike effect that is positively astonishing

THREAT LETTERS REVEALED

_I love my country indeed I do_

_But this war is making me blue_

_I like fightin fightin’s my name_

_But fightin is the least about this fightin game_

the police found an anteroom full of mysteriouslooking packages which when opened were found full of pamphlets in Yiddish Russian and English and of membership cards for the Industrial Workers of the World (605)
This Newsreel contains the official narrative of war and of the following peace talks, and describes the “leaders of the democratic movements” who try to disrupt the talks as “wild men” (606). But at the same time, the Newsreel contrasts these law-and-order denunciations by offering these “wild men” a voice, even one that they can use to criticize “this fightin game” (605). In alluding to the discovery of pro-labor pamphlets and membership cards, this Newsreel demonstrates that while the fighting abroad may be over, conflict at home continues. But as The Big Money begins, it is impossible not to see that something has shifted: the Newsreels have become less conflicted, less polyphonic, and more uniform.

**Looking for The Big Money**

A cursory glance at The Big Money’s Newsreels reveals how thoroughly advertising has overtaken the public mind. There are far more advertisements in these Newsreels than in The 42nd Parallel’s or 1919’s. Newsreel L, for example, trumpets improvements in industrial products: “IMPROVED LUBRICATING SYSTEM,” “NEWLY DESIGNED GEARs,” “NEW CLUTCH—AN ENGINEERING ACHIEVEMENT,” and “NEW AND LARGER BULLET LAMPS” (845). But consumer products also appear to be on the rise, with other Newsreels advertising consumer services: “you too can quickly learn dancing at home without music and without a partner…” or quack remedies: “… he can show you how to grow brains. … He can show you how to dissolve marital or conjugal problems. He is an expert in matters of sex” (903). The chatty familiarity of these ads (and their references to more personal problems
of romance or sex) suggests their appeal is more personal – “you too” can learn, they promise.

These advertisements are not aimed at an abstract, plural public, instead, they invite readers to imagine themselves into the paper: “We Want You to Use Our Credit System to Your Utmost Advantage. Only a Small Down Payment and the Balance in Small Amounts to Suit Your Convenience” (1000). The ad plucks the reader from anonymity by seeming to recognize and appeal to his advantage and convenience (1000). The city of Detroit advertises itself in a similar way, offering something to every prospective visitor. “A marvelous industrial beehive” beckons the businessman, “a site made forever remarkable by the waters of that noble strait that gives the city its name” awaits the nature enthusiast, and a rich collection of legends and archives lures the history buff to the city (1007). Such advertisements are a far cry from the first ads that Moorehouse was pictured writing, which were full of dreck such as: “The lifegiving surges of the broad Atlantic beat on the crystalline beaches of Ocean City (Maryland)” (165). Instead of appealing to abstract ideas or generic clichés, the advertisements of The Big Money single out individuals and include them in the space where the news once was.

The Newsreels suggest that the equivalence public relations pioneer Ivy Lee drew between reading and consumption has become second nature to the American public. The papers appeal to individuals’ desire for distinction by offering them the chance to buy their way out of the anonymous mass. As with Moorehouse’s campaign for Americanism, which sold Bingham’s medical tonics to consumers who wanted to treat their own maladies, these ads sell the illusion of independence. Telling consumers that Bingham’s tonics could free them from a slavish reliance on doctors is a particularly clever shell
game on Moorehouse’s part, for his ads actually persuade consumers to trade one kind of
dependence for another: “Surely the American people have the right to choose what
products they want to buy,” Moorehouse tells a senator who clears the way for
Bingham’s medications to be sold legally (1193). In U.S.A., Americans depend both on
the companies that sell them particular things and on the narratives that the companies
use to authorize such expenditures. Ads tell consumers a story that they can fit
themselves into: the history lover who immerses himself in Detroit’s legends, the mother
who sees a Dodge as more prestigious than a Ford, the patient who spurns a doctor’s
advice in favor of taking a tonic that he can buy for himself.

The Big Money’s Newsreels, however, advertise opportunities and possibilities
even more than particular products. A telling scene from Richard Ellsworth Savage’s
narrative, one that echoes an earlier Newsreel, suggests that the advertisements are
literally seducing the reader.

YOUNG MAN WANTED

Oh tell me how long

I’ll have to wait

OPPORTUNITY […]

OPPORTUNITY FOR […]

Do I get it now

Or must I hesitate (791)
The lyric “Do I get it now… or must I he…estate,” which lets the frustrated lover’s sigh double as the job seeker’s anticipation, returns in the narrative of *The Big Money*, where both sides of the lyric’s meaning come into play. A man who calls himself Gloria Swanson hums it into Dick Savage’s ear in a Harlem club, and once he and Dick are alone, he steals Dick’s wallet (1203). The resonance of this lyric across *The Big Money*’s modes reveals its universality, and the ease with which characters pick up the Newsreels’ language suggests how thoroughly the language of advertising permeates the public mind.

As *The Big Money*’s Newsreels proceed, it becomes clear that the papers are advertising for more than just services and products. Each named position in this Newsreel’s help wanted ad, which begins “YOUNG MAN WANTED,” is a position that one of the paper’s readers could take up:

[...]for wide awake ambitious bookkeeper… architectural draftsman with experience on factory and industrial buildings in brick, timber, and reinforced concrete… bronze fitter.. letterer… patternmarker… carriage painter… first class striper and finisher… young man for hosiery, underwear and notion house… assistant in order department… first class penman accurate at figures… energetic hardworker for setting dies in power presses for metal parts. (790)

This catalogue proceeds for two more paragraphs, offering opportunities to men of all stations. One peculiar touch is that the job titles in the next paragraph are alphabetized,
proceeding from “canvasser” through “jeweler” and ending with “wrapper” (790-1), and the same is true for Newsreel LI, which contains a list of jobs for women. Such lists, neatly punctuated by ellipses and at times organized in alphabetical order, would have been unthinkable in The 42nd Parallel’s Newsreels. The shift suggests that advertising has made America’s ambition orderly and demarcated. Advertising parses ambition into individual stories.

As characters treat each other as figments of publicity, the social fabric of the novel continues to fray. After Moorehouse’s heart attack, one of his employees glibly explains his lack of sympathy: “After all J. Ward Moorehouse isn’t a man. It’s a name… You can’t feel sorry when a name gets sick” (1196). Moorehouse’s transition from “man” to “name” parallels his transition in the trilogy from character to institution, from man of the public to publicity man. The character Moorehouse has his own third-person narrated sections: we see young Ward “chafing when he had nothing to do until he thought he’d go mad and run amok and kill somebody… full of sick longing for the future,” for example (160). But there are only three sections (and all of them are in The 42nd Parallel) focused on the character Moorehouse, despite his many appearances as the “name” Moorehouse in the later volumes of the trilogy. By contrast, there are eight sections focused on Charley Anderson spread out over the whole trilogy, and eight sections focused on Mac, who is never heard from again after The 42nd Parallel. U.S.A. stages the disappearance of Moorehouse the character, a neat erasure that is the very indication of the success of Moorehouse’s craft. When he appears later in the trilogy, characters note his appearance in near-reportorial shorthand. Describing him, through Eveline’s eyes, as “a large quiescoken blueeyed jowly man with a touch of the southern senator in his way
of talking” (662), the narrator has turned Moorehouse into a public figure, a metaphor instead of a character “full of sick longing for the future” (160).

As *U.S.A.* demonstrates, advertising acclimates readers to only looking out for their own advantage. In such a culture, Dos Passos shows, readers respect public figures only to the extent that they can personally identify with those public figures. Upon meeting G.H. Barrow, Mary French is confident that she knows what men like him are like: “He seemed so nice somehow Mary felt sure he had been a workingman” (866). Janey Williams comes to the same conclusion about Barrow, but, consistent with her more genteel background views him with suspicion instead of warmth: “He wore shellrimmed spectacles that he kept pulling off and putting on as if he wasn’t sure whether he saw better with them or without them. … It was with a little feeling of worry that she worked out that he must be a laborleader” (251). Even the instantly recognizable J. Ward Moorehouse gets this treatment: “there was something sincere and appealing about him, like about her father, that she liked,” thinks Eveline (547). When two characters meet, they tend to imagine stories for each other, as Charley does upon meeting Margo Dowling: “She wore a little black hat and a neat bluegrey suit … She had an amazed look on her face like she’d just heard something extraordinarily funny” (1036). The narration switches quickly from a description of a generic woman to Charley’s interpretation of Margo’s expression, suggesting that in Moorehouse’s age of publicity, no character can be anonymous to another.

Though she makes her fame as an actress, Margo’s greatest role appears to be that of Margo Dowling herself, a person whose very identity is public property. As Richard Sennett writes about the figure of the performer, Margo’s “declaration of a forceful,
exciting, morally suspect personality” is “wholly contrary to the style of ordinary bourgeois life, in which one tried to avoid being read as a person by suppressing one’s feelings” (27). By cultivating a number of personal histories, Margo sets herself apart from her audience. Her inauthenticity makes her more appealing to audience members who are afraid to reveal personality themselves. Two characters at Eveline’s cocktail party argue about Margo: “She has the loveliest manners… I don’t know why, I expected her to be kinda tough. They say she came from the gutter” only to be corrected by another: “Not at all… Her people were Spaniards of noble birth who lived in Cuba” (1234).

As The Big Money illustrates, while the process of reading the news has become the process of participating in the news, the stories that readers debate most avidly are stories about personalities, not politics. This anticipates Sennett’s argument that “the sharing of a common, collective personality” keeps the people from “using their fraternity to change social conditions” (261), and The Big Money emphasizes the role of the newspapers in celebrating these collective personalities. To invoke the readers’ fraternity requires another form entirely.

Celebrities and “persons unknown”

The Big Money’s biting portrayal of Hollywood centers on the problem of celebrity, casting it as the ultimate exploitation of the individual’s story. “Adagio Dancer,” one of The Big Money’s biographical sections, highlights the difference between the person born Rudolfo Guglielmi, and the man he becomes: Rudy Valentino, “the gigolo of every woman’s dreams” (926). “Adagio Dancer” proves that Valentino’s
fame is actually intensified, not extinguished, by his death. “When the public was barred from the undertaking parlors hundreds of women groggy with headlines got in to view the poor body/claiming to be exdancing partners, old playmates, relatives from the old country, filmstars” (929). That the crowd is “groggy with headlines” indicates that the newspapers have incited this proliferation of imposters, of people who do not at all see themselves as part of a far away public.

Valentino’s fans and the newspaper exist in a reciprocal relationship: after the paper reports that mobs have shown up at the funeral parlor in express violation of the funeral parlor’s orders, additional throngs appear. When Valentino’s biography concludes “The funeral train arrived in Hollywood on page 23 of the *New York Times*” (928), page 23 sounds like as much of a destination as Hollywood. Eliding Hollywood and page 23 of *The New York Times* is only plausible because both are, to Dos Passos’s mind, fictions that rely on the public’s participation. Just as moviegoers willingly rush to Margo’s films, so they rush to the funeral parlor – but only because they have read that others are rushing to the funeral parlor. But what *The Big Money* can make visible, which neither Hollywood nor *The New York Times* can, is the invisible script that directs public participation.

Other artist figures in *The Big Money*, like the struggling director Margolies, sell a fantasy of substitution by which viewer-consumers imagine themselves into the place of those they see on the screen. Directing his romantic leads Margo Dowling and Rodney Cathcart, Margolies emphasizes their responsibility to their audience instead of to their roles:
… You must make them feel it. …They all love her, a piece of fragile beautiful palpitant womanhood. … They all feel they are you, you are loving her for them, the millions who want love and beauty and excitement, but forget them, loosen up, my dear fellow, forget that I’m here and the camera’s here, you are alone together snatching a desperate moment, you are alone except for your two beating hearts, you and the most beautiful girl in the world, the nation’s newest sweetheart… All right… hold it… Camera. (1126)

To “make them feel it” is no longer about, as it was in Dos Passos’s discussion of Processional or Grosz’s drawings, shocking the viewer into identifying with the low or abject. Margolies’s film elicits love for Margo instead of interest in the movie’s incredibly far-fetched plot (1115), and it gives the audience a conduit for loving Margo by pairing her with the blandly good-looking Cathcart (1126). Paradoxically, the intimacy of Cathcart and Dowling’s scene is inversely proportional to the size of the audience it appeals to. Their performance of a moment just for two appeals to no fewer than millions. Margolies’ film shows how much the adoration that we feel through and for characters is highly constructed. It is a fiction to believe that we can love or understand someone else by proxy, The Big Money tells us, but Hollywood’s fiction is particularly cruel. It offers an illusion of closeness only to rebuff the viewer as a member of that “far away” public, one of the anonymous, unworthy “millions” who are merely part of the audience (1126).
But anonymous characters pull the greatest part of the novel’s symbolic weight, because it is on an anonymous character that Dos Passos writes the story of the entire nation – a retort to Moorehouse’s “campaign for Americanism.” While the title of the biography that ends 1919, “The Body of an American,” refers to a singular person, this individual’s tomb contains: “what they’d scraped up of Richard Roe/and other person or persons unknown. Only one can go” (756). 1919 finds that representing “persons unknown” means maintaining the anonymity that keeps individuals from becoming figments of publicity. For this reason, instead of naming the specific place where the soldier was born, “The Body of an American” offers up several birthplaces: “in Brooklyn, in Memphis, near the lakefront in Cleveland, Ohio, in the stench of the stockyards in Chi, on Beacon Hill, in an old brick house in Alexandria Virginia, on Telegraph Hill, in a halftimbered Tudor cottage in Portland the city of roses” (757). The soldier was born into different circumstances: everywhere from a “shack” to an “exclusive residential suburb,” had many jobs (747), and may have lost his identification tag in any number of ordinary ways before “The shell had his number on it” (760). Thus, “The Body of an American” emphasizes the arbitrariness by which we elevate individual stories, and in doing so, indicts the novel itself, the pre-eminent form for telling individual stories. Compared to the other models U.S.A. has established for telling multiple stories at the same time, namely interruption, obfuscation, and projection, “The Body of an American” succeeds in telling multiple stories at the same time but reveals the violence necessary to do so.

The only other positive scene of collectivity in the novel also demonstrates the confluence of violence and collectivity. As Don, Mary, and others who protested Sacco
and Vanzetti’s execution ride to jail in a patrolwagon, Don, injured after a police beating, asks his fellow protesters to sing: “Mary forgot everything as her voice joined his voice, all their voices, the voices of the crowds being driven back across the bridge in singing: *Arise ye prisoners of starvation*...” (1155). Don’s voice blends with Mary’s voice, their voices blend with the group’s and those of the crowds, and in singing the *Internationale*, they ally themselves with their movement both in America and abroad. But Sacco and Vanzetti are dead, and Don is half-dead, the wounds on his head “bleedin’ terrible” (1155), making this stirring gesture nothing but a whistle in the dark.

The scene in the patrol wagon demonstrates not that power is afraid of people once they get together, but that people can only get together in the face of injustice and brutality so overwhelming as to render their actual resistance futile. By contrast, during Mary’s earlier arrest for passing out pamphlets, a similar chance for connection is squandered because resistance is so peaceable. In a holding cell with “two Jewish garmentworkers and a well-dressed woman in a flowered summer dress with a string of pearls round her neck,” Mary notes that the “cops were polite, everybody was jolly; it seemed like a kind of game, it was hard to believe anything real was at stake” (1151). In Mary’s first arrest, the characters do not speak to each other. They exist in parallel, anonymous plots, and as such the police are indifferent to them. Within *U.S.A.*, connections between plots can disrupt the sense of anonymous simultaneity that makes individuals docile.

“The Body of an American,” then, may well be Dos Passos’s most fully realized version of America. *U.S.A.*’s prologue contains the famous pronouncement that *U.S.A.* is “the speech of the people” (2), and initially this seems to have little in common with the
body of “Richard Roe/and other person or persons unknown.” “The speech of the people,” interestingly, is the answer to the prologue’s question about where the epilogue’s main character feels less alone, where he finds “the link that tingled in the blood” (2), so it is another way of considering Denning’s question about the lack of connection between characters. The main character finds the link “in his mother’s words telling about long ago, in his father’s telling about when I was a boy, in the kidding stories of uncles, in the lies the kids told at school, the hired man’s yarns, the tall tales the doughboys told after taps” (2). This link, importantly, is not a link to the past: while the young man’s parents situate him within their family’s past, the kids’ lies and the hired man’s yarns are all fabrications. What is more important is that all of these stories come from someone, as opposed to being the disembodied projections of the movies or the jumbled voices of the Newsreel. These anti-celebrity stories of “persons unknown” (756) act as connective tissue between individuals. They ask the individual hearer to imagine him or herself into the position of someone without fame, someone completely anonymous.

**Parallel deaths**

Citing the death of Joe Williams in 1919, Jean-Paul Sartre lauds the skill with which Dos Passos changes points of view: after being deep within Joe’s mind, we immediately “find ourselves outside with the chorus, part of the collective memory… Nothing gives you a clearer feeling of annihilation” (103). The sudden permeability of Joe’s interior monologue to the view of the “chorus” or “collective memory” undoes the
illusion that one’s story proceeds in simultaneous anonymity parallel to the stories of others.

Joe laid out a couple of frogs and was backing off towards the door, when he saw in the mirror that a big guy in a blouse was bringing down a bottle on his head held with both hands. He tried to swing around but he didn’t have time. The bottle crashed his skull and he was out (561).

The idiomatic “couple of frogs” and “backing off” clearly signal that the narrative is in Joe’s mind, but we know we are out of it from the report, which an unconscious Joe never could have made, that “he was out.” This description’s use of free indirect discourse does what the overlapping stories in *The 42nd Parallel’s* Newsreels do, but in a more graceful way. The transitions between stories in *The 42nd Parallel* were jarring and sudden, but the complete erasure of a character’s personality through the effacement of his narration is subtler, and thus more flexibly negotiates the line between individual and collective stories.

Characters like Anne Elizabeth Trent and Charley Anderson die abruptly somewhere offstage, just as Joe did. The narrator inhabits Trent’s mind as she falls to her death in a plane crash and Anderson’s mind as he lies in the hospital, but in both cases the Newsreel intercedes at the moments of their deaths.
They were climbing again. Daughter saw the shine of a wing gliding by itself a little way from the plane. The spinning sun blinded her as they dropped.

*Newsreel XXXIX* (713)

Dos Passos renders Charley Anderson’s death in the hospital after a car crash in the same way, bringing the reader rapidly out of Charley’s consciousness and into the Newsreel, into the public: “He had to make them hear him. He was too weak. He was dropping spinning being sucked down into/ Newsreel LXII’ (1086). We move from the character’s mind to what Sartre called the “chorus, part of the collective memory” and from that collective memory to the Newsreel, itself a chorus. Each contact point between narratives changes the novel’s scale, and helps clarify the way in which *U.S.A.* is, as many critics have claimed, a collective novel. *U.S.A.* is not just collective just because it collects many voices; it is collective because of the ease with which it shifts from story to story, from character to chorus.

*The Big Money* layers its plots most densely as the novel ends, when Mary French learns of Eveline’s suicide shortly after she hears that the police have shot Eddy Spellman while he delivered food to striking miners. Though two characters more unlike each other than the frivolous Eveline and the noble Eddy could not be found, French initially conflates the two when her friend Ada calls her: “At first Mary couldn’t make out what it was about. ‘But, Mary darling, haven’t you read the papers?’ ‘No, I said I hadn’t. You mean about Eddy Spellman?’ ‘No, darling, it’s too awful, you remember we were just there yesterday for a cocktail party… you must remember, Eveline Johnson, it’s so
awful’ (1238). “The papers” are to blame for Mary’s confusion, that is, both Mary and Ada assume that the newspaper would be most concerned with the story they are most interested in.

The fleeting chance that we might be told Eddy’s story instead of Eveline’s is an instance of what Michael North, referring to a meeting in Genoa between Joe Williams and Richard Savage, calls the possibility for “a sort of utopian encounter in which both sides realize the coercive power of cash and class and in realizing it throw it off” (161). Mary’s supposition that the papers might have spurned Eveline’s story in favor of Eddy’s is utopian indeed. But for a moment in The Big Money, Eddy’s death eclipses Eveline’s – if only to bemoan the public’s inability to keep both on its mind at once.

The Big Money highlights the contingencies of fortune that make stories transpire one way instead of another, and nowhere more so than in the story of Eddy’s death. In an earlier scene, Eddy tells Mary that on a previous supply run, a bootlegger also named Eddy saved his life by telling him that a police ambush was waiting for him (1219). And when Eddy Spellman is actually found dead, the men who spot his wrecked truck think he has been in “an accident” until they see the bullet in his head (1237). Eddy’s narrow escape from the police, his having been alerted by someone with the same name, and the way his murder initially looked like an accident point to at least three other narratives that did not transpire. In the first, Eddy would have been murdered earlier; in the second, he might have been a bootlegger instead of a labor organizer, in the third, Eddy dies in a car accident instead of by a policeman’s gun. These paired stories highlight U.S.A.’s organization: it is not an orderly newspaper page with stories running side-by-side but a complex web of interlocking stories.
The intersection of Eveline’s plot with Eddy’s recalls the end of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), published five years before *The 42nd Parallel*. Both novels contrast the sudden death of a young man – shell-shocked soldier Septimus Smith in Woolf’s novel and union activist Eddy Spellman in Dos Passos’s – with frivolous cocktail parties that go on at the same time. Clarissa’s identification with the close-by Septimus is much more complete than the fleeting overlap between Eveline and Eddy, so much more striking that Clarissa experiences Septimus’s death through her own body:

> Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it (184).

The sudden switch in this passage from Clarissa experiencing another’s death just as she “always” does to perceiving Septimus’s death through his body suggests how startlingly complete her identification with others can be. By contrast, in *1919*, the account of Joe Williams’ death ends with “and he was out” – there is nobody to report, as the narrator does from Clarissa’s mind, “So she saw it.” This reflects the novels’ different priorities: characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* are more capable of connecting with others, and such connection is regarded unequivocally as positive. Clarissa and Peter, for example, “went in and out of each other’s minds without any effort” (63).
In *U.S.A.*, this kind of collectivity has fallen away: characters experience events differently because the papers they read have begun to pander to them solely as individuals. Dos Passos’s trilogy shows us what happens when personal relationships have become publicity projections. The popularity of false stories that “make great publicity,” like Margo’s patently false account of growing up among exiled noblemen on a Cuban sugar plantation (987) exemplify the ascendency of publicity over the public, of Americanism over America. Stories like Jerry Burnham’s war stories, policemen beating Mary French and her companions outside the Boston courthouse after the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, or the truth of Eddy Spellman’s “accident,” figure into the novel of their own right, but also as the stories that Margo’s or Eveline’s stories displace. *U.S.A.* not only tells these unpopular stories, but also reveals the process by which they are usually obscured.
CODA

I hope to have demonstrated that our account of the relationship between the modernist novel and collectivity can be helpfully inflected by a closer attention to gaps and overlaps between plots. It is not a coincidence, I have argued, that such surprising moments often coincide with or mimic the form of the very same daily newspapers that these novels represent. Having begun with *Between the Acts*’s Lucy Swithin engrossed in a book and ended with John Dos Passos’s vision of an America “groggy with headlines,” we might ask what comes *after* Isa Oliver’s *Times*. Over a century after Conrad’s novelistic appropriation of the newspapers’ power to invade, what technologies and forms help us imagine other plots, and what sorts of communities do they imply?

To answer these questions, I turn briefly to Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2011) to draw out a connection between what Egan has described as her debt to modernism and her novel’s representation of a media culture characterized by the intersection of different plots. While modernist novelists undermined myopic reading, shocking readers who could not see beyond their own narratives with echoes or reminders of other stories, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* offers a totality in which all plots are intolerably visible. This formal difficulty, as I will explain, has some very dystopian consequences.

Nearly every interview with or article on Egan mentions the unlikely pair of texts that inspired *A Visit from the Goon Squad*: HBO’s *The Sopranos*, for its multi-plot structure, and Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, for its non-linear handling of time. But Egan also cites James Joyce as an inspiration, usually also in regard for his fiction’s non-linear representation of time. In particular, Egan praises Joyce’s ability to capture the
way that “a moment itself is infinite and full of aspects” (Ashbrook). Because of its mediation by the human imagination, any given moment of time can expand into the past and future, and into alternate presents. For Egan, Joyce’s work is important because it does not exhibit a “forward feeling”; that is, in these works time does not move linearly forward (Ashbrook). But what I have tried to do in this project is suggest that our discussions of modernist time would be incomplete without considerations of multiplottedness, and considerations of the way that form creates a sense of multiplottedness. If A Visit from the Goon Squad indeed takes up a sort of Joycean time, it is also worth asking what difference our decidedly twenty-first technology makes.

Egan describes the organizing principle of her book as “lateral curiosity,” the opposite of the “forward feeling” that she sees modernist authors as rejecting (Julavits 84). “Lateral curiosity” refers to the moments in the narrative in which a minor character becomes a major character – i.e. someone glimpsed out of the corner of a character’s eye receives her own point-of-view chapter immediately after, or when an event mentioned in passing becomes the focus of the following scene (Ashbrook). This sense of “little tingling awarenesses of other people” affects not just Egan’s readers, but also the characters in A Visit from the Goon Squad, who seem somewhat aware of the plot machinations that keep bringing them together. Alex notes, for example, that “enough years had managed to pass that he felt like he’d seen every person in Manhattan at least once” (329). When Ted puts off looking for Sasha for a week only to run into her by chance, both realize that it is a “staggering coincidence” (215). The sense of connectedness also links past, present, and future plots, with Bennie telling Alex he has “[a] feeling… That we have some history together that hasn’t happened yet” (311).
A Visit from the Goon Squad suggests, however, that this sense of familiarity is technologically mediated, even technologically produced. In one of the most-discussed episodes of the novel, a group of Americans on safari in Africa sees a lion attack a member of their group:

The members of Ramsey’s safari will have gained a story they’ll tell for the rest of their lives. It will prompt some of them, years from now, to search for each other on Google and Facebook, unable to resist the wish-fulfillment fantasy these portals offer: What ever happened to …? (71)

It appears that Google and Facebook have taken up where Mrs. Swithin’s book and Isa Oliver’s newspaper left off, and Egan’s prose provides detail as if it were offering a search result. Google animates the lateral curiosity of A Visit from the Goon Squad, asking and quickly answering these “What ever happened to…?” questions. As writer Heidi Julavits says in an interview with Egan, the sudden leaps of the narrative from one character to another “mimics how our curiosity fires these days” (84).

As a best-case scenario of what can come of Googling, the narrator gives the example of Louise and Dean (both of whom are far younger in “Safari,” with Louise only twelve). After Louise’s eventual divorce, they find each other online and wind up at the altar, and Goon Squad relates, as Google would, a number of intimate details about their encounter (71). But “mostly, the reunions will lead to a mutual discovery that having been on safari thirty-five years before doesn’t qualify as having much in common” (71). Other discoveries are more cruel: the joyful final scene of “Safari,” in which Charlie
dances with her young brother Rolph, is disrupted by the narrator’s assertion that Charlie will remember this moment fondly “long after Rolph has shot himself in the head in their father’s house at twenty-eight” (82). Like the death of Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, this sudden dispatching of a story’s main character is described as if that death had already happened, somewhere else offstage.

Egan deploys flash-forwards about characters that are not even in the scene at hand. Of the Samburu warrior in “Safari” who visits the tour group as a sort of faux anthropological attraction she writes:

Thirty-five years from now, in 2008, this warrior will be caught in the tribal violence between the Kikuyu and the Luo and will die in a fire. He’ll have had four wives and sixty-three grandchildren by then, one of whom, a boy named Joe, will inherit his lalema: the iron hunting dagger in a leather scabbard now hanging at his side. Joe will go to college at Columbia and study engineering, becoming an expert in visual robotic technology that detects the slightest hint of irregular movement (the legacy of a childhood spent scanning the grass for lions). He’ll marry an American named Lulu and remain in New York, where he’ll invent a scanning device that becomes standard issue for crowd security (62).

This description is laden with detail about Joe, a character that has never appeared before (and in the end, appears only briefly in “Pure Language”). Joe does not even appear in “Safari,” and neither does his father. Even his grandfather’s role in “Safari” is limited.
But *A Visit from the Goon Squad* does not find this glut of information as overwhelming as some of the modernist novels I have discussed do – the detectives in *The Secret Agent*, for example, tracked the anarchists’ targets day and night but still missed Verloc’s sending Stevie out with the bomb. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* seems to relish its ability to leave nothing out, not even a passing character’s grandson.

Critic David Rando, borrowing from Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the archive, writes that modernism’s historic moment exemplified a duality – the ability to record everything, to capture into an archive the impressions of moments as small as the instant – but at the same time, the realization that any new experience “is simultaneously an act of repressing, forgetting, or erasing of something else” (6). If modernism articulated an anxiety about forgetting and leaving things out, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* evinces no such anxiety. In fact, its concern is more about what to do with all this information – the novel asks whether there is an ethical imperative attendant upon seeing these other plots. And it also asks whether all these gathered details form a meaningful whole, or merely act as window dressing.

The possibility that all of these details might add up to a comprehensive whole keeps Egan’s characters searching for the right ones. Alex’s thirst for information about Lulu, his new boss’s assistant, is overwhelming – when her answers to his questions about her parents are inconclusive, he is “inclined to pursue this line of questioning back to the moment of Lulu’s conception” in service of “a perverse need to go backward, to understand Lulu, to pinpoint exactly why she disconcerted him” (318). Alex’s interrogation of Lulu over a lunch that he regretfully calculates will only last for “thirty minutes, maybe forty-five” (327) restages “Forty-Minute Lunch,” an earlier chapter that
saturizes a newspaper celebrity profile. “Forty-Minute Lunch” seems full of detail for detail’s sake, picturing starlet Kitty Jackson as “a human bonsai in a white sleeveless dress, seated at a back table of a Madison Avenue restaurant” (166). Alex’s curiosity about Lulu is of a different magnitude than Jules’s about Kitty (the interview comes to a close because Jules tries to rape Kitty in Central Park), but is still an attempt to try, by assembling detail, to imagine another person’s interiority.

But Alex and Jules are not the only collectors of detail in A Visit from the Goon Squad, a novel clearly apprehensive about what happens when individuals are reduced to collections of data. Alex “could never quite forget that every byte of information he’d posted online (favorite color, vegetable, sexual position) was stored in the database of multinationals who swore they would never, ever use it—that he was owned, in other words…” (316). Alex himself runs a similar calculation, assessing each of his 15,896 friends on his social network according to how much “Need” “Reach,” and “Corruptibility” each expresses. Trying to suss out which of his friends has the right qualities to publicize his latest project, Alex runs a sort of mental-Google on them: “his friend Finn, for example, a failed actor and quasi-drug addict who’d posted a recipe for speedballs on his page and lived mostly off the goodwill of his former Wesleyan classmates (Need: 9, Corruptibility: 10) had no reach (1)” (316). All of these details of Alex’s and Finn’s lives are immediately available: posted online, they are accessible to curious old friends and “multinationals” alike. A Visit from the Goon Squad’s lateral curiosity, then, reveals that twenty-first century ways of imagining the lives of others is but a mania for cataloguing characteristic detail.
One of the novel’s most dystopic visions dramatizes the thin line between Googling and being Googled, between the relief of having one’s curiosity sated with readily available detail and the anxiety of being under constant surveillance. “Forty-Minute Lunch” draws out this dynamic by giving voice to Jules Jones’s satirical suggestion that visitors to Central Park be required to wear electronic tracking bracelets. The bracelets, which would index such census-like matters as marital status and number of children as well as more qualitative measures like “fulfillment of sprawling, loopy youthful ambitions or lack thereof, ability to fight off bouts of terror and despair or lack thereof” (185) would then produce a ranking measuring the likelihood by which “personal failures will occasion jealous explosions directed at those more accomplished” (185). On one hand, this vision can’t be taken entirely seriously, as it is Jules’s tongue-in-cheek proposal to Mayor Giuliani for preventing incidents like the one in which Jules himself assaulted Kitty Jackson. But on the other hand, A Visit from the Goon Squad’s Central Park seems like the Internet age’s answer to Joyce’s “Wandering Rocks.” There can be none of minor Ulysses character John Wyse Nolan’s “unseen coldness” toward imperial power when everyone in Central Park is seen, reduced to a number, and then to one of several “encoded points of light on a radar screen” (185). While “Wandering Rocks” offered the potential for freedom in “unseen” moments, in “Forty-Minute Lunch” there are no unseen moments, and hence no freedom.

Surveillance in A Visit from the Goon Squad isn’t just symbolized by the choppers that hover over Lower Manhattan, reminding outdoor concertgoers in “Pure Langauge” that their anxiety is “the price of safety” (330). It is imbued into the very form of the novel. The logic that leads us to expect that other characters’ plots are just a few
turns of the page away suggests that privileged knowledge of other people is just a few keystrokes away. If for Woolf, the generational change that *Between the Acts* chronicles can be expressed as the shift from the book to the newspaper, Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* articulates the very high price that we pay when we imagine each other through Google. Some sense that we can proceed simultaneously and anonymously, it turns out, actually helps us evade classification and embody the variety that any community worth being part of would preserve.
Works Cited


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