

THE ART OF NOISE: LITERATURE AND DISTURBANCE 1900-1940

by  
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## ABSTRACT

*The Art of Noise: Literature and Disturbance 1900-1940* is a study of noise's role in prose literature in the U.S., Britain, and Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century. *The Art of Noise* focuses on what I call *modernist noise*, a way of leveraging noise—understood both as an auditory phenomenon (unwanted sound) and cybernetic interference (additional or garbled information that distorts information transmission)—to draw attention to, and in some cases to patch, a communicative or epistemological gap. I examine how authors leverage noise's ability to confuse, to dismay, to pull a reader out of the flow of a text, and even to alienate her in order to create sticking points in their work that demand attention. In tracing noise's disruptive qualities through modernist and modernist-era novels, I am particularly interested in how the defamiliarizing action of modernist noise coalesces around limit cases of social and political belongingness—narratives of extremity ranging from total war to economic and racial otherness.

Scholarship on literary sound has tended to focus on musicality, or on the impact of sound technology on modernist culture. This focus has led to a general neglect of noise *in se*. The authors I consider—chief among them Mary Borden, James Joyce, Upton Sinclair, and Richard Wright—suggest that writing noise carries with it the possibility of intercourse between otherwise unbridgeable domains of experience. Instead of resolving modernist noise into a symptom of the twentieth century's mechanized war and industry or of modernism's own inclination toward an aesthetic of difficulty, I read its irruption into the novel as a productive disturbance.

Directors: Douglas Mao and Mark Christian Thompson

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My parents raised Cubs fans in a house made of books; I suspect there is no formula for producing Ph.D. students more effective than to bring your children up as readers with a high tolerance for delayed gratification. This is for them.

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## INTRODUCTION. THE ART OF NOISE

KATTRIN *is staring into the far distance, toward the town. She goes on drumming.*

FIRST SOLDIER: This can't go on, they'll hear it in the town as sure as hell.

LIEUTENANT: We must make another noise with something. Louder than the drum. What can we make a noise with?

FIRST SOLDIER: But we mustn't make a noise!

LIEUTENANT: A harmless noise, fool, a peacetime noise!

OLD PEASANT: I could start chopping wood.

LIEUTENANT: That's it! (*The PEASANT brings his ax and chops away.*) Chop! Chop harder! Chop for your life!

—Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (1939)

How much noise must be made to silence noise?

—Michel Serres, *Genesis* (1982)<sup>1</sup>

Noise, as any dictionary not written by Ambrose Bierce has it, is unwanted sound.<sup>2</sup> “Unwanted sound” is a convenient definition, both in its apparent simplicity and broad applicability: if disruptive theatergoers can be noisy, so can an elevated train rattling along its track, an audio recording marked by a hiss or a hum, or even—to stretch very slightly from the strictly auditory into the world of cybernetics—a message or signal containing extra or distorted information.<sup>3</sup> Further clarification seems unnecessary. You know noise when you hear it.

But if noise is unwanted sound, then at the core of the idea is not a sound itself, but a subject—someone who wants or does not want a sound or set of sounds. What constitutes noise, then, is to some extent a question of taste and convention. Passive silence, for example, has only been expected of theater audiences for the past two or three

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<sup>1</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 106-7; Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. Geneviève James and James Nielson (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>2</sup> *The Devil's Dictionary's* entry for noise reads “A stench in the ear. Udomesticated music. The chief product and authenticating sign of civilization” (Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, in *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce*, vol. 7 [New York: Neale, 1911], 228).

<sup>3</sup> See *OED*, s.v., “noise, *n.*,” 1a, 11.

centuries, before which some interactivity would not necessarily have risen to the level of “noise.”<sup>4</sup> The subjective quality of noise is clarified by the freighted modes of communication that appear among extended definitions of “noise”: gossip and scandal are noise; rumor and slander are noise; nonsense is noise.<sup>5</sup> To Bertolt Brecht’s hapless Catholic soldiers, faced with the prospect of stopping Mother Courage’s mute daughter Kattrin from alerting the Protestant town of Halle to an imminent sneak attack, the woman’s martial drumbeat registers as unwanted sound. Neutralizing it requires “another noise,” one not only “[l]ouder” but “harmless” and “peacetime”; the soldiers land, with the assistance of a peasant better-versed in the harmless and peacetime than they, on the chopping of wood. Noise battles noise. Or, more properly, as the soldiers’ noise battles Kattrin’s signal to the town, Kattrin’s noise battles the soldiers’ own transfer of information—their attempt to mimic innocent pastoral sounds and thereby to suggest that nothing out of the ordinary is occurring. Occupying opposing ends of the same information system, Brecht’s Catholics and Protestants introduce noise into each other’s communications in a battle to determine whose message will be heard, and how clearly.

The soldiers, after much ineffective yelling of orders, shoot and kill Kattrin to stop her drumming. Yet the woman’s noise is victorious. “That’s an end to the noise,” says the Lieutenant, who is immediately corrected by a stage direction: “*But the last beats of the drum are lost in the din of cannon from the town. Mingled with the thunder of*

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<sup>4</sup> See Gareth White, “Noise, Conceptual Noise and the Potential of Audience Participation,” in *Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012): 198-207.

<sup>5</sup> See *OED*, s.v., “noise, *n.*,” 6a, 8a, 10.

*cannon, alarm bells are heard in the distance.*”<sup>6</sup> “How much noise must be made to silence noise?” Michel Serres asks. “And what terrible fury puts fury in order?”<sup>7</sup>

Literary noise rarely takes the form of nonsense, if we take nonsense and meaninglessness as analogues.<sup>8</sup> Brecht’s noise carries meaning: it may be unwanted sound, but sound with undeniable content; it may be ambiguous information, but it is information nonetheless. And much as it serves as noise in an information system, an adjunct that interferes with the smooth exchange of information—what this study will refer to as *cybernetic noise*—Katrin’s drumbeat is at base a disruptive sound directly experienced by Brecht’s characters. The soldiers’ attention to their sonic environment’s continuity—the Lieutenant’s insistence on “a peacetime noise,” as earlier on the plausibility of knocking on a door without arousing suspicion in the dark and quiet countryside (“Knocking’s a natural noise, it’s all right, could be a cow hitting the wall of the cowshed”)—signals a close attention to the phenomenological.<sup>9</sup> As *Mother Courage* is a stage play, the onus is not on Brecht to reproduce sound in his text mimetically, or even onomatopoeically, as the authors of novels, vignettes, and essays I will discuss in this study often strive to do. At the same time, in the Lieutenant’s meticulousness about knocking, drumming, and chopping, *Mother Courage* is representative of close literary attention to the *phenomenological noise* of discordant sound.

In *The Art of Noise: Literature and Disturbance 1900-1940*, I argue that modernist and modernist-era prose literature is particularly invested in replications of and meditations on noise. Modernist noise, I submit, is characterized by a generative interplay

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<sup>6</sup> Brecht, 114.

<sup>7</sup> Serres, 13.

<sup>8</sup> See *OED*, s.v., “nonsense, *n.*,” 1a.

<sup>9</sup> Brecht, 103.

between noise's phenomenological and cybernetic senses: in the texts considered in this study, phenomenological and cybernetic noise swirl in and around each other, contributing to each other's confusion and to each other's depth. In both the phenomenological and cybernetic formulations, noise is a nuisance. But modernist noise is also an opportunity: a way to exploit sonic and informational irritants in order to decode a resonant world that defies descriptive synthesis. The primary works I consider—Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) and *King Coal* (1917), and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940)—capture a defining interest in the power of noise. In tracing the crenellated, self-canceling logic of literary noise—of a noise that cannot be dismissed as nonsense and yet resists easy synthesis, demanding and frustrating attention—I am especially interested in how Borden, Joyce, Sinclair, and Wright use interference to channel their readers into a particular orientation toward the world.

While “orientation” itself might suggest a process of determining your relative position visually, by checking your bearings against landmarks or the points of the compass, modernist noise acts, for the authors in this study, as a tool of echolocation. If Georg Simmel, in 1903, told us that the modern “metropolitan blasé attitude” flattened the values of objects to “a homogeneous...grey color,” in *The Art of Noise* I argue something of the opposite: modernist noise is sensitizing.<sup>10</sup> *The Art of Noise* traces a persistent tendency, within and beyond the modernist canon, to fashion narratives of extremity—of total war, of economic and racial otherness—through noise in both its phenomenological and cybernetic valences. In this distinctive combination, I argue, noise

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<sup>10</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 14.

presents a clarifying obstacle that at once impedes readerly progress and wrestles its audience into a confrontation with otherness. For the authors I consider in this study, to write noise is not simply to record or represent unwanted sound, or to descend into a paean to the radical undecidability of the modern world. It is, I argue, a subtle means of attempting to mold readers' attitudes toward the unknowable or the distantly experienced. I am thus interested in two operations of literary noise. On the one hand, I examine how authors leverage noise's disruptive qualities—its ability to confuse, to dismay, to pull a reader out of the flow of a text, even to alienate her—to create sticking points in their work that demand attention. On the other, I trace how the defamiliarizing action of modernist noise coalesces around limit cases of social and political belongingness in the first half of the twentieth century, as in the case of *Mother Courage*'s temporally displaced protest to Hitler's 1939 invasion of Poland.

#### I. DOES SOUND STUDIES MATTER YET?

Brecht's tale and Serres's wry questions highlight the paradox and the opportunity of noise that form the heart of this study. In each case, noise proves incapable of silencing noise, which instead accretes, changing what a subject might consider to be noise in changing the context in which it is experienced. In *Mother Courage*, as in each of the texts I consider in the work that follows, noise (Kattrin's drumming) also functions as signal (her warning to Halle), its disruption of one message (*this is a normal, peaceful morning in the countryside*) creating the opportunity for another (*remember that we are at war*). By reading literary noise in this way—as fundamentally context-based, unsettlingly phasic, and capable at times of being both itself and its opposite—I do not

seek to resolve noise into any of its many antipodes.<sup>11</sup> Wherever possible, this study seeks to describe noise not as merely ugly language or as an information puzzle to be solved. My stubbornness in this regard runs counter to a tendency in media history, material culture studies, and literary sound studies to collapse noise into its more pleasing high-culture and -theory fellows (music the chief honoree, in close competition with nonanthropocentric attempts to translate thing-speech). My attempt is to read noise in modernist-era literature, and to decode its aesthetic and political operations, without unmaking its noisiness through conceptual transduction. This reading of noise relies on two modalities of understanding it as a phenomenon: the first phenomenological, considering how the literature represents unwanted sound and the experience of perceiving unwanted sound; the second cybernetic, considering noise as excessive, distorting, stochastic information that interferes with the pure transmission of a message. In tracing how modernist noise operates, this dissertation will employ the methodology of sound studies, whose binding questions—what does sound mean? and how do you study it?—might in their minimalism mask the inherent political content of a field that takes as its object not simply acoustics but also understandings and practices of inscription and information.

To hear many of its practitioners tell it, sound studies is about to come into its own. Waiting in the wings as the natural successor to the study of the visual regime which made vision “the root metaphor for thought, the paradigm that dominates our understanding of thinking”—a regime whose downfall was made to seem more or less

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, I am rather attempting, self-consciously, to combat a critical tendency, as identified by Rey Chow and James A. Steintrager, to “slide between referential and figurative registers” and to employ terms such as noise “in the form of synecdoche for something like sound in general” (Chow and Steintrager, “In Pursuit of the Object of Sound: An Introduction,” *differences* 22.2-3 [2011]: 2.)

inevitable by Martin Jay's pertinacious 1994 reading of a century-long attack on ocularcentrism by French thought—sound studies bides its time, excavates new subject matter, produces new key texts, and courts new disciplines to augment its enviable catholicity of approach.<sup>12</sup> It shares with Deaf studies a mandate to expand “what it means to have...a sonic way of knowing and being in the world...beyond a limited definition of the auditory[.]”<sup>13</sup> But its big break, whatever that may be, has apparently yet to occur.<sup>14</sup>

Sound studies' institutional neoteny belies a long and rich history—one that might be traced variously to Douglas Kahn's seminal 1999 *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, to R. Murray Schafer's 1977 *The Tuning of the World*, to John Cage's 1961 essay and lecture collection *Silence*, to Hermann von Helmholtz's 1863 study *On the Sensations of Tone*, or possibly to Book III of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>15</sup> Studies of sound's cultural history, technological underpinnings, and philosophical implications have appeared at an increasingly rapid clip over the past two decades, foremost among them Alain Corbin's *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French*

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<sup>12</sup> Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2007), 8. See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994); and Margaret Schedel and Andrew V. Uroskie, “Writing about Audiovisual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 10.2 (2011): 137-44.

<sup>13</sup> Michele Friedner and Stefan Helmreich, “Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies,” *Senses & Society* 7.1 (2012): 75.

<sup>14</sup> If we date sound studies even from John Cage's 1961 *Silence*, the field has been incubating through the entire history of critical theory since structuralism. This perpetual emergence may have cushioned sound studies from quicker reflection on its own limitations; more recent developments in sound studies have emphasized and suggested corrections to the field's early blunders, especially as it has incorporated (or failed to incorporate) questions of racial identity and, to some extent, disability. This work has been done luminously by Gus Stadler, whose “On Whiteness in Sound Studies” argues that “there are important ways of exploring sound and listening that need to be sharpened in ways that extended discussion of race, gender, class, or sexuality will not help with. But this doesn't mean that work that doesn't consider such categories is somehow *really* about sound in a way that the work that does take them up isn't” (<https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/07/06/on-whiteness-and-sound-studies/>).

<sup>15</sup> See Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999); R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1961); Hermann von Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, trans. Alexander J. Ellis (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1875); Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (Cambridge: Hackett, 1992).

*Countryside* (1998), Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (2002), Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003), and surveys including *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003), *Hearing History: A Reader* (2004), *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (2011), *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012), and *Keywords in Sound* (2015).<sup>16</sup> These have been joined, in the same space of time, by literary scholarship attentive to the world of sound created within (and from which were created) literary texts by writers from Shakespeare to Don DeLillo and beyond, and by works—variously head-scratching, cheerleading, and admonishing—of what we might, cribbing a term from biotechnology, call “acoustography”: sound studies studies.<sup>17</sup> Works of sound studies take as their subject—indeed, celebrate—not just the modern age's cycling through sound technologies from the telephone and phonograph to the radio, Walkman, and MP3, but, as James Steintrager highlights in the work of Michel Chion, the subtler “[r]ustling of fabrics, silken brushings-up-against, crinklings.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound & Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998); Thompson; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2003); Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Mark M. Smith, ed., *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2004); Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011); Sterne, *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012); and David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, eds., *Keywords in Sound* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> For specifically literary sound studies, see, for example, Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending the O-Factor* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999); Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001); Philipp Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2006); Juan A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2007); and Halliday. A 2009 issue of *Modernism/modernity* features a “Dossier on Joyce and Sound” including essays by Margot Norris and Maud Ellmann.

<sup>18</sup> Steintrager, “Speaking of Noise: From Murderous Loudness to the Crackle of Silk,” *differences* 22.2-3 (2011): 269. On sound technology, see Tim Armstrong, “Player Piano: Poetry and Sonic Modernity,” *Modernism/modernity* 14.1 (2007): 1-19; Michele Pridmore-Brown, “1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones, and Fascism,” *PMLA* 113.3 (1998): 408-21; Mara Mills, “On Disability and Cybernetics: Helen Keller, Norbert Wiener, and the Hearing Glove,” *differences* 22.2-3 (2011): 74-111; Michael Bull, *Sounding out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Dominic Pettman, “Pavlov's Podcast: The Acousmatic Voice in the Age of MP3s,” *differences* 22.2-3

Many of these texts trace their lineage to Schafer's *The Tuning of the World*, in which the Canadian composer-scholar describes the modern acoustic environment as a rapidly evolving "soundscape," and proposes "soundscape studies": a "middle ground between science, society and the arts" that would incorporate elements of acoustics and psychoacoustics, sociology, and music into "a new interdisciplinary."<sup>19</sup> It would be easy to see sound studies in its current form as answering this version of Schafer's call to action. Contributions come from social geography, cultural history, sociology, political science, literary history and criticism, neuropsychology, philosophy, the history of science and technology, queer studies, disability studies, information studies, film studies, musicology, and more—the "new interdisciplinary" is alive and well. Contemporary sound scholars also rely on Schafer for key elements of their analytical language; thus we have Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity*, John M. Picker's 2003 *Victorian Soundscapes*, Charles Hirschkind's 2006 *The Ethical Soundscape*, and Christine Ehrick's 2015 *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape*, to name but a few of the major monographs to incorporate Schafer's "soundscape" into their titles.<sup>20</sup> Compiling a list of scholars who

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(2011): 140-67; Mikko Keskinen, *Audio Book: Essays on Sound Technologies in Narrative Fiction* (Lanham: Lexington, 2008); and St. Clair, *Sound and Aural Media in Postmodern Literature*.

<sup>19</sup> Schafer, 3-4. Schafer later refers to this work as "[a]coustic ecology": "Ecology is the study of the relationship between living organisms and their environment. Acoustic ecology is therefore the study of sounds in relationship to life and society" (205).

<sup>20</sup> See John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009); Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015). A fuller (but still not exhaustive) list would reveal few years since the turn of this century in which a work of sound studies has not named itself after the soundscape: 2001 saw Kay Kaufman Shelemay's *Soundscapes and Soundscapes Classical*, 2005 Brigitte Cazelles's *Soundscape in Early French Literature*, 2007 Fiona Richards's *The Soundscapes of Australia*, 2012 Carolyn Birdsall's *Nazi Soundscapes*, 2013 Noelle Morrisette's *James Weldon Johnson's Modern Soundscapes* and Edwin C. Hill, Jr.'s *Black Soundscapes White Stages*, 2014 Bijsterveld's *Soundscapes of the Urban Past*, and 2016 Jian Kang and Brigitte Schulte-Fortkamp's *Soundscape and the Built Environment* and Marie-Paule MacDonald's *Jimi Hendrix: Soundscapes*. Eric Wilson, for one, has attempted to draw away from a reliance on "soundscape," employing additionally the phrase "sonic topographies" to emphasize the spatial element of his study, but that inconsistently ("Plagues, Fairs, and

rely on the term while maintaining titular autonomy from Schafer would be a herculean task.<sup>21</sup>

But for all that the idea of the soundscape has been absorbed into the discourse of contemporary sound studies, it is in a form largely abstracted from Schafer's original intent.<sup>22</sup> Thompson, in her highly influential study of architecture and sound technology in the first third of the twentieth century, writes of the soundscape—entirely intuitively, I might add—as “an auditory or aural landscape.”<sup>23</sup> “Like a landscape,” she continues,

a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world. . . . The physical aspects of a soundscape consist not only of the sounds themselves, the waves of acoustical energy permeating the atmosphere in which people live, but also the material objects that create, and sometimes destroy, those sounds. A soundscape's cultural aspects incorporate scientific and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener's relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what.<sup>24</sup>

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Street Cries: Sounding out Society and Space in Early Modern London,” *Modern Language Studies* 25.3 [1995]: 2).

<sup>21</sup> Other key book-length works of sound studies published since the turn of this century include Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2008); Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang & Beyond* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); and Aimée Boutin, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2015). See also Susan J. Smith, “Soundscape,” *Area* 26.3 (1994): 232-40.

<sup>22</sup> Ari Kelman makes a version of this case in “Rethinking the Soundscape.” Kelman argues cogently that sound studies' reluctance to deal in the original, if divisive, meaning of Schafer's key terminological contribution has retarded the field's search for useful methods by which to pursue its central questions.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, 1-2.

In both its physical and cultural sense, Thompson's "soundscape" (a term she admits she uses "somewhat differently" from how Schafer does) calls out for description: what, she asks, are modern sounds? how are they a product of technology? and how are they a product of socially determined listening practices?<sup>25</sup> Pursuing these questions, Thompson builds a picture of the modern soundscape as a tug-of-war between the celebration of discord (of the sort emblemized by urban clamor and the rise of jazz) and the triumph of human architectural ingenuity over the wild reverberations of the physical environment. At the end of this struggle, Thompson argues, the historically intimate and idiosyncratic relationship between sound and space had been degraded to the point of dissolution, with standardized architectural acoustics leading to an unprecedented homogenization of the soundscape.

The idea of the soundscape as an aural landscape easily pressed into hegemonic service has given rise to much of contemporary sound studies' interest both in something akin to ideology critique and in self-reflexive critiques of the field.<sup>26</sup> Rey Chow and James Steintrager, introducing a 2011 special issue of *differences* on "The Sense of Sound," take the opportunity to remind us of the fragile "question of (sonic) objectivity itself."<sup>27</sup> Perceiving sound, they write, requires work: "Objects as sonic phenomena are points of diffusion that in listening we attempt to gather. This *work* of gathering—an effort to unify and make cohere—implies that subjectivity is involved whenever we try to draw some boundary in the sonic domain."<sup>28</sup> Listening to sound thus participates in a

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<sup>25</sup> Thompson, 1. Thompson's use of "soundscape" most directly echoes that of Alain Corbin in *Village Bells*.

<sup>26</sup> See Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Preface," *American Quarterly* 63.3 (2011): v-vi; Gordon Waitt, Ella Ryan, and Carol Farbotko, "A Visceral Politics of Sound," *Antipode* 46.1 (2014): 283-300.

<sup>27</sup> Chow and Steintrager, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Chow and Steintrager, 2, emphasis in original.

cultural politics that touches directly on both our social and economic lives. “The essential difference between music and noise is neither acoustic nor aesthetic,” wrote Garret Keizer in 2010, “but ethical.”<sup>29</sup> To return to Thompson’s question with new vigor, who gets to hear what?<sup>30</sup>

Where the genealogy of sound studies departing from Corbin and Thompson tends toward thick description and ideology critique, Schafer had proposed “soundscape studies” as a path toward the establishment of a coherent and highly prescriptive field of “acoustic design.”<sup>31</sup> Schafer was far from alone in wanting to use design to combat what was seen as the growing problem of noise pollution. The first national noise control legislation in the United States, the Noise Pollution and Abatement Act, had been passed in 1972, and throughout the ’70s the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a series of noise abatement information sheets and brochures aimed at the general public, proposing that “Design May Be the Answer,” and warning that “[t]hose who are no longer bothered by noise... may not be adapting to it, but rather may be experiencing some hearing impairment.”<sup>32</sup> But where the EPA was representing noise pollution as a public health concern, Schafer wanted the rise of acoustic design to push back against the “indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of man’s life,” where those sounds are defined more by being uncontrollable

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<sup>29</sup> Garret Keizer, *The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want: A Book About Noise* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 120.

<sup>30</sup> This question is taken up at length in Picker’s *Victorian Soundscapes*, which is as invested in recording the xenophobic and classist origins of Victorian England’s attitude toward its own soundscape as it is in producing an acoustic record of the period through a history of media technology and acoustic events.

<sup>31</sup> Schafer, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Noise Pollution: Now Hear This!* (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Washington, D.C., n.d.); *Noise: The Harmful Intruder in the Home* (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Washington, D.C., 1972). Such information sheets are published to this day. A recent effort, *Noise and Its Effects on Children*, highlights causes of and prevention techniques for Noise-Induced Hearing Loss in children and provides the oddly synesthetic “Sound Thermometer” as a visual aid in understanding the relative decibel levels of city traffic, fireworks, and (ranked side by side at between 95 and 105 decibels) “Walkman, Tractor” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Washington, D.C., 2009).

(Schafer's "imperialistic") and uncured ("indiscriminate") than dangerous. "[L]arger" is importantly distinct from "louder."<sup>33</sup>

Thus, where Thompson and others are interested to varying degrees in how sound studies is revelatory of underlying structures of power, Schafer, at base, wants to harness that power to his own ends. More interested in exercising the sort of aural imperialism he decries than in tearing it down, Schafer longs for a world in which the alarm in his car to remind him to buckle his seatbelt is soothing, not irritating, and is as bothered by the "aberrational noises of war" as by that "*other* occasion for loud noise," religious celebration.<sup>34</sup> Ari Kelman, in the midst of agitating for sound studies to return to something closer to a narrow Schaferean understanding of "soundscape" than simply "any aural area of study," argues that Schafer conflates sound and listening, effectively collapsing the material production of sound and the material conditions of its reception.<sup>35</sup> I would counter that what *The Tuning of the World* sees Schafer do is evacuate almost all meaning from the category of sound, making of it either music or noise depending upon his own tastes. (These are specific tastes indeed, with Schafer rejecting huge swaths of the avant-garde, as in his pronouncement that, "[o]n the whole, the suggestions of the futurists have been tepid."<sup>36</sup>) While his self-indulgent idea of acoustic design makes it tempting to shy away from the specifics of the Schaferean soundscape, to erode Schafer's irascibility in favor of greater terminological portability, to do so also conceals the

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<sup>33</sup> Schafer, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Schafer, 51, emphasis in original.

<sup>35</sup> Kelman, 215. Of Schafer's conflation, Kelman writes, "[I]n his desire to populate his soundscape with acoustic designers and 'ear cleaned' listeners, Schafer confuses the relationship between sound and listening throughout his discussion" (219).

<sup>36</sup> Schafer, 244.

intimate and sometimes troubling ties between sound studies and power that its practitioners have spent thirty years rediscovering.

Still, the questions raised by media scholar Michele Hilmes's 2005 sound studies primer-cum-eulogy "Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?" are as pertinent as ever. Sound studies is so frequently characterized as "an emergent field of scholarly research"—as "always emerging, never emerged"—that at least some of its authors are finally admitting to "indifference to this oft-heralded emergence."<sup>37</sup> The field, Justin St. Clair writes, "is a valid enterprise regardless of institutional recognition."<sup>38</sup>

What is so special about sound studies, then? In his introduction to a 2010 special issue of *Social Text* dedicated to "The Politics of Recorded Sound," Gus Stadler remarks that "sound seems to escape the seemingly innate structure of subject-object that anchors so much thinking on the nature of vision" to occupy a critical position at once "relatively uncontainable and irresistible" and "deeply embedded in historical contexts and narratives to which [the perception of sound] give[s] rise."<sup>39</sup> If this seems at best a magic act ("sound *seems* to escape the *seemingly* innate structure") and at worst a recipe for failure, it is also the field's greatest opportunity. Hilmes has argued elsewhere that sound studies' inclination to "poac[h]" its subjects and methodologies from disparate fields and reassemble them under its banner "holds much promise," allowing sound scholars to "draw parallels and establish continuities between disciplines separated more by historic accident than logical coherence, and reach out to embrace fields that might not have been

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<sup>37</sup> Kelman, 213; Michele Hilmes, "Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?," *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005): 249; Justin St. Clair, *Sound and Aural Media in Postmodern Literature: Novel Listening* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

<sup>38</sup> St. Clair, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Stadler, "Introduction: Breaking Sound Barriers," *Social Text* 102 28.1 (2010): 7-8.

even considered under the old paradigms.”<sup>40</sup> On this reading, the field itself participates in the structure of interference-opportunity that this study will argue proves exceedingly fertile for modernist-era noise writing itself. Just as modernist noise informs through obstruction, sound studies, Hilmes suggests, allows for the defiance of “logical coherence” to capitalize on resonances that might otherwise escape the grasp of a strict chronological or generic intellectual history.

## II. NOISE | SILENCE | NOISE

Happily, then, in answering the key questions of this study—how are we to understand the insistent appearance of noise in modernist-era literature? how do these narratives absorb and then turn to their own use interruptions, stutters, glitches, and gaps in information? and to what end?—sound studies allows me the freedom to pull from high and low and extra-modernist texts, from trauma studies and neuroscience, from the treatises of Cicero and *The Miracle Worker*. One could, I think, make a compelling argument for the inclusion of Rachel Carson’s 1962 *Silent Spring* in the sound studies canon. All of which is to say that while this dissertation will not be an encyclopedic cultural study of the sort that sound studies frequently inspires, I do intend to paint a picture, in both broad and fine strokes, of what authors drawn together by a concern with alterity and personhood were doing with sound over the first forty years of the twentieth century. Doing so will require attention not only to noise, but also to its limitations, and to how those limitations become noisy opportunities. As this study will reveal time and again, literature struggles to represent some of the most representative elements of sound:

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<sup>40</sup> Hilmes, “Foregrounding Sound: New (and Old) Directions in Sound Studies,” *Cinema Journal* 48.1 (2008): 115-17.

its duration through time, its diffuse and often uncertain point of origin, and its uncanny sometime-confusion of the border between self and environment or self and other.

Patrick Hamilton's 1947 World War II novel *The Slaves of Solitude*, spiritual successor to his bleak, gin-soaked *Hangover Square* (1941) and the work of midcentury modernism that first inspired this study, is at base the story of a clash of wills between two wartime spinsters—one the permanently pained, hypersensitive Miss Roach; the other the German Vicki Kugelmann, who carries something “maliciously and exquisitely genial and forbearing” about herself, “even in the sound of her footsteps.”<sup>41</sup> Miss Roach and Vicki are housemates at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, a boarding house in a fictionalized version of Henley-on-Thames—roughly forty miles west of London—that houses a Mannian menagerie of gossipy Blitz refugees. The two women are also competitors, it seems, for the affections of the “reverberating, twanging, banging invasion” of American servicemen who have descended on the London suburbs (*SS*, 27). Miss Roach views her adversary with a growing mix of repulsion (she is sometimes convinced that Miss Kugelmann is a Nazi sympathizer, if not in fact a Nazi spy) and attraction: “Was she jealous? She dismissed the idea with an easy conscience as grotesque. What,” she wonders, “was this strange woman doing to her? She was doing something” (*SS*, 95).

Vicki, the Americans, homosocial desire, a busybody neighbor named Mr. Thwaites, and everyone's increasingly alcoholic habits of life during the Blitz slowly erode Miss Roach's sanity (a process which culminates in a fight with Mr. Thwaites in the hallway of the Rosamund Tea Rooms during which Miss Roach pushes him down for suggesting that she is having an affair with a teenage boy; Mr. Thwaites is subsequently

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<sup>41</sup> Patrick Hamilton, *The Slaves of Solitude* (New York: New York Review Books, 2007), 156. Hereafter abbreviated *SS* and cited parenthetically by page number.

hospitalized for an attack of peritonitis and dies). As Miss Roach lies in bed at night under blackout, she listens to German bombers, “still purring in the sky, miles and miles high, it seemed, and miles and miles around.... And then there was the second front to come, which couldn’t possibly succeed (well, be sensible, *could it?*), and then the Lieutenant [her American gentleman] would be killed, and then the war would go on and on, like the planes in the sky...” (SS, 136). The ellipses here are original to Hamilton, and characterize Miss Roach’s thoughts in such moments. But as much as they indicate something like a span of time that cannot be accounted for, the sounds of the German planes do not allow that time to go unmarked. They haunt Miss Roach’s nights. “The planes were roaring over again...” she notes in late December. “How they roared and filled the sky for miles around....” (SS, 178).

The planes were still going over....

She heard quiet voices below, and then, she fancied, the key in the lock, and the front door being closed.

Then, amidst the sound of the planes, she heard Vicki come up the stairs to the landing, and closing the door of her room.

This was the conclusion of the proceedings. Within ten yards of her, amidst the purring of the planes, Vicki was undressing.... Such had been, such was, her jolly, jolly Christmas Eve. (SS, 180)

To represent the planes’ continuous noise, Hamilton must simply repeat, over and over, that the planes are in earshot—five times in this short span. In the interim, smaller sounds break in: voices and Vicki ascending to her room, certainly; but Miss Roach only

“fancie[s]” that she hears the intervening sounds of “the key in the lock, and the front door being closed,” as though allowing her mind to fill in the missing pieces of a sonic narrative that were out of earshot, perhaps drowned out by the droning of bombers. “Background noise is the ground of our perception,” Serres writes.<sup>42</sup> “No life without heat, no matter, neither; no warmth without air, no logos without noise, either.”<sup>43</sup> As the planes circle, so do Miss Roach’s thoughts: about England’s potential demise; about her suitor’s potential death; about “this strange woman,” her political and social rival, who is doing something thoroughly mysterious to her, unwrapping herself in a room down the hall on Christmas Eve during the Blitz. In this, Hamilton deploys noise to structure and emphasize Miss Roach’s psychological distress—distress itself caused, in no small part, by noise. This cycle is prefigured, as I write in Chapter One, in the war writing of Mary Borden. Throughout this study, we will see authors similarly sink into and capitalize on the most disorienting elements of noise, and on its stubborn resistance to being written.

### III. “WE MUST MAKE ANOTHER NOISE WITH SOMETHING”

To explore noise in literature is to step into a complicated field of sensory transduction. As Sarah Banet-Weiser has written of sonic matter in American studies, “while the words on the page hold political, social, and cultural meaning, when we read, we do not always hear, or are not invited to actively engage aural perception.”<sup>44</sup> In a world in which silent reading is perceived to be the norm, Banet-Weiser’s comment points up the challenges posed by the conversion of the auditory into the literary. Stanley Link reminds us that, even in the case of recorded music, “[i]t is obvious but by no means

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<sup>42</sup> Serres, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Serres, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 63.3 (2011): vi.

trivial that the listener cannot hear the event, but only its representation, and cannot hear the document, but rather only its transduction.”<sup>45</sup>

It must be admitted that a reader cannot, as Link writes, “hear the document”—cannot experience literary sound mimetically. As Don Ihde writes in the original introduction to his 1976 *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, “To do a phenomenology of sound in *a book* is itself something of a functional ‘contradiction.’ A book is read and its words are seen rather than heard. There are vast differences between hearing voices and reading words[.]”<sup>46</sup> At the same time, recent studies in neuropsychology have revealed that reading sound in literature is not as physically distinct from hearing sound as one might assume. Reading a written text can inspire what has been called “auditory verbal imagery,” not only in the form of imagined direct or indirect speech—the experience of hearing a character or narrator’s voice in your head, likely even speaking in your own accent—but also in stimulating a reader’s brain to transmute language from the verbal to an imagined version of described sound, with the reader mentally “simulat[ing] the specific sounds being described in a text.”<sup>47</sup> Thus might Brecht’s reader, and not just his theater audience, hear thundering cannons; thus might

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<sup>45</sup> Stanley Link, “The Work of Reproduction in the Mechanical Aging of an Art: Listening to Noise,” *Computer Music Journal* 25.1 (2001): 37.

<sup>46</sup> Ihde, xx, emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup> S. S. Shergill et al., “A Functional Study of Auditory Verbal Imagery,” *Psychological Medicine* 31 (2001): 241; Tad T. Brunyé et al., “You Heard It Here First: Readers Mentally Simulate Described Sounds,” *Acta Psychologica* 135 (2010): 212. Mental imagery has been shown to activate both the neural and motor structures associated with perception and action. Research on auditory imagery seeks to differentiate it from the more-widely studied phenomenon of visual imagery by refusing to generalize the characteristics of the latter to the former. See also David J. Smith, Margaret Wilson, and Daniel Reisberg, “The Role of Subvocalization in Auditory Imagery,” *Neuropsychologia* 33.11 (1995): 1433-54; Mariane DeSouza, Amanda DaSilveira, and William B. Gomes, “Verbalized Inner Speech and the Expressiveness of Self-Consciousness,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 5 (2008): 154-70; Jessica D. Alexander and Lynne C. Nygaard, “Reading Voices and Hearing Text: Talker-Specific Auditory Imagery in Reading,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 34.2 (2008): 446-59; and Ruth Filik and Emma Barber, “Inner Speech during Silent Reading Reflects the Reader’s Regional Accent,” *PLoS ONE* 6.10 (2011): 1-5.

the reader of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* hear, and not just see, the “pock” of cricket bats or the “crack” of the prefect’s pandybat.<sup>48</sup>

Sam Halliday begins his ambitious *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts*, a text that typifies literary sound studies’ penchant for the encyclopedic, by asking “[w]hat is ‘modern’ about sound, and what is the significance of sound for modernism?”<sup>49</sup> My answer, in effect, is nothing and everything. Brecht and Joyce—two of the foremost preening iconoclasts of modernist-era literature—are not examples of noisecraft chosen at random. Consider a third: the Italian Futurist painter and composer Luigi Russolo. “Ancient life was entirely silent,” he writes in his 1913 manifesto “The Art of Noises.” “Noise was born in the nineteenth century, with the invention of machinery. Today, noise reigns supreme over human sensibility.”<sup>50</sup> It is almost immaterial whether Russolo’s work of cultural history is accurate or laughable.<sup>51</sup> What is material is that Russolo believes it is true—or at least believes that it is rhetorically important to assert—and that literary modernism joins Fauvism, Dadaism, Futurism, and a string of other avant-gardes in acting as though it is true that noise is a quintessentially modern issue. As Thompson has it, with the turn of the twentieth century “[t]he physical transformation of the soundscape, as well as the social and cultural

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<sup>48</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 45, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Luigi Russolo, *L’Arte dei rumori* (Milan: Edizione Futuriste di “Poesia,” 1916), 9. Translations from Russolo are mine.

<sup>51</sup> A version of his claim for auditory exceptionalism stretches back at least to Hesiod—a didact among his kind with Brecht and Joyce—whose *Works and Days* details the downfall of man from his golden age to a time in which “crooked untruths,” “false witness” and “commotion” (the first two instances of cybernetic noise, the last phenomenological) replace the earlier age’s “festive pleasures” (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, in *The Poems of Hesiod*, trans. R. M. Frazer [Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1983], lines 194, 197, 115). Jacques Attali locates the twentieth-century “entry of noise into music,” characterized by the appearance in “the spectacle” of fairly Hesiodic elements (“provocation and blasphemy, the cry and the body”) in “a world in which brutal noise was omnipresent” (*Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985], 136). For Attali, it is “not by coincidence” that “noise entered music...just before the outbursts and the wars of the twentieth century” (10).

transformation taking place within it, combined to create a culture in which noise became a defining element.”<sup>52</sup> Literary modernism’s investment in noise may have been a self-fulfilling prophesy, but it was nonetheless met by a society whose experience of sound had been dramatically altered by advances in auditory technology and which in response was developing new habits of listening in science, art, and politics. Absorbing the contemporary soundscape into its fabric, modernist writing practice embraces disquiet to provoke disquiet. Modernism writes noise.

Schafer’s 1977 call, at what he termed the “apex of vulgarity” of the modern soundscape, for “a new interdiscipline” is an echo—slightly distorted, as is the way of the echo—of T. S. Eliot’s 1933 case, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, for the growing need for “a new discipline of suffering” to match the “new stage of experience” the modern (interwar) world found itself entering. Schafer called for acoustic design; Eliot for “the auditory imagination.”<sup>53</sup> Eliot describes the “auditory imagination” as

the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginnings and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Thompson, 119.

<sup>53</sup> Schafer, 3; T. S. Eliot, “Matthew Arnold,” in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1933), 95, 111; Schafer, 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> Eliot, “Matthew Arnold,” 111-12.

“It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense”: for Eliot, the auditory imagination functions through an informational mechanism not so different from noise. The auditory imagination concerns itself not with conveying meaning, but with using meaning as a conveyance; its basic operation is “far below the conscious,” but its work is to link disparate ages and “mentalit[ies]”—through “syllable and rhythm”—under a new, auditory rubric, “invigorating every word.” Recall Serres: “Background noise is the ground of our perception.... [N]o logos without noise.”

To emphasize modernism’s noisy birth is not to discount the decisive aesthetic and political impact of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music on modernist literature, or the simultaneous impact of noise on music. As Josh Epstein has recently and convincingly written, modernists took music to be, in some measure, “an effort to interpret, orchestrate, sublimate, amplify, or critique the sounds and the affective shocks of industrialization, urbanization, warfare, publicity, and mechanical reproducibility.”<sup>55</sup> But reliance on a musical framework in the description of modernist literature risks discouraging the practice, as promoted by Kahn, of “first asking about the composition of sound prior to composition *with* sound.”<sup>56</sup> That is, defining and discussing literary sound and structure in terms of musical arrangement, in practice, frequently overshadows the raw material—sounds themselves—in favor of what is constructed with them. “Cagean silence,” Kahn argues, “has silenced other things, as it... attempts to hear the world of

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<sup>55</sup> Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), xiv-xv.

<sup>56</sup> Kahn, 17, emphasis in original. For examples, one need only witness the profusion of work on the appearance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in Chapter V of *Howards End*; such studies have resurfaced in recent years, perhaps in response to the 2005 publication of Zadie Smith’s Forster reboot *On Beauty*. See Mi Zhou, “Fiction as Musicology: Aesthetic Listening in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 47.3 (2011): 237-50; David Deutsch, “Reconnecting Music to *Howards End*: Forster’s Aesthetics of Inclusion,” *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 21.3 (2010): 163-86; and Michelle Fillion, *Difficult Rhythm: Music and the Word in E. M. Forster* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2010).

sound without hearing aspects of the world in a sound.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, sound comes to be considered as an epiphenomenon without being examined as a phenomenon, and can seem incidental to literary composition.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, William R. Paulson’s generative 1988 study *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* argues that noise (understood chiefly cybernetically, through the second law of thermodynamics and what Paulson calls “the mathematical theory of information”) characterizes *all* of literature—that “literary understanding can be seen as a self-organizing process, as a creation of meaning out of the placing of meaning in jeopardy” that he considers to be analogous to the reclamation of meaning from noise.<sup>58</sup> But meaning, for Paulson, never seems to be much in jeopardy to begin with; reading noise in literary texts leads him to the conclusion, generative and yet so broad as to seem parodic, that “[l]iterary texts may not themselves be created with a cognitive aim or to advance knowledge, but they, their writing and reading, participate in the processes in which knowledge is created.”<sup>59</sup>

Recent attention to literary noise comes from critics Philipp Schweighauser and Juan Suárez. Suárez’s 2007 *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* concerns itself specifically—and fascinatingly—with what Suárez terms “quotidian otherness,” and how, as he puts it, “[n]oise, in the cybernetic sense of nonsignifying matter, is another name for the otherness that modernism, as an art of practice, discovered in the heart of the quotidian.”<sup>60</sup> Suárez emphasizes, as had Thompson, “the analog

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<sup>57</sup> Kahn, 4.

<sup>58</sup> William R. Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), 88, 102.

<sup>59</sup> Paulson, 166.

<sup>60</sup> Juan A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2007), 7, 8.

media—sound recording machines, film, and photography—that were the hardware of modernity and of modernism,” and in exploring its “media/ated exploration of the everyday,” *Pop Modernism* does important work tracing American modernism’s campaign of “perceptual scattering and shock.”<sup>61</sup> With the exception of my second chapter’s attention to Joyce’s attitude toward the press, and specifically toward daily newspapers, my interest is in the exceptional rather than the quotidian. But a more basic departure between this previous work and my own is Suárez’s refrain, signaled by that first definition of noise as “nonsignifying matter,” that noise is part and parcel of modernism’s solipsistic interest in “obstreperous matter that does not yield meaning,” an interest that heralds contemporary art’s habit of “embrac[ing] the unsignifying.”<sup>62</sup>

Schweighauser, whose interest is also in American literature, asserts in *The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985* that “literature from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century negotiates, affirms, critiques, *and* becomes an integral part of the acoustics of modernity/postmodernity.”<sup>63</sup> “Many of the writers discussed in this book,” he notes later,

challenge and sometimes reverse the hierarchy between voice and noise, sense and nonsense by valorizing the sound-making of others as a productive disturbance of established modes of communication and sense-making. These authors, chief among them the modernists and early postmodernists, are faced with the

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<sup>61</sup> Suárez, 8, 9, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Suárez, 134, 270.

<sup>63</sup> Philipp Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2006), 3, emphasis in original.

task of preserving in (and through) their writing something of the otherness of alternative forms of sounding.<sup>64</sup>

In acknowledging the “productive disturbance” that modernists see in and make of noise, Schweighauser comes closer to my own understanding, detailed throughout this project, that modernist noise presents an obstacle to information exchange that forces different, and often more profound, communication to occur. But Schweighauser’s focus on “alternative forms of sounding” in naturalist, modernist, and postmodernist American literature stops short of making a positive case for what modernist noise *does*. For Schweighauser, the message of modernist noise is in authors that “see[k] to retain something of the alterity and ineffability of the noises they represent,” to buck “epistemological projects whose sole purpose is to make the unknown known” and instead “align themselves with an aesthetics of negativity that probes the fuzzy realm of that which ultimately eludes our cognitive and representational grasp.”<sup>65</sup> Surely, we can see this as one path of noise—echoing as it does the path of capital-m Modernism, broadly understood, in delivering us from a forthright Victorian/Edwardian episteme into lush aesthetic uncertainty. But this is not the only story of noise, or the most interesting. It is the project of *The Art of Noise* to uncover what modernist noise’s productive disturbance in fact produces, and my contention that its result far exceeds an aesthetics of negativity.

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<sup>64</sup> Schweighauser, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Schweighauser, 197.

In my first chapter, “Mary Borden’s Soundscape: Modernist Noise in *The Forbidden Zone*,” I focus on Borden’s World War I nursing memoir, tracing its incorporation of the noise of mechanized war into its fabric. If, as Thompson writes, “a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment,” I argue that Borden consciously straddles that line, at once invested in a phenomenological record of the Great War and in positing noise as a mode of communicating the isolating trauma of the war—a soldier’s trauma, certainly, but also the nurse’s own—to a civilian audience without her own first-hand experience of it. In “Class and Calumny After the Great War,” the interlude that follows the first chapter, I extend my reading of Borden’s modernist noise to her intrawar society novels, arguing that the social, cybernetic noise of gossip and scandal at once highlights the estranging effects of intrawar British class distinctions and offers an unlikely key to decoding the coterie communications of the upper class.

In a reading of Joyce in the second chapter, “News/Noise: *Ulysses* on the Astral Plane,” I take up modernism’s emblematic (noise) novel. If *Ulysses* is often understood, as it was by its contemporaries, as a kind of high modernist limit case of aesthetic difficulty, relatively little has been done to understand how noise—phenomenological and informational—permeates the work. Joyce, I argue, creates in *Ulysses*, and in “Aeolus” in particular, a world in which the noise of urban life—of trams and trains, of the circulation of news and the circulation of Guinness—casts doubt on the construction, cohesion, and comprehensiveness of the information systems on which Dublin’s public life is based. In the context of the work’s broader record of the rise of phonography and

its exponentially expanded potential for comprehensive recording, reading noise in *Ulysses* reveals a profound concern with narrative selectivity and fullness.

Chapter Three, “Upton Sinclair’s Disruptions of Sympathy,” examines the relationship between noise and Sinclair’s evangelizing political project in the novels *The Jungle* and *King Coal*, proposing Sinclair’s contemporary, fellow Socialist agitator and deaf-blind activist Helen Keller as a foil for his didactic and phenomenological methods. *The Jungle*, I argue, sees Sinclair using noise to fashion proletarian propaganda that makes demands on readerly empathy for an economic other through shared phenomenological experience. It is in turn Keller’s disavowal of just that shared experience—her insistence that silent experience is not politically disqualifying—that highlights *King Coal*’s interrogation of the limited sympathetic capacities of the later novel’s wealthy, and therefore sensorially sheltered, protagonist.

My final chapter, “*Native Son* and the Panaudicon,” takes up the way Wright’s highly visual and inescapably noisy novel constructs Bigger Thomas’s Chicago audiovisually. At the nexus of film theory and panopticism, audiovisual *Native Son* links the novel’s rhetorical makeup, generic choices, and political content. The engine of this work, I contend, is the panaudicon: a way of figuring power relationships through sound in which the applicable vector of observation is not, as in the panopticon, from authority to its subject, but the reverse: subjects of the panaudicon are compelled to listen to an authoritarian presence. The panaudicon and its echoes—echoes that include, in Wright’s hands, the cinema and hailing propaganda posters as well as white supremacist law enforcement *in se*—haunt the novel’s audiovisual field, forcing Bigger to both police his own soundprint and become a detective of others’.

“When the rhythms of the soundscape become confused or erratic,” Schafer writes in *The Tuning of the World*, “society sinks to a slovenly and imperiled condition.... [T]he soundscape is no accidental byproduct of society; rather it is a deliberate construction by its creators, a composition which may be as much distinguished for its beauty as for its ugliness.”<sup>66</sup> Schafer’s investments are clear: if we can control the soundscape, it is our duty to safeguard society by maintaining a steady, beautiful rhythm. Borden, Joyce, Sinclair, and Wright do nothing of the sort. With *The Art of Noise*, I hope to provide a profile that existing criticism has neglected—of modernist-era literature’s use of noise to safeguard what Schafer would consider them to be imperiling.

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<sup>66</sup> Schafer, 237.

ONE. MARY BORDEN'S SOUNDSCAPE: MODERNIST NOISE IN *THE  
FORBIDDEN ZONE*

A loud wind was howling. It was throwing itself like a pack of wolves against the flimsy wooden walls, and the guns were growling. Their voices were dying away....

I thought, 'This is the second battlefield.'

—Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone* (1929)<sup>1</sup>

I. MODERNIST NOISE AND COMBAT GNOSTICISM

Interviewed by the BBC a half-century after his service in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Robert Graves recalled the impossibility of relating his World War I experience to family in England:

GRAVES: [T]he idea of being and staying at home was awful because you were with people who didn't understand what this was all about.

[LESLIE] SMITH: Didn't you want to tell them?

GRAVES: You couldn't: you can't communicate noise. Noise never stopped for one moment—ever.<sup>2</sup>

In describing an unbridgeable epistemological gap that the war created between combat personnel and civilians, Graves articulates what is termed by James Campbell "'combat gnosticism,' the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience."<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, there is the event of war posited as an object of knowledge that, far from being a litany of dates, names, and battlefields, concerns instead

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<sup>1</sup> "Blind," in *The Forbidden Zone* (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2008), 96-97.

<sup>2</sup> "The Great Years of Their Lives—Robert Graves, Brigadier C. E. Lucas Phillips, Henry Williamson and Lord Chandos talk to Leslie Smith about the First World War," *Listener*, 15 Jul. 1971, 74.

<sup>3</sup> James Campbell, "Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism," *New Literary History* 30.1 (1999): 203.

the phenomenal character of being at war: its attendant perceptual experiences, bodily sensations, emotions, and moods. On the other is the intended knower. But someone who has never been to war, veterans such as Graves argue, cannot really “understand” it. When Graves claims that “you can’t communicate noise,” he is characterizing the isolating experience of being at war as an enveloping, sustained, extreme auditory experience that cannot be replicated in another setting and that, phenomenologically unavailable, is conceptually unavailable as well.

In what follows, I argue that noise is a crucial element in modernist writing’s attempts to negotiate the war experience gap that Graves and others assert. Noise, to hear Graves tell it, obstructs any account of war experience: “you can’t communicate noise.” But for authors invested in writing the experience of the Great War, communicating noise, I argue, becomes precisely the point, in two interlocking senses. First, war texts (even Graves’s own) relentlessly attempt the mimetic representation of war noise; second, noise itself is deployed in war literature as the key to decoding that which is incommunicable about war experience. Just as a cipher both encrypts and decrypts information, noise is in modernist war literature just as capable of providing a conceptual bridge across the war experience gap—of communicating—as it is of obstructing understanding. Modernist noise’s internally oppositional character echoes the war literature into which it is woven—texts that actively resist, even as they explicitly admit, the existence of an epistemological gap between those with and those without combat experience. In other words, the obstacle to and method of the communication of war experience—what war writing is like and how it works—are one and the same.

Graves's invocation of noise as a key factor in modern communication follows, more than it inaugurates, a genealogy of artists who claim that noise is uniquely characteristic of modernity. Angela Frattarola has noted that "there is a heightened attention to sound and auditory experience in the modernist novel"; considering even a narrow sweep of modernist texts, this begins to look like something of an understatement.<sup>4</sup> In his 1913 "Art of Noises," the Futurist Luigi Russolo agitated for the rise of a new noise aesthetic, arguing that mechanization had so spoiled the modern ear for "pure sound" that to inspire an emotional response in a modern audience an artist must turn to noise.<sup>5</sup> Russolo's imperative is borne out within and beyond Futurism, even as literary approaches to an art of noise reveal the difficulty of representing in text the experience of sound as continuous, immersive, and often indeterminately located—calling into question the basic possibility of transducing sound from first-order experience to communicable information.

Strategies for circumventing this difficulty tend toward a sort of conceptual onomatopoeia. Consider the noise of the Second Balkan War as recounted in F. T. Marinetti's "Zang Tumb Tumb":

treno treno treno treno **tren tron**  
**tron tron** (ponte di ferro: **tatatluun-**  
**tlin ssssssiiii ssiissii ssiusssiiiii**

—or the first appearance of James Joyce's thunderwords in *Finnegans Wake*:

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<sup>4</sup> Angela Frattarola, "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce," *Journal of Modern Literature* 33.1 (2009): 132.

<sup>5</sup> Russolo, 10. Where I distinguish between sound and noise as counterpoised terms in modernist auditory topography, Russolo's manifesto pairs mechanical, natural, and otherwise incidental "noises" and "pure sound" against a third term: the organized chaos of his "art of noises," performed by an orchestra of *intonarumori* [noise makers], custom noise-making instruments with which he put on a handful of ill-received performances in Milan during the First World War.

bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonner-  
ronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntooohooordenenthur-  
nuk!<sup>6</sup>

Each takes up and then quickly deforms the explicit language of a phenomenon into a phenomenological equivalent: Marinetti by gradually degrading the Italian word *treno* (“train”) into the sound of a train’s cars on a track (“treno **tren tron / tron tron**”), Joyce by stringing together the word “thunder” in a dozen or so languages until their accretion itself creates the rolling reverberation the words signify. In these instances, we move with Marinetti and Joyce from a noise to a concept and back again. This sideways investment in onomatopoeia reveals the breaks between hearing and recalling and writing and reading sound—breaks echoed in arguments in support of the war experience gap—that call into question from another angle the communicability of noise.

If noise strains the limits of language—and is thus a structural echo of war experience’s resistance to being put into words—it seems, perhaps unsurprisingly, a privileged medium through which to conceive of war experience. Graves’s own 1918 poem “Two Fusiliers” is a litany of things that marry a pair of soldiers in “lovely friendship.”<sup>7</sup> There is no need, Graves writes, for “pledge or oath,” for the two are bound “[b]y firmer stuff” than that, “[b]y all the misery and loud sound” that he later identifies as an insuperable obstacle to connection with the civilian world.<sup>8</sup> But not all of war’s auditory misery can be so optimistically recuperated. As Siegfried Sassoon writes in his contemporaneous “Repression of War Experience”:

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<sup>6</sup> F. T. Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (Milan: Edizione Futuriste di “Poesia,” 1914), 35; James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999), 3.15-17.

<sup>7</sup> Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, 19.

Hark! Thud, thud, thud—quite soft...they never cease—  
Those whispering guns—O Christ, I want to go out  
And screech at them to stop—I'm going crazy;  
I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns.<sup>9</sup>

After “[t]hud, thud, thud,” Sassoon abandons the sound of war *in se*, turning instead to Graves’s second element of war noise—that it “never stopped for one moment.” Where Russolo looked for the redemption of music in noise and Marinetti and Joyce reveled in transforming language into noise and back again, Sassoon zeroes in on the toll noise takes on a soldier’s mental health. Each of these writers thus contributes to the matrix of trauma, sound, and art that Sara Haslam has recently claimed to be the foundation of the modernist aesthetic. Following David Trotter’s *Paranoid Modernism* and quoting Adam Phillips, Haslam claims that “‘what we have learned to call modernism is more akin to a cumulative trauma’—the trauma of loss, of narrative disability, of madness” organized in part around the collective experience of the Great War.<sup>10</sup> “[W]e need,” she writes, “to refocus attention on the ways that the experience of war, and therefore the development of modernism, were mediated through sound.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Counter-attack and Other Poems* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1918), 53.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Phillips, *Side Effects* (London: Penguin, 2006), 264, ctd. in Sara Haslam, “The ‘Moaning of the World’ and the ‘Words that Bring Me Peace’: Modernism and the First World War,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, ed. Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), 48-49. This link is supported by an array of trauma and testimony theorists; in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s study of testimony, war literature is figured as the record of “the meeting point between violence and culture” that concerns itself with the witnessing of war qua historical event (Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* [New York: Routledge, 1992], xiii).

<sup>11</sup> Haslam, 49.

Haslam's attention to sound in twentieth-century war literature is not, strictly speaking, a critical innovation.<sup>12</sup> Still, Haslam's formulation usefully constellates literary-critical discussions of an experience of war that touched all of Europe, an art movement increasingly dominant in the aftermath of that war, and a sensory experience common to both. Indeed, the claim begins to pertain even before July 1914, in the impact of literature coming out of the smaller clashes that were to build to World War I. "Zang Tumb Tumb," which onomatopoeically incorporates the soundscape of the war into its text as it typographically displays the explosive rhythms of the 1912-13 Siege of Adrianople, mediates the experience of war through its acoustics. And while the Balkan War drew fewer participants into its cumulative trauma than the First World War was to, its literature propels itself, and its soundscape, onto the broader modernist scene. Marinetti's typographical and acoustic poetics appear, in modified form, in the first issue of Wyndham Lewis's self-consciously Futurism-opposed Vorticist magazine *Blast*. Even the word "blast" (pace the colloquial outburst echoed in the "DAMN" that begins the excerpt below) conjures up the explosive noise of battle; it is followed by still more auditory play:

DAMN

all those to-day who have taken on that Rotten Menagerie,  
and still crack their whips and tumble in Piccadilly Circus,  
as though London were a provincial town.

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<sup>12</sup> For a consideration of the soundscape of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century war, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999).

WE WHISPER IN YOUR EAR A GREAT SECRET.

LONDON IS NOT A PROVINCIAL TOWN.<sup>13</sup>

Lewis may claim to be bored by “Marinetteism,” and his Manifesto’s bellowed “GREAT SECRET” may subvert the literalism of Futurist typography, but his work in literary sound bound up in representations of war is inevitably in conversation with “Zang Tumb Tumb.”<sup>14</sup> In the face of such associations, Haslam’s reading of literary sound offers the opportunity to tether a reading of fundamental texts of the modernist era not only to familiar genealogical hunts but also to historical and phenomenological fact. But sound’s mediation of the development of modernism, though it may find an important node in literature of the First World War, extends far beyond 1918, and far beyond Marinetti’s showboating onomatopoesis. Just as noise must be taken not only as phenomenal discordancy but also as informational interference, to attend to modernist noise is not only to catalog onomatopoesis but also to analyze the prevailing informational system within which some element of a signal is defined as noise rather than useful input.<sup>15</sup> This chapter anatomizes one such progression from mimetic to conceptual noise, taking as an exemplary case the poetry and memoir of Mary Borden. Borden, I argue, uses noise-writing to confront and refute the tribalism inherent in combat gnosticism; reading noise across her work likewise challenges critical assumptions about the genre of the nursing memoir.

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<sup>13</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blast 1* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, 9.

<sup>15</sup> The dependence of the concept of noise on a contextualizing order against which it reads as chaos is highlighted most forcefully by Jacques Attali, who proclaims that “[w]ith noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world” (*Noise*, 1). For recent work on locating the birth of modernism relative to World War I, see Douglas Mackaman and Michael Mays, ed. *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2000); Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007); Jeremy Black, *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2011).

*The Forbidden Zone*, Borden's memoir of her years as a Great War nurse, first published in 1929, admits that the war experience gap is a problem for war writing—that its stories might be inaccessible to “those who have never heard for themselves the voice of the War.”<sup>16</sup> Still, Borden's memoir works to acquaint its civilian audience with the experience of war by deploying noise in both its phenomenological and cybernetic forms. If for Graves the bare noise of war deadens communication, in Borden's hands noise informs despite and through the impediment it represents. *The Forbidden Zone's* sonic environment emphasizes both the material acoustic ecology of war—the noise of planes, bombardments, ambulances—and a set of metaphors built around the facts of the surrounding noise—injured men who “mew like kittens,” patients dragged from roiling battlefields as from the booming ocean onto a peaceful beach, men whose silent deaths suggest the possibility of hearing a departing soul flit through the air like a bird.<sup>17</sup> These metaphors are characterized by an uncannily incomplete synthesis of figures of war, nature, and domesticity. Refusing to resolve the terms of her metaphors into each other fully, Borden instead emphasizes the seams in her own rhetoric, employing a metaphoric structure that, in its jarring asymmetry, reflects the deracinating psychological violence of war experience back onto previously comfortable scenes of nature and domesticity. The choice to defamiliarize the very figures that ostensibly familiarize war introduces an intentional communicative insufficiency to Borden's war writing that, I argue, is itself a mode of affective communication. Thus, *The Forbidden Zone's* noisy metaphors function as one potential channel for transmitting what has seemed to others unutterable in the lived reality of war.

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<sup>16</sup> Borden, “Prefatory Note,” *Modernism/Modernity* 16.3 (2009): 607.

<sup>17</sup> Borden, “Moonlight,” in *The Forbidden Zone*, 44. Hereafter abbreviated “M” and cited parenthetically by page number.

Borden's modernist noise also has significant implications for the war-nursing memoir. Operating within a genre that encourages authors to shrink into the background and become neutral conduits for stories of soldiers' suffering, Borden asserts the primacy of her own experience. Reading Borden's memoir through its use of noise restores the memoirist to a place of prominence in her own life-writing. Moreover, in providing a model for understanding and reacting to the gruesome, uncanny experience of the Great War, *The Forbidden Zone* reveals how the prominent subjectivity of the nurse, rather than presenting a distraction from the combat veteran, in fact facilitates the transmission of information from abject soldier to empathetic civilian audience, enfranchising the latter in conversations from which proponents of combat gnosticism exclude them. Structural echoes of each other, noise and the nurse appear in Borden's modernist memoir as forms of mediation that link discourses of phenomenology and gender.

## II. BORDEN AMONG THE MODERNISTS

Mary Borden was born into a wealthy Chicago family related at various removes to both Gail Borden, developer of condensed milk, and Lizzie Borden, of bloodier fame. In 1913, after years splitting their time between England, the United States, and India, she, her first husband George Turner, and their daughters settled in Mayfair. Borden was already a published author—her first two novels, *Mistress of Kingdoms* (1912) and *Collision* (1913) were published under the pseudonym Bridget MacLagan—and once she settled in England her social circle came to include, among others, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, and E. M. Forster, all of whom were in attendance at the Turners' country house in late July, 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was

assassinated in Sarajevo.<sup>18</sup> Lewis, with whom Borden had a brief affair in 1914, “later recalled [her] as an ‘attractive American’” distinguished from the rest of London society “by her classless ‘freshness’”; Gertrude Stein, whom Borden would meet in Paris during the war and whose works, along with those of Flaubert, Borden carried with her to the Front, remarks in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that “Mary Borden-Turner had been and was going to be a writer.... Mary Borden was very Chicago and Gertrude Stein was immensely interested in her and in Chicago.”<sup>19</sup> In 1917, Borden began an affair with a young French-born British Army Captain, Edward Louis Spears, and at the end of that year petitioned for the dissolution of her first marriage; she and Spears married in March of 1918. The two made their first home in Paris, where Borden took pride in entertaining politicians and artists.<sup>20</sup>

In her forty-five year career, Borden would write twenty-two novels, two war memoirs, a collection of short stories, and *The Technique of Marriage*, a 1933 manual on sex, cookery, and domestic management. Her first post-war novel, *The Tortoise* (1921), shows the hallmarks of its author’s familiarity with Stein in its tendency toward repetition, taxonomy, and the savoring of its own lexicon (“The man and the woman were dreadfully still in the joyous rustling garden.... The man was at a distance from the woman.... The man was bigger than most men.... His attention was fixed on the distant

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<sup>18</sup> See Jane Conway, *A Woman of Two Wars: The Life of Mary Borden* (N.p.: Munday Books, 2010), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Higonnet, *Nurses at the Front: Writing the Wounds of the Great War* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2001), xv; Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 170. On Borden and Wyndham Lewis, see Conway, 32-36; for Borden’s admiration of Stein, see Jane Marcus, “Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War,” afterword to *Not So Quiet...Stepdaughters of War*, by Helen Zenna Smith (New York: The Feminist Press at the City Univ. of New York, 1989), 247.

<sup>20</sup> See Conway, 65, 87-91, 94. Borden describes her first meeting with Spears in her Second World War memoir: “The day came rushing out of the past on that silent morning of September 3, 1939, filling my London room with its roar, its mixture of romance and horror.... Captain Spears had been up to the front line to try to locate a British company that had been lost in the mud.... I gave him tea. He went away again as he had come through the wind, under the cracking sky. I lost him. The battle surged over us. But he turned up again” (Borden, *Journey Down a Blind Alley* [New York: Harper, 1946], 8).

woman”); it was not well-received by either critics or the public.<sup>21</sup> Popular success came in 1923, however, with *Jane, Our Stranger*. The story of a Midwestern heiress manipulated by her mother into marrying into a struggling but titled Parisian family, the novel capitalized on Borden’s knowledge of *belle époque* and interwar high society to capture the imagination of British audiences, and went through six reprints by 1925. Stage adaptations ran in New York and London in 1926, with Borden under the tutelage of Luigi Pirandello. In 1929, anthropologist Fred Eggan and psychologist and educator John M. Stalnaker sent out requests to “a selected group” of newspaper, magazine, and university critics to rank a list of seventy-two prominent contemporary novelists “in the approximate order of their general literary merit, as evidenced by their novels”; critics polled included Van Wyck Brooks, Mark and Dorothy Van Doren, and Upton Sinclair.<sup>22</sup> Borden appeared in the seventh of the resulting ten tiered groups, rating below unanimous selections Willa Cather and Edith Wharton, and above popular genre fiction writers such as Zane Grey and the bottom-ranked Edgar Rice Burroughs.<sup>23</sup> Interest in her novels remained strong through the next decade, and in 1937 her courtroom drama *Action for Slander* was adapted into an Alexander Korda-backed film.<sup>24</sup> On her death in 1968, a London *Times* obituary compared her “distinctively American temper” to Wharton’s.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Borden, *The Tortoise* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 9.

<sup>22</sup> John M. Stalnaker and Fred Eggan, “American Novelists Ranked: A Psychological Study,” *The English Journal* 18.4 (1929): 298-99.

<sup>23</sup> See Stalnaker and Eggan, 304-5. Upton Sinclair himself appears in the fifth group, which also contains F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos.

<sup>24</sup> *Jane, Our Stranger*, at least, entered into the cultural lexicon to a sufficient degree to figure in two *Times Literary Supplement* crossword puzzles in the 1940s. See “TLS Crossword 179,” *Times Literary Supplement* 3 Jan. 1942, 11; “TLS Crossword 333,” *Times Literary Supplement* 16 Dec. 1944, 611, accessed 5 Feb. 2015, *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive*. See Miles Malleson, *Action for Slander*, directed by Tim Whelan (Sandy Hook: Video Yesteryear, 1987), VHS.

<sup>25</sup> “Miss Mary Borden,” *The Times* 3 Dec. 1968, 10, accessed 15 Sept. 2014, *The Times Digital Archive*.

At the outbreak of World War I, Borden volunteered to staff, equip, and fund *L'Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No. 1*, a mobile hospital unit operating under French authority. Borden spent much of the war following the French Army along the Western Front, nursing infantrymen and recording her time behind the front lines in a series of vignettes and poems. Austin Harrison at *The English Review* published a handful of these prose sketches and poems in 1916 and 1917, but the full collection proved too graphically violent for both French and English military censors.<sup>26</sup> Given Borden's refusal to edit out particularly brutal passages, the manuscript that would become *The Forbidden Zone* could not be published during the war. Borden's memoir would finally be published by Heinemann, in revised form, only in 1929—a year that saw the publication of “the war books”: Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Graves's *Goodbye to All That*, and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.<sup>27</sup> Among these, and in the shadow of those writers Paul Fussell would, in 1975's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, name “[a]ll three of the great English memoirists of the war, Graves, [Edmund] Blunden, and Sassoon,” Borden, along with women war memoirists such as Vera Brittain and Helen Zenna Smith, was largely overlooked.<sup>28</sup>

When *The Forbidden Zone* came back into print in a 2008 republication by Hesperus, it was due to the efforts of feminist scholar Margaret Higonnet, and it is only

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<sup>26</sup> See Conway, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Haslam, 47. Conway describes the revisions as “substantial changes to the manuscript [Borden] had proposed in 1917, rewriting and amalgamating some of the prose pieces and omitting others altogether, including a lengthy prologue that took the form of a poem, and adapting the preface with the effect of making it less raw; like other writers who published their war memoirs after a long interlude, the passage of time allowed her to adopt a greater degree of emotional detachment, although the directness of her accounts of suffering, chaos and brutality retained all their original power” (149). On the publication history of *The Forbidden Zone* in part and whole, see also Martha S. Vogeler, *Austin Harrison and the English Review* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2008), 207-8; further discussion of editorial changes from manuscript to publication follows below.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), 73, emphasis added.

since the turn of this century that *The Forbidden Zone* has been taken up consistently as a text of interest in a growing body of work on women's war writing, most extensively in Higonnet's invaluable criticism. *The Forbidden Zone* has thus joined Ellen La Motte's *The Backwash of War* (1916) and Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) as a favorite object of study for critics interested in how women experienced the trauma of the Great War and how and why they decided to write about it.<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Breen singles out Borden as one of the few female war writers whose poems "can bear much exegesis," and Nosheen Khan marks in the 1917 war poem "Unidentified" a "probable" precursor to Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1919).<sup>30</sup> Jane Marcus, in her afterword to Smith's *Not So Quiet...Stepdaughters of War* (1930), begins to recuperate Borden as "a modernist, obviously influenced by Gertrude Stein."<sup>31</sup>

Reiterating Marcus's assertion, Laurie Kaplan has argued that Borden relies on "compulsive repetition...us[ing] *repetitio* as a rhetorical strategy to convey the boredom,

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<sup>29</sup> Such work underwrites James Longenbach's claim that "the battle for women's suffrage, the battle for modern art, and the battle in the trenches" were, in practice in 1914 as in criticism now, not differentiable—that just as modernism needs to be considered through the lens of the Great War, both are affected profoundly by social tensions that predate the Somme (Longenbach, "The Women and Men of 1914," in *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation*, Helen M. Cooper et al, eds. [Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1989], 98). Longenbach reminds his reader that "[i]t was 'on or about December, 1910'—not 1914—that Virginia Woolf said that 'human character changed'" (Longenbach, 98). La Motte, who nursed for Borden's ambulance unit, had an experience with military censors that echoes Borden's own: though the fourteen vignettes of *The Backwash of War* were initially published in a more lenient climate, the collection was soon suppressed and not republished until 1934 (see Lea Williams, "Narrating Trauma in the Writings of World War I Nurses," in *Gender Scripts in Medicine and Narrative*, ed. Marcelline Block and Angela Laflen [Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010], 217-18).

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Breen, "Representations of the 'feminine' in First World War poetry," *Critical Survey* 2.2 (1990): 174; Nosheen Khan, "Mary Borden's 'Unidentified' and W. B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming,'" *ANQ* 4.1 (1991): 20. Borden's poem reads, in part, "The earth, ages ago, leaped screaming up; out of the / fastness of its ancient laws, / There is no centre now to hold it down" (Khan, 20).

<sup>31</sup> Marcus, 247. The writer Evadne Price, working under the pseudonym Helen Zenna Smith, was originally tasked by her editor to write a satire of *All Quiet on the Western Front* to be told from a female point of view and called *All Quaint on the Western Front*; unwilling to deride Remarque's novel, Price instead produced *Not So Quiet...*, based on the diaries of a female ambulance driver named Winifred Young (see Marcus, 266).

dreariness, and monotony of the quotidian routine of war.”<sup>32</sup> I would argue that just as often, Borden uses rhythmic and rhetorical repetition to convey the pulsing energy of her environment and the frantic logic of war. “Mud,” she writes in the opening vignette, “Belgium,” “and a thin rain coming down to make more mud”:

Mud: with scraps of iron lying in it.... It is quiet here. The rain and the mud muffle the voice of the war that is growling beyond the horizon. But if you listen you can hear cataracts of iron pouring down channels in the sodden land, and you feel the earth trembling.... [M]ud, and a thin silent rain falling to make more mud—mud with things lying in it.<sup>33</sup>

Borden turns the seven appearances of “mud” in even this small excerpt from monotonous, deadening, repeated schwa (recall Sassoon’s “thud, thud, thud”) to a reverberating medium that has “lying in it” not only vehicles and bodies but also the sound of war itself, the noise of the unceasing guns “trembling” through the earth to places otherwise out of the reach of “cataracts of iron.” Sound thus travels as much through mud as through air. Borden’s *repetitio* goes some way toward resolving one of the basic problems of writing war noise—portraying it with the continuity with which it is experienced. “Can the noise [of military pomp],” Borden soon asks, “the rhythmical beating of the drum...make [the soldiers] glad to be heroes? They have nowhere to go now and nothing to do. There is nothing but mud all about, and a soft fine rain coming down to make more mud.”<sup>34</sup> With nowhere to go, in Borden’s telling, the entire French

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<sup>32</sup> Laurie Kaplan, “Deformities of the Great War: The Narratives of Mary Borden and Helen Zenna Smith,” *Women and Language* 27.2 (2004): 36.

<sup>33</sup> Borden, “Belgium,” in *The Forbidden Zone*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Borden, “Belgium,” 8.

military apparatus grows ever more enveloped in mud, an acoustic medium that is not the life-sustaining air through which martial drumbeats might travel but muffling filth, the bolus of the natural world rising up and combining uncannily with the sounds of mechanized warfare.

### III. SOUNDING OUT WAR EXPERIENCE: *THE FORBIDDEN ZONE*

Borden certainly was alive to the potential for a communicative gap between herself and readers with a less direct experience of the war, as comparison of the manuscript and published forms of *The Forbidden Zone* emphasizes. As it appeared in 1929, *The Forbidden Zone* comprises a preface (in the earlier, unpublished manuscript a “prefatory note”) followed by two parts. “Part One: The North” contains ten atmospheric vignettes and short stories; “Part Two: The Somme—Hospital Sketches” is made up of seven sketches of particular patients Borden treated or towns the mobile hospital passed through. As Jane Conway, Borden’s most comprehensive biographer, remarks, the manuscript’s “prefatory note” is substantially more personal than the published “preface.” But Borden’s changes did not only have “the effect of making it [the preface] less raw.” Comparison of the manuscript and published forms of *The Forbidden Zone*, especially, reveals how alive Borden was to the potential for a communicative gap between herself and readers with a less direct experience of the war. The original prefatory note takes upon itself the job of explaining the memoir’s artistic project—

Week after week, month after month... I lived within the range of cannon, with the roaring of guns sounding in my ears, with the piteous horror of the wounded, before my eyes—and above and

beyond, the noise, the suffering, the confusion, I gradually became conscious of the War as a being, an essence, with a quality, as unique as the quality of a race, a country, or a person. This quality I have tried to convey.

That it can be conveyed to those who have never heard for themselves the voice of the War, I am not sure.<sup>35</sup>

Jennifer Gromada reads this version of the prefatory material as an “inclusive and hopeful gesture” aimed at the civilian population, “meant to enhance their understanding of war’s horrors.”<sup>36</sup> When Borden most wants to set out *The Forbidden Zone*’s aesthetic project, and to define it as communicating what might be understood only with difficulty from a civilian viewpoint, she falls back on the phenomenal experience of war. But such experience is not simply a matter of “the roaring of guns.” As Joyce and Marinetti tacked toward thick description of noise by transducing sound from phenomenon to explanatory language and back, Borden approaches war experience by degrees: it is, at first, sensory (“the wounded, before my eyes—and above and beyond, the noise”); next, it becomes an embodied “essence” that can be studied, categorized, and interacted with (“a country, or a person”); finally, it is again diffused into the phenomenal (“the voice of the War”). While this spiral reveals the inherent discursive difficulties of her project, Borden’s circling around war experience is also a journey of mediation. And with mediation comes uncertainty: where the sensory immediacy of Borden’s own war experience is figured as immersive and unavoidable, and where even “War as a being” retains some of the concrete physicality of a person or country named War, the prefatory note’s resolution of

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<sup>35</sup> Borden, “Prefatory Note,” 607.

<sup>36</sup> Jennifer Gromada, “Introduction,” *Modernism/Modernity* 16.3 (2009): 600.

war experience into a voice, even as it returns an auditory experience to an auditory medium, is imperfect. Borden leaves open the possibility that the voice, no matter how faithfully she replicates it, might ring as noise—as interference rather than information—in the ears of those without the same personal phenomenological history (“those who have never heard for themselves”).

The published 1929 preface removes this uncertainty. Whereas the original note allowed for the possibility that her text might fail her reader, the revision shifts some responsibility for understanding the evidence she presents onto that reader: “To those who find these impressions confused,” she writes, “I would say that they are fragments of a great confusion. Any attempt to reduce them to order would require artifice on my part and would falsify them.”<sup>37</sup> As though in reaction to the conflict with official censors that the manuscript provoked, the revised preface represents something more than a statement of purpose; it is a defense of the memoir’s most formally progressive moments—as well, perhaps, as its more violent ones. Indeed, the first words of the 1929 edition are a truth claim, defending “the bare horror of facts” presented in the pages that follow: “I have not invented anything in this book.... I was incapable of a nearer approach to the truth.”<sup>38</sup> Abandoning the original prefatory note’s direct invocations of the noise of war, Borden’s published preface and added prose pieces incorporate the inescapable presence of noise into their textual fabric, exposing the reader as nearly as possible to the manuscript’s “voice of War.”

As I have noted, *The Forbidden Zone* draws on noise both as auditory phenomenon—the mimetic representation of the disturbing sounds of war—and as

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<sup>37</sup> Borden, “Preface,” in *The Forbidden Zone*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Borden, “Preface,” 3.

cybernetic interference—and obstacle to the communication of information. “Moonlight” provides a powerful example of how Borden wields both senses of noise to disorient, but ultimately enfranchise, the civilian readership of her war narrative. The seventh of the ten pieces in “The North,” “Moonlight” begins on a straightforwardly biographical note: “The cannonade is my lullaby. It soothes me. . . . If it stopped I could not sleep. I would wake with a start” (“M,” 39). Conway writes that Borden in fact “grew so used to the accompaniment of shellfire that when she returned to Paris on leave, the silence at night kept her awake.”<sup>39</sup> But Borden’s attention to sound is more than an anecdote about habituation to familiar noise. “The thin wooden walls of my cubicle tremble and the windows rattle a little,” Borden writes. “That, too, is natural. It is the whispering of the grass and the scent of new-mown hay that makes me nervous” (“M,” 39-40). “That, too, is natural”: in the built environment of war, the rhythms of life are those of pounding three-inch guns and rattling windows, while the erstwhile natural world of growth and harvest is received as threatening interference. Fussell notes that the literature of the First World War is frequently concerned with the relationship between nature and war. “If the opposite of war is peace,” he writes, “the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral. Since war takes place outdoors and always within nature, its symbolic status is that of the ultimate anti-pastoral.”<sup>40</sup> In “Moonlight,” Borden plays with and deforms the opposition of the natural and unnatural in wartime that Fussell would later take up. Even as her prose deploys the noise of war mimetically, Borden

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<sup>39</sup> Conway, 47-48. David Trotter writes that “[t]he sound of the guns, composite and sourceless, was a primary terror for the soldier in the trenches” (“The British Novel and the War,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent B. Sherry [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006], 38); it is perhaps here that Borden demonstrates the greatest variance between her experience of *la zone interdite* and a soldier’s experience of the trenches.

<sup>40</sup> Fussell, 231.

enacts a kind of narrative noise, swiftly and counterintuitively reordering the categories of natural and unnatural. Defamiliarizing the pastoral as she employs it to familiarize combat, Borden capitalizes on the disturbance and discordance of noise to evoke the theater of war for a civilian audience.

One of five prose pieces added to *The Forbidden Zone* in the 1920s, “Moonlight” sees Borden reorganizing narratives of wartime valor in response to an experience that forces her to question what is real and what is fantasy. In a totalizing realm in which “[t]he war is the world,” the realities of peacetime—or even of the civilian world during wartime, a world Borden denied herself—become sources of danger and anxiety (“M,” 40). Better the terrors of war:

The little whimpering voice of a man who is going to die in an hour or two comes across the whispering grass from the hut next door. That little sound I understand. It is like the mew of a wounded cat....

Lying in my bed, I listen to the great, familiar, muttering voice of the war and to the feeble, mewing, whimpering voice of Life, the sick bad-tempered animal, and to the loud triumphant guttural shouts of Pain plying her traffic in the hut next to me.... Lovely night...you are not true; you are not a part of the routine. You are a dream, an intolerable nightmare, and you recall a world that I once knew in a dream.

The mewing voice of the wounded cat dying in the shed next door to me is true. (39-41)

Over the indistinct, bass womb-noise of the guns, Borden layers the opposing sonic contributions of Life and Pain. Life makes its pathetic appearance in the thready whimper of the dying; Pain, deep and explosive, echoes war in a voice both crassly eroticized (“plying her traffic”) and subtly villainized through its Teutonic gutturals. Yet the most telling sonic engagement in the story is not with these grandiose avatars, given life and voice by the men in the medical tent, but with the utterances of a single, anonymous patient—the “man who is going to die.”

The man appears five times in the story’s seven pages, in each instance through the sound of his dying. His first incursion into the soundscape establishes an abiding analogy: his voice is “like the mew of a wounded cat.” Borden’s simile is designed to convey a functional correspondence between two sounds: over the distance between huts, and through the interference presented by both the mechanized and pastoral soundscapes, this man’s whimpers of pain resemble those of a cat. The representation begins straightforwardly, but Borden’s simile is far from stable; the content of the analogy persists, but its rhetorical form shifts even over the course of the quotation above. By the man’s second appearance, he has been entirely absorbed by his analog, and what was before a man who sounded like a mewling cat has become “the wounded cat dying in the shed next door to me.” In a story that sees Borden negotiating her relationship to the war through a consideration of “true” and “dream” sounds, this transition from explicit simile to hypocatstasis is consequential. From an individual infantryman, the dying man turns into a pitiful creature; from an individual agent and victim of war’s destruction, he turns into a moral innocent (provided one does not think that a cat can commit a war crime). Perhaps most telling, Borden’s figure for the wounded soldier is a domesticated animal.

“That little sound I understand,” Borden writes, echoing her “[t]hat, too, is natural” and reinforcing a pattern, in “Moonlight” as in *The Forbidden Zone* more broadly, of using domestic rhetoric, frequently flagged as “natural” or otherwise proper, both to represent war and to highlight the aberrance of war experience.

For if the analogy of the mewling cat reflects back on the dying man’s agency, the twisted domesticity of his analogic representation has broader implications for Borden’s memoir. As the man emerges and reemerges in the text, his representation and the nurse’s sense of responsibility for him continue to fluctuate. “The sick man is still mewling,” she notes next, and his rhetorical return to humanity seems to recall her to duty: “I must go to him. I am afraid to go to him” (“M,” 43). She does not go to him.<sup>41</sup> Rather, her brush with the soldier’s humanity—a moment of clarity that seems almost accidental—and her violent retraction from the impulse to tend to him (“I cannot bear to go across the whispering grass and find him in the arms of his monstrous paramour [Pain]”) sends Borden back toward the figurative (“M,” 43). “Listen. Do you hear him? He is still mewling like a cat,” she writes, “but very faintly, and the trees are still murmuring” (“M,” 45). The soldier’s dying gasps are again likened to those of a cat, but notably without either direct invocation of the man’s humanity (“the sick man” of above) or a recurrence of the impulse to nurse him. Instead, we see the reappearance of the speaker’s quiet horror at the soundscape (“the trees are still murmuring”). Two paragraphs later, as the story draws to a close, the soldier is decisively effaced: “Listen! The whimpering mew of the wounded cat has stopped. There’s not a sound except the whisper of the wind in the

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<sup>41</sup> Further discussion of Borden’s navigation of the paradoxes of war nursing follows, but one statistic might go some way toward explaining the nurse’s unwillingness to draw out the fight against Pain: “two-thirds of wounded British and German soldiers returned to fight at the Front, and...of the 2,800,000 French soldiers seriously wounded, a third had been wounded *twice*” (Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* [New York: Zone Books, 2011], 581).

grass” (“M,” 46). In this last iteration, the mew itself takes the position of the subject, removing the figure still further from the cat-like man—now dead—from whom the sound had emanated. The pathetic sound of one of the war’s victims diffuses into the sound of the natural environment of war—a whimper resolving into a whisper.

In “Moonlight,” that noise is found not only in Borden’s description of the mewling soldier but also in the conceptual structure of the story’s guiding metaphors. Recall that, even as the narrator of “Moonlight” rejects the “intolerable nightmare” of a peaceful pastoral world, her description consistently returns to some version of domestic intimacy. Of the mewling soldier she notes “I go on duty at midnight, and he will die and go to Heaven soon after, lulled to sleep by the lullaby of the guns” (“M,” 39). There is something of the nursery in the insistence that the soldier will “die and go to Heaven”; even before Borden’s invocation of cradlesong she is assuring her reader, as one might a child, of the immortality of the man’s soul. The hybridization of this familiar scene with another—that of the soldier as mewling cat—results in an unsettling, surreal blend of domestic analogues: when the man’s soul leaves his body, Borden writes, it will, catlike, “run lightly over the whispering grasses” (“M,” 41) and “leap through the velvety dark” before its final ascent to heaven (“M,” 42).

On the heels of this circuitous track, we find an unadorned truth claim: “I know this is true. I know it must be true” (“M,” 42). Borden’s insistent return to “mud” in “Belgium” telegraphed the quivering continuity of war noise, but here her *repetitio* is itself a form of cybernetic noise: the nurse’s repeated protestation telegraphs some skepticism that everything above—the feline soldier, the sinister grasses and trees, the purring personification of Pain—is “true.” The story thus sets up an opposition between

the historical reality of war and the composed reality of narrative, until at last the intuited categories of fact and narrative are reversed—the “true” describes a man’s gradual metamorphosis into a cat, while what might ordinarily be thought of as the story’s factually pastoral setting is rendered as a nightmare. In light of this transformation, the attempt to bridge the war experience gap through language evocative of hearth and home resolves at every turn into an uncanny bisociation of waking and dream narrative, combat and civilian life. Borden’s troubled insistence on the “truth” of the sonic journey in “Moonlight” and the persistence of her seemingly maladroit figurative language map onto the apparent irresolvability of the memoir’s concurrent ethical questions: what is the war nurse’s immediate responsibility toward her patients? and in war’s aftermath, what is the nurse memoirist’s testimonial responsibility to herself, her patients, and her audience? “Moonlight” at once denies the pastoral as an insidious dream of beauty and peace that estranges the nurse from her work amid destruction and death and reports on the warzone in a manner that connects it, via language of domestic idyll, to a civilian readership’s immediate environment. Rather than being baldly familiarizing, this connection is deliberately unmooring, its use of comforting metaphor to convey the pain and confusion of the war experience at once mediating and estranging, and in this a structural echo of what I have termed modernist noise, which leverages discomfort to supply information.

A brief return to Graves highlights the original contribution Borden’s conceptual blending makes to Great War writing, even as it puts her in conversation with a broader discourse surrounding war’s domestic analogues. “A Child’s Nightmare,” a late poem in *Fairies and Fusiliers* (published during the decade between *The Forbidden Zone*’s

conception and publication), tells of a man whose war trauma has reawakened his recurring childhood nightmare of a beast,

gigantic, formless, queer,

Purring in my haunted ear [...]

Saying for ever, “Cat!... Cat!... Cat!...”<sup>42</sup>

A version of the “Cat!” refrain ends each stanza, and the poem closes with the soldier’s assertion that on his death, “shot through heart and head,” “The last word [he]’ll hear, no doubt,” will not be orders shouted by superiors or medics, “[b]ut a voice cruel and flat / Saying for ever, ‘Cat!... Cat!... Cat!...[.]’”<sup>43</sup> Graves’s version of feline *repetitio* takes the name of the beast, rather than the sound it makes, as its object; his “Cat!” is more staccato, more martial than Borden’s “mew.” At once domestic and uncanny, Graves’s noise blurs time, blending boy and man, dream and truth, the natural and the something beyond. In “Moonlight,” Borden follows much the same track but shifts the hearing ear from soldier to nurse, from the idiosyncratic manifest content of a soldier’s dream to the nurse’s imaginative overlay of a domestic scene on the external auditory phenomenon of a man’s suffering moans. Borden’s noise is hers, not his.

Evidence of Borden’s investment in such conceptual blending can be found across her war writing, in both more and less straightforward iterations. In “Escape,” a love poem excised from the original *Forbidden Zone* manuscript before its first Heinemann edition, the speaker encourages her lover to leave his men in the trenches and come away with her for a brief assignation:

And together we will go, down and down

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<sup>42</sup> Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, 67-69. The ellipses following “Cat!” are original to Graves.

<sup>43</sup> Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, 69.

Into the wild sweet throbbing dream [...]

You'll be safe and you will sleep —

I shall hold you while you sleep for a little, like a child[.]<sup>44</sup>

Again, war experience is eroticized, the speaker's "throbbing" sexual reverie echoing the pounding of cannons; again, a scene that associates a stolen moment of intimacy with a dangerous "dream" resolves into the comforting of an agitated child. In another expurgated love poem, "Take Me Away From My Wounded Men," Borden's speaker similarly longs for an escape from "the wind and the roar of cannon" into a world from which she can "hear their delirium calling" as from afar—it is unclear here if she refers to her patients' or the cannons' delirium—and "Let the war thunder" without while she and her lover dream that in some future domestic space "the chimney fires are burning — / The quiet rooms are waiting."<sup>45</sup> As in "Moonlight," Borden's speaker has a complex relationship to her medical duties. Again, the noise of war interferes with her ability to determine unequivocally the truth or fantasy of a particular setting. Again, mimetic and narrative noise trace the same path. In these moments, Borden encourages her reader to engage with the enormity of the Great War via interlocking mechanisms: the unavoidable auditory perception of pounding guns evokes the "throbbing" experience of erotic longing (more nearly universal than trench combat); that physical experience is then tied into an idealized domesticity. Layering familiarity on familiarity, Borden turns noise to her advantage to assist her in creating the narrative of an event that resists communication and to mark the horror of war.

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Borden, "Escape," *Modernism/Modernity* 16.3 (2009): 601-2.

<sup>45</sup> Borden, "Take Me Away From My Wounded Men," *Modernism/Modernity* 16.3 (2009): 603.

#### IV. THE NURSE'S TEXT AND THE PERILS OF EMPATHY

Reading noise in Borden expands our sense of how modernist writing could take up the constitutive experience of war and create from it a broadly accessible cultural understanding of a fundamentally alien experience. But this reading has another effect. As Borden informs through distortion, she recasts the war experience gap as a gendered empathy gap. If Borden's noisy metaphors contest Graves's assertion that noise, and thereby war, cannot be communicated, *The Forbidden Zone* contradicts a second strain in his insistence that "you can't communicate noise": the idea that there is on the one hand an accredited epistemological community made up of those who can be said to have access to an authentic experience—and therefore a genuine understanding—of war, and on the other hand narrative interlopers (the "you" in Graves's imprecation, if we perhaps modulate his emphasis slightly).

Recent studies of women's war writing are heavily invested in reversing what Higonnet identifies as "a conflation of *war* with *combat*" responsible for the disparagement of women's novels and accounts of war experience.<sup>46</sup> Samuel Hynes, whose *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* is for Higonnet exemplary of such confluences, argues that "[w]ar—any war—is for women an inevitably diminishing experience. There is nothing like a war for demonstrating to women their inferior status, nothing like the war experiences of men for making clear the exclusion of women from life's great excitements, nothing like war casualties for imposing on women the guiltiness of being alive and well."<sup>47</sup> What Hynes overlooks, as both Higonnet and Longenbach make clear, is that the experience of war must be understood in terms more

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<sup>46</sup> Higonnet, "Another Record: A Different War," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 23.3/4 (1995): 86.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), 379.

capacious than those of direct experience of battle. Contra Hynes, critics such as Higonet and Ariela Freedman propose that “dividing the front of war writers along gendered lines is insufficient.”<sup>48</sup> Though it may have been World War II that brought the fight directly to the English civilian population, their argument goes, the First World War had numerous points of entry into women’s experience beyond mourning, from rationing and war industry at home to ambulance driving and nursing on the Continent.

Despite the move to open the field to women’s war experience more generally, if Borden’s work is especially compelling to recent critics it is likely because her proximity to the Front and the approximation of combat experience that her memoir thus achieves is unique in accounts of women at war. Being so close, Borden is equipped to engage what Higonet identifies as “the central theme of the Great War: needless wounding and destruction,” and convey it to a noncombatant audience of which the author, technically at least, forms part.<sup>49</sup> In underwriting Borden’s access to the central literary theme of the war, Higonet counters Fussell’s insistence on women’s exclusion from the great triad of war memoirists. At the same time, Higonet highlights the importance to war literature of the description of trauma, and within that description of the fundamental “needless[ness]” of war’s destruction. It certainly follows that “wounding and destruction” would figure in war literature’s central concerns—to write about injury is to focus one’s efforts on what, in Elaine Scarry’s formulation, is “the main purpose and outcome of war.”<sup>50</sup> But Higonet’s full formulation, that the central theme of Great War writing is the needlessness of war’s destruction, effectively assigns war writers a specific task: to

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<sup>48</sup> Ariela Freedman, “Mary Borden’s *Forbidden Zone*: Women’s Writing from No-Man’s-Land,” *Modernism/modernity* 9.1 (2002): 112.

<sup>49</sup> Higonet, *Nurses at the Front*, xx.

<sup>50</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 63.

communicate to a body of readers that may not share a single experience of war in terms of intensity, proximity, or politics both a specific ideological position (antiwar sentiments) and the evidence for that position (war's injurious effects).<sup>51</sup>

Accepting Higonnet's position means that in order to be considered "central," whether penned by a combatant man or noncombatant women, a war text must communicate trauma. In this context, nurse memoirists are in a unique position: in their medical lives, witness to the ruin and pain of innumerable others and tasked with returning the wounded to fitness for another battle; in their writing, expected to attempt a record of that pain, often at the expense of their own, despite working in a genre of personal narrative. And yet, as already noted, war literature is frequently understood as an exercise in recording an event so far outside the quotidian as to be nearly incommunicable to those who have not experienced it. Similarly, testimony of psychological trauma and physical pain is often greeted as a futile and politically fraught attempt to crystallize in language an insurmountably private event.<sup>52</sup> This is the series of intellectual switchbacks *The Forbidden Zone* and its fellows are faced with navigating.

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<sup>51</sup> Ann-Marie Einhaus has noted that, in contradistinction to the interest of a chronologically-defined canon of early twentieth-century writing in literary form ("how a given text expresses thoughts, concepts, or ideologies"), the literary canon defined by the event of the Great War "is interested primarily in *what* is expressed"—in maintaining a specific ideological position defined by "authenticity," and using "antiwar sentiments" as an evaluative criterion (Einhaus, "Modernism, Truth, and the Canon of First World War Literature," *Modernist Cultures* 6.2 [2011]: 298-99). In this light, Higonnet's formulation can be read as being almost as totalizing as Hynes' or Fussell's: to fail to engage with "needless wounding and destruction" pushes a writer to the periphery in a canon defined, on this reading, by a single primary ideological and narratological concern.

<sup>52</sup> Scarry contends that physical pain "actively destroys" (4) language, and that the attempt to express another's pain is implicated in an inevitable slippage between the problem of finding referential language that verbally represents pain and "the ease or difficulty with which that phenomenon comes to be *politically represented*" (12). Jane Robinett provides a compelling and comprehensive overview of attitudes toward the communicability of lived experience in "the postmodern academy" as a whole, providing key theoretical examples of both mimetic and antimimetic positions ("The Narrative Shape of Traumatic Experience," *Literature and Medicine* 26.2 [2007]: 290.) See also Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000). In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes interacting with open wounds and dead bodies as forcing a subject to confront the material refuse—the "blood and pus," the "sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay," the corpse—that she "permanently thrust[s] aside in order to live"

In returning, at the close of the story, to her own idiosyncratic fear of the pastoral, Borden subtly but importantly subverts some of the expectations of the genre of the nurse's memoir. As writers such as Borden, Brittain, and La Motte have received increasing critical attention, memoirs of war nursing have become an ever-expanding topic of study. But as much as the recognition of female war narratives represents a radical expansion of the canon of war literature, their discussion has sprung from and to a large extent continues to follow a set of standard patterns of thought about how women's war writing goes about balancing the experience of women as individual subjects against the experience of active-duty soldiers and the world-historical experience of war. In the most general sense, as Higonnet writes, the animating problem of the genre is that of reconciling "self-control and technical efficiency" with "emotional investment and the threat of hysteria."<sup>53</sup> Or, as Laurie Kaplan has it, "the arc of action in what has been called 'the nurse's text' develops when women face head on the extremes of physical and psychological trauma of trench warfare while simultaneously projecting an image of efficiency, competence, and intelligence."<sup>54</sup>

The propulsive force of women's war writing, for Kaplan and others, springs from the conflict between a desire to maintain a long-idealized image of the war nurse and the felt responsibility to communicate the experience of war in all its unassimilable

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(Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982], 3). For Kristeva, what the subject arrives at and forcefully recoils from in this confrontation is "the border of [her] condition as a living being" (3), the point at which she must recognize that the habitually-rejected sight of death and decay is "here, jetted, abjected, into [her] world," "death infecting life" and troubling the distinction between subject and object (4). This, Kristeva writes, is the place for art: to record the confrontation, collapse, and ultimate reinscription of subject and object, to "retrac[e] the fragile limits of the speaking being...at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject" (18). As the nurse inhabits an interstitial zone between combat personnel and civilian, medic and memoirist, she also becomes something of a permanent inhabitant of that horrific border; constantly faced with human decay, she cannot give into repulsion. These constitutive tensions are vital to an understanding of how Borden, writing through noise, recasts the role of the war nurse memoirist.

<sup>53</sup> Higonnet, *Nurses at the Front*, xvii.

<sup>54</sup> Kaplan, 35.

violence.<sup>55</sup> Contemporary reviews of *The Forbidden Zone* certainly took issue with Borden's content. Cyril Falls, who seems concerned simultaneously that Borden's memoir does not constitute an accurate portrait of war and that it does, wrote in 1929 that Borden's hospital scenes were "dreadful," though powerfully rendered: "It is perhaps right that this aspect of war should be made clear to the public which knows nothing of it; but there is some risk that the fashion in which the subject is handled will make it appear that the hospital was for the wounded a place of horror rather than of relief."<sup>56</sup> Falls lauds the educational mission of Borden's work, but he bemoans its major tools in wishing that her stories included less of what is "horrible to laymen"—that they were not, in the introduction of the possibility of horror to otherwise clear-cut tales of tragedy and triumph, quite so noisy.<sup>57</sup>

Even in Kaplan's able definition of the form, there persists a telling ambiguity: whose "physical and psychological trauma" do women war writers face? Is an efficient, competent, and intelligent self-presentation made difficult purely because of a nurse-writer's emotional investment in her patient, her vicarious horror at witnessing the destructive power of trench warfare? Or can "the nurse's text" also act as a record of her own trauma—of the suffering of a woman who, though rarely in the same physical danger as the men she treats, faces the horrors of war first-hand while working steadily to ensure that there will be soldiers to continue the fight, perpetuating the casualties she

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<sup>55</sup> To some extent, this is a conflict that shadows women's writing on a larger scale: in her *Notes on Nursing* (London: Harrison, 1859), Florence Nightingale reminds her reader that "[e]very woman, or at least almost every woman, in England has, at one time or another of her life, charge of the personal health of somebody, whether child or invalid,—in other words, every woman is a nurse" (3); Kaplan goes on to note that war nurses' writings "challenge assumptions about what is 'appropriate' for the woman writer to take on in terms of form, content, imagery, and realism," over and above the government censorship they frequently faced (35).

<sup>56</sup> Falls, "The Forbidden Zone," *Times Literary Supplement* [London, England] 5 Dec. 1929, 1030.

<sup>57</sup> Falls, *War Books: An Annotated Bibliography of Books about the Great War*, ed. R. J. Wyatt (London: Greenhill Books, 1989), 267.

must face by the very work of healing? In a general sense, to question the attribution of trauma in the nurse's text is to ask where the war nurse falls on a spectrum running from civilian to soldier, and of what experience she is thereby authorized to offer testimony.

If, again on Kaplan's reading, the works of male war writers such as Hemingway, Remarque, and Sassoon "seem less concerned with how to write about physical wounding"—and, by extension, the fates of individual soldiers—"than how to describe in general the effect of the war and war wounds on survivors and society," female war writers are expected to concern themselves precisely with the individual victim, to demonstrate an ability to feel for the patients they describe.<sup>58</sup> More often than not, to comply with this expectation is to become the conduit of that victim's trauma, channeling its narrative to a broader audience and largely disappearing in the process. As Carol Acton and Jane Potter have argued, the ideology that dictates that the nurse's text be populated primarily by "narratives of resilience," designed to boost the morale both of the caregiver and her charges, in practice "often stood in the way of medics claiming a place at the center of the narratives emerging from [the Great War] or encouraged them to remain silent about their own suffering."<sup>59</sup>

Sounding out *The Forbidden Zone* reveals how deeply noise is constitutive of, rather than incidental to, this repudiation of the soldier's monopoly on war trauma. "Conspiracy," a three-page meditation in the second part of *The Forbidden Zone*, highlights Borden's horror at the revolving door of war nursing:

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<sup>58</sup> Kaplan, 39. Higonnet advances a compelling motive for conforming to these expectations: "While men's experimental forms and hyperrealism about their wartime experience have been praised for their transgressions and bitter ironies, the impropriety of shocking descriptions and open-ended structures in texts by women has led critics to characterize them as inartistic 'commercial opportunists'" ("Another Record," 87).

<sup>59</sup> Carol Acton and Jane Potter, "These frightful sights would work havoc with one's brain': Subjective Experience, Trauma, and Resilience in First World War Writings by Medical Personnel," *Literature and Medicine* 30.1 (2012): 78, 81.

[W]e send our men to the war again and again, just as long as they will stand it; just until they are dead, and then we throw them into the ground.... It is only ten kilometres up the road, the place where they go to be torn again and mangled. Listen; you can hear how well it works. There is the sound of the cannon and the sound of the ambulances bringing the wounded, and the sound of the tramp of strong men going along the road to fill the empty places.<sup>60</sup>

Again, Borden figures the trauma of war in a stark *repetitio* of sound. Yet it is the nurse rather than the gunner, the ambulance driver, or the infantryman who acts as the antenna for the soundscape, the nurse who, as she does several times in “Moonlight,” bids her audience, “Listen.” Foregrounding the nurse’s perspective, “Moonlight” validates her idiosyncratic auditory phenomenology of war at the expense of a fuller narration of the dying soldier’s plight. The reality of patient care drops away, and the nurse’s experience—her experience of living through and listening to war—becomes the necessary mediator for a public who, like the nurse herself, cannot see the action at the Front. In Borden’s version of the nurse’s text, sound fills the vacuum left by the failure of visual witnessing to affirm the nurse’s experience: noise recuperates a broken gaze.

Exploring a broad swath of Great War literature with reference to the early stages of psychoanalytic trauma theory, Santanu Das suggests that Borden’s “Moonlight” follows just this pattern. In his *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Das traces the physicality of the war nurse’s relation to her patients, arguing that bodily experience comes to define the subjectivity of men and women in a warzone, be they

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<sup>60</sup> Borden, “Conspiracy,” in *The Forbidden Zone*, 79-81.

“private, officer, stretcher-bearer, ambulance driver [or] nurse.”<sup>61</sup> The task of war writing, he argues, is to create an empathetic bridge between reader and protagonist; in the case of the female nurse-author, the reader is asked not only to empathize with the pain of the soldier, but also to share in the dilemma of the nurse. “[E]mpathy becomes a yoke of conscience,” he writes: “we are made to feel the burden of the nurse-narrator, of bearing witness to another’s pain.”<sup>62</sup> But if, as Das argues elsewhere, “moments of physical contact [with soldiers’ wounds] often define the subjectivity of the women...both as witnesses and participants,” and if such physical connection is limited by the “*incommensurability and absoluteness of physical pain*,” this “bearing witness” results in a familiar double bind.<sup>63</sup> Though in Das’s view the nurse is an intimate witness to the destructive power of war, neither her participation in the battle against death nor her powers of empathy can make her a party to her patients’ pain.

For Das, as the nurse’s subjectivity is defined by physical access to her patients, and as that access is limited by the basic condition of pain, her subjectivity is “doubly eroded—first, through the gap with the male trench experience, and second, through the sheer magnitude of suffering, an experience that can never be owned by women either historically or ontologically.”<sup>64</sup> On this reading, such “erosion” is practically necessary to the transmission of the pain of the protagonist to the reader: “This is what makes women’s war writings often far more depressing and painful than the men’s memoirs: the helplessness of the nurse is translated into the haplessness of the witness—and in turn,

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<sup>61</sup> Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>62</sup> Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, 189-90.

<sup>63</sup> Das, “‘The impotence of sympathy’: Touch and Trauma in the Memoirs of the First World War Nurses,” *Textual Practice* 19.2 (2005), 242, emphasis in original; Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, 177.

<sup>64</sup> Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, 190.

the reader.”<sup>65</sup> In some sense, Das is presenting the nurse as the ideal carrier of Higonet’s “central” war theme—the more affecting the writing, the better it conveys the needlessness of war trauma.<sup>66</sup>

Yet there is something of Hynes’s reading of women as unhappily excluded observers of war’s excitements in Das’s insistence that the experience of war’s suffering “can never be owned by women.”<sup>67</sup> The reading of “Moonlight” that underwrites this claim relies on an understanding of the nurse’s “eroded” subjectivity in the face of violence. To be sure, Borden’s narrative of violence is extensive. In addition to the drama of the dying cat “Moonlight” features litanies of depersonalized wounds. “There are no men here,” she writes,

so why should I be a woman? There are heads and knees and mangled testicles. There are chests with holes as big as your fist, and pulpy thighs, shapeless; and stumps where legs once were fastened. There are eyes—eyes of sick dogs, sick cats.... It is impossible to be a woman here. One must be dead. Certainly they were men once. But now they are no longer men.... Once they were real, splendid, ordinary, normal men. Now they mew like kittens. (“M,” 43-44)

As in previous scenes from “Moonlight,” Borden’s text is following a host of ideas—the role of the nurse in confronting physical trauma, the figure of the injured soldier as a

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<sup>65</sup> Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, 190.

<sup>66</sup> Das, it is worth noting, absorbs the soundscape of combat into his study of touch. “The noise frequently led to nervous breakdown,” he notes with reference to a collection of statistics detailing the almost inconceivable amount of ordnance employed in the war; “it also resulted in a strange sensory phenomenon – the experience of sound as something tangible” (*Touch and Intimacy*, 79).

<sup>67</sup> This is not the only instance of such totalizing language; Das earlier renders this narrative limitation as “the plight of women as witnesses to violence” (*Touch and Intimacy*, 177).

distressed domesticated animal (here either a dog or a cat), the unstable boundary between the fantastic outcomes of war and the “real.” For Das, Borden’s analysis of war experience can be reduced to the atomization of her patients: “the terrible phrase ‘mangled testicles’ moves beyond the tightening, the violation and the waste to the absolute crushing of female subjectivity: these mangled remains, neither human nor yet wholly objects...unmake the fundamental categories of gender and sexual difference.”<sup>68</sup> For Kristeva, the aesthetic exploration of the abject—what manifests itself in literature as “the crying-out theme of suffering-horror”—“retrace[s]” the troubling of subjectivity to which that confrontation with such things as wounded testes gives rise.<sup>69</sup> Contra Kristeva, for whom literature observes and records this conflict at the borderland between subject and object but ultimately witnesses it “start again,” reinscribed in a new subject/object clash without a definitive synthesis, Das reads the nurse’s subjectivity as decisively obliterated.<sup>70</sup>

Das may be proposing, here, that by virtue of the impossibility of relating to an injured infantryman, Borden and her contemporaries come to occupy a transcendental medical and testimonial subjectivity outside of gender. Yet it is just as easy to see this argument for “the absolute crushing of female subjectivity” not as a vaguely utopian promise of freedom from gendered subjectivity, but as the denial of any feasible subject position among those defined by the few, conflicted wartime occupations available to women.<sup>71</sup> In the emphasis his reading places on the medical fact of “mangled testicles,”

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<sup>68</sup> Das, “Touch and Trauma,” 245.

<sup>69</sup> Kristeva, 141.

<sup>70</sup> Kristeva, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, to see it as the former would mean reading Das as couching an argument for the explosion of gendered subjectivity in terms of “the absolute crushing” of only one of its subject positions, which rings as strangely as the quick slippage of Das’s argument from crushed testicles to the crushing of *female* subjectivity.

Das can be seen to exemplify an ongoing critical elision of the war nurse as independent subject and agent of war. In Borden's text, on this reading, an injury to the male body erases the possibility of a female subject, reducing war nurses to conduits for (exclusively male) physical pain and barring them from sharing in the historical experience of the Great War, even as they are relied upon to transmit that experience to a reading population. In the extreme version, then, the empathy ideal ends in effacing the nurse altogether.

In an important sense, Das is correct: *The Forbidden Zone* is a model of the empathetic nurse's text. But despite that empathy, the trauma of war, in Borden's telling, is not solely the purview of the male soldier; though it may be the patient who is in any literal sense dying, his nurse undergoes trauma as well. In an early vignette, "The Regiment," Borden registers the basic threat to a nurse's subjectivity as she enters a warzone dominated by a very specific mythos. "The Regiment" narrativizes the struggle for primacy between the individual nurse's experience of war and the demands imposed on her by her work, echoing Acton's description of "a traumatic witnessing where events cannot be wholly seen or understood, nor can they be fully conceptualized by the observer/participant":

She opened the door of the motor and put out her white foot and stepped down, and her delicate body dressed in the white uniform of a hospital was exposed to the view of the officers and the regiment....

She was a beautiful animal dressed as a nun and branded with a red cross. Her shadowy eyes said to the regiment: 'I came to the war to nurse you and comfort you.'...

Her red mouth said to the officers: 'I am here for you.'

And the officers said: 'We know why you are here.'<sup>72</sup>

"The Regiment" narrativizes the struggle for primacy between the individual nurse's experience of war and the demands imposed on her by her work precisely by narrating a failure to be "wholly seen." The nurse here is fragmented along several axes. First, she breaks into the "body," "uniform," "eyes," and "mouth" that silently transmit and receive messages across the square. Next, she resolves into a series of figures that highlight the complicated meaning the regiment reads in her: the objectified and potentially sexualized "animal," the revered and unsexed "nun," and finally the meeting of the transgressed/transgressing object and religious mother figure in the symbol of the nurse, "branded with a red cross." Fragmented, too, is the idea of the nurse's role in the war, as her "I am here for you," ostensibly as source of empathetic comfort and medical succor, is met with a peremptory "We know why you are here," ringing as a challenge to her claim to the determination of her own worth and function in the warzone. In these various divisions, war's violence extends from soldier to nurse, reifying her conflicted but definitively gendered subjectivity. Borden may not fear dissolution by bomb, but disintegration by gaze—as Acton has it, a breakdown "into partially seen and incompletely comprehended images"—is never far off.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Acton, "Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women's War Writing," *College Literature* 31.2 (2004): 62; Borden, "The Regiment," in *The Forbidden Zone*, 28.

<sup>73</sup> Acton, "Diverting the Gaze," 70. Compare Borden's earlier description of the regiment itself: "Their gait was the steady jolting gait of weary animals.... They did not look quite like men, and yet they were men.

The nurse's trauma registers powerfully in the auditory realm as well. In a later story, as a priest prays for the recovery of a dying infantryman, known as the "Enfant de Malheur" ["child of misfortune"], to whom Borden and her staff are particularly attached, the speaker notes that "[h]is words came to my ears like the soft raps of a small muffled hammer, hammering away, hammering and hammering."<sup>74</sup> Though the nurse here falls into a mild dissociative state characterized by the evacuation of some auditory sensitivity, it is still the nurse's perspective, rather than the soldier's or the priest's, from which the reader experiences the moment—it is her trauma the audience inhabits as finer sense perception drops out of the narrative and gives way to the muffled, repetitive "hammer, hammering...hammering and hammering." Recall, too, that in "Moonlight" it is ultimately the soldier, not the nurse, who is gradually eroded. Granting Das the force of Borden's "there are no women here," the fact remains that, by the end of the story, there are also no cats.

Read through its sonic environment, *The Forbidden Zone* thus falls somewhere between the traditional combat narrative of a strong male protagonist with sweeping ideological concerns and the traditionally empathetic nurse's text. It ends by stretching expectations of both forms. On Higonnet's account, writers such as Borden and La Motte argue "that nursing must be a kind of resistance to the physical and spiritual destruction wrought by war"; in doing so, and in destabilizing propagandistic accounts of the war, they enable their readers' "understanding of war as a social trauma."<sup>75</sup> That understanding in turn opens a dialogue about psychic injuries that has the potential to

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Nor did they behave like men...and yet they assuredly were men. I saw in their eyes that they were men" ("The Regiment," 23).

<sup>74</sup> Borden, "Enfant de Malheur," in *The Forbidden Zone*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> Higonnet, *Nurses at the Front*, xx-xxi.

extend the nurse's capacity for healing from the direct and isolating experience of war to the secondary, collective experience of war writing.

In Borden's hands, the nurse's text can be seen to define a relation with a traumatic event that resists effacing the recording witness: *The Forbidden Zone* testifies to a war experience in which the nurse-witness herself is doubly, if differently, traumatized—once in participating in war's violence via the practice of healing, and once in recording that violence, even years after the event. In this, Borden fulfills Higonnet's demand that a war text transmit the needless destruction that characterizes war, even as it models and legitimizes a type of war trauma that does not depend on having fought in the trenches. Far from effacing herself in the interest of evoking sympathy for wounded men, Borden implicates the reader not in empathizing with the wounded as such but in experiencing the deracinating effects of total war through her own ears.

Her memoir's departure from more expected narrative modes thus has two major effects: that of opening up an experience of trauma to a new kind of communication and that of marrying that communication to a specific ideological stance. For as personal as stories such as "Moonlight" are, Borden's memoir nonetheless participates in a broader literary and political conversation that attempts to assign moral responsibility for the trauma it records. Consider a more thematically and stylistically direct moment from an early vignette, "The Square," in which Borden describes the arrival of a group of French officers in a town trying to maintain its civilian normalcy:

The motors make a great noise and a great smell and a great dust.  
They come into the square, hooting and shrieking; they draw up in  
the square with grinding breaks. The men get out with a flourish of

capas: they stamp on the pavement with heavy boots; they salute one another stiffly like wooden toys, then disappear into the buildings where they hold murderous conferences and make elaborate plans of massacre.<sup>76</sup>

In this instance, Borden's attention is fixed on the noise of troop movements; in contradistinction to "Moonlight" and its mewling cat, "The Square" provides more or less literal descriptions of mechanized military noise (honking horns, grinding breaks, stamping boots). The rhythm of the passage, too, is regular and martial: motors appear, they approach, they stop; men appear, they approach, they stop—two sets of noisemakers whose actions are set off by a series of nested semicolons. Where the passage breaks out of that pattern is also where its affective and baldly moralistic weight falls. When the concluding phrase runs out of the rhythm established by its predecessors and into the quiet, unpunctuated murmur of the war room, the reader lulled into complacency by Borden's rhetorical cannonade must confront ideas that run counter to wartime ideals of glory and honor. As "Moonlight" works to destabilize the categories of real and unreal, home and battle, so "The Square" uses noise and narrative disruption to draw attention to the ways that acts of war, repositioned in a civilian legal context, quickly become indefensible.

Borden thus recasts the war experience gap as an epistemological impasse that nonetheless, given the proper mediator, might not be as intractable as Graves would have us believe. Two such mediators are at play in *The Forbidden Zone*: noise and the figure of the nurse. Noise takes on a disembodied, almost hallucinatory character that plays into Borden's deracinating metaphoric structures: it coats and confuses the senses, standing in

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<sup>76</sup> Borden, "The Square," in *The Forbidden Zone*, 17.

the way of a straightforward narrative of war, but in so doing reveals the truth of the “great confusion” of war experience. The nurse, echoing the constructively obstructionist character of modernist noise, redirects the reader’s attention from the pure suffering of the injured soldier, yet in refusing to step out of her patients’ spotlight provides a model for a listener who might engage with their suffering more completely for witnessing the confusion, perhaps even the meaninglessness, of the violence done them. Whether or not Borden’s work to close the war experience gap would satisfy a combat veteran, *The Forbidden Zone* presents a strong challenge to combat gnosticism.

Resisting combat gnosticism as Borden does is not a politically neutral act. The claim that a civilian can never understand war is at once portable—serviceable to excusing an inability or disinclination to tell war stories, characterizing the alienating trauma of combat veterans, or arguing for or against military intervention—and proprietary. To say that someone who hasn’t been to war cannot understand it—in Susan Sontag’s pointed construction, “Can’t understand, *can’t imagine*”—forecloses connection in a way that both prevents the civilian world from processing its own war trauma and perpetuates the mystique of the warrior.<sup>77</sup> Undermining the idea of an experience gap that sits at the heart of combat gnosticism, as Borden’s noise-writing does, redistributes the ownership of war narratives, implicating the civilian as an equal partner in questions of war’s ethical, political, and social toll.

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<sup>77</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 126.

## INTERLUDE. CLASS AND CALUMNY AFTER THE GREAT WAR

Mrs. Carpenter affected my mother like a loud and unpleasant noise, and my mother hated noises more than anything in the world. I am not trying to be witty. I mean this literally.

—Borden, *Jane, Our Stranger* (1923)<sup>1</sup>

Ann-Marie Einhaus writes that the most critically salient characteristic of Borden’s war writing is her “attempt to satisfy two conflicting demands concomitantly”—on the one hand the formal demands of modernism, in which context Einhaus concludes that *The Forbidden Zone* is ultimately a “failure,” and on the other the demands of an ideological argument.<sup>2</sup> While my first chapter has followed the broadest strokes of Einhaus’s work in tracing a fertile constitutive opposition between the formal demands of a literary genre—women’s war writing—and the representational demands of an anti-war ideological stance, I wish to resist limiting Borden’s importance and interest to the fraction of her work lauded by contemporary critics as avant-garde.<sup>3</sup> Over the two and a half decades—1921 to 1946—that I take up in this project, Borden, whose career extended from 1912 to 1957, uses noise-writing to confront combat gnosticism, to challenge critical assumptions about the genre of the nursing memoir, and to attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> *Jane, Our Stranger* (New York: Knopf, 1923), 93, hereafter abbreviated *J* and cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>2</sup> Einhaus, 297.

<sup>3</sup> The critics who do attend to *The Forbidden Zone* frequently justify their readings through invocations of Borden’s unacknowledged aesthetic progressivism; “here at least is a highly conscious literary modernist” writes Das, exemplifying this tendency (*Touch and Intimacy*, 220). This is not to say one could not argue, as Seamus O’Malley has recently of Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*, that Borden’s postwar social novels are “both modern—charting twentieth-century conflicts—and modernist in [their] techniques” (“Listening for Class in Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*,” *Modernism/modernity* 21.3 [2014]: 690). Nor is it to suggest an expansion of the category of modernism, or even necessarily to reaffirm or recuperate the middlebrow for critical purposes—work that has been done with great acuity elsewhere. For a comprehensive reading of the rise of modernism to dominate perceived cultural legitimacy and disciplinary credibility, see Ann Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002). On the history of the middlebrow novel and its influential relation to class and gender identity in the first half of the twentieth century, see Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

make comprehensible what Virginia Woolf calls the “mysterious prerogatives and disabilities” introduced by English class distinctions that “impede and disorder the great business of human intercourse.”<sup>4</sup> Just as reading noise in *The Forbidden Zone* reveals how the memoir challenges the formal demands of the nurse-memoir in the service of anti-war ideology, attention to noise in the texts that follow clarifies how Borden’s largely forgotten fiction is invested in performing a similar narrative alchemy on the sociopolitical nuance of postwar England. In thus expanding the critical conversation surrounding Borden, this reading underwrites a consideration of her post-World War I novels and short stories that moves beyond a justification of the critical importance of the middlebrow and toward a more comprehensive view both of Borden’s modernist noise and of the portability of noise writing in the first half of the twentieth century.

Though on the surface Borden’s works undergo a seismic generic and topical shift after 1918, there are distinct through-lines between her Great War and postwar writings. Just as *The Forbidden Zone*’s engagement with war takes place on individual and collective levels, her middlebrow novels do the work Julian Markels, following Lionel Trilling, has recently characterized as “abstract[ing] a political master narrative which engages us intellectually and moves us emotionally in and through its poetic, dramaturgic, or novelistic representation...in which the personal becomes political not in abstract reflection after the fact but in the contradictions and stress of lived experience.”<sup>5</sup> In *The Forbidden Zone*, war forced an unmooring confrontation between a subject and the inassimilable realities of death and decay. In Borden’s postwar social novels, noise works

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Woolf, “The Niece of an Earl,” in *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, 1986), 215.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Markels, *The Marxian Imagination: Representing Class in Literature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 11.

to orient Borden's readership within another sort of inassimilable personal and political reality: class. If war threatens to muddle the border between life and death, subject and object, the consistent confrontation with class in Borden's postwar work likewise raises questions about individual identity and the possibility of literary representation.

#### I. MODERNIST NOISE AND CLASS GNOSTICISM

John McCain and Mark Salter's 2004 *Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life* contains a familiar sentiment: "no one who wasn't there could understand what happens in a war."<sup>6</sup> Seventy-five years after the publication of *The Forbidden Zone*, war narratives maintain the existence of an unbridgeable gap between civilian and combat experience—even when, as in the case of *Why Courage Matters*, those narratives' explicit goal is to provoke the everyday reader to new heights of moral action. If Raymond Williams was, in 1977, skeptical of "that separation of the social from the personal which is so powerful and directive a cultural mode," such diverse veterans as Graves and McCain take the separation one step further: not only can institutions never assimilate the personal, nothing that is "this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective'" about the experience of war can be transmitted successfully to another individual subject.<sup>7</sup>

A similar attitude toward experience is found, in various iterations, throughout the record of modern class conflict. In her interwar essay "The Niece of an Earl," Woolf highlights what she sees as an intentionally underdiscussed aspect of contemporary English fiction: class distinctions. On Woolf's reading, the class system is at once

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<sup>6</sup> John McCain and Mark Salter, *Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life* (New York: Random House, 2004), 194.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 128.

impossible to avoid and impossible to render *in toto*. “English fiction is so steeped in the ups and downs of social rank that without them it would be unrecognizable,” she writes.<sup>8</sup> And yet, “[s]ociety is a nest of glass boxes one separate from another, each housing a group with special habits and qualities of its own,” and as much as the English novelist might delight in describing the habits particular to his or her own glass box, revealing the “curious veins and streakings” of a single segment of society, social stratification is also an artistic limitation.<sup>9</sup> The English novelist “knows that there are Earls and that Earls have nieces; he knows that there are Generals and that Generals brush their coats before they visit the nieces of Earls,” but even after tracing the serpentine paths and degrees of separation that lead from earls to their nieces, the nieces to their gentlemen callers, the generals to their cousins, and so on, “we are still faced with an abyss; a gulf yawns before us; on the other side are the working classes.”<sup>10</sup> There are “no gentlemen in Dickens; no working men in Thackeray”—on Woolf’s account, the English novelist cannot “escape from the box in which he has been bred” to “describe with understanding” any social rank other than his or her own.<sup>11</sup> If it is a commonplace to maintain that there is an almost ineradicable epistemological barrier between everyday life and war, it would seem an equal challenge for literature to render the British class system in any comprehensive manner.

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<sup>8</sup> Woolf, 214.

<sup>9</sup> Woolf, 215.

<sup>10</sup> Woolf, 215.

<sup>11</sup> For all the claustrophobia of her account of the class system’s fictional instantiation, Woolf is uninterested in a revolution in English literary habits. (“English fiction without the nieces of Earls and the cousins of Generals would be an arid waste,” she writes in “The Niece of an Earl.” “It would resemble Russian fiction” [216].) Indeed, her essay closes on an apocalyptic note: in the inevitable future in which the aristocracy has disappeared, “English fiction...may change its character so that we no longer know it. It may become extinct.... The art of a truly democratic age will be—what?” (219).

In the more recent discussion of class and literature that opens their collection *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore note that their contributors chiefly approach class “not as a self-evident concept, and not necessarily as a category of Marxist analysis, but rather as a conceptual hurdle of its own, *a site of explanatory impasse*[.]”<sup>12</sup> Like Woolf in “The Niece of an Earl,” Dimock and Gilmore figure class as difficult, resistant, unrepresentable.<sup>13</sup> But just as combat gnosticism, resilient though it may be, has not doomed war literature, the social novel survives this persistent vision of class as an epistemological “abyss” (or “gulf,” or “hurdle,” or “impasse”).

If the social, on the above accounts, represents for the writer a perilous conceptual sublime, it is one Borden approaches determinedly. Borden’s interwar and postwar fiction, growing out of her role as witness to and subject of the trauma of the Great War, is characterized by an attention to the act of testimony and its relation to other forms of noisy storytelling and social interference. In a series of popular social novels, Borden extends the logic of her war writing to domestic life, using such noisy modes as gossip, slander, and legal testimony to depict a social environment at once as monolithic and as evasive as war. The shape of the class system coming out of the Great War is a live issue for both literature and historiography; Borden’s novels participate in a push to define and represent the English class system even as they suggest that a place of understanding and communion across the social order may be out of reach. Read through noise, Borden’s

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<sup>12</sup> Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 1-2, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Expanding on that difficulty later in the collection, Dimock cites an Emersonian critique of the division of labor that resonates, the better part of a century later, in the violence of Borden’s “Moonlight”: “[I]n ‘The American Scholar,’ Emerson thrusts before the reader a catalog of bodily parts, amputated and randomly assorted, ‘strut[ting] about’ like ‘so many walking monsters—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man’” (Dimock, “Class, Gender, and a History of Metonymy,” in *Rethinking Class*, 57).

oeuvre thus forms an important part of the conceptual landscape of Britain's domestic and social life throughout the modernist era.

The concern with the domestic that marks her war writing—and which in that context is deployed to communicate anxieties about patriotism and war work in the face of unfathomable violence—reappears throughout her post-war novels. Borden's post-war characters are preoccupied by familiar difficulties, problems of conforming to the tacit and often contradictory expectations of social self-presentation, of maintaining one's reputation despite illicit (or merely idiosyncratic) behavior, of complications of love by and across class and national boundaries. Yet the texts are neither as predictable nor as toothless as such a description may make them sound: the *Spectator* review of Borden's 1926 collection *Four O'Clock and Other Stories* proposes as “perhaps the bitterest comment ever made in good temper on modern social life” the story “To Meet Jesus Christ,” a thinly-veiled *roman à clef* in which Lottie (a fictionalization of society hostess Lady Sibyl Colefax) obsesses so much over a dinner party that she snaps and spends the entire event “convers[ing] with animation to nothing at all in the vacant chair at her side, chatting of olive groves and morals.”<sup>14</sup> *Jehovah's Day* (1928), which in its persistent interest in evolutionary and geological time prefigures Woolf's *Between the Acts*, is described in *The Times* as “concern[ing] a group of people, chiefly Mayfair Londoners, whose resemblance to their primeval ancestry lately evolved from slime is insisted on with the sharpest emphasis.”<sup>15</sup> That these are Mayfair Londoners is not incidental—once a Mayfair resident herself, Borden (by marriage Lady Spears, after all) is unequivocally more Thackeray than Dickens.

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. of *Four O'Clock and Other Stories*, *The Spectator* 5134 (1926), 930.

<sup>15</sup> “New Novels,” rev. of *Jehovah's Day*, *The Times* 9 Nov. 1928, 22, accessed 15 Sept. 2014, *The Times Digital Archive*.

There is a close connection, in both historiography and literature, between war and class politics, and between World War I and the English class system in particular. Trotter identifies the class system as the chief protagonist of Great War literature: “The implicit investment these novels all make, with or without enthusiasm, is in the durability of the class-system,” he writes. “The class-system goes to war, and survives, even if its individual representatives do not (they often do not).”<sup>16</sup> But the affairs of the home front, in moving out of the immediate context of war, do not lose their connection to the forbidding and dangerous. If war literature is “the meeting point between violence and culture,” British World War I literature is bound up in a culture that comes out of the war undergoing large-scale and frequently violent conflicts over workers’ rights, Irish independence, and the full enfranchisement of women.<sup>17</sup>

In linking the class system and the First World War, Trotter participates in a long-standing conversation about the effects of the war on English society. Although recent studies have been interested in a more comprehensive review of World War I and British society, considering the ways colonial subjects and women responded to the war and reacted to an increasingly fervent patriotism’s demand for exhibitions of Englishness, the majority of accounts have centered on the war’s impact on white working-class men, the emerging middle class, and capital-S Society writ large.<sup>18</sup> One set of arguments,

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<sup>16</sup> Trotter, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Felman and Laub, xiii.

<sup>18</sup> See George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave, 2002). Hereafter abbreviated *B* and cited parenthetically by page number. Many such historical studies specifically elide a consideration of women, even as they acknowledge that collapsing the social and economic fate of English women into that of enfranchised men is problematic (see Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987], 6-7; hereafter abbreviated *CS* and cited parenthetically by page number). Broadly speaking, studies of class and class history employ different modes of analysis: while some theorists are more inclined to consider class divisions as the basis for a dedicated analysis of social and economic dynamics, others take them as a measure of what Waites refers to as “an American descriptive theory of social ranking” that is invested more in the popular concept of class than in its

categorized by historian Bernard Waites as “emancipatory,” maintains that war brought about “a liberalization or partial dissolution of the class structure” on the English home front (CS, 26). Within such accounts, an oft-cited mechanism of this relaxation of strict social divisions was trench warfare itself, Wartime fraternization between servicemen of various ranks—in social and military senses—“suggested possibilities for a new political order” (B, 29) at the war’s end, by promoting interaction between individuals who would, under peacetime circumstances, have been unlikely to socialize; contact with soldiers of American, Australian, and Canadian origin introduced a brand of political thought “much more favorable to the working class.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, scholars cite civilian war work as a unique opportunity for personal interaction cutting across class boundaries. By 1918, almost a quarter of the adult male population of Britain was in military service, with nearly half again as many men and women employed in munitions production. At the same time, direct action on the part of labor organizers and suffragettes subsided. George Robb writes that “as was the case with the labor movement,” whose leaders agreed soon after the outbreak of war to do everything possible to avoid strikes, “the war proved a unifying force for the nation. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), suspended suffrage agitation for the duration of the war and pledged her organization’s support for the war effort” (B, 37).<sup>20</sup>

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Marxian conceptions (CS, 17). Less commonly do scholars reject class wholesale as a metric of social historiography; David Silbey writes that “[a]ny historiographical system that views a society on the basis of its ‘history of internal fragmentation’ obscures areas of similarities within that society. By using ‘class, gender, and race,’ analyses may miss the existence or establishment of shared beliefs and interests.” (*The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914-1916* [London: Frank Cass, 2005], 3.) For the purposes of this literary and theoretical discussion, an understanding of English postwar society as characterized precisely by “internal fragmentation” is vital.

<sup>19</sup> Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 298.

<sup>20</sup> On the war’s effect on labor disputes, see Silbey, 21.

The emancipatory argument is appealing, not least because it recuperates a narrative of unity and positive liberalization from a war that, by some accounts, resulted in the wounding of more than 1.5 million soldiers from the British Isles and the deaths of upwards of 700,000.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, scenes of camaraderie between classes found their way into wartime propaganda. A May 1916 article in *The Times* heralding the “evolution of the working woman” and “A Confraternity of Sisterhood” among female laborers argued that “the titled woman has been thrown into contact with the girl at the lathe, just as Tommy has come into close and affectionate contact with his officers. They find themselves on a new footing. Battle is a wonderful leveller; so is labour.”<sup>22</sup>

But the emancipatory argument is perhaps too cheerful. Opponents of the emancipatory theory emphasize that the gains made in some quarters provoked resentment and political retribution from other social ranks.<sup>23</sup> Far from admiring the “close and affectionate contact” (*B*, 67) between enlisted men and officers, they dispute the liberalizing potential of the trenches, suggesting instead that “the Army itself recreated the British class system in miniature” (*B*, 84). Likewise, not all stories of the camaraderie of the munitions factory suggest that it resulted in mutual understanding and affection. Again according to Robb,

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<sup>21</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War: 1914-1920* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), 237. The report lists “the number of soldiers who lost their lives in, and through, the Great War” as 702,410, of which only 37,452 were officers; the wounded are listed at 1,662,625, with 79,445 officers.

<sup>22</sup> “The 1916 Woman,” *The Times*, 18 May 1916, 9, accessed 15 Apr. 2015, *The Times Digital Archive*.

<sup>23</sup> Waites writes that specifically middle-class insecurities sprang from “the ostentatious use in wartime of representatives of both capital and labour [the upper and working classes, respectively] as government advisers and temporary civil servants”—insecurities that came to a head “during the industrial crises of 1919 when the government was engaged in publicly effecting a series of industrial compromises seen as damaging to the interests of the middle-class[.]” (*CS*, 53). He notes, too, that while working-class wages kept up with inflation and “benefited from regular employment in the better-paid sectors of industry,” “professional incomes and salaries fell substantially behind inflation and there were fewer ways middle-class families could compensate” (*CS*, 51).

The *Manchester Guardian* also reported the story of a titled lady who gave a party to celebrate her first month's work at a munitions plant. Guests included a duchess, the wife of a Cabinet Minister, and a working woman, introduced as "Mabel, my mate in the shop." The hostess carved and guests helped themselves to the vegetables. "The simple life," said the hostess. "Mabel and I only get fifteen bob a week..." Such stories were given great play in the press as evidence of class solidarity, but they were open to other interpretations. Sylvia Pankhurst commented darkly, "What fun indeed for the titled few—and behind it the trenches. What ghoulisish sport!" (B, 44-45)

Pankhurst's emphasis on "the titled few" points to another vision of the war's effects on English class society. Competing with the emancipatory model, especially in more recent scholarship, is one that sees the war as the occasion for further social polarization. True though it may be that agitators for labor and women's enfranchisement reached agreements with authorities to defer conflict and preserve England's capacity for the production of war goods, the decision was not born of pure patriotism. Both Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the Pankhursts believed that women war workers would convince the government that it depended on women as well as men and make it more difficult to refuse enfranchisement at war's end.<sup>24</sup> In any case, contracting against agitation did not win the activists lasting favor; on 17 December 1917, Sir George Sydenham Clarke

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<sup>24</sup> Christabel Pankhurst seems to have thought the war might even convince reluctant women to join the cause: "Sooner or later this war will end in victory, and, when that day comes, women who are paying their equal share of the price will claim, will insist upon being brought into equal partnership as enfranchised citizens of this country" (B, 37).

argued in the House of Lords that extending suffrage to women would introduce “the germs of a disease which may bring about the destruction of our Empire” just as it contributed to the fall into “anarchy” of revolutionary Russia.<sup>25</sup> “[V]ery probably,” he hypothesized, “it helped the Germans to believe that a country in which educated women perpetrated outrages on churches and public property was not in a position to wage war.”<sup>26</sup>

A third schema traces an intermediary path between the emancipatory and polarization theories, and draws the conversation back to a consideration of what literature offers the war and society debate. In *A Class Society at War*, Waites argues that there was in fact a noteworthy shift in social stratification due to the war. Society, on this reading, was “less steeply stratified” due to an expansion of educational chances and a “narrowing of economic differentials,” a change in the distribution of wealth and income that saw certain historically upper-class sectors of the economy, especially rental income, suffer while working-class wages generally increased (*CS*, 114). However, Waites continues, if a leveling can be said to have occurred it does not follow that the social structure on the whole became less polarized. Rather, he argues, the war “strengthened the class structure by consolidating those immanent tendencies in capitalist society which give rise to [a stratified social] form” (*CS*, 28-29). In consolidating differences within social ranks, the war in effect “simplified”—and strengthened—the status hierarchy (*CS*, 114). Between 1914 and 1924, Waites concludes, “there took place...a concatenation of

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<sup>25</sup> United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, vol. 27, 17 Dec. 1917, col. 210-12. In the same session, Viscount Bryce displays a confidence in the unsophisticated forthrightness of the suffragettes that reappears in later historiography, as he argues that “it is disparaging to suggest that those who gave themselves to hospital and Red Cross work, or those who went into munition factories, did so with any thought of having the suffrage given to them as a reward. To think this would be to disparage their sense of duty and their sense of patriotism” (col. 179).

<sup>26</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 17 Dec. 1917, col. 212.

changes in English society which altered the specific form of the class structure but did not fundamentally disturb those processes of social differentiation which are generic to a capitalist market society” (CS, 279).<sup>27</sup>

A Waitesian view of social structure as reflected in literature would be, then, neither a description of utterly entrenched hierarchy nor a narrative of utopian social progress. Just as Waites’s nuanced historiography charts a course between surface liberalization and structural polarization, Borden’s post-1918 narratives work against both the Woolfian expectation that inhabitants of society’s glass boxes must remain forever incomprehensible to each other and the “‘democratic’ novels of social progress” such as A. J. Cronin’s *The Citadel* and Winifred Holtby’s *South Riding* that Ross McKibbin argues formed the characteristic post-war middlebrow novel.<sup>28</sup>

To an extent, Borden’s investment in exploring a relatively conservative model of social stratification is a narrative convenience. Stanislaw Ossowski, in his 1963 *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, argues that “the most socially significant view of stratification is the dichotomous one [divided into rulers and ruled, or rich and poor, or the workers and the idle] because it is an *idée force* in its function in social movements” (CS, 36-37). That is, a dichotomous class structure, tapping as it does into easily intuited understandings of social conflict (*Ye cannot serve both God and Mammon*), serves as a

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<sup>27</sup> In *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), McKibbin echoes Waites in arguing that, rather than eliminating the upper class, post-World War I social changes “in some ways...invented the upper class,” largely through what, in his description, sounds like a concerted marketing effort: “Although, as we would expect, the formal ‘decline’ of the aristocracy continued—though that can be exaggerated—an upper-class embodying wealth, power, glamour, and a good part of the aristocracy flourished in its place. The constant recruitment of wealth, glamorous persons and avocations, an ever-growing peerage, an honorific system topped by a judiciously popularized monarchy and social élites who could still be integrated—partly by hostesses who saw to it that they were—preserved an articulated social hierarchy which combined the dignity of the old aristocracy with the democracy of the modern middle classes” (530).

<sup>28</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 516.

compelling narrative and political formula for class struggle. In some ways, certainly, Borden capitalizes on such simple divisions: sinister or hilarious are the decadent and dishonest, the *nouveau riche*, the Americans of her novels; sympathetic are observant children, strivers down on their luck, Whartonian heroines caught up in social machinations beyond their ken. Yet Borden also avoids the simplicity of Ossowski's dichotomous model in working against a vision of class as unassailable and unrepresentable. As *The Forbidden Zone* recontextualized combat narratives within domestic scenes (recall "Escape" and "Take Me Away From My Wounded Men"), these novels and short stories familiarize the lives of upper class characters through another sort of intimate ground: the rhetorical space of gossip. As the remainder of this section will argue, gossip—a cybernetic noise at once constitutive of and disruptive to the social ecosystem—allows Borden a thick description of upper class social concerns, even from an outsider's perspective. That said, the provision of conceptual access to a closed social class is importantly distinct from any "democratic" project; Borden resists advocating social integration or leveling. These narratives, that is, recognize that the postwar social structure is different enough from what went before and still unstable enough to merit nuanced description, but do not suggest that the boundaries to representation that Woolf, Dimock, and Gilmore identify have disappeared.

## II. "FROM STRATIFICATION TO CONFLICT": WEAPONIZING GOSSIP

Where *The Forbidden Zone* is characterized as much by its record of the soundscape of war as by its noisy narrative techniques, Borden's post-World War I novels instantiate another kind of noise, one abstracted from specific acoustic

environments. To be sure, the novels employ the details of the contemporary urban soundscape as familiarizing phenomenological shorthand in establishing setting and mood. The most basic iteration of this use of acoustics appears in *Three Pilgrims and a Tinker*, as the protagonists' children recall their former homes. "Jill remembered the room in Venice very well," Borden writes. "The ceiling was very high with painted beams and the window opened out on to a balcony over the canal. You heard the water lapping softly below."<sup>29</sup> "I liked London," contends Jill's sister Biddy. "I liked lying in bed and hearing the 'buses go down the street[.]"<sup>30</sup> Where *The Forbidden Zone* employed domestic space to highlight the barbarity of combat, *Three Pilgrims and a Tinker's* attention to the noise that has filtered into the children's domestic spaces and from there into their ideas of home operates through a sort of acoustic metonym. Background noise is constitutive rather than disruptive of a scene, allowing Borden economical renderings of the children's memories of Venice and London.

The introductory descriptions of an ever-modernizing Manhattan in *Flamingo* are similarly efficient: "The city clanged and roared round him. It was a portrait in stone and steel and reinforced concrete of his young raw people and his boisterous, bumptious, incredibly aspiring, tumultuous age[.]"<sup>31</sup> As does *Three Pilgrims and a Tinker*, *Flamingo* renders a complex urban environment through characteristic sounds—New York's tumult of constant traffic and equally unending construction joining Venice's canals and London's omnibuses. But unlike the earlier novel, *Flamingo* begins to draw meaning from the city's noise, and concurrently to register discomfort with it. The admiring wonder at a "young raw people" and an "incredibly aspiring, tumultuous age" is certainly

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<sup>29</sup> Borden, *Three Pilgrims and a Tinker* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1924), 24.

<sup>30</sup> Borden, *Three Pilgrims*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Borden, *Flamingo* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1927), 5.

continued in the note that “[a] radio apparatus could hear faint sounds three thousand miles away, and whisper a ‘Hello’ round the earth so quickly that it whipped back into its own tail.”<sup>32</sup> Still, there is a hint of monstrosity in this supernaturally sensitive and responsive acoustic instrument—an informational ouroboros born of new auditory technology. Indeed, the “Hello” that eats its own tail is quickly followed by a reminder of the dangers of unbridled mechanization as evidenced by the Great War:

It was really the machines that were at the bottom of it all.

Thousands of guns and innumerable engines of destruction had been waiting, champing at the bit, bursting to do something, and had at last broken out of their factories and forges. They had had a good time of it; they had had their money’s worth; they had had everything their own way during the war. They had blown ten million men to smithereens and made such a noise as even they themselves had scarcely believed possible.<sup>33</sup>

In *The Forbidden Zone*, Borden’s noise participated in an intricate recalculation of the ethical and emotional responsibilities of war. *Flamingo*, a novel more concerned with interactions between the American nouveau riche and British old money, proposes another responsible party. Evacuating the responsibility of human agents, the novel suggests that the technology itself is eager to fulfill its purpose—in the process making a noise so great that it is almost its own reward—even if that purpose is the destruction of its creators. In this case, noise’s appearance in the acoustic environment remains

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<sup>32</sup> Borden, *Flamingo*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Borden, *Flamingo*, 6-7.

explicitly tied to the soundscape of war, even as the narrative of which it forms part interests itself not in war but in a critique of modern society.

Borden is not alone in bringing the war home in this fashion. Waites notes that there was a broad transition to more belligerent language in socially-conscious postwar literature: “the shift in the primary reference of the language of class from stratification to conflict,” he writes, “was intimately connected with the changes in social consciousness wrought by the conflict which engulfed Europe” (*CS*, 35). But where *Flamingo* contributes to a general tendency to introduce war’s disruptive noise into the civilian soundscape, in many of Borden’s post-1918 novels noise appears not as phenomenological distortion but as a more abstracted form of interference.

If *The Forbidden Zone*, *Three Pilgrims and a Tinker*, and *Flamingo* demonstrate an interest in a literal phenomenology of sound, novels such as *Action for Slander*, the taxonomy of Mayfair Londoners *Jehovah’s Day*, the popular *Jane*, *Our Stranger*, and *You, The Jury* (1952) primarily relate not a material acoustic ecology but a social ecology. Borden’s 1930 *A Woman With White Eyes* exemplifies the transition. Marcella Mackintosh, the ringleader of the novel’s cast of decadent and debauched antagonists—described in Joe Lee Davis’s *Bookman* review of the novel as a “grotesque Lesbian circus-woman of post-war Paris”—devastates the city’s social equilibrium:

Marcella was all out to destroy respectability, morality, decency, privacy, and silence. She was the apostle of anarchy, the prophet of the beast, the inspired devotee of vice. She’d come out of Kansas City like a whirlwind to set the old world topsy-turvy; like the ten plagues of Egypt she swept over Europe, leaving a desert behind

her. She destroyed Paris. She filled its streets with noise and made the pale gray stones of its beautiful proud eighteenth-century houses echo and shake with American jazz. Paris went down before her. . . . [T]he people who had made Paris, the old shy exquisite people of taste who had built it, carved it and smoothed it and given to it the patina of a lovely bibelot, fled from her. They fled into their dim houses, the gates clanged behind them, and Paris saw them no more. It was emptied of Parisians and delivered up to Marcella and her gang of marauders as it had been to the Germans in 1870.<sup>34</sup>

Faced with the barriers to representation articulated in Woolf's topography of glass boxes and Dimock and Gilmore's definition of class as itself a "conceptual hurdle" and "site of explanatory impasse," Borden finds a narrative lever in gossip. Describing her "circus-woman," Borden herself becomes something of a ringmaster, an emcee rattling off a litany of Marcella's spectacular qualifications: *out of Kansas City, the Apostle of Anarchy,*

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<sup>34</sup> Joe Lee Davis, review of *A Woman With White Eyes*, by Mary Borden, *The Bookman* (December 1930): 415; Borden, *A Woman With White Eyes* (New York: Doubleday, 1930), 86. Basil Davenport, reviewing the novel in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, predicts that Borden "will be remembered for several novels. . . dealing with the smart sets of England and France, sometimes as they were revealed by contrast with an American" ("Sleep and Waking," review of *A Woman With White Eyes*, *The Saturday Review* [20 December 1930]: 470). Davenport's review appears on the same page as a review of A. M. Frey's *The Cross Bearers* written by Mary Lee, a Radcliffe alumna whose memoir of her life in France as a nurse, secretary, and canteen worker for the American Expeditionary Forces, the American Air Service, and the YMCA from 1917 to 1919 was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1929 as "*It's A Great War!*". The first paragraph of that review, luminous to the last, is worth quoting in full: "Another man's war book. Like most men's war books, it deals only with life at the front. The long, agonizing period of training, and the still longer, still more agonizing, period of readjustment to peace, which are as much a part of war as the actual fighting, are not touched on at all. One should not, perhaps, blame men for writing exclusively of the front,—even though it does lure youth into a desire for conflict,—for I doubt if there was ever a publisher who did not insist that the proper place for a war book to begin is on the train going to the front lines, and the proper place for it to end is either on the train going to the rear, or at that point where a shell snuffs out that particular hero's life" ("Life at the Front," review of *The Cross Bearers*, by A. M. Frey, *The Saturday Review* [20 December 1930]: 470).

*the Prophet of the Beast, the Devotee of Vice; like the ten plagues of Egypt, Marcella Mackintosh!* These are not epithets whispered behind a fan from one demure lady to the next—if Marcella has not quite destroyed such quiet pursuits, along with “privacy” and “silence,” she has certainly overwhelmed them with her own noise, the “clan[g]” of the gates closing on old Paris’s retreat an exclamation point on her victory. She has become the engine and megaphone of her own gossip.

Critical studies of gossip and scandal in literature are largely concerned with works from the long eighteenth century through the Victorian novel, with the exception of a marked interest in the indecency and obscenity trials of Oscar Wilde, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Radcliffe Hall.<sup>35</sup> Even then, interest is chiefly in either the personal (read: erotic) lives of the authors themselves, or in the phenomenon of the *roman à clef*.<sup>36</sup> Departing from this trend in her wide-ranging study *Gossip*, Patricia Meyer Spacks draws on texts from *People* magazine to the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to come to a nuanced definition of gossip and to defend it as a mode of discourse that braces the disenfranchised against the power of the broader social world.

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<sup>35</sup> See most recently Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip In Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2007); Nicholas Hammond, *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal In France (1610-1715)* (Oxford: Lang, Peter, AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2011); and Melinda Alliker Rabb, *Satire and Secrecy In English Literature From 1650 to 1750* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On Victorian literature, see William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1996); Jan B. Gordon, *Gossip and Subversion In Nineteenth-Century British Fiction: Echo's Economies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); and Carol L. Bernstein, *The Celebration of Scandal: Toward the Sublime In Victorian Urban Fiction* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1991). On the indecency trial of Radcliffe Hall, see Jodie Medd, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012). Medd's incisive study of the function of the scandalous “suggestion of lesbianism” (4) read through its connection to attitudes toward female sexuality as “cognitively impossible and unrepresentable,” traces a relation between lesbian scandal and a more general concern with epistemological uncertainty in British national culture during and after the Great War (2).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law and the Roman à Clef* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), in which Sean Latham argues that the tendency “[t]o read novels as gossip” (5) leads to a body of *fin de siècle romans à clef* that can be read as “a crucial stimulus of modernist innovation” even as it feeds on a public appetite for gossip and scandal (10).

Gossip, on Spacks's account, can be either harmless or malevolent ("distilled malice").<sup>37</sup> Malevolent gossip "plays with reputations, circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods about the activities, sometimes about the motives and feelings, of others" (*G*, 4). We will see this form of gossip at work in Borden's *Action for Slander*. In gossip's harmless iterations, it can be simply "the kind of gossip accurately characterized [by Heidegger] as 'idle talk'" or a more "serious" form, generally ignored by purveyors of official rhetoric, that "exists only as a function of intimacy" and "provides a resource for the subordinated... a crucial means of self-expression, a crucial form of solidarity" (*G*, 5).<sup>38</sup> In this last definition, gossip establishes an intimate unity, providing a common language over against a dominant and exclusionary system. Such gossip molds the space in which it appears. Where, recalling Fussell, war appropriates natural space and creates the ultimate subversion of the pastoral scene, gossip, for Spacks, works under the cloud of another kind of personal injury—a somewhat less literal challenge to its subjects' integrity—and creates, within a perilous social world, a protected "psychic space like that of Arden or Thessaly": "a version of pastoral" (*G*, 3). These spaces shelter the creation of a shared narrative, cloaked by the Heideggerian flattening of gossip into "idle talk"—so that where Heidegger sees gossip as useless noise, some forms, Spacks's account suggests, can capitalize on that very dismissal to become "a resource for the subordinated."

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 4. Hereafter abbreviated *G* and cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>38</sup> "In its original meaning," Spacks writes elsewhere, "*gossip* implied no gender; it meant 'godparent,' of either sex. Its increasingly degraded connotations follow its intensifying association with women" (Spacks, "In Praise of Gossip," *The Hudson Review* 35.1 [1982]: 19). Whereas gossip became inextricably linked with female speech, in Borden's post-war novels its reach is broadened to include a series of prominent male characters.

In this sense, gossip is capable of functioning as a sort of encryption system. A noise code—made possible by what physicist William Ditto and mathematician Louis M. Pecora call a “chaotic system”—capitalizes on cybernetic interference.<sup>39</sup> As Ditto and Pecora explain, if “Bill” sends “Al” a signal deliberately contaminated with noise, as long as each knows what parts of the signal have been added and should be removed, the original message can be recovered:

Anyone who intercepts these signals will detect only chaotic noise and will be unable to extract any information (unless, of course, he or she manages to get a copy of Bill or Al’s subsystem. When Al receives the drive signal, he sends it through his subsystem, which reproduces the chaotic output of Bill’s subsystem. Al can then subtract this output from the encoded information signal to recover the secret message.<sup>40</sup>

If only Al and Bill have the codebook, they form the entire community capable of understanding encoded communications. Cybernetic noise can thus facilitate coterie communication just as “serious” gossip camouflages intimate expression beneath a veneer of “idle talk.” As Douglas Kahn writes, “the sound and the fury never signify nothing or, rather, just nothing.” Instead, he continues, “such auditive states have proven to drown out...the social in sound—the political, poetical, and ecological[.]”<sup>41</sup> Kahn’s work is to recuperate what is political in sound from “[a]rt screams” and “Cagean silence.”<sup>42</sup> Borden’s postwar prose similarly emphasizes the social in sound. Drawing

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<sup>39</sup> William Ditto and Louis M. Pecora, “Mastering Chaos,” *Scientific American* 269.2 (1993): 78.

<sup>40</sup> Ditto and Pecora, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Kahn, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Kahn, 4.

together auditory phenomenology and Spacks's and Kahn's sociological interest in cybernetic and rhetorical interference and encoding *avant la lettre*, Borden depicts and employs gossip as a form of social noise that cuts across codified class boundaries.

The 1923 *roman à clef* *Jane, Our Stranger* overflows with gossip—gossip within families whose members affect each other “like a loud and unpleasant noise” (*J*, 93), gossip about “historic personages” (*J*, 70), scandalous marriages, and the details of characters' movements throughout Europe. The main character's female rival, Bianca, “so gossip related it,” once traveled to Spain and fell in with a matador: “Some people said she had joined his troupe disguised as a boy and had, more than once gone into the arena in a pink suit embroidered in silver” (*J*, 284). Jane herself “neither believed nor disbelieved the story,” despite recording it in her role as first-person narrator (*J*, 284). In Jane and Bianca's high-society world, such an outlandish tale might indeed be true. To Jane, considering the item of gossip on the basis of its potential for truth collapses an act of true belief (trusting the voice of gossip) and one of imagination (treating the gossip as a fiction). Jane's suspension between belief and disbelief leaves both the character and Borden's reader to face a narrative aporia in which gossip, unavailable for verification or disproof, must remain unresolved. In this instance, to be sure, gossip may not have much political purchase beyond recording the bizarre excesses of the moneyed class. But the relationship between truth and fiction that gossip mediates and the story's failure to resolve into reliable information is a telling model for the novel's successors, most notably *Action for Slander*, the fifth of seven novels Borden published in the 1930s.

*Action for Slander* follows Major George Daviot, falsely accused by one Captain Bradford, who happens to be both Daviot's comrade-in-arms and the husband of his

mistress, of cheating at a high-stakes game of cards while on an exclusive weekend hunting trip. Eager to avoid the public scandal that would follow an unseemly revelation of gambling in the ranks, Daviot gives in to the advice of friends of political and social rank and agrees not to sue Bradford and his fellow accuser, the drunkard Mr. John Grant, for slander.<sup>43</sup> Daviot thereby avoids a general clamor over his adultery. He cannot, however, escape casual whispers about his card play, or the escalation of those whispers into comparatively louder scenes of “a lot of women gabbling together excitedly” over the case.<sup>44</sup> The ensuing gossip has decidedly disagreeable effects on Daviot’s social and professional life. His wife having left him in protest of his affair with Josie Bradford, the Major takes a leave of absence from his job and moves into a solitary apartment, losing touch with the friends on whose advice he agreed not to pursue legal action. Hounded by public opinion, Daviot is brought to the point first of contemplating suicide and then of throwing himself at the mercy of general scandal by bringing his accusers to court. The Major is eventually vindicated, as his accusers cannot reproduce the sleight-of-hand he is supposed to have employed, and is by novel’s end reunited with his wife.

As questions about truth and fiction in *Jane, Our Stranger* coalesce around the story of the transvested matador’s assistant, so the story of Daviot’s search for justice is bound up in a complex exploration of relevant and irrelevant information, information and misinformation, organized around the meeting point of cybernetic and social noise that gossip represents. In its most basic sense, the gossip that motivates the novel’s action is an instance of what Spacks terms “distilled malice”: Grant accuses Daviot out of anger

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<sup>43</sup> Gambling, while widespread in the English working class, was generally considered a vice, especially by the middle class. See McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, 101-66.

<sup>44</sup> Borden, *Action for Slander* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1937), 161. Hereafter abbreviated *AS* and cited parenthetically by page number.

at his mounting losses; Bradford adds his voice to Grant's charge as an act of retaliation against the man sleeping with his wife. But understanding gossip in *Action for Slander* is not as simple as categorizing its motives. Rather, it is by identifying attempts to circumscribe and denature gossip and isolating what those attempts leave unresolved that we can understand the novel's comment on the representability of the English class system. The legal action that comprises a large part of *Action for Slander* absorbs gossip into a concrete dichotomy of truth and slander; the social violence that Daviot suffers sees gossip weaponized; the public scandal that surrounds him transforms it into a commodity. In each case, gossip is taken as a distortion to be wielded, marketed, resolved. Gossip's remainder—the story of Daviot and Josie Bradford's affair, raised neither during the court action nor in public discussion of the case—resists resolution, and figures as the unrestricted transmission of social noise from text to reader. With regard to the affair, the novel's audience (wide enough, recall, for the book to merit a screen adaptation) is handed relatively unprocessed gossip and left to decide, as was Jane, how to respond.

The text's first method of assimilating gossip is suggested by the genre of the courtroom drama itself. The legal system occupies a unique position in a conversation about gossip as noise. Recall the cybernetic definition of noise as “distortions or additions which interfere with the transfer of information”: if the putative function of a court proceeding is to sift through a mass of evidence and determine which of it is factual and relevant to the case at hand and which of it is not—which items represent distortions or additions with regard to a desired clarity of narrative—Daviot's eventual recourse to court action suggests an understanding of the legal system as a mechanism of

informational verification, a sorting process that nullifies the possibility of “neither believ[ing] nor disbeliev[ing] the story.” Gossip, once introduced in court, can be sorted in one of two ways. Either it is determined to be true and germane to the proceeding, attaining the status of information, or it is determined to be untrue, slanderous, cybernetic noise. Legal action is in this sense interested in dissipating gossip as such and instituting a more forthright rhetorical practice.

Yet in Daviot’s case, as the judge bemoans, there is “no direct evidence, no provable facts to go on, only feelings, predispositions, probabilities” (*AS*, 20). The connection between gossip and courtroom evidence weighs on the proceedings, raising the specter of a parallel court under the auspices of which Daviot finds himself in relatively more danger: the court of public opinion. As Daviot’s attorney, Sir Quintin Jessops, remarks in his opening statement, “Major Daviot...is not on trial in this court at all. It is he who is bringing this action for slander and he is bringing it after all these months because he is in truth at another bar and before another judge. He stands at the bar of England, before the people, the public, the nation whose paid servant he is, whose defender he has been” (*AS*, 5). It is in the court of public opinion that the relationship between gossip and social violence is made clearest. Daviot is made subject to punitive silence, traumatically “cut dead by [his] old friends” as the allegations of his cheating spread (*AS*, 196). The narrative tension of *Action for Slander* is thus slyly self-referential, recalling Borden’s war writing as it does: violence is a serious concern for many of Borden’s characters, but where infantrymen in *The Forbidden Zone* were faced with a literal loss of bodily integrity (recall the dismembered soldiers of “Moonlight”), members

of the military in *Action for Slander* are threatened with social death, a loss of integrity affecting only their reputations.

The novel persistently relates gossip to violence even as its characters bemoan the inadequacy of violence to silence gossip. Jessops argues that “‘It was folly...to think that no one would hear of the quarrel, or that if it was talked about the men who’d advised [Daviot] to do nothing would be able to silence any and every whisper of calumny. How could they? Even had they all done their uttermost, how could any man grasp a whisper in his fist and choke it?’” (*AS*, 13-14). Gossip, in this figuration, is a diffuse, persistent undertone, a noise that cannot be silenced. It is a “whisper,” “sly, slippery and deadly as rattlesnakes. You can’t catch them and throttle them. They don’t come out into the open” (*AS*, 14).<sup>45</sup> Even Daviot, as he takes the stand, contributes to the sibilant murmuring filling the novel: “His small, dry, monotonous voice,” Borden writes, “was scarcely more than a whisper” (*AS*, 20). The whisper of gossip is persistent—almost ungentlemanly, one feels Borden’s gentlemen protesting—in its insidious ability to resist violent confrontation. And so, as Clive Brook’s Major Daviot intones in the *Action for Slander* film, gossip must be confronted not in individual combat, but through legal proceedings. “I can’t fight a duel,” he remarks, “so I’ve got to be cleared in court”—testimony replacing violent action as the means available to redress a wrong.

If a legal judgment is intended to throttle slander, to determine whether gossip is true, and thus invulnerable, or false, and thus punishable, its process feeds another facet of social noise: the public association of gossip with a privileged group that transforms it into scandal. “A scandal in high society. Excellent entertainment for the idle rich” (*AS*,

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<sup>45</sup> This sentiment is echoed nearly verbatim by the Jessops of the film adaptation, highlighting its importance to the narrative on the whole: “Whispers are sly, slippery, deadly. You cannot grasp a whisper by the throat and throttle it. You cannot make a whisper party to a silence pact[.]”

20) muses Justice Trotter—“a lot of conspicuous people...being a little more conspicuous” (AS, 34). The appearance of Miss Millikin, “gossip-writer of the *Evening Tribune*,” suggests the entertainment value of upper class scandal transcends economic boundaries (AS, 221); Daviot’s commanding officer, Colonel Standish, laments that although his Major had almost certainly not cheated at cards, he “had, through his own fault, let down the regiment and involved it in a horrid scandal” (AS, 219) perpetuated by “the more gossipy press” (AS, 4).<sup>46</sup> Even Jessops asserts that Daviot has summoned Bradford and Grant “to answer publicly for the accusation they brought in private” not because of any desire to publicize the matter further, but “because [their] accusation *has become public property*” (AS, 5, emphasis added). At its outset used to poison Daviot, and on its way to being resolved in court, gossip becomes a commodity, and a nationalized one, even as it remains a liability for Daviot.

If the novel provides a panoply of paths for the absorption of gossip into its narrative fabric, there remains an aspect that does not succumb to such assimilation. Daviot’s affair with Josie Bradford is effectively isolated from the courtroom. *Action for Slander* makes use of a disrupted narrative: the opening of the trial (at which time Jessops insists that “the ladies,” including Josie Bradford, “have little, if anything, to do with this affair” [AS, 4]) is followed by a flashback to the events of the weekend in question and its aftermath (at which point the reader is made aware that the ladies have everything to do with this affair); the remainder of the trial, closing out the narrative, continues in ignorance of the true motive behind Bradford’s accusation.

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<sup>46</sup> This differentiation of the press into more or less “gossipy” is a moderation of the position taken in 1929’s *Jehovah’s Day*, in which Borden describes, among the effects of an expansion of print newspapers, “a new kind of world aptitude for gossip...certain men and women by being talked about in the press had become Titans, with a legendary significance.” (Borden, *Jehovah’s Day* [Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929], 26.

Borden thus positions the reader closer to the novel's true moral center than any of the individuals deciding Daviot's fate. The wealthy and connected class is portrayed as inscrutable to both the legal institution and to the common citizens who form the jury. This inscrutability is played for laughs, as in the case of the juror Mr. Sidebottom, who at the trial's abrupt end feels he had "never been more bewildered in his life.... All his ideas turned upside down all in a minute. Mr. Sidebottom's huge inside felt as if it was being all churned up. He belched audibly" (*AS*, 293). It also emphasizes that it is the reader who is in the best position to make an informed judgment about Daviot's character.

In this sense, the action for slander can be seen to structure the stakes of reading the story of the affair. In the context of the trial, Daviot is proposed as a representative of a variety of facets of Englishness. Borden sets up the terms of the debate quite explicitly: either Daviot stands for an old guard worth maintaining, or his behaviors and values put him on a scale from ridiculous to threatening. His friend Charles Cinderford says as much, in praise less equivocal than it at first seems: "He was only a decent Englishman of the twentieth century with the usual collection of sins to his account.... Oh yes, one could laugh. But, by God! they wanted men of his sort in this messy world" (*AS*, 91). Justice Trotter muses that Daviot "stood for something bigger than himself, as did all these people. He stood for the army, for the honorable and incorruptible service of the King" (*AS*, 43).

While agreeing that the Major is representative of a group larger than himself, Borden's characters voice fundamental concerns about his character. Echoing Cinderford's sentiment about the importance of reliable Englishmen, the judge remarks to himself that no matter which of the officers is lying, "the sort of smell" such a scandal

carries with it “in the sort of quarter” they represent is “particularly shocking and might even be called dangerous at this time of world unrest and depression” (*AS*, 21).<sup>47</sup> If suffragettes caused the First World War, gambling army officers seem to be considered a risk to cause the Second. Still more drastically, in language that recalls “The Square,” schoolmaster juror Mr. Brownrigg thinks of Daviot as “a man who had survived the war to represent class privilege, the vices of the aristocracy and the revolting glamor of mass murder” (*AS*, 60). And yet, at the end of it all, Daviot is vindicated. Bradford and Grant, the obvious villains of the story, are found guilty of slander, while the Major pledges to donate to charity the three thousand pounds they are ordered to pay him. But the unresolved gossip of Daviot and Josie’s affair troubles this apparently straightforward resolution. The reader, privy to more information than most of the novel’s individual characters, is thrust out of the realm of easy moral judgment regarding Daviot, whom the novel has flagged rather emphatically as representative of a specific segment of postwar English society.

Reading gossip as social noise in *Action for Slander* thus brings it into a conceptual relation to Borden’s more phenomenologically active war writing. Borden is as concerned in 1937 as she was in 1916 with what her reader could know. The received wisdom of combat gnosticism dictates that the civilian reader’s understanding of war is inescapably stunted; *The Forbidden Zone*’s familiarizing noise is Borden’s rebuttal, her move to enfranchise and legitimize the experience of a wider audience. Attention to

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<sup>47</sup> Notably within the auditory rhetoric of the novel, Justice Trotter engages in a lengthy consideration of ideas of reputation: “‘The honor of the regiment! The good name of the regiment!’... *Clichés*; clap-trap; pompous self-importance of fools” (*AS*, 45). Interesting here is the judge’s use of “clap-trap.” By the late 1930s, certainly, the noun had passed into its modern use of “nonsense,” “cheap showy sentiment” (OED, s.v. “claptrap, *n.*,” 2). But its original meaning, as “[a] trick or device to catch applause; an expression designed to elicit applause” is even more evocative of the conceptual soundscape of *Action for Slander*, in which rhetoric is instrumentalized for social effect (OED, s.v. “claptrap, *n.*,” 1).

Daviot's success at trial might suggest that *Action for Slander* confirms, belatedly, Trotter's estimation that Great War novels end by reaffirming the class system. Yet the unresolved gossip that hovers in the background of the middlebrow courtroom drama hands the well-informed reader considerable power to dictate an ideological position with regard to the postwar class politics Daviot represents. In this sense, gossip emphatically creates a sort of "Arden or Thessaly," an informational pastoral in which the reader can evaluate the dominant system, temporarily disencumbered of Woolf's nested glass boxes.

A version of Borden's social-epistemological concern animates my analysis of the noise writing of Sinclair, Keller, and Wright that appears in Chapters Three and Four: how much can a privileged group come to understand of the experience of the disadvantaged? and how can such understanding be promoted in and by an art of noise? Borden's noise writing, operating as it does both sonically and conceptually, is a model for the authors in the remainder of this study. Each of the chapters that follow is concerned to no small extent with the way literature incorporates the noisy sonic environment of twentieth-century urban spaces, industrial operations, and ever-evolving auditory technology. I turn next to modernism's great novel of urban noise: *Ulysses*.

## TWO. NEWS/NOISE: *ULYSSES* ON THE ASTRAL PLANE

Dead noise. Akasic records of all that ever  
anywhere wherever was.  
—James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)<sup>1</sup>

When Stephen Dedalus, sitting in the office of the *Freeman's Journal* on 16 June 1904 listening to J. J. O'Molloy recite a 1901 speech by John F. Taylor in defense of the Irish language, determines to save himself by leading the assembled crowd of newspapermen and their friends to the pub, it is on concluding that Taylor's speech, "howled and scattered to the four winds," is "[d]ead noise" (*U*, 7.881-82). Not simply the "noise" of unwanted talk or of oratory that confuses its message, Taylor's dead noise, in Stephen's judgment, has ceased to resonate—even if it is not as thoroughly silent as he might wish. But the speech is not just an annoyance, either. Stephen's thoughts continue: "Dead noise. Akasic records of all that ever anywhere wherever was. Love and laud him: me no more" (*U*, 7.882-83). If Stephen experiences Taylor, and O'Molloy and company's performative reverence for him, as a sort of not- (or post-) noise, he links it in the next moment to the religio-philosophic idea of the "Akasic recor[d]," a concept that would seem to gainsay the very possibility of the death of noise.

Henry Steel Olcott, cofounder with Helena Blavatsky and William Quan Judge of the Theosophical Society, describes the Akasa in his 1881 "Buddhist Catechism" as the celestial location of "a permanency of records" of all existence.<sup>2</sup> The writer and Theosophist Alfred Percy Sinnett insists that the record does not only contain "feelings

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<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), chapter 7, lines 882-83. Hereafter abbreviated *U* and cited parenthetically by chapter and line number.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Steel Olcott, "Buddhist Catechism," quoted in Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), 127. Though the term is more usually translated from the Sanskrit आकाश as "Akasha," I will here follow the spelling used by Joyce and the Theosophists. I distinguish, too, between theosophy, the centuries-old subset of Western esotericism, and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Blavatskian Theosophy's Asian-inspired occultism by capitalizing the latter.

and thoughts having a direct reference to religion or spiritual philosophy,” but that “all the superior phases, even of sensuous emotion” might find their place on a plane of enlightenment accessible to the spiritually advanced.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps explaining Stephen’s interest in the Akasa—even as the young Dedalus opts out of Taylor’s cult of personality—Olcott further describes “the potential capacity of man to read the [Akasic record] when he has evolved to the stage of *true individual enlightenment*.”<sup>4</sup> For the Theosophists, Taylor’s speech, Stephen’s thoughts and feelings about it, and the event of its recitation—“all that ever anywhere wherever was”—are inscribed forever on the astral plane, waiting there to be witnessed by the truly “evolved” seeker.

Stephen moves on from Theosophist doctrine as quickly as he came to it, returning to the mundane in remembering in the next moment that he has money for drinks and suggesting immediately that “the house do now adjourn” (*U*, 7.886). He shows no apparent interest in an enlightenment that would see him joined forever in unearthly communion with the likes of Taylor (“Love him and laud him: me no more”). When next Stephen considers the Akasic record, later in the same episode, it is on being reminded of an encounter with a prostitute in the Liberties: “Against the wall. Face glistening tallow under her fustian shawl. Frantic hearts. Akasic records. Quicker, darlint! On now” (*U*, 7.927-29). Again, his reference to the Akasa is followed by its immediate dismissal (after

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<sup>3</sup> Sinnett, 127. The Akasic record was also a favorite idea of Rudolf Steiner, who discussed it in a series of 1904 articles in the journal *Lucifer Gnosis* eventually published in English as *Cosmic Memory: Prehistory of Earth and Man*, trans. Karl E. Zimmer (Blauvelt: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1959). More recently, in his Deepak Chopra-blurbed *Science and the Akashic Field*, Ervin László has argued for the existence of the “A-field,” an importation of the Akasic record, what László calls an “age-old intuition shared by countless generations,” into his theory of “a super-rich information field—the holographic memory of the universe,” which, he argues, should “tak[e] its place among the fundamental fields of the universe, joining science’s G-field (the gravitational field), EM-field (the electromagnetic field), and the various nuclear and quantum fields” (*Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything* [Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2004], 56).

<sup>4</sup> Olcott, “Buddhist Catechism,” quoted in Sinnett, 127, emphasis added.

“On now,” Stephen continues regaling the company with his “*Parable of The Plums*” [*U*, 7.1057-58]). Indeed, Robert Spoo casts Stephen as the anti-Akasa: a Nietzschean beast, “liv[ing] *unhistorically*,” “a creature that is able to consign the historical moment to oblivion as soon as it has occurred.”<sup>5</sup> But the Akasic record—as an account of the world that both prizes breadth and fullness and resists comprehension without individual effort—hangs over “Aeolus,” and over *Ulysses* as a whole. In its light, the novel appears as a sort of Akasic record of its own, recording the complementary and competing circuits of communication that structure life on a June day in Dublin—circuits that the reader, in the position of the enlightened, “evoluted” individual envisaged by Olcott, might see as from above.

To claim as much is not merely to point out a similarity of scope between one tumescent record and another. Neither is it to use Stephen’s invocation of the Akasa to make a claim, as do several of the handful of critics who discuss Joyce’s relation to the occult, for the centrality of either *Ulysses*’s textual unconscious or some “unconscious desire” in Joyce himself.<sup>6</sup> Rather, it is to consider Joyce’s novel as an information system that both formally and thematically reflects the “ever anywhere wherever” of the Akasa—a structure that, through the very volume of narration introduced by its putatively all-inclusive mandate, at once privileges noise and introduces its own. For the very breadth of the Akasic record ensures that whatever information or communication one looks for within it will be surrounded by, and in some cases obscured or contradicted by,

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Spoo, “Joyce’s Attitudes Toward History: Rome, 1906-07,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 14.4 (1988): 484, emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> Enrico Terrinoni, *Occult Joyce: The Hidden in Ulysses* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 55. On John Rickard’s somewhat associative reading *Ulysses*’s “textual unconscious” is an analog of the Akasic record that manages to steer Stephen inexorably toward a confrontation with a memory of his mother (which is itself, in turn, a confrontation with the Catholic Church) (Rickard, “Stephen Dedalus Among School Children: The Schoolroom and the Riddle of Authority in *Ulysses*,” *Studies in Literary Imagination* 30.2 [1997]: 26).

information that is of no use to the seeker. The Akasa snubs selectivity, and rebuffs selection.

In its meditation on recording, Akasic *Ulysses* draws on contemporary sound technology, including both the phonograph and the player piano.<sup>7</sup> Joyce likewise revels in the “homophonous and cacophonous” (*U*, 17.443) sonic environment of Dublin’s pubs and bawdy houses, in the “black crack of noise in the street” (*U*, 14.408), and in the fraught narrative reliability of the circulation of news, gossip, rumor, and politics in evidence from “Wandering Rocks” to “Circe.” A case could be made (and it is, in several contemporary reviews appearing below) that *Ulysses* functions as an aesthetic limit case—that it produces a bewildering, unmooring reading experience in the course of an extended demonstration of authorial virtuosity. Acoustic and cybernetic noise meet on the middle ground of aesthetics in *Ulysses*, and the book engenders a corresponding ethos of difficulty in readers, even as its tendency toward incomprehensibility is perhaps overblown. What this reader-response reaction obscures is the way Akasic *Ulysses*, and the modernist noise inherent in it, sees Joyce replicate and critique the virtuosity and inherent selectivity of existing discourse and communication networks in the world outside the literary work: primarily Dublin’s press, but also its streetcars, trains, advertisements, gossip, and barrels of Guinness.

#### I. “A MASTERPIECE OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE”

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Edison’s 1877 invention is known as the phonograph; “gramophone,” the name of the device invented in 1887 by Emile Berliner, is the proprietary eponym most widely used in the United Kingdom. See Bonnie Kime Scott, “The Subversive Mechanics of Woolf’s Gramophone in *Between the Acts*,” in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela L. Caughie (New York: Garland, 2000), 97.

A reading connecting *Ulysses* and Theosophy is signaled, though certainly unintentionally, by the opening of Joseph Collins's May 1922 *New York Times* review of the newly-published novel:

A few intuitive, sensitive visionaries may understand and comprehend "Ulysses"...without going through a course of training or instruction, but the average intelligent reader will glean little or nothing from it...save bewilderment and a sense of disgust.... It is not unlikely that every thought that Mr. Joyce has had, every experience he has ever encountered, every person he has ever met, one might almost say everything he has ever read in sacred or profane literature, is to be encountered in the obscurities and in the frankness of "Ulysses."<sup>8</sup>

Collins's attention to accessibility ("the average intelligent reader") and accretion ("every thought...every experience...every person...everything"), even as it is meant to challenge *Ulysses*'s opacity, echoes the emphasis on readerly enlightenment and archival capacity that Olcott and his fellows see as central to the concept of the Akasic record. And if Collins's implicitly "[above-]average intelligent reader"—the one who could in fact glean something from *Ulysses*—is something like the Theosophists' "evoluted" person who could read the Akasic record, Joyce himself is altogether otherworldly. John Eglinton, whom Joyce inserts in "Scylla and Charybdis" as the victim of Stephen's Trinitarian theory of Hamlet, wrote in *The Dial* the month after Collins's *Times* review that the novel's attempt to reconstruct a "'specimen day'" in the life of Leopold Bloom

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Collins, "James Joyce's Amazing Chronicle," *The New York Times*, 28 May 1922. Despite his above diagnosis, Collins goes on to name *Ulysses* "the most important contribution that has been made to fictional literature in the twentieth century."

reminds one of the ascetic practices of those Indian Yogis, who in attempting to recall their past lives, begin from the present moment, and travelling back laboriously to the moment of birth, are then able to leap the mysterious gulf dividing them from their last incarnation.... There is an effort and strain in the composition of this book which makes one at times feel a concern for the author.<sup>9</sup>

With his reference to past life regression, Eglinton explicitly connects Joyce to the Blavatskian Theosophists who popularized Eastern spiritual beliefs in the West, both for a complicated institutional hierarchy of allegedly enlightened followers and for *fin de siècle* mystical dilettantes—either of whom might be counted among *The Dial*'s core readership.<sup>10</sup> For Eglinton, the experience of reading *Ulysses* might easily approach the spiritual, if less for any transcendent quality of the narrative than for the quantity of labor it both instantiates and demands.

But that is not the only story of Eglinton's Dublin Letter. In singling out Joyce's "effort and strain," Eglinton presents an argument that recurs among the first wave of reviews of Sylvia Beach's first edition: that Joyce's novel demonstrates a privileging of the herculean effort of drawing together and narrating every possible element of Bloom's day over the practice of purposeful choice that self-evidently underwrites all great literature. "Mr. Joyce's feat in this book I should find admirable," Eglinton continues, "if it were executed with some practical purpose."<sup>11</sup> Instead, he argues, it exhaustively records that which is better left to dissolve in the mists of time:

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<sup>9</sup> John Eglinton, "Dublin Letter," *The Dial* 72.6 (1922): 622.

<sup>10</sup> See Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vol. (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888).

<sup>11</sup> Eglinton, 622.

Byron deplored that “a third of life is passed in sleep”: and of the waking two-thirds, probably at least nine-tenths are passed in reverie and abstraction, and the drift of associated ideas. Yet the remaining tenth part of waking life, in which the will is exerted, our true life, is the subject-matter of art. Even our natural memories recognize this and work selectively[.]<sup>12</sup>

Anyone who believes that but two-thirtieths of human life is the proper “subject-matter of art” is going to run into problems with *Ulysses*. And so, on this reading, the novel is an extended failure of selectivity, Joyce so very undiscerning that what above appeared as a mystical practice (past life regression) comes down to earth as an effort not only inartistic, but truly unnatural (contra the “natural” workings of memory).

Such language appears across the reviews. Collins, for his part, snipes that “[Joyce] is the only individual that the writer has encountered outside of a madhouse who has let flow from his pen random and purposeful thoughts just as they are produced. He does not seek to give them orderliness, sequence or interdependence.”<sup>13</sup> Arnold Bennett, who reviewed the novel for a late April number of the London *Outlook*, concurs: “In some of his moods the author is resolved at any price *not to select*, nor to make even the shortest leap from one point of interest to another. He has taken an oath with himself to put it all down and be hanged to it. He would scorn the selective skill in such a masterpiece of narrative technique as ‘Esther Waters[.]’”<sup>14</sup> Richard Aldington contends

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<sup>12</sup> Eglinton, 622.

<sup>13</sup> Collins, “Chronicle.” Despite the above, and although he proceeds to characterize Bloom as “a moral monster, a pervert and an invert, an apostate to his race and his religion, the simulacrum of a man who has neither cultural background nor personal self-respect, who can neither be taught by experience nor lessoned by example,” Collins was largely pleased and excited by the novel.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold Bennett, “James Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” *Outlook* (London) (29 April 1922), 337-39, quoted in “Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ Sets a New Standard in Fiction,” *Current Opinion* 73.1 (1922): 102, emphasis added. Bennett

that the novel is evidence of a “great undisciplined talent...more dangerous [to literature’s seriousness] than a ship-load of Dadaistes.”<sup>15</sup>

Not everyone comes down on this side of the debate. Edmund Wilson wrote in the *New Republic* the week after Collins’s *New York Times* review that “[i]t has taken Mr. Joyce seven years to write *Ulysses* and he has done it in seven hundred and thirty pages which are probably the most completely ‘written’ pages to be seen in any novel since Flaubert.”<sup>16</sup> Lest you read his “completely ‘written’” as a version of Bennett’s “put it all down and be hanged to it,” Wilson continues: “though exercising *a severe selection* which makes the book a technical triumph, Mr. Joyce manages to give the effect of unedited human minds, drifting aimlessly along from one triviality to another, confused and diverted by memory, by sensation and by inhibition.”<sup>17</sup> Wilson refutes Collins and Bennett point for point: it is not that Joyce fails to give his thoughts interdependence, it is that his is a true-to-life failure of “unedited human minds”; *Ulysses* is a “technical triumph,” not evidence of technique scorned; not only does Joyce select, he does so “severe[ly].” In his 1931 expansion of the *New Republic* review, Wilson doubles down: “It is now apparent,” he writes, “that ‘Ulysses’ suffers from an excess of design rather than from a lack of it.”<sup>18</sup> Eliot’s “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” relies, too, on a discourse of selection in explicitly repudiating Aldington’s characterization of Joyce’s as an

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may be mistaking the vectors of scorn in the Joyce/George Moore relationship. Richard Ellmann records that Moore “never invited [Joyce] to his evenings at home,” was publicly “derisive” about the younger man’s poetry, and declared Joyce’s borrowing and spending habits those of ““nothing but a—but a *beggar!*”” (*James Joyce* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959], 135). Later, Moore was to declare Joyce ““a sort of Zola gone to seed”” (R. Ellmann, 529). Yet Joyce was, as Ellmann details, influenced by Moore (see R. Ellmann, 250, 358). The two men “maintained exaggeratedly courteous relations until Moore’s death” (R. Ellmann, 618).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Aldington, “The Influence of Mr. James Joyce,” *The English Review* 32 (1921): 339.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Wilson, “Ulysses,” *The New Republic*, 5 July 1922.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, “Ulysses,” emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, “James Joyce,” in *Axel’s Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), 211.

“undisciplined talent”: “One can be ‘classical,’ in a sense, by turning away from nine-tenths of the material which lies at hand,” Eliot argues, “and selecting only mummified stuff from a museum. . . . Or one can be classical in tendency by doing the best one can with the material at hand.”<sup>19</sup>

Seen from afar, this constellation of critical reactions is decidedly, sometimes famously, ambivalent: Collins characterizes *Ulysses* as “a mirror held up to life, which we could sincerely wish and devoutly pray that we were spared”; Aldington as “a tremendous libel on humanity which I, at least, am not clever enough to refute”; Wilson as “perhaps the most faithful X-ray ever taken of the ordinary human consciousness”; Eliot as “a book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape.”<sup>20</sup> “My martyrdom is over. I hope to sell it for £4.10,” Virginia Woolf wrote Roger Fry on finally finishing her copy.<sup>21</sup> But even as contemporary critics failed to agree on the novel’s literary merit, their focus on Joyce’s practice (or lack) of selection remains integral to understanding Akasic *Ulysses*. No textual unconscious, Akasic *Ulysses* is squarely a textual consciousness (perhaps even, at the risk of preciousness, a textual conscience), whose sweeping day-in-the-life tale is underwritten by a raft of careful narrative selections made by a firm hand.

Were *Ulysses* constructed differently—more like *Esther Waters*, say—to question whether or not it was the product of authorial selection would seem comical. That the novel as it stands, with its clipped and sometimes frenetic flashing between scenes and points of view (a style the July 1922 *Current Opinion* deemed “a kind of stenographic

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<sup>19</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” *The Dial* 73.11 (1923): 484, 483.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, “Chronicle”; Aldington, 336; Wilson, “Ulysses”; Eliot, 480.

<sup>21</sup> Virginia Woolf to Roger Fry, 3 October 1922, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vol., ed. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975-80), 2:566.

reporting”), can seem randomly plucked from the “ever anywhere wherever” of the astral record instead demands a closer look at its true selectivity—and at the way that its selectivity is masked by noise.<sup>22</sup> Noise in Akasic *Ulysses*—Kittlerian informational noise, certainly, but mimetic noise, too—at once camouflages and highlights how the novel operates through a sort of selection bias, in which a supposedly comprehensive (if not quite randomized) body of data is in fact carefully directed.

In light of this encounter between subjective and objective accounting, it is telling that Joyce’s meditation on noise comes to a head in “Aeolus,” the chapter of *Ulysses* dedicated to journalistic rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> Collins wrote in the *New York Times* that “every day of his life, if the mails do not fail, [Joyce] gets a Dublin newspaper and reads it with the dutifulness with which a priest reads his breviary.”<sup>24</sup> Joyce certainly studied his own press.<sup>25</sup> But he also dedicates “Aeolus” to the technique of the enthymeme, a truncated syllogism that, rather than laying out its premises and conclusion completely, is based on at least one implicit or audience-supplied statement. The enthymeme itself is not a logical fallacy; it may merely omit a piece of common knowledge so obvious as to be unnecessary. But the figure can also be turned to other, more dubious ends. The logician Douglas Walton explains some of the potential problems with employing the enthymeme as follows:

The classic example is the argument: all men are mortal; therefore  
Socrates is mortal. As pointed out in many a logic textbook, you

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<sup>22</sup> “Joyce’s ‘Ulysses,’” 101.

<sup>23</sup> This focus on “journalistic rhetoric” according to the Gilbert schema, though I would submit that of the revelations about “Aeolus” in that document only the emphasis on the enthymeme, listed as the chapter’s guiding technique, could not be deduced easily from the text itself. See Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study* (New York: Vintage, 1952), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Collins, “Chronicle.”

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the headnote on Joyce’s pleasure at reviews by Mary Colum, Gilbert Seldes, and Wilson in Robert H. Deming, ed., *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2013), 235.

need to insert the premise that Socrates is a man in order to make the argument into a valid syllogism. But what are the grounds for inserting this proposition as a premise if it was not explicitly stated by the proponent who put forward the argument about Socrates? The problem is that if a critic is allowed to fill in any proposition needed to make such an inference valid, he or she may be inserting assumptions into the text of discourse that the speaker or audience do not accept, or were not meant by the proponent to be part of his or her argument.<sup>26</sup>

Consider one of the more famous enthymemes of the information age: Johnny Cochran's "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit." Cochran's enthymeme supplies a minor premise ("[the glove] doesn't fit") and a conclusion ("you must acquit"), but leaves out a major premise—or what would more plausibly be a long series of linked premises—explicitly establishing the glove's proper fit as a necessary condition for acquittal or its opposite. Presenting his case as a simple  $P \rightarrow Q$  conditional statement, Cochran passes over any other relevant evidence to suggest that only his carefully-staged glove fitting should be determinative of the case's outcome, and leaves his audience to, as Walton put it, "fill in any proposition needed to make such an inference valid."

Don Gifford details two appearances of the enthymeme in "Aeolus": "If you want to draw the cashier is just going to lunch" (*U*, 7.113), which requires the reader to deduce that 16 June was a Thursday payday, and "We are liege subjects of the catholic chivalry of Europe that foundered at Trafalgar" (*U*, 7.565-66), which implies that had the French

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<sup>26</sup> Walton, "The Three Bases for the Enthymeme: A Dialogical Theory," *Journal of Applied Logic* 6.3 (2008): 362-63.

and Spanish not been defeated by Lord Horatio Nelson the Irish would be subject to a different imperial power (though whether this is a buried turn of *the enemy of mine enemy is my friend* meant to indicate a preference for Napoleon or merely highlights something inescapably colonial about Irish existence is harder to determine).<sup>27</sup> All of which is to say that Joyce may have been as devoted to the Dublin press as Collins suggests, but “Aeolus” nonetheless presents a thoroughly irreverent portrait of the *Freeman’s Journal*—a portrayal organized around a rhetorical figure that stands for the incomplete, ambiguous transfer of information.

## II. A NOISE AND NOTHING MORE

The idea of a permanent and comprehensive astral record and that of noise are related by more than their proximity in Joyce’s text. For dead noise—noise without a body to revive it, noise that no longer rings out from its source but has not for that been effaced—recalls an auditory concept from antiquity: acousmatic sound. Composer and cinema scholar Michel Chion credits *musique concrète* pioneer Pierre Schaeffer with reviving the idea of acousmatic sound in the 1950s, but notes that the word itself derives “it would seem, [from] the name given to a Pythagorean sect whose adepts used to listen to their Master speaking from behind a hanging, so that, it was said, the sight of the sender would not distract them from the message.”<sup>28</sup> If the acousmatic voice has its origins in pedagogy and philosophical doctrine, its afterlife stretches across sound

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<sup>27</sup> See Don Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s Ulysses* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2008), 636, 639, 642.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Chion, “The Impossible Embodiment,” trans. Martin Thom, in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 206n1. Thus were the *akousmatikoi*, or listeners, distinguished from the *mathēmatikoi* (teachers), the followers of Pythagoras who advanced his scientific and mathematical discoveries. See Charles H. Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

technology: the player piano, radio, phonograph, and telephone launched acousmatic sound into modern culture; film embraced it; the MP3 continues its reign. As Dominic Pettman writes, “[s]ince Victorian times, the acousmatic voice has been simultaneously uncanny, unsettling, banal, and omnipresent.”<sup>29</sup> In each case, an absence in the visual realm wrestles with the plenitude of the auditory for preeminence in its subject’s sensory experience, though whether the phenomenon minimizes or increases distraction is a matter for debate.

And distraction may be the least of our worries. Brian Kane writes that the experience of acousmatic sound—sound that “underdetermines attributions of its source or cause”—can cause the hearer to misrecognize the sound’s source in dramatic fashion: “the location of that [sound’s] source as definitively located inside or outside the listener’s own body,” he writes, “becomes uncertain.”<sup>30</sup> On this formulation, acousmatic sound is more than just sound that cannot be attributed to a visible source. It is rather an experience of sound that dissolves definite boundaries between self and world. While discussions of acousmatic sound and of the acousmatic voice in particular find favorite examples in *Psycho*’s Norma(n) Bates and The Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*—voices climactically rejoined with images of the bodies from which they originate—Mladen Dolar, in the midst of an account founded in the voice’s Lacanian role as a key embodiment of *objet petit a*, maintains that the acousmatic voice cannot be rebottled so easily:

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<sup>29</sup> Dominic Pettman, “Pavlov’s Podcast: The Acousmatic Voice in the Age of MP3s,” *differences* 22.2-3 (2011): 152-53.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 159. Maud Ellmann, taking a different approach to the acousmatic voice in *Ulysses*, introduces a similar line of thought in referring to “the ghostly independence of acousmatic voices from their speakers” (“Joyce’s Noises,” *Modernism/modernity* 16.2 [2009]: 387).

There is no voice without a body, but yet again this relation is full of pitfalls: it seems that the voice pertains to the wrong body, or doesn't fit the body at all, or disjoins the body from which it emanates.... It is a voice in search of an origin, in search of a body, but even when it finds its body, it turns out that this doesn't quite work, the voice doesn't stick to the body, it is an excrescence which doesn't match the body[.]<sup>31</sup>

On Dolar's account, as on Kane's, the acousmatic voice reflects back on the body, defamiliarizing it just enough that the sound and its erstwhile mechanism no longer seem to match. (One imagines Peter Pan trying to stick his shadow back on with soap.) Acousmatic sound, then, and against the clarifying desires of its Pythagorean originators, comes to be read as increasingly indeterminate and unsettling. Where does it come from? We hear Joyce give an answer: "anywhere wherever."<sup>32</sup> In *Ulysses*, Joyce capitalizes on the technoacousmatic environment of 1904, folding both the phonograph and the player piano into his auditory mix. *Ulysses* is suited to the underdetermined territory of the acousmatic in other ways as well—not only in Joyce's development of discordant sound as such, but also in the work's formal crafting, the apparent contingency of which (at least in the Eglinton-Collins-Bennett-Aldington critical matrix) simultaneously emphasizes and conceals both its literal and interpretive meanings and its fundamental craftedness (on the Wilson-Eliot side of the equation).

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<sup>31</sup> Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 60-61. Pettman provides a sparkling account of the implications of (techno)acousmatic sound for conceptions of subjectivity, including in his analysis work by Dolar, Roland Barthes, Kaja Silverman, and Adriana Cavarero.

<sup>32</sup> A case could be made that Stephen's preoccupation with *nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* in "Proteus" follows something of the same pattern, folding the spatial and the temporal around each other.

No shortage of critical attention has gone to the acoustic elements of Joyce's work. Susan Mooney recommends considering Joyce as "auteur," "the creative (often unconscious) organizer or mediator of acoustic fragments (instances or memories of voices, music, noise, sounds)."<sup>33</sup> Sebastian D. G. Knowles writes that "Joyce, more than any other modernist writer, has his ear to the ground, listening for catchphrases, musical tags, sound effects, verbal punning, and the rhythm of words."<sup>34</sup> But in a measure belied by his own list, Knowles and critics like him are disproportionately interested in Joyce's music. Margot Norris demonstrates a broader tendency to musicalize Joyce's acoustic world in arguing that Joyce "present[s] vernacular language as a form of musical poetry"; Timothy Martin has written persuasively that

Joyce's achievement in "Sirens" was less to make writing musical than to exploit musical awareness, analogy and allusion in order to foreground the properties that music and language share.... The question, in any case, is not so much whether Joyce's writing is qualitatively musical than how his experience of music and impulse toward musical expression shaped his work.<sup>35</sup>

Studies that purport to analyze Joyce's noise specifically encounter no little difficulty. Jack W. Weaver reads *Joyce's Music and Noise*, but the musical is the true focus of the monograph, sometimes absorbing noise altogether. Among the features of Joyce's oeuvre as a whole and *Ulysses* in particular that Weaver reads as musical are allusion, resonance,

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Mooney, "Bronze by Gold by Bloom: Echo, the Invocatory Drive, and the 'Auteur' in 'Sirens,'" in *Bronze by Gold*, 229. Mooney's "auteur" is an "aural auteur" (239n1).

<sup>34</sup> Sebastian D. G. Knowles, "Introduction: Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce," in *Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce*, ed. Knowles (New York: Garland, 1999), xxx.

<sup>35</sup> Margot Norris, "The Music of Joyce's Vernacular Voices," *Modernism/modernity* 16.2 (2009): 378; Timothy Martin, "Music," in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 282-83.

chaos, echoes, multiple narrative voices, spoonerisms, parody, rhetoric (of which he writes, “For rhetoric to be music almost exclusively, it need only communicate more sound than sense”), and noise itself.<sup>36</sup> “To the discerning (that is, the musically educated) ear,” Weaver writes, “what many regard as noise may not even be an irritant, much less an earwig.”<sup>37</sup> Moving in the opposite direction, Allan Hepburn argues that in Joyce’s work “sound itself does not necessarily have meaning.”<sup>38</sup> But his idea of “meaning” seems limited to sound in the form of verbalizations that carry information from one character to another: “In *Dubliners*,” he writes, “environments are acoustic without being verbal,” and the “acoustic” *in se* is apparently devoid of “meaning”: “the air is full of British accents, creaking floors, wailing children, restaurant hubbub, train rumbles, screams, murmurs, speeches, sermons, concerts, even ‘noisy dresses.’ Characters bridge discord with musical interludes or noises. Sometimes they vocalize alone[.]”<sup>39</sup> In Hepburn’s scheme, it would seem, Weaver’s rhetoric-cum-music is a distraction from meaning rather than its revelation.

This chapter, like the project of which it forms part, pushes against the tendency in both Weaver and Hepburn’s approaches to subsume noise either under the signifying star of a discipline such as music or under the banner of meaninglessness. Here, it is precisely the meaning of the non-musical, and precisely the murmurs, rumbles, and speeches—the lonely vocalizations of the city, the Irish political scene, and characters’ minds—that are worth following. This is not the first work to do so. Maud Ellmann has written of “Joyce’s Noises,” singling out within them “the noises of language, the

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<sup>36</sup> Jack W. Weaver, *Joyce’s Music and Noise: Theme and Variation in His Writings* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1998), 94.

<sup>37</sup> Weaver, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Allan Hepburn, “Noise, Music, Voice, *Dubliners*,” in *Bronze by Gold*, 191.

<sup>39</sup> Hepburn, 191.

acoustic detritus that cannot be assimilated into meaning or intention,” and more specifically the noise of Bloom’s bout of flatulence that closes “Sirens”—the “Ppprrpffrrppffff” (*U*, 11.1293) that, she writes, “represent[s] the bodily remainder of the voice that cannot be assimilated into speech or song; [it] neither make[s] sense nor gratif[ies] the ear.”<sup>40</sup> For Ellmann, it is rather “the visceral noise that both facilitates and interferes with the communicative function of speech.”<sup>41</sup>

Ellmann’s reading follows Dolar, up to a point (Dolar writes of Plato’s account of Aristophanes’s hiccups in the *Symposium* that “[t]he involuntary voice rising from the body’s entrails can be read as...the condensation of a senseless sound and the elusive highest meaning”), but without his sense of the noise’s potential.<sup>42</sup> Ellmann is correct that Bloom’s fart would be difficult to render in speech, and more difficult still to find “gratify[ing].” But the passage in “Sirens” from which the “visceral noise” is drawn suggests two connections that Ellmann lets pass. First, for Joyce to close his chapter with Bloom’s fart evokes nothing so strongly as the end of Canto XXI of Dante’s *Inferno*, in which the leader of the Malebranche, the devils who punish corrupt politicians in the Malebolge, calls them to action by “mak[ing] a trumpet of his ass” [*ed elli aveva del cul fatto trombeta*].<sup>43</sup> Even Dante did not attempt to record the sound of the devil’s flatulence in his verse. Nevertheless, Joyce’s debt to Dante cannot be denied, and in this

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<sup>40</sup> M. Ellmann, 384, 385.

<sup>41</sup> M. Ellmann, 385.

<sup>42</sup> Dolar, 25. As Dolar invokes Plato, philosophical heir to Pythagoras, and as Pythagoras is at the heart of acousmatic sound, it seems only right to note that Pythagoreanism forbade the eating of beans. The rationale behind the injunction remains opaque, but perhaps it is as Cicero recounts: “Plato...asserts that we should bring our bodies into such a disposition before we go to sleep as to leave nothing which may occasion error or perturbation in our dreams. For this reason, perhaps, Pythagoras laid it down as a rule, that his disciples should not eat beans, because this food is very flatulent, and contrary to that tranquility of the mind which a truth-seeking spirit should possess” (*On Divination*, in *The Treatises of M. T. Cicero: On the Nature of the Gods; On Divination; On Fate; On the Republic; On the Laws; and On Standing for the Consulship*, ed. and trans. C. D. Yonge [London: Bohn, 1853], 172).

<sup>43</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* (Milan: RCS Scuola S.p.a., 2000), canto 21, line 139. Translation mine.

instance the resonance with Dante's trumpet suggests precisely the assimilation of bodily noise into "song" that Ellmann rejects. Then, too, Ellmann shows no interest in the mechanical sounds that proceed the crowning "ppffff": "Tram kran kran kran. Good oppor. Coming. Krandlkrankran... Kraaaaaa" (*U*, 11.1290-91). This record of the noise of the coming tram that might cover Bloom's outburst echoes the mechanical interference Bloom imagines coming from a phonograph recording of "poor old greatgrandfather" in "Hades" (on which more below): "Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladseeagain hellohello amawf krpthsth" (*U*, 6.964-96).

In the first instance of mechanical sound above, "Tram kran kran kran," Joyce narrowly (by one consonant in either direction—we have "Tram kran kran," not "Tram tran kran" or "Tram kram kran") avoids what I have in Chapter One called conceptual onomatopoeia, in evidence in F. T. Marinetti's gradual transformation of a word that designates the source of an incursion into the sensorium—a train rumbling along its tracks—into the phenomenological equivalent of that incursion: "treno [train] **tren tron / tron tron**." Joyce instead introduces something like the novel's own language for interference. The overture of "Sirens," the close of that episode, and description of gramophone noise in "Hades"—two farts and a great grandfather—are marked by the plosive k of "kran" and "kraa," a sound that completely occludes airflow in the vocal tract when spoken. In multiple senses, then, these sounds "interfere with the communicative function"—in the latter case "of speech" proper, and in the former of the "bodily remainder" whose signifying qualities Ellmann is arguing against. At the same time, in belonging in the first order to sound recording technology and public transit they are sounds intimately connected to a contemporary auditory and information culture

witnessing the (re)birth of the acousmatic voice in technologies such as the phonograph and reliant on communicative circuits like the newspaper.

### III. DULLTHUDDING “AEOLUS”

“Aeolus” follows Bloom and Stephen as each attempts to insert an item in the paper. Bloom comes in to work up an advertisement for Alexander Keyes: “This ad, you see. Keyes, you remember?... Keyes, you see. He wants two keys at the top.... Two crossed keys here. A circle. Then here the name. Alexander Keyes, tea, wine and spirit merchant.... [T]he house of keys. You see?... You know, councillor, the Manx parliament. Innuendo of home rule” (*U*, 7.122-50). Stephen’s freight is the letter on foot and mouth disease pressed on him by Garrett Deasy in “Nestor” (“I have a letter here for the press.... I want that to be printed and read.... I am trying to work up influence with the department. Now I’m going to try publicity” [*U*, 2.291-342]). Though Bloom and Stephen approach the *Freeman’s Journal* with what could be considered noisy pursuits, distractions from news itself—the former an advertisement-cum-political statement for a tea and wine merchant in the form of a visual pun, the latter an unsolicited bid for publicity on behalf of a school headmaster with a passion for animal virology—it is not Stephen or even the pitiable Bloom but the newspaper and its own set of windbags that bears the brunt of the chapter’s innuendo and noisy ironizing.

Michael Rubenstein has argued that Joyce’s formal innovation in “Aeolus” and “Wandering Rocks” was to “mode[l] narrative voice on some of the modern technological structures that redefined everyday life” at the turn of the twentieth century:

the newspaper and Dublin's municipal sewer system.<sup>44</sup> As a result, Rubenstein writes, Joyce's storytelling is intrinsically dependent on modern social and urban infrastructure, and specifically on infrastructure that connects people and things, "allow[ing] the networks of modernity to change the ways a story about a modern polity can be told" ("CC," 124). The distinguishing structural feature of "Aeolus," which takes place in and around the offices of Dublin's *Freeman's Journal* and *Evening Telegraph*, are its 63 newspaper headline-like section titles. Coming in the wake of the opening chapters' "fairly standard version of third-person omniscient narration, and then the intense subjectivity of the stream-of-consciousness technique," Rubenstein argues, these headlines cement the influence of the newspaper on the episode's (and novel's) "intensified mimeticism," which "seeks to outdo...narrative realism" ("CC," 113). The newspaper in "Aeolus," that is, is a key player in Joyce's attempt to distinguish *Ulysses* from both nineteenth-century narrative realism and modernism's "non- or anti-mimetic" strain, even as it works to describe a specifically Irish, or even specifically Dublin, self-conception and relationship to current events ("CC," 113). Journalistic rhetoric, ideally comprehensive and informative, is turned to "the malicious irony and opacity of the headlines" ("CC," 119).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Michael D. Rubenstein, "City Circuits: 'Aeolus' and 'Wandering Rocks,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses*, ed. Sean Latham (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 113. Hereafter abbreviated "CC" and cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>45</sup> For Rubenstein, "the culture work of the newspaper" ("CC," 116) as portrayed in "Aeolus" sees Joyce constructing a national community as much through the ironically inapt headline as through the more self-serious image of the newspaper qua engine of national consciousness advanced by Benedict Anderson. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 32-36. The other key piece of technologically-aided material culture in Rubenstein's argument is part of Dublin's public infrastructure, its new sewer system, embodied in the scatological image (he singles out the "tongue of liquid sewage" that Joyce's Poddle River has "hung out in fealty" in "Wandering Rocks" [*U*, 10.1197]). Wilson writes of Joyce's style that "it is like a thin metallic pipe through which the narrative is run—a pipe of which every joint has been fitted by a master plumber" (Wilson, "Ulysses").

Rubenstein writes that while in the first instance, “IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS” (*U*, 7.1-2), Joyce’s headline is “perfectly apposite to what follows it,” its fellows are often “unrelated and sometimes nonsensical; others sometimes even actively undercut or critique the actions of the characters in the episode” (“CC,” 116). “CLEVER, VERY” sees such luminous demonstrations of wit as “Madam, I’m Adam” (*U*, 7.683) and “Able was I ere I saw Elba” (*U*, 7.683), each offered to take some of the air out of Myles Crawford’s paean to the journalistic prowess of Ignatius Gallaher. One of Joyce’s headlines is simply “SAD” (*U*, 7.291).<sup>46</sup> But it is “SUFFICIENT FOR THE DAY...” that holds the sharpest critique (*U*, 7.726). J. J. O’Molloy’s “Sufficient for the day is the newspaper thereof” fills in the headline’s ellipses with some standard verbal irony, O’Molloy subverting readerly expectations while at the same time connecting the ideas of “newspaper” and “evil” by constructing his epigram on the model of Matthew 6:34. And while that proposition may be enough, the line also suggests something incomplete at the heart of the daily newspaper—that more could always be added to it, even if no more is, strictly speaking, desirable.

The chapter’s ironizing attitude toward the press is not news: Ezra Pound, in his panegyric Paris Letter of 1922, lists among *Ulysses*’s man points of interest “just what the public deserves, and just what the public gets every morning with its porridge, in the Daily Mail and in sentiment-rhetorical journalism; it is perhaps the most savage bit of satire we have had since Swift suggested a cure for famine in Ireland.”<sup>47</sup> Certainly, in

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<sup>46</sup> At the time of writing, this example was not yet a Donald Trump joke.

<sup>47</sup> Ezra Pound, “Paris Letter,” *The Dial* 72.6 (1922): 627. In *Axel’s Castle*, Wilson remarks that without the Gilbert schema, “though we may have felt the ironic effect of the specimens of inflated Irish journalism introduced at regular intervals in the conversation with the patriot at the pub [in “Cyclops”]—we should hardly have understood that these had been produced by a deliberate technique of ‘gigantism’...all the banalities of his patriotic claptrap swollen to gigantic proportions.... [But] if we are tipped off, we are able to further discover all sorts of concealed ornaments and emblems.... [I]n Aeolus, the newspaper office, not

capitalizing on dashing the expectations raised by the headlines that structure it, “Aeolus” deploys the irony that Rubenstein’s “City Circuits” and Pound’s Paris Letter identify. But it remains true that the Joyce of “Aeolus,” interested as he is in the way a modern polity gets its stories, is not *only* working through the information technology of the newspaper. For *Ulysses* in the same breath embraces the far-from-modern concept of storytelling (albeit one revitalized by contemporary pop philosophy) that the Akasic record offers. In constructing Akasic *Ulysses*, even if Joyce doesn’t participate in intentionally anti-mimetic modernism, he still very much participates in the informing-through-confusion of modernist noise. Not simply (though certainly also, as in “Sufficient for the day is the newspaper thereof”) the deliberately contradictory assemblage of irony, Joyce’s noise creates an indeterminacy of information that pushes against the utility and plausibility of the complete record, and is rendered even more unsettling as it sits amid the textual and informational gigantism that unavoidably constitutes the novel. If Borden’s noise suggests, contra combat gnosticism, that even the civilian on the home front might begin to understand war experience, Joyce’s noise is a reminder that information systems are necessarily selective. If, as Akasic *Ulysses* demonstrates, even the appearance of the lack of selectivity can create problems with comprehension and information transfer, the parameters of narrative selectivity and information flow must themselves be interrogated.

The newspaper offices are in the busy environs of Prince’s Street North, where outside, “before Nelson’s pillar” (*U*, 7.3), Dublin’s electric trams converge and depart:

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merely many references to wind but...some hundred different figures of speech” (Wilson, “James Joyce,” 212). Though the citizen has yet to be introduced in “Aeolus,” Wilson’s description of his rhetoric’s “gigantism”—of “banalities...swollen to gigantic proportions”—could be taken straight from the reviews of *Ulysses* preoccupied with Joyce’s failure to select. The citizen’s “gigantism,” as does Joyce’s (on display again in “some hundred different figures of speech”), leads back to the Akasic record, and hints at the way Akasic “Aeolus” complicates straightforward irony in favor of a critique of the press at once more absurd and more pointed.

“Right and left parallel clanging ringing a double-decker and a singledeck...swerved to the down line, glided parallel” (*U*, 7.10-12). The opening of “Aeolus” is in this sense highly visual, with Joyce’s reinforcement of the scene’s coordinated movement (“[r]ight and left,” “parallel,” again “parallel”) promoting the sense that the larger and smaller trams are taking part in a calm, “glid[ing]” partner dance. The quietness of the scene’s motion is belied, though, by the incursion—neat and parallel in its own way, but noisy nonetheless—of the “clanging ringing” of the trams themselves, and more particularly by the “hoarse” voice of the company timekeeper “bawl[ing] them off” on their way (*U*, 7.6-7).

The effect of this encounter between sound and sight in Joyce’s picture of urban mass transit is that noise, rather than confusing the scene or otherwise troubling narrative coherence, is instead descriptive; the noise of the tram hub appears as but one logical element of a scene that fleshes out Joyce’s portrait of Dublin and the immediate vicinity of the newspaper offices, situated, as the opening headline has it, “IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS.” The chapter’s second section, “THE WEARER OF THE CROWN” (*U*, 7.14), likewise features expected urban noise: outside the post office, shoeshine boys call to customers while mail trucks are filled with “loudly flung sacks of letters, postcards, lettercards, parcels” (*U*, 7.17-18). These scenes demonstrate what Chion, with reference to film, calls “*added value*”: “the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression...that this information or expression ‘naturally’ comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself.”<sup>48</sup> According to Chion, most instances of added value rely

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 5.

on “*synchresis*, the forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears.” In this case, something like *synchresis* is what suggests that the sound of “clanging ringing” above and the sight of “a double-decker and a singledeck” tram form a coherent scene. Likewise, *synchresis* patches the otherwise puzzling experience of “loudly flung sacks”: instead of asking what Joyce leaves out (for what is the necessary relation of the act of flinging—or being flung—to the question of loudness? and, as “loud” itself is not a sound, what is the sound whose amplitude we are meant to be sensing?), we are trained to accept something unspoken (the sacks’ landing? sounds of exertion made by the ones who fling?) that links what Joyce’s syntax leaves an open question. Chion offers *synchresis* as one tool by which cinema presents itself primarily as an art of the image rather than sound, which sinks into this ancillary role; while the linking of sound and image in “Aeolus” enhances the cinematic quality of the chapter’s opening, it does not for that challenge the idea that literature, too, is a visual art.

But even if “Aeolus” seems to open with mimetic noise relegated to the background, it has a noisier beginning than might at first appear. To understand how, it is worth returning to one of the more prominent visual markers of the scene: Nelson’s Pillar. Constructed in Dublin’s O’Connell Street between 1806 and 1808, the monument was erected to the memory of Nelson following his victory (and death) at Cape Trafalgar in October of 1805. The Pillar, a 121-foot Doric column topped by a 13-foot statue of Nelson, was received as both a traffic obstruction and, in the rare understatement by W. B. Yeats, “not a beautiful object.”<sup>49</sup> When, in March of 1966, still-unidentified republicans

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Micheál Ó Riain, “Nelson’s Pillar: A Controversy That Ran & Ran,” *History Ireland* 6.4 (1998): 24.

planted a bomb at the top of the column, blowing away the statue of Nelson in what was generally agreed to have been “a thoroughly professional manner,” the *Irish Times* subhead to its front-page story could, as Andrew Thacker notes, “slip unobtrusively into ‘Aeolus’”: “NELSON DEFEATED IN THE LONG RUN,” it read; “*Abused for 157 years.*”<sup>50</sup>

Given its history, Joyce’s inclusion of Nelson’s Pillar in the chapter of *Ulysses* dedicated to rhetoric and the newspaper seems more or less natural.<sup>51</sup> But the appearance of Nelson’s Pillar in “Aeolus” muddles the apparent relegation of noise to the chapter’s background in the opening ballet of the trams. Although the monument itself, bifurcating O’Connell Street as it does, is highly visible (and highly visual—before its demise, sixpence and a 168-step climb of Nelson’s Pillar revealed “a panoramic view of the city, bounded by the bay to the east, the Wicklow mountains to the south, and, on a clear day, by the Mourne mountains to the north”), it ushers its own political noise onto the scene. Recall, for one, the ambivalence of Professor MacHugh’s self-important enthymeme about “the catholic chivalry of Europe.”<sup>52</sup> Then, too, there is the fact that the Pillar was, as Joyce makes clear, in the very heart of Dublin, but celebrated a British military victory over the French. Micheál Ó Riain details what the *Irish Times* gestured toward in its obituary subhead: that the Pillar’s existence, placement, and legal status were continually debated over its lifetime—“in parliaments, newspapers and council chambers”; it is just around the corner that Stephen and the assembled company witness the recreation of

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<sup>50</sup> “Explosion Wrecks the Pillar,” *Irish Times*, 7 March 1966; Andrew Thacker, “Toppling Masonry and Textual Space: Nelson’s Pillar and Spatial Politics in *Ulysses*,” *Irish Studies Review* 8.2 (2000): 199.

<sup>51</sup> See Thacker; Andras Ungar, *Joyce’s Ulysses as National Epic* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2002); and Michael Patrick Gillespie, *James Joyce and the Exilic Imagination* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Ó Riain, 22.

Taylor's patriotic oratory.<sup>53</sup> This, then, is the immediate environment in which the *Freeman's Journal* operates—the political incongruity of the chapter's setting marking out a consistent pattern of noisy irony that touches the heart of the novel's status as information(-distribution) system.

The third section of the chapter finally brings the reader inside the newspapers' business offices, where Bloom is following up on an ad and Stephen is soon to appear. The section's opening, however, is worth lingering over:

#### GENTLEMEN OF THE PRESS

Grossbooted draymen rolled barrels dullthudding out of Prince's stores and bumped them up on the brewery float. On the brewery float bumped dullthudding barrels rolled by grossbooted draymen out of Prince's stores.

—There it is, Red Murray said. (*U*, 7.20-25)

Who are the “gentlemen of the press” Joyce's headline heralds? The draymen are the first candidates to appear, and in this formulation the gentlemen of the press are “[g]rossbooted” brutes, thus equipped for the task of hauling a “dullthudding” product out into public circulation. But this answer undergoes immediate amendment through anastrophe: in the second formulation, it seems that the gentlemen of the press might just be the “dullthudding barrels” themselves, now in the position of the subject. “There it is,” Red Murray interjects, as though the passage has been undergoing live revisions and he can confirm the accuracy of the final edit. Even once it is revealed that Red Murray is telling Bloom he has discovered an ad they have been searching out in his files (“There it is.... Alexander Keyes” [*U*, 7.25]), all Joyce has done is add the wine merchant to his

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<sup>53</sup> Ó Riain, 21.

growing list of people and things contained absurdly under the heading “gentlemen of the press.” It is four sections later, under the headline “WE SEE THE CANVASSER AT WORK” (*U*, 7.120), that Bloom finally interacts with the newspaper foreman, Councillor Nannetti, and another seven before the proper gentlemen of the press appear, under the apparent non sequitur “ERIN, GREEN GEM OF THE SILVER SEA” (*U*, 7.236).

If this all seems something of a throwaway joke, Joyce returns to it rather stubbornly. The fourth section, “WILLIAM BRAYDEN, ESQUIRE, OF OAKLANDS, SANDYMOUNT,” hyperbolically announces of the arrival of a dignitary, the *Freeman’s Journal’s* editor (*U*, 7.38-39). A sensory palimpsest of man and beer barrel overtakes Brayden’s introduction: “Mr Bloom turned and saw the liveried porter raise his lettered cap as a stately figure entered between the newsboards of the *Weekly Freeman and National Press* and the *Freeman’s Journal and National Press*. Dullthudding Guinness’s barrels. It passed statelily up the staircase” (*U*, 7.42-45). In one sense, this scene sees Joyce working through the simultaneity of Brayden’s entrance and the background noise of the draymen working in the street outside, counterpoising the visual and auditory as he goes. The highest visual and spatial specificity are reserved for the inanimate: the porter’s clothing and cap, the entryway flanked by newsboards. Of Brayden himself all that is revealed is that his figure is “stately” and his stately figure passes “statelily.” If sound moves around and through the visible action—if it is “omnidirectional” in the face of vision’s “partial...directional” capabilities—then describing the thudding of the barrels outside as Brayden moves through the entryway between the street and the stairs is just as faithful to the scene as mentioning it before or after would have been.<sup>54</sup> Just as faithful, but with the ambiguity of referent that allows for confusion about who, precisely,

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<sup>54</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. Gorbman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 17.

passes—the collection of barrels, or the man?—and it is in the ambiguity created by Joyce’s solution to the problem of representing simultaneous sound and action that a scene of noise becomes itself noisy.

For in this case Joyce’s is a troubled simultaneity, not the triumphalist sort that Rubenstein’s account of Anderson, himself following Hegel, heralds as fundamentally nation-building: the “mass ceremony,” the “modern... substitute for morning prayers” of opening the newspaper. I have described “added value,” the information added by sound to the experience of an image, as part of what gives the opening of “Aeolus” its cinematic quality—trams and tram-sounds and mail and mail-sounds combining to enrich the image of Prince’s Street North. But if Joyce deploys conventional synchresis in that instance, in this case and others he demonstrates an affinity for what Chion calls “audiovisual counterpoint.”<sup>55</sup> Joyce does not negate the image of Brayden coming in off the street to the point that it cannot be understood, and indeed rarely if ever, even in as noisy a text as *Ulysses*, descends into full incomprehensibility; he rather “carr[ies] the perception of the image to another level” through a sometimes dissonant combination of images and sounds that challenges a straightforward internal logic of narrative. Of course, the “stately figure... pass[ing] statelily” is not one or a group of the intervening “[d]ullthudding Guinness’s barrels” come to life—the next line finally gives him “a solemn beardframed face” (*U*, 7.746). But the sounds of the beer barrels, finally fading into the sounds of the printing presses themselves, trails his image in Bloom’s thoughts as he proceeds “along the now reverberating boards. But will he save the circulation? Thumping. Thumping” (*U*, 7.71-72).

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<sup>55</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 38.

If “Aeolus” insistently connects the newspaper and brewing businesses of Dublin, it is not just to present the circuit of communication of news and that of beer as echoes of each other, or rivals for the higher circulation; depicting newspapermen as barrels of beer may ironize the press, but it also models how two emphatically Irish products diffuse into public life. For in *Ulysses*, as in history, Guinness and the news are both implicated in the political scene. The Guinness family was involved in the life of Nelson’s Pillar at every stage except, presumably, for its demolition: the Second Arthur Guinness was on the original 1805 committee that managed the construction of the monument, and another Arthur Guinness—Lord Ardilaun, the great-grandson of the brewery’s founder—was both one of the trustees in whom the Pillar was vested in 1876 and, in 1881, sponsor of a bill in Westminster to move the Pillar to O’Connell Street, current site of the Parnell Monument.<sup>56</sup> Joyce notes their political proximity by listing the Guinnesses and the Pillar side by side in the stage directions for mass suicide in “Circe”: “MANY MOST ATTRACTIVE AND ENTHUSIASTIC WOMEN ALSO COMMIT SUICIDE BY STABBING, DROWNING, DRINKING PRUSSIC ACID...CASTING THEMSELVES UNDER STEAMROLLERS, FROM THE TOP OF NELSON’S PILLAR, INTO THE GREAT VAT OF GUINNESS’S BREWERY” (*U*, 15.1746-50). A mere comma separates the two Dublin institutions, preventing them from hosting a joint suicidal swan dive from O’Connell Street to St. James’s Gate. And though the conceits of the two chapters are miles apart, “INTO THE GREAT VAT OF GUINNESS’S BREWERY” would not seem out of place among the 60-odd headlines of “Aeolus.”

The Guinnesses appear by name earlier, in “Lotus Eaters,” with Bloom standing under a railway viaduct musing of their production that

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<sup>56</sup> See Ó Riain, 23

Lord Iveagh [Edward Guinness, Ardilaun's younger brother] once cashed a sevenfigure cheque for a million in the bank of Ireland. Shows you the money to be made out of porter. Still the other brother lord Ardilaun has to change his shirt four times a day, they say. Skin breeds lice or vermin. A million pounds, wait a moment. Twopence a pint, fourpence a quart, eightpence a gallon of porter, no, one and fourpence a gallon of porter. One and four into twenty: fifteen about. Yes, exactly. Fifteen millions of barrels of porter.

What am I saying barrels? Gallons. About a million barrels all the same.

An incoming train clanked heavily above his head, coach after coach. Barrels bumped in his head: dull porter slopped and churned inside. The bungholes sprang open and a huge dull flood leaked out, flowing together, winding through mudflats all over the level land, a lazy pooling swirl of liquor bearing along wideleaved flowers of its froth. (*U*, 5.304-17)

In “Lotus Eaters,” the Guinnesses—as will their barrels two chapters later in “Aeolus”—set Bloom down the path of calculating circulation: “Aeolus” reveals a comparatively dim view of the opportunities offered by the newspaper business (recall, of Brayden, “but will he save the circulation?”); here he thinks, with a hint of contrarian satisfaction, “[s]hows you the money to be made out of porter,” and immediately sets about reckoning the exact amount of product that money represents. And while Bloom refrains from calculating how many ads he would have to sell or how many copies of the *Freeman's*

*Journal* Dublin would have to soak up to rival Lord Iveagh's cheque, one feels such a calculation in the background.

As Bloom's computation under the railway arch ends, a retrospective and prognostic flood of associations is unleashed: a train "clank[s]" over the bridge, and though it is not certain that the train itself contains barrels of beer, its clanking resonates with the trudging rhythm of Bloom's arithmetic ("twopence a pint, fourpence a quart, eightpence a gallon of porter"), sending all those barrels of beer "bump[ing] in his head." Those barrels, set sloshing, spring a leak, their contents "flowing together...all over the level land," froth forming "wideleaved flowers" ("Flower" being Bloom's personals-*ad nom de plume*) as it, in what appears as fanciful external narration, coats Dublin. Urban transit, beer—the future "dullthudding barrels"—and the circulation of goods and stories ("lord Ardilaun has to change his shirt four times a day, they say") tie the scene to the later business in Prince's Street North and to *Ulysses*'s ongoing and often convoluted fascination with Dublin's distribution networks.

It is discord that sutures these various conditions (train and tram traffic, beer and news circulation) together, making them legible as a single narrative concern even as they ironize each other. Even in the moment he first evokes the "Akasic record," Joyce returns to the practice of counterpoising background noise and commentary in a way that ironizes the commentary rather than neutralizing the noise: "The troop of bare feet was heard rushing along the hallway and pattering up the staircase. —That is oratory, the professor said uncontradicted" (*U*, 7.877-79). Certainly, Joyce's adherence to the "ever anywhere wherever" is enacted in his jumping between scenes (as between headlines in "Aeolus") and synesthetic mashing-together of perceptual experience (the oratory of

feet/the oratory of noise). Even so, it functions less as reassurance that nothing “ever anywhere wherever” escapes the Akasic record than as a sort of mandate to go “ever anywhere wherever” at any moment, and to allow disjointed and disembodied noise to become oratory, “uncontradicted.”

#### IV. UNDEAD NOISE: *ULYSSES* AND THE TECHNOACOUSMATIC

Cheryl Temple Herr has written that “[w]e are always moving further from the material world that Joyce and his characters inhabited.”<sup>57</sup> Certainly, by 1922 Joyce himself had moved away from the technoacoustic world that Bloom inhabits in 1904, into one increasingly populated by personal automobiles and on the cusp of revolutions in electrical recording technology and sound film. And yet, there is perhaps no greater confirmation of Richard Ellmann’s pontifical declaration that “[w]e are still learning to be James Joyce’s contemporaries” than the rise of personal electronic devices—the Walkman as much as the MP3 player—that, on the back of an increasingly technologized everyday urban experience, have thrust us ever deeper into the technoacousmatic world Joyce and Bloom spent their day(s) theorizing.<sup>58</sup>

It would be difficult to overstate how much, from the late 19th century forward, phonography reshaped both sound technology and the practice of hearing. Douglas Kahn writes that “the phonograph represented a new day in aurality... a new status for hearing”; the passive education in listening provided by everyday life expanded to include the possibility of hearing the same sound return to the sensorium again and again, identically

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<sup>57</sup> Cheryl Temple Herr, “Being in Joyce’s World,” in *James Joyce in Context*, 163.

<sup>58</sup> R. Ellmann, 1. On personal stereo use and urban behavior and experience, see Bull.

but for the noise inevitably introduced by the reproduction.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, informal sensory development made the modern listening audience more and more practiced at listening through the noise of reproduction to what was reproduced, even if the noise became an inexorable part of the experience—think of the hiss and pop of vinyl, and then of more recent attempts to reintroduce the hiss and pop of vinyl into relatively noiseless digital recordings. Adorno theorizes that the realities of the phonograph’s sound reproduction shaped listening habits: “[T]he hours of domestic existence that while themselves away along with the record are too sparse for the first movement of the *Eroica* to be allowed to unfold without interruption. Dances composed of dull repetitions are more congenial to these hours. One can turn them off at any point.”<sup>60</sup>

But we need not wait for Adorno. Theorization of the shift from the prephonographic world to a world (one of many) that might be called the start of sonic modernity began to appear roughly as soon as was possible. Thomas Edison, writing in the year of the phonograph’s patent, names the device’s “foundation principle” as “the gathering up and retaining of sounds hitherto fugitive, and their reproduction at will.”<sup>61</sup> For Edison, the phonograph’s use is located precisely in a practice of the retention and reproduction of sound that has no regard for its original source, with two consequences: the first that the recorder need not bother with the “consent of the original source”; the second that the recorder might preserve and multiply that recording infinitely “without regard to the existence or non-existence of the original source.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kahn, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” in *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 278.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Edison, “The Phonograph and Its Future,” *The North American Review* 126.262 (1878): 527.

<sup>62</sup> Edison, 530.

Consent was to become (and continues to be) its own issue—enough that by 1906 John Philip Sousa could pen an impassioned philippic predicting the downfall of original musical composition itself at the hands of phonographic piracy.<sup>63</sup> But it is the idea of the perpetuity of sound regardless of “the existence or non-existence” of its source that has continued to mesmerize critics and adherents alike. An 1881 opinion piece in London’s *Spectator* laments “an immense storing up of sounds that it might be better not to store up, an immense accumulation of those winged words whose wings are best employed in carrying off into nothingness what deserves only temporary life” until “future generations [are] drowned beneath the accumulated scraps of ancestral voices and expressions” and overwhelmed “with the superabundant vestiges and records of the past.”<sup>64</sup> This vision of sound recording as creating a material and dangerous noise pollution—a stratigraphic column of phonograph cylinders and records that builds up atop the auditory innocence of future generations—may itself seem bizarre, as much for its imagery as for its presentiment of the weaponization of sound.<sup>65</sup> But it also signals an abiding interest in the life and death of sound and of its sources. What, the writer wonders, would the consequences be of enchaining Edison’s “fugitive” sounds—of extending the “temporary life” of sound waves passing through the air to something closer to immortality?

In some sense, these concerns were outdated by the time of their articulation: as Tim Armstrong writes, sound technology such as the player piano “records sound but not

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<sup>63</sup> See John Philip Sousa, “The Menace of Mechanical Music,” *Appleton’s Magazine* 8 (1906): 278-84.

<sup>64</sup> “What Will Come of the Phonograph?” *The Spectator* 3131 (1881): 881. See Ivan Kreilkamp, “A Voice Without a Body: The Phonographic Logic of *Heart of Darkness*,” *Victorian Studies* 40.2 (1997): 211-44, esp. 222.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, writing on the use of music in PsyOps, notes that “sound can damage human beings, usually without killing us, in a wide variety of ways....Theorists of battlefield use emphasize sound’s bodily effects, while theorists of the interrogation room focus on the capacity of sound and music to destroy subjectivity” (“Music as torture / Music as weapon,” *Trans* 10 (2006): n.p.). It is something very like the latter capacity that the *Spectator* opinionist seems to dread.

‘all sound.’”<sup>66</sup> Just because recording technology exists does not mean that it creates an Akasic record by default; for Niklas Luhmann and Hermann von Helmholtz “music [was] already a technology for the storage of experience, prior to the gramophone.”<sup>67</sup> But neither of these objections diffuses the interplay between the “temporary life” and Akasic immortality of sounds—in what Terrinoni calls “an immortal repository”—that Joyce addresses in “Hades.”<sup>68</sup>

In “The Phonograph and Its Future,” Edison had proposed that part of the ongoing use of the phonograph would be “preserving the sayings, the voices, and *the last words* of the dying members of the family—as of great men[.]”<sup>69</sup> Michael North points out that as late as 1922 the Darbycord Company marketed its phonographs as providing the opportunity to record “the precious gems of fleeting childhood, and the memories of the ‘Golden Age.’”<sup>70</sup> In part, the Darbycord advertising copy echoes both the 1878 Edison and the 1881 *Spectator* worrier (adding “fleeting” to the picture of previously “fugitive” “winged words”), but North emphasizes the latter euphemism—on his reading, “that an ordinary consumer might accumulate an Egyptian necropolis in wax.”<sup>71</sup>

Following Paddy Dignam’s funeral, Bloom, strolling through the cemetery, contemplates the gramophone’s usefulness as a sound recording technology that might preserve the voices of the dead:

Besides how could you remember everybody? Eyes, walk, voice. Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in

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<sup>66</sup> Armstrong, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Armstrong, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Terrinoni, 97.

<sup>69</sup> Edison, 533-34, emphasis in original.

<sup>70</sup> Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 27-29.

<sup>71</sup> North, 27.

every grave or keep it in the house. After dinner on a Sunday. Put  
on poor old greatgrandfather. Kraahraark! Hellohellohello  
amawfullyglad kraark awfullyladaseeagain hellohello amawf  
krpthsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you  
of the face. Otherwise you couldn't remember the face after fifteen  
years, say. For instance who? For instance some fellow that died  
when I was in Widsom Hely's.

Rtststr! A rattle of pebbles. Wait. Stop!

He looked down intently into a stone crypt. Some animal.

Wait. There he goes. (*U*, 6.962-72)<sup>72</sup>

Greatgrandfather's garbled greeting from beyond the grave returns us to Mooney's meditations on Joyce as the organizer of "acoustic fragments," from life or memory. "In this amateur performance," Scott suggests, "Joyce is interested in recording an age of mechanical imperfection, noises, the running together of words, and repetition caused by a scratch on the record."<sup>73</sup> But of course, we're not listening to a record—we're listening to Joyce's idea (as our "auteur") of Bloom's impression ("amateur performance") of a record. As Stein writes, "This is a mixture of a memory and a reproduction. This is never

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<sup>72</sup> Flying in the face of Stephen's diagnosis of "[d]ead noise," when Joyce was asked to produce phonograph recordings of his own work—recordings through which he participates in the undead noise of "poor old greatgrandfather"—he chose the John F. Taylor speech from "Aeolus" because, according to Sylvia Beach, it "was 'declamatory' and [was] therefore suitable for recital" (quoted in Adrian Curtin, "Hearing Joyce Speak: The Phonograph Recordings of 'Aeolus' and 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' as Audiotexts," *James Joyce Quarterly* 46.2 [2009]: 269). Joyce's recording suffers from the sorts of mechanical interference that Bloom imitates, though in the main this is of a kind that neither Bloom nor Joyce could have conveyed in writing or a single voice: a constant background hiss that perhaps best resembles the "Rtststr" of the rat-disturbed pebbles that closes Bloom's phonographic musings. An archive of Joyce's reading from "Aeolus" is available online at <https://archive.org/details/JamesJoyce1924ReadingFromUlysses>; a longer recording of an excerpt from the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" episode of *Finnegans Wake* is available on UbuWeb at <http://www.ubu.com/sound/joyce.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Scott, 104.

noisy. Nothing is noisy.”<sup>74</sup> If Stephen is concerned with the implicit mediation the faculty of vision imposes between a subject and an object, with the “[i]neluctable modality of the visible,” Joyce reminds us that the direct line between the substance of a sound and the hearing of it is nonetheless imperfect (*U*, 3.1).

To argue that Akasic *Ulysses* takes up questions of the completeness and accuracy of public records, and that it does so through sound and sound technology, is to fall squarely into the crosshairs of Paul Saint-Amour’s 2015 essay “*Ulysses* Pianola.” Saint-Amour reads the novel as a faithful recording system in the guise of a noisy one, arguing that “for all its interest in noise, Joyce’s book is one of the least noisy ever written in its storage and reproduction of its own language.”<sup>75</sup> For Saint-Amour, the true nature of the information system that the “pneumatic *Ulysses*” itself represents has been masked by “a deepening regime of *gramophonecentrism*” centered around “media histories of phonography [that] receive categorical heft from a deconstructive speech-writing analytic they in turn endow with historical depth” and inspired by Jacques Derrida’s 1984 “*Ulysses* Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce.”<sup>76</sup> The gramophone, on this reading, has become so overburdened with Derridean interpretation that its appearance in criticism is overwhelmingly an excuse to suggest Joyce’s interest in the primacy of speech over

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<sup>74</sup> Stein, “Sentences and Paragraphs,” in *The Gertrude Stein Reader: The Great American Pioneer of Avant-Garde Letters*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), 457. Noisy phonography takes center stage again, almost two decades later, in Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941). Michele Pridmore-Brown writes of the phonograph in *Between the Acts* that “La Trobe deliberately uses her gramophone to adulterate the messages of authority, thus interrupting what can be considered the imperialism of perfect communication. Woolf implies that such adulteration, the static or noise inherent in any channel of communication, can serve to fight totalitarianism by encouraging acts of personal interpretation—that is, of particularized (noncollective) listening.... In *Between the Acts* the gramophone’s noise suggests the now popular idea of self-organization insofar as the auditors are shown trying to make meaning out of this noise” (Pridmore-Brown, 411-12). I would not argue that Joyce shares in this democratizing project, but some of Pridmore-Brown’s argument rings true in this context, too: “By increasing the noise in the communication channel, La Trobe deliberately draws attention to the channel itself, thus attenuating the link between sound waves and emotion” (Pridmore-Brown, 414).

<sup>75</sup> Paul K. Saint-Amour, “*Ulysses* Pianola,” *PMLA* 130.1 (2015): 29.

<sup>76</sup> Saint-Amour, 30, 16.

writing, or to become mired in the relationship between sound and *différance* at the expense of the specifics of *Ulysses* as information-storage device.<sup>77</sup>

Derrida has it thus:

[W]e can already hear the gramophony that records writing within the liveliest voice. It reproduces *a priori*, in the absence of any intentional presence of the affirmer. Such a gramophony certainly responds to the dream of a reproduction that *preserves*, as its truth, the living *yes*, archived in its liveliest voice. But by this very fact, it allows the possibility of a parody, a technology of the *yes* that persecutes the most spontaneous and the most giving desire of the *yes*.... The affirmation of the *yes* is an affirmation of memory. *Yes* must preserve itself, and thus repeat itself, archive its voice to give it once again to be heard.

This is what I call the gramophone effect. *Yes* gramophones itself and telegramophones itself *a priori*.<sup>78</sup>

Daniel Melnick, in a formulation that reverses Derrida's concern that repeated affirmation might be turned rebelliously to parody, argues that "it is the essence of Joyce's dissonant form that, as the wily art of his exile, it transforms the act of rebellion into an affirmation."<sup>79</sup> Melnick's focus on the "musicalization of fiction" falls into my

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<sup>77</sup> Adorno, for one, takes up the phenomenological end of the phonograph's intervention in the speech-writing dichotomy; the phonograph record, he writes, "is covered with curves, a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing" (Adorno, 277).

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," trans. François Raffoul, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2013), 56.

<sup>79</sup> Daniel C. Melnick, *Fullness of Dissonance: Modern Fiction and the Aesthetics of Music* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1994), 105.

own crosshairs, but also demonstrates that Derrida's "gramophone effect" is anything but inescapable.<sup>80</sup>

Saint-Amour is largely convincing in his assessment of *Ulysses* as a high-fidelity storage device, uncannily adept at preserving its own idiom and far exceeding the technical and imaginative capabilities of gramophony. The ground-clearing work of "Ulysses Pianola" succeeds in its bid "to restore some lost complexity to the sound-capture, -storage, and -playback universe to which twentieth-century literary works often turned in testing and revising their self-concepts."<sup>81</sup> At the same time, even if Joyce is self-evidently interested in the relations between speech and writing, and even as I have taken up *Ulysses*'s account of the (recorded) spoken presence of absent friends (both Taylor and "poor old greatgrandfather"), it is not my contention that Joyce's noises are inherently Derridean. Rather, as Joyce is explicitly interested in (a) the Dublin press qua institution; (b) information storage, mystical and profane; and (c) technoacoustics, *Ulysses*'s noise calls attention to the vast capacity human interpretation has for the enthymemic undermining of logical expectation and result—Johnny Cochran *avant la lettre*—and emphasizes the implicit noise and selection in the circuits of communication that structure Dublin's public life.

In the end, that is, Joyce's gives us a *Freeman's Journal* that has perhaps aspired to the condition of the phonograph, gathering up fugitive sounds and replaying them for its audience as though—in an echo of *Ulysses*'s contemporary reviews—at pains not to make any selection during the process. "[I]n the phonograph and its successor devices," Kreilkamp writes, "the modern world has a way of recording not just the discrete tones of

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<sup>80</sup> Melnick, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Saint-Amour, 18.

music but *all* sounds, the messy glissandi and dissonances of the natural world.”<sup>82</sup>

Stephen, undergoing the recital of Taylor’s “[d]ead noise” in the paper’s offices, certainly feels “drowned beneath the accumulated scraps of ancestral voices and expressions.” The question this palimpsest of [phonograph] record, [news] record, and [Akasic] record leaves us with is double: is the phonograph worthy of this aspirational stance? and can the newspaper be saved regardless, inferior as its circulation is to that of Guinness Double X? For all their comprehensiveness, the Akasic record and the phonograph record require endless acts of interpretation of their audiences. In some cases, these acts of interpretation are inspired or required by noise. Without interpretation, greatgrandfather’s message from beyond the grave is left even more incomprehensible. But in other cases, interpretation opens a path for noise, allowing the selectivity involved in compiling and interpreting the record to be masked enthymemically. In turning its attention to the press, *Ulysses* highlights how noise is inherent to the media of information storage that structure Dublin’s public life.

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<sup>82</sup> Kreilkamp, 1, emphasis in original.

### THREE. UPTON SINCLAIR'S DISRUPTIONS OF SYMPATHY

“How could a man of sensitive nerves, aware of the refinements and graces of life, learn to love these people, who were an affront to his every sense—a stench to his nostrils, a jabbering to his ear, a procession of deformities to his eye?”

—Upton Sinclair, *King Coal* (1917)

“Touch cannot bridge distance,—it is fit only for the contact of surfaces,—but thought leaps the chasm....

I have felt the rondure of the infant's tender form. I can apply this perception to the landscape and to the far-off hills.”

—Helen Keller, *The World I Live In* (1908)

“In these...days of autumn your description of the country displays it self often to my mind... Your letters are a breath of the open country and sky.”

—Bartolomeo Vanzetti to Sinclair, from Charlestown State Prison, 19 September 1924<sup>1</sup>

In his sprawling *Mammonart: An Essay on Economic Interpretation* (1925), Upton Sinclair proclaims, “All art is propaganda. It is universally and inescapably propaganda; sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propaganda.”<sup>2</sup> Any prevailing belief that there is a qualitative difference between the art of an Upton Sinclair, or of fellow didacts like James T. Farrell and Jack London, and that of “pure and unsullied creative artists” such as Shakespeare and Goethe is, Sinclair writes, “ruling-class propaganda,” a tool for the maintenance of authoritarian aesthetic standards and imbalanced economic conditions alike.<sup>3</sup> Art, *Mammonart* argues, has always been

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<sup>1</sup> Upton Sinclair, *King Coal: A Novel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 21 (hereafter abbreviated *KC* and cited parenthetically by page number); Helen Keller, *The World I Live In*, ed. Roger Shattuck (New York: New York Review Books, 2003), 66, hereafter abbreviated *W* and cited parenthetically by page number; Bartolomeo Vanzetti to Sinclair, 19 September 1924, LMC 1964, Box 6, Folder “1924 September,” Sinclair mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart: An Essay in Economic Interpretation* (Pasadena: Upton Sinclair, 1925), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sinclair, *Mammonart*, 10b. Sinclair might find his argument confirmed in the reception of Farrell, London, and himself since midcentury: defined variously as social realism, naturalism, or propaganda, their novels have been dismissed on grounds of aesthetic insufficiency as well as political irrelevance. All three of these authors, along with many others, appear across the comprehensive lists “Who Are the Naturalists?” and “Who Are the Realists?” (as judged by a bevy of scholarly monographs) that open Edd Applegate’s

motivated by and rewarded for serving the propertied classes: “entertaining them, making them pleasant to themselves, and teaching their subjects and slaves to stand in awe of them.”<sup>4</sup> Sinclair, by 1925 a professional writer for over thirty years and a socialist of only slightly newer vintage, envisions *Mammonart* as asking a question of artists that reads as a précis for much of his own fiction: “WHO OWNS YOU, AND WHY?”<sup>5</sup>

Sinclair grew up between family homes and boardinghouses, first in Baltimore, where his mother’s family’s expanding wealth offset his own family’s growing poverty (his alcoholic father, Upton Beall Sinclair, Sr., was a whiskey wholesaler, predictably down on his luck), and then in New York, where the elder Upton sold hats while the younger began his political and literary education in earnest.<sup>6</sup> He sold his first story to the pulp magazine *Argosy* in 1891, at the age of thirteen. The next year, though technically too young to be admitted, he entered the College of the City of New York, which in the late nineteenth century had a reputation as “the poor man’s Harvard.”<sup>7</sup> Sometime around 1897, alienated in part by his father’s faith in the Tammany Hall machine, Sinclair moved into a lodging house and, still only in his late teens, began to write to earn his living while taking classes at Columbia University.<sup>8</sup> It was, he would later write, “just after the Spanish War,” and his tales of adventure in Cuba, published under such pseudonyms as “Ensign Clark Fitch” and “Lieutenant Frederick Garrison,” were popular enough to

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*American Naturalistic and Realistic Novels: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002). In 1947, following Sinclair’s propagandist/artist distinction, *The New Republic* hazarded that Farrell would “be respected more as polemicist and moralist than as a creative writer” (Harry Sylvester, “Righteous Anger,” rev. of *Literature and Morality* by James T. Farrell, *The New Republic* 117.14 [1947], 26).

<sup>4</sup> Sinclair, *Mammonart*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Sinclair, *Mammonart*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> See Lauren Coodley, *Upton Sinclair: California Socialist, Celebrity Intellectual* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2013), 4-17.

<sup>7</sup> Coodley, 20.

<sup>8</sup> See Coodley, 18-22.

sustain him until, in an epiphanic moment, he made the “wonderful discovery” of “socialism as the world-wide rebellion of the proletariat against the rule of organized and predatory capital.”<sup>9</sup> Sinclair would call it “the key to all my problems”; the conversion of Comrade Sinclair gave him “purpose” (“WL,” 592), “meaning,” and a use for his voice (“WL,” 593).

In identifying socialism as the ultimate use for his authorial voice, Sinclair insinuates himself into the ranks of the propagandists, if not those of the “ruling-class.” His body of work makes clear that he saw himself as subverting rather than escaping the inevitable propaganda of artistic economies and ideologies outlined in *Mammonart*, and as bending propagandistic communication to his own ends in using art to advocate for socialist reforms.<sup>10</sup> If Goethe’s propaganda buttresses the bourgeoisie, Sinclair’s work aims to be propaganda from below.<sup>11</sup>

Sinclair’s nearly ninety published novels include pulp adventure, religious allegory, and a pair of thinly-veiled fictionalizations of his own adulterous affairs; highly popular in their time, such works join a body of relatively more enduring novels of social

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<sup>9</sup> Upton Sinclair, “What Life Means to Me,” *Cosmopolitan* 41.6 (October 1906), 592. Hereafter abbreviated “WL” and cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>10</sup> This understanding of Sinclair’s deployment of propaganda relies (as does Sinclair, I would argue) on the silent replacement of the at once more common and more pessimistic definition of propaganda—“systematic dissemination of information, *esp. in a biased or misleading way*, in order to promote a political cause or point of view”—with the more neutral “[a]n organization, scheme, or movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine, practice, etc.” (OED, s.v. “propaganda,” 2-3, emphasis added). In appropriating strategies of “ruling-class” propaganda for his own ends, Sinclair performs a kind of information work that has ongoing purchase in communication studies; see John Arthos, “The Just Use of Propaganda (?): Ethical Criteria for Counter-Hegemonic Communication Strategies,” *Western Journal of Communication* 77.5 (2013): 582-603.

<sup>11</sup> *Mammonart* was published the year before W. E. B. Du Bois’s “Criteria of Negro Art” itself proclaimed that “all Art is propaganda and ever must be,” and argued for the “right of propaganda” “for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy” (W. E. B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” in *Crisis* [New York: Crisis Publishing Co., 1926] 296, 297). For a reading of Sinclair and Du Bois’s engagements with socialism, albeit one with perhaps a more skeptical attitude toward the term “propaganda” than either Sinclair or Du Bois demonstrate in these moments, see Mark Van Wienen, *American Socialistic Triptych: The Literary-Political Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Upton Sinclair, and W. E. B. Du Bois* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2014).

and political critique, among them *The Jungle*, a novel of the Chicago stockyards; *King Coal*, a story of industrial mining; *Oil!* (1927), a satire of the oil industry on which Paul Thomas Anderson based his 2007 film *There Will Be Blood*; and *Boston* (1928), a documentary novel of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. All prominently contain elements of what Sinclair would admit to be propaganda; by 1938, he was bemoaning the fact that tight finances had forced him to “swear off on publishing even my own propaganda books.”<sup>12</sup>

As a self-styled propagandist for the people, Sinclair follows what philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul identifies as propaganda’s basically utilitarian logic: “Whoever handles this instrument can be concerned solely with effectiveness,” he writes in his 1965 taxonomy *Propaganda*. “Ineffective propaganda is no propaganda.”<sup>13</sup> On Ellul’s reading, modern propaganda targets the individual, but only insofar as that individual is a member of a community that holds myths, motivations, and feelings in common. Such conscious and unconscious commonalities are the ground on which propaganda enacts its two chief goals: first, to “furnish[ the individual] with a complete system for explaining the world”; second, to provide “immediate incentive to action.”<sup>14</sup> For Ellul, propaganda’s ultimate aim is to achieve “an *orthopraxy*: an action that in itself, and not because of the value judgments of the person who is acting, leads directly to a goal that for the individual is not a conscious and intentional objective to be attained, but

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<sup>12</sup> Sinclair to Henry Volk, 16 August 1938, LMC 1964, Folder “1938, Aug. 16-18,” Sinclair mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), x.

<sup>14</sup> Ellul, 11. Ellul’s first goal of propaganda underwrites the opening quip in Mark Wollaeger’s *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006): “Change ‘propaganda’ to ‘ideology’ and this familiar thought would fit easily into any recent introduction to literary studies” (xi; Wollaeger is making specific reference to George Orwell’s 1941 declaration that “propaganda in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose”).

which is considered such by the propagandist.”<sup>15</sup> Such propaganda does not seek to convince its subject of the justness of its cause as much as it works to create a precise reflex action in a targeted individual who has already been interpellated into the propagandist’s system of values. In this context, the propagandist manipulates an information system within an information system: a propagandistic narrative nested within a grander ideology.

Comrade Sinclair, though, constructed his propaganda from outside the orthodoxy. If Ellul’s work makes clear that propaganda operates within nested information systems, what Sinclair accomplishes in his “propaganda books” is perhaps more properly counterpropaganda: the dissemination of information that competes with the established narrative of barons of industry and the triumph of democracy. In Mary Borden’s social fiction, I argued in chapter 1, gossip works as a mode of coterie communication that allows a subordinated population to encrypt its intimate, internal communications so that they appear to the outside world as cybernetic noise. Sinclair’s proletarian propaganda operates within an importantly related set of terms. Just as Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that some forms of gossip turn their dismissal by patriarchal powers to their own advantage, becoming “a resource for the subordinated” under cover of frivolity, the propaganda contained in such novels as *The Jungle* eschews the high literary style of Shakespeare and Goethe, blue-eyed boys of the ruling class.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Sinclair’s

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<sup>15</sup> Ellul, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, 5. Mark Wollaeger further underlines the structural echoes between Spacks’s account of gossip and this chapter’s Ellul-informed picture of propaganda when he reads Ellul as “[f]inding a use value for negative affect” in seeing propaganda as “giv[ing] citizens increasingly deprived of traditional forms of support, such as church, family, or village life, precisely what they need: personal involvement in public events and a justification for otherwise useless feelings” (Wollaeger, xii).

propaganda declares itself as such, and busies itself with recording the unstylish realities of the proletarian experience.

In that process, Sinclair relies on two of Ellul's propagandist's most important tools. Sinclair's didactic fiction is, first, the work of a proletarian propagandist who "concern[s] himself above all with the needs of those whom he wishes to reach": his socialism dictates that everyone, not just the laborers whose concrete needs are not being met, stands to gain from a new political order.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Sinclair's work relies heavily on appeals to sympathy, which he [is Sinclair the agent here?] envisions as one of a set of possible "psychological 'mechanisms' that permit the propagandist to know more or less precisely that the individual will respond in a certain way to a certain stimulus."<sup>18</sup> That is, insofar as Sinclair's aim is political activation, his novels employ a discourse of sympathy intended to elicit a specific psychological response to a narrative stimulus.

Sinclair's key novels of the American labor movement, *The Jungle* and *King Coal*, marked his rise to literary and political prominence in the first two decades of the century, and it is chiefly to these novels that this chapter looks to read Sinclair's noisy interventions into literary sympathy. Each novel has at its heart a protagonist's journey toward sympathy with the working class; each journey toward sympathy is, I will argue, fundamentally figured as a process of perceptual Bildung in which a character comes to understand a political reality through phenomenological education. Examining the soundscape of each novel, as well as the calls to fellow-feeling and social justice that appear in Sinclair's political and aesthetic statements, this chapter will argue that Sinclair set his sights on a version of Ellul's orthopraxy inflected not only by his own socialist

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<sup>17</sup> Ellul, 52

<sup>18</sup> Ellul, 36.

beliefs but also by aesthetic and moral elements descended from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of sympathy. Sinclair's own commentary on the use of sympathy proposes it as a tool by which the socially-conscious author might both inspire identification between reader and working-class character and charge the reader with bettering the lives of the real-world working class for which his characters stand. In this, Sinclair follows in a tradition of literary sympathy that relies at once on the imaginative extension of the reader into the character's situation—properly empathy—and the evaluative distance between reader and character that allows ethical conclusions and action to take place safely outside the realm of self-interest.<sup>19</sup> Important features of Sinclair's literary noise, I contend, are imbricated with the terms of Sinclairean sympathy: just as the latter requires both emotional intimacy and intellectual distance, the former is employed as both narrative irritant (the unfamiliar shrieks of slaughter-bound animals, the suspenseful groans of a coal mine's load-bearing support beams) and sympathetic bond (the familiar sounds of traffic and machinery, plangent cries of pain and sorrow).<sup>20</sup> Yet although Sinclair's dedication to class propaganda remains a constant, *The Jungle* and *King Coal* occupy different positions with regard to literary sympathy. The novels' differences bespeak a development in Sinclair's implementation of structures of sympathy rooted in noise—what I will term sensational sympathy—following the unsatisfactory public response to *The Jungle*.

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<sup>19</sup> For a critique of the idea that sympathy for fictional characters might extend to real people, see Gregory Currie, "The Paradox of Caring: Fiction and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. Mette Horjit and Sue Laver (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997): 63-77.

<sup>20</sup> Existing work on audition and propaganda focuses largely on the use of radio communication in propaganda projects (see, for example, Laura De Giorgi, "Communication Technology and Mass Propaganda in Republican China," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 13 (2014): 305-29); for recent work on propaganda and noise, see Giuseppe Fidotta's worthwhile "Ruling the Colonies with Sound: Documentary, Technology and Noise in *Cronache dell'Impero*," *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 4.1 (2016): 111-25.

I. "SO VERY HUMAN IN THEIR PROTESTS": SYMPATHY FOR *THE JUNGLE*

In 1904, Chicago's Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America went on strike to win higher wages and the institution of a minimum wage. The Employers' Association, headed by J. Ogden Armour, hired black strikebreakers and, after a riot and the diplomatic intercession of settlement movement leader Jane Addams, the strike ended in failure.<sup>21</sup> Inspired by the news from the Midwest and funded by the socialist weekly *Appeal to Reason*, Sinclair traveled to the Union Stock Yards, Chicago's South Side meatpacking district. There, he spent seven weeks researching the working and living conditions of stockyard and factory workers in "Packingtown." The novelization of this research, *The Jungle*, was published serially in the *Appeal* between February and November of 1905 and as a book by Doubleday early the following year.<sup>22</sup>

*The Jungle's* thirty-one chapters tell the story of Jurgis Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant who brings his family to Chicago, where (he has been told) a friend of a friend has made his fortune. Jurgis finds work in the yards and makes enough money to pay for his wedding to his fifteen-year-old fiancée Ona, but as expenses related to the tumbledown house they have been conned into buying mount, every member of the household is forced to find work in the stockyards. The family slowly succumbs to workplace injuries and the illnesses attendant upon their poor living conditions and adulterated food. Their house is repossessed, and Jurgis spends time in the city jail for attacking the man who has forced Ona to have sex with him to retain her job. While

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<sup>21</sup> See James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in The Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> See "A Note on the Text" in Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, ed. Clare Virginia Eby (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), xi. Hereafter abbreviated *J* and cited parenthetically by page number.

Jurgis is imprisoned, Ona's stepbrother Stanislovas is eaten alive by rats at his factory job, and her cousin Marija is forced into prostitution to support the family. Ona dies in childbirth the day Jurgis is released; the newborn soon dies; and the couple's first child, a toddler, drowns in the waterlogged street in front of their boardinghouse. Abandoning his few surviving relatives, Jurgis flees to the countryside and lives for a time as a seasonal worker on nearby farms, but when winter comes he is forced back into the city, where he becomes first a con artist, then an agent of and strikebreaker for the local political machine, then once again homeless and destitute. At this nadir, having hustled into the warm tent of a political rally to forestall dying of exposure on a cold Chicago night, Jurgis discovers socialism. Four concluding chapters largely abandon Jurgis as focalizer in favor of lengthy orations, intensive political instruction by one "Comrade Ostrinski," and a free-form debate between a handful of socialist acolytes, most notably a Fletcherite former philosophy professor and an itinerant ex-preacher.<sup>23</sup> The novel closes by predicting a Socialist Party sweep of upcoming local elections and socialism's inevitable rise to prominence in national politics.<sup>24</sup>

Writing for *Cosmopolitan Magazine's* series "What Life Means to Me" in October 1906, Sinclair claimed to have composed *The Jungle* "from the inside," describing the life "of his fellows" with an eye to their relief as a man on a sinking ship

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Brewster Folsom explores the consequences of this ending more extensively than the reading to follow will, concluding that "Sinclair's search for a way to conclude...led away from engagement with (even sympathy for) working class life, and away from a potentially interesting complex vision of the interrelations between historic process and the fate of individuals." ("Upton Sinclair's Escape from *The Jungle*: The Narrative Strategy and Suppressed Conclusion of America's First Proletarian Novel," *Prospects* 4 [1979], 262.) Some of this departure involved Sinclair more aggressively inserting his own voice into the proceedings: Kevin Mattson notes that for a time Sinclair himself adopted Fletcherism—a belief that only frantically and thoroughly chewing both food and drink could unlock their full nutritive potential—as part of a lengthy and fraught search for a "healthy" diet. (*Upton Sinclair and the Other American Century* [Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006], 77.)

<sup>24</sup> Farrell writes that this closing optimism marks the novel as having been written before the Russian Revolution of 1905, in contradistinction to London's decidedly dystopian 1908 *The Iron Heel* (see "Return to *The Jungle*," *The New Republic* 115.18 [1946], 603).

“thinks of getting ashore, and of getting his brothers and comrades ashore—and then there will be time enough for art” (“WL,” 594). As Farrell argues in a fortieth-anniversary review in *The New Republic*, to judge *The Jungle* on the depth of its characterizations and the subtlety of its dialogue is “to apply to this book the criteria which we apply in judging novels which deal with private lives”; though Sinclair’s affective energy is oriented toward individual characters, those characters are constructed as figures for a broader social group, his proletarian “fellows.”<sup>25</sup> Sinclair claims that he, “alone of all men who had education and a voice, had been down into the social pit, and had lived the life of the proletarian,” having for a time secluded himself, with his wife and baby, in relative penury in a cabin in the woods: “And so I knew, with a knowledge that no man could impeach, the cause and the meaning of all the evils that are raging in modern society” (“WL,” 593). Sinclair’s grandiose but sincere claim here is that he is the only person—out of all the “doctors and wise men, the scholars and statesmen of the world”—positioned to use his platform and experience to give voice to the proletariat and the lie to ruling-class propaganda (“WL,” 593). His extraction from the “social pit” he ascribes to his fellow workers: “Is there any way that I could escape from the memory of the men and women and children whom I left behind me, down there in the social pit—from their wan and hungry faces, from their tears and cries of despair? It is upon the faces of these people that I climbed out; they made themselves into a ladder for me” (“WL,” 595).

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<sup>25</sup> Farrell, 603. Perhaps the most self-consciously stylish episode, a page-long musing on individual fate and free will framed through the consciousness of a hog going to slaughter (on which more below), apparently had more purchase than intended; Clare Virginia Eby notes that *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair* specifies that the passage was meant to be a “hilarious farce” (*J*, 37n8).

Dantean journey complete, Sinclair turns his attention to those very “cries of despair.” However much we credit Sinclair’s claim to proletarian solidarity, it is clear that his major investment is in the measurable improvement of the lives of the American working class. London, writing in the *Appeal*, provides the most optimistic, if ideologically tone-deaf, view of what *The Jungle* might accomplish: “Here it is at last!... The ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ of wage slavery! Comrade Sinclair’s book, ‘The Jungle!’ and what ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ did for black slaves, ‘The Jungle’ has a large chance to do for the wage slaves of today.”<sup>26</sup> It is equally clear that Sinclair and London’s idea of the novel’s message diverged rather widely from the realities of its reception.<sup>27</sup> Appearing squarely in the middle of the Progressive Era, *The Jungle* helped solidify a groundswell of support not for labor reform but for the Pure Food and Drug Act, approved 30 June 1906, an act “[f]or preventing the manufacture, sale, or transportation of adulterated or misbranded or poisonous or deleterious foods, drugs, medicines, and liquors[.]”<sup>28</sup> The impact of *The Jungle* and the Pure Food and Drug Act on the public consciousness is not to be underestimated. Charlotte Perkins Gilman satirizes the response in light verse in the

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<sup>26</sup> Jack London, letter to *The Appeal to Reason*, 18 November 1905, ctd. in Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992), 30. Clare Eby writes that muckraking as a genre owes much to the nineteenth-century sentimental novel. Michael Brewster Folsom has marked Sinclair’s departure from a radical aesthetic that valorized urban poverty, focusing instead on his inclination toward “sentimental abstractions” that emphasize the moral certainty of his work despite the graphic detail with which he records the horrors of life in the stockyards (239). Mattson and Anthony Arthur (*Radical Innocent: Upton Sinclair* [New York: Random House, 2006]) both compare *The Jungle* to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in their Sinclair biographies.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that after *The Jungle*’s Doubleday publication Sinclair acknowledged that his attempt at replicating Stowe’s success was a failure, though his bloviating justification—that he had not “had as good an opportunity as Mrs. Stowe had,” that his “task was so much harder” as “the life of the modern wage-slave is...so much less picturesque than that of the chattel-slave of fifty years ago,” and that the relatively pleasant life of the black slave, who “had a bright and happy childhood” and “generally lived in the country” meant that his narrative had “so much less opportunity for color and brightness, for humor and adventure” than his novel would have required to carry a popular message about labor rather than about food safety—calls into question the apparent humility and self-awareness of that admission (“WL,” 593).

<sup>28</sup> “Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906,” last modified 20 May 2009, <http://www.fda.gov/RegulatoryInformation/Legislation/ucm148690.htm>.

14 June 1906 issue of *The Independent*: “We submit,” she argues of Americans’ blasé attitude toward certain aspects of public safety, “to be killed by our railroads,”

But we are a little particular  
About the food we eat.  
It is not so much that it kills us—  
We are used to being killed;  
But we like to know what fills us  
When we pay for being filled.

[...]

Let there be death in the dinner,  
Subtle and unforeseen,  
But O, Mr. Packer, in packing our death,  
Won’t you please to pack it clean!<sup>29</sup>

Other responses were less concerned with the potential hypocrisy of the public outcry.

Among the promotional messages that open the *Cosmopolitan* issue in which Sinclair’s

“What Life Means to Me” appears is a full-page advertisement for the Chicago-based

Quaker Oats Company that touts their rolled oats as “contain[ing] only the finest quality

of selected, pure, white oats” and assures the reader that “the process of manufacture is

the result of years of constant progress; the Quaker Mills are models of cleanliness and

purity.”<sup>30</sup> As Lori Anne Loeb has established, purity—in itself and as a cypher for moral

progress—was already “the almost obsessive focus of the Victorian advertisement.”<sup>31</sup> But

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<sup>29</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “I Would Fain Die a Dry Death,” *The Independent* 60.3002 (1906), 1401.

<sup>30</sup> “Quaker Oats,” *Cosmopolitan* 41.6 (1906), 532.

<sup>31</sup> Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 57.

given its contexts, both temporal and typographical, it is hard to see such insistence on the purity and genuineness of not just the ingredients but the facilities and machinery that process them as purely a reaction to snake oil salesmen and the taint of sin. As Sinclair famously quips some 60 pages later, “I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach” (“WL,” 594).

It is not difficult to see why *The Jungle* had such an impact on the public imagination. Particularly in the narrative’s early chapters, Sinclair goes into great detail in describing the wretched food quality controls of the stockyards. Inspectors looking for tubercular pork are easily distracted from their task; chemicals used to cure beef for canning are recycled endlessly; and the old meat and other refuse of the factory floor that swills around with it is periodically strained out and packaged with the rest of the product. When the workers strike for better wages and black strikebreakers are shipped in by the thousands, Sinclair, in a break from his own insistence on a sympathetic rendering of laborers, seems to relish describing the dissipated lives of his own fictional scabs:

Every night there were stabbings and shootings...and with the night there began a saturnalia of debauchery—scenes such as never before had been witnessed in America. And as the women were the dregs from the brothels of Chicago, and the men were for the most part ignorant country negroes, the nameless diseases of vice were soon rife; and this where food was being handled which was sent out to every corner of the civilized world. (*J*, 261)

Here it is explicitly the food quality concern and not the wellbeing of the factory worker that Sinclair chooses to emphasize.<sup>32</sup> Even when the laborer in question is not a black strikebreaker, impersonal scenes of factory malfeasance arouse disgust with tainted products more readily than sympathy with the white “wage slave.” In what Eby identifies as “the only passage not confirmed by government inspection,” Sinclair tells of men working in rooms full of steam among open vats set at floor level. The danger for these workers, he writes, “was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out into the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard” (*J*, 97). A public faced with the threat of unintentional cannibalism might be forgiven for passing over sympathy with the horrors of Jurgis’s life in favor of self-interested outrage, even if the bulk of the novel concerns itself exclusively with the experience of being an immigrant laborer in the stockyards.

If Sinclair aimed to write the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of “wage slavery,” and if readers from Franklin D. Roosevelt down reacted to *The Jungle* as muckraking, more recent scholarship has had a harder time categorizing the work. Howard E. McCurdy, an expert on public policy and administration, writes that social scientists have embraced it because as a text written “after [its author’s] excursions into the worlds of professional

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<sup>32</sup> In his history of Helicon Hall, Sinclair’s communal living experiment of 1906-1907, Lawrence Kaplan notes that the “obvious racist attitudes” of the participants were “consistent with the mainstream of the Progressive movement” (“A Utopia during the Progressive Era: The Helicon Home Colony 1906-1907,” *American Studies* 25.2 [1984], 63). In 1930, responding to a pitch letter from Norman Thomas, co-executive director of the League for Industrial Democracy (the student affiliate of which would, in 1960, become Students for a Democratic Society), Sinclair wrote, “I never write anything about the Negro question. I do not know much about race, and give all my thought to economics” (Sinclair to Thomas, 21 February 1930, LMC 1964, Box 6, Folder 20, Sinclair mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries). Sinclair insisted again in the following year that he was “not in the least bit interested in race”: “I hardly ever know whether a Jew is a Jew until somebody tells me. For example, I have no idea whether you are a Jew or not, or whether your wife is. What I am interested in are those human troubles which I believe can be immediately remedied [sic]—the economic” (Sinclair to Charlie [?], 27 February 1931, LMC 1964, Box 12, Folder 22, Sinclair mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries).

scientific scholarship” it “clearly reflects problems as the textbooks describe them.”<sup>33</sup>

Likewise Kevin Mattson, whose 2006 monograph is one of a scant handful of recent biographical Sinclair studies, “read[s] Sinclair’s novels as political tracts, not as exercises in literary expression.”<sup>34</sup> Other scholars resist this inclination to dismiss Sinclair’s literary importance. Michael Brewster Folsom notes that *The Jungle* was the first American novel described as “proletarian literature”—though it was Sinclair himself who declared it such—and pronounces it “a major text of American social fiction.”<sup>35</sup> Christopher Taylor, remarking that Sinclair’s novels “have all but disappeared from academic discourse” despite his great contemporary influence, argues that *The Jungle* should be taken neither as journalistic muckraking nor as naturalism in the tradition of Frank Norris or Theodore Dreiser.<sup>36</sup> Rather, Taylor writes, in its active criticism of the existing economic order, *The Jungle* most nearly resembles the French *roman à thèse*, of which the “most famous American example is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”<sup>37</sup> Sinclair thus latterly achieves (in academic recognition of *The Jungle*’s intent and method, if not in practical political influence) the relation to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to which he and London aspired.

If Sinclair’s work is inescapably in the didactic orbit of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and for all that it is explicitly an exercise in propaganda, his social fiction has its own very specific relation to the production of sympathy and ethical conviction. *The Jungle* is no sentimental novel—Jurgis is at once an everyman and, as this chapter will discuss in detail, a negative example of the capacity for sympathetic extension for much of the

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<sup>33</sup> Howard E. McCurdy, “Fiction, Phenomenology, and Public Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 33.1 (1973), 52-53.

<sup>34</sup> Mattson, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Folsom points to Sinclair’s claim in “What Life Means to Me” that “[*The Jungle*’s] publication marks the beginning of a proletarian literature in America” (“WL,” 594, ctd. in Folsom, 263n2).

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Taylor, “‘Inescapably Propaganda’: Re-Classifying Upton Sinclair outside the Naturalist Tradition,” *Studies in American Naturalism* 2.2 (2007), 166.

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, 169.

novel, changing only when he has himself experienced the full spectrum of Packingtown's horrors. For all that the novel wants to inspire ethical action, the relief of the proletariat, it envisions a similar obstacle to sympathy standing in the way of the bourgeois observer Sinclair imagines as his reader. In response, Sinclair's narrative is organized around phenomenological experience, as though to provide for his audience the same education responsible for his protagonist's growth into sympathy. Tracing noise in *The Jungle* reveals not only the documentary realities of life in Packingtown in 1904, but also an experience of that life characterized as much by growth into nuanced perception of sensory information as by growth into political awareness.

## II. THE NOVEL OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Jurgis's family's first experience of the stockyards takes place from a distance, but nonetheless is both immersive and highly instructive, and worth examining in detail. Their initial impression of Chicago is not visual, but olfactory:

A full hour before the party reached the city they had begun to note the perplexing changes in the atmosphere.... And along with the thickening smoke they began to notice another circumstance, a strange, pungent odor. They were not sure that it was unpleasant, this odor; some might have called it sickening, but their taste in odors was not developed, and they were only sure that it was curious.... It was now no longer something far-off and faint, that you caught in whiffs; you could literally taste it, as well as smell it—you could take hold of it, almost, and examine it at your leisure.

They were divided in their opinions about it. It was an elemental odor, raw and crude; it was rich, almost rancid, sensual, and strong. There were some who drank it in as if it were an intoxicant; there were others who put their handkerchiefs to their faces. (*J*, 27)

This liminal moment sees two important movements: first, the train's gradual approach to the city, which Sinclair marks by rendering the city's odor in increasingly substantial and specific terms. The scent of the slaughterhouse is at first mention merely a "perplexing chang[e]" in the air that can be confused with the "thickening smoke" of general urban pollution. The atmospheric change can next be identified as a "strange, pungent odor"; finally, it transitions from the olfactory to the gustatory ("you could literally taste it"), becoming abstractly material as they travel into it ("you could take hold of it, almost"). Sinclair's characters thus experience the city for the first time through secondary sensory modalities that combine to provide a sort of spatial reasoning—it is clear that they are getting closer and closer to the source of the smell—even as such sensation confuses rather than clarifies the qualities of the smell itself.

The passage's more complex second movement is that of Sinclair's characters toward an evaluative understanding of the odor. For Jurgis's family, this movement amounts to a phenomenological education. A distinction from sensory neuroscience pertains here. Whereas sensation is an electrochemical reaction to a stimulus based on sensory information received and processed in the present (the train passengers' recognition that there is an odor), perception—the brain's processing and interpretation of sensory information in order to come to an understanding about one's environment—is based not only on that experience of the moment but on a history of experiences that vary

across individuals, cultures, and times.<sup>38</sup> All of the train passengers agree that the approaching odor is strong, but they cannot immediately determine whether or not it is unpleasant; “some,” Sinclair writes, “might have called it sickening,” but they can only be certain of its strangeness. As they approach the city and have the chance to “examine it at [their] leisure,” evaluation seems to become harder rather than easier, description more nebulous. The scent is “elemental,” “raw and crude,” “rich, almost rancid, sensual, and strong”—an account of something vital, certainly, but (aside perhaps from “rancid”) a collection of adjectives that could describe a painting or a romantic hero as easily as an odor. Yet this reaction does not read as an affirmation of Jurgis’s family’s radical innocence. Rather, Sinclair here introduces the stockyards as a place containing such radically new sensory information that any previous experience is insufficient support for a sensation to rise to the level of perception; the stimulus itself highlights the inability of an uninitiated individual to process his or her sense experience and derive information from it.

If odor introduces the stockyards through sensory noise, it is sound that begins to register the stockyards as an institution based on another perceptual sublime—the almost inconceivably vast destruction of life. As the train draws closer to Chicago, its passengers “be[come] aware of another strange thing”:

This, too, like the odor, was a thing elemental; it was a sound, a sound made up of ten thousand little sounds. You scarcely noticed it at first—it sunk into your consciousness, a vague disturbance, a trouble. It was like the murmuring of the bees in the spring, the

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<sup>38</sup> See John M. Henshaw, *A Tour of the Senses: How Your Brain Interprets the World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012), esp. 183-185.

whisperings of the forest; it suggested endless activity, the rumblings of a world in motion. It was only by an effort that one could realize that it was made by animals, that it was the distant lowing of ten thousand cattle, the distant grunting of ten thousand swine. (*J*, 27)

At a distance the sound of the slaughterhouse can evoke the pastoral, the “murmuring of the bees in the spring, the whisperings of the forest” suggesting activity that accords with a natural plan.<sup>39</sup> But Sinclair undermines the bucolic idyll even before it begins, instead describing the fractal “sound made up of ten thousand little sounds” as sinister white noise that works itself into one’s consciousness as “a trouble.” This perversion of the pastoral is, in part, a matter of scale: there is a “world in motion” ahead of them in which the “endless activity” is that of slaughter.<sup>40</sup> Sinclair’s fable of bees turned Fordist dystopia introduces the “lowing” and “grunting” of some twenty thousand condemned beasts that must form the backdrop of much of the story to come, though the sound goes unmentioned as the novel develops.

Sinclair’s explicit work on the sonic environment of the stockyards is expansive and varied, but in the wake of his above introduction of a sort of phenomenological *bildung* of immigrant labor it is worth pausing over this moment of background noise.

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<sup>39</sup> Much later, after Ona and his children die, Jurgis is granted a pastoral interlude, complete with “a herd of cows, and a meadow full of daisies... hedgerows set thick with June roses... little birds singing in the trees” (*J*, 204). Even so, he is unable to survive outside the city, and it is his inevitable return to the urban scene of concentrated human injustice that underwrites the conversion to socialism that marks the end of the novel and carries the weight of Sinclair’s explicit political rhetoric.

<sup>40</sup> Sinclair’s “world in motion” recalls the fact that the publication of *The Jungle* is less than a decade shy of the first appearance of Carl Sandburg’s “Chicago Poems,” in which the poet assigns the city the sobriquet “Hog Butcher for the World” (Carl Sandburg, “Chicago,” *Poetry* 3.6 [1914], 191). If it is evident that Sandburg’s portrait of a “wicked,” “crooked,” “brutal” city is more sentimental than critical, the two share an interest in the city’s auditory footprint (Sandburg’s “stormy” city “with lifted head singing,” “Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil”) (Sandburg, 191-92).

With it, Sinclair introduces both an otherwise-unrecognized sensory constant in the stockyard workers' lives and a conceptual double for the workers themselves—and not just because the men might sometimes be canned along with the animals. Rather, a close identification between the stockyards' animal and human victims builds over the entire body of the text, revealing both the dehumanization of Packingtown laborers and the novel's complex investment in a sympathy that asks its reader to feel with another while never pulling away from the fact that the life of that other may be so unimaginable as to make that ethical imperative an impossible thought experiment. What is it like to be a hog? The relation between laborer and beast is built on noise, which, in Sinclair's hands, functions both as narrative irritant—calling attention to itself even as its very structure repels close engagement—and phenomenological bond.

Inside Durham's—Sinclair's stand-in for the behemoth Armour & Company—Jurgis's party, freshly arrived in Chicago, joins a larger tour group to witness the slaughter of hogs for the first time. Amid a description of hogs being methodically hauled to the ceiling by one leg, bled, and submerged in boiling water, Sinclair inserts what he would later claim to have been parodic characterizations of the doomed animals: "Each one of these hogs was a separate creature.... And each of them had an individuality of his own, a will of his own, a hope and a heart's desire.... And trusting and strong in faith he had gone about his business, the while a black shadow hung over him and a horrid Fate waited in his pathway" (*J*, 37). Indeed, this moment, complete with a lament for the "hog-squeal of the universe" and for the apparent absence of both "a heaven for hogs" and "a god of hogs...to whom these hog-squeals and agonies had a meaning," could be taken easily for pure farce (*J*, 37). As in Mary Borden's war writing, the pastoral

possibility is raised (“the murmuring of bees in the spring”) only to be exposed as a scene of violence more horrific for its once peaceful appearance. And just as Borden’s ultimate concern is with her patients and not with the animals that her rhetoric transmutes them into, Sinclair is not, in this moment, constructing an animal rights manifesto. Yet while Sinclair’s novel invites a quick dismissal of the apparent narrative silliness of his foray into hog cosmology—even in ignorance of his subsequent remarks about his own seriousness—it simultaneously militates against a simple reading either of the role of the hogs or of the novel’s philosophizing over them. Were we to understand the passage as one of pure dismissive humor at the expense of truly expendable beasts, *The Jungle* could even then be read to be manufacturing a moment of instruction in the minute workings of Sinclairean sympathy: in a novel that asks its readers to suspend disbelief long enough to be horrified at the idea of a drunken child being eaten alive by rats, is a hog’s existential crisis really so ridiculous?

For it is horror at the spectacle of the destruction of life that comes to the fore in *The Jungle*’s highly-researched and technical first description of butchery. Moving the hogs through the production line results in an enormous volley of squealing: “The uproar was appalling,” Sinclair writes, “perilous to the ear-drums; one feared there was too much sound for the room to hold—that the walls must give way or the ceiling crack.... [T]here would be a momentary lull, and then a fresh outburst, louder than ever, surging up to a deafening climax” (*J*, 36). Noise pushes into the narrative here as an occupant of physical space, its degree of loudness lending it a sense of threatening bulk within the enclosed area (the sound is “too much,” not “too loud”)—one kind of volume reinscribed as another. This impersonal description (“one feared”) is punctuated by an account of the

horrified reactions of the process's spectators: "It was too much for some of the visitors—the men would look at each other, laughing nervously, and the women would stand with hands clenched, and the blood rushing to their faces, and the tears starting in their eyes" (*J*, 36). Sinclair peppers his account with *woulds*—the sound of the hogs' protest "would" drop and then renew, the men "would look at each other," confirming their mutual discomfort, the women "would stand with hands clenched," blood rushing upward to their cheeks as it rushes downward and out of the throats of the stuck pigs—that give the scene a sense of habitual action; these moments are repeated endlessly, down to the hogs' squeals and the men's nervous laughter, as tens of thousands of animals pass through the slaughterhouse.<sup>41</sup> The noise of the (dis)assembly line that Jurgis and his family hear from the train into Chicago, then, contains the feedback of its spectators; to the constant, if unmentioned, drone of Packingtown is added the grace note of human reaction.

I will return below to the complexity of the sympathetic impulse *The Jungle* records. First, I want to pursue a point I began to make above: that the wonderfully "separate creatures" that are the Packingtown hogs and cattle are importantly aligned with the Packingtown workers—Sinclair's proletarian "fellows," the "wage slaves" his novel is meant to emancipate. Again of the hogs, Sinclair writes, "they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so very human in their protests" (*J*, 36). Pace Sinclair, much of the novel's work in this regard could be characterized more accurately

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen Darwall points out that one important mechanism for "emotional contagion"—the ability to be aware of feelings occurring in others—is facial mimicry, at evidence here both in the women's blushing and the men's nervous echoes of the pigs' ejaculations ("Empathy, Sympathy, Care," *Philosophical Studies* 89.2/3 [1998], 265). On mimicry's role in emotional contagion, see also Janet Beavin Bavelas et al., "Motor Mimicry as Primitive Empathy," in *Empathy and Its Development*, ed. Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987): 319-34.

as a portrayal of humans as being so very hog-like. The connection is reinforced in small ways throughout the novel: on his arrival, Jurgis's new acquaintances "told him stories about the breaking down of men" (*J*, 23), where "breaking down" likewise describes the process of butchering animals into smaller parts; Packingtown residents are referred to as "human creature[s]" (*J*, 54); in jail for beating Ona's rapist, Jurgis decries the tyrants who "had ground him beneath their heel...devoured all his substance...crushed and cowed his whole family" (*J*, 155).<sup>42</sup> A short time after arriving in Chicago, when Jurgis and his family discover the full extent of the confidence scheme through which they have "bought" and will eventually lose their home, Sinclair quite closely echoes the language of his "hilarious farce" of a pig heaven that doesn't await the beast who finds that "a horrid Fate wait[s] in his pathway" despite his "innocen[ce]" and "trus[t]." "As if in a flash of lightning they saw themselves," Sinclair writes of Jurgis's family, "victims of a relentless fate, cornered, trapped in the grip of destruction. All the fair structure of their hopes came crashing about their ears" (*J*, 69). Finding themselves trapped (here by "fate," though Jurgis will later learn to call it "the ghastly charnel-house of capitalist destructiveness" [*J*, 321]), their protests fill the room in which Grandmother Majauszkiene has been explaining their fate to them in a voice "like the croaking of some dismal raven": "Teta Elzbieta broke the silence with a wail, and Marija began to wring her hands and sob" (*J*, 69). Their protests will be of no use: not only will the family lose the house and all the money they have sunk into it, but the building which has been the direct cause of the demise of some of its inhabitants and hastened the others toward death will be painted and sold to another family who will, after similar economic and affective investments in their "new" home, fall behind on payments and be evicted, and so on in an

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<sup>42</sup> See *OED*, s.v., "break, v.," 2b.

unbroken line. Despite their cacophonous wailing, the family fails to elicit a sympathetic reaction from the con men, or from anyone else who might, at any point in the novel's litany of tragic injustice, intervene on their behalf. Jurgis can no more escape from the fatal graft and greed of Packingtown unharmed than even the most human of hogs might tug its leg from a chain and trot out of the slaughterhouse.

If I have paused at length over a short span in a relatively large novel, it is because these pages, which introduce *The Jungle*'s characters to the terms of their new existence and the novel's audience to the realities of life in Sinclair's urban jungle, establish a constellation of relations—between auditor and protestor, between witness to and object of economic exploitation, between newly minted and longstanding victim—that organizes the way both *The Jungle* and *King Coal* portray life in “the social pit.” Sinclair's ethical imperative to emancipate the “wage slave” promotes and is predicated on emotional investment in the life of the economic other. The investment modeled thus far, in the slaughterhouse tour participants' empathetic mimicry of the hogs' distress, is incomplete: there is no indication that anyone's horror at the hogs' deaths will have a lasting effect on either their feelings or their behaviors; Durham's proceeds as before.<sup>43</sup> The “men upon the floor,” those workers for whom butchery is (or approaches) a livelihood, are blasé: “Neither squeals of hogs nor tears of visitors made any difference to them” (*J*, 36). But this does not read as a failure of empathy *per se*; Sinclair is not in the business of rousing the proletariat to take sympathy on itself, but of inspiring others—think of Borden's writing noise across English class divisions—to feel with the Packingtown workers as they experience horror on horror. Indeed, Sinclair considers

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<sup>43</sup> In this context, the novel's reception reveals an uncomfortable reversal: whereas the real-world Durham's could not in fact proceed as before, the reception of the novel manifested none of the sympathetic reaction for labor that the novel proceeds to model at length.

himself a model of this empathetic extension. In “What Life Means to Me,” he writes that in constructing *The Jungle* he was “attempt[ing] to combine the best of two widely different schools; to put the content of [Percy Bysshe] Shelley into the form of [Émile] Zola” (“WL,” 594). The “traditional” realist novel, he argues, is often the work of an author who “resemble[s] a doctor who is too much absorbed in his study of the case to sympathize with the patient’s desire to escape from his agony” (“WL,” 594). If by criticizing the doctor’s “absorp[tion] in his study” Sinclair means to censure a preoccupation with style, he is at least not a hypocrite—*The Jungle* demonstrates little in the way of artistic flair. Rather, in turning away from the “middle-class” realism of authors who “do not feel obliged to share in the emotions of their characters,” Sinclair underscores the importance of sympathy to his own project (“WL,” 594).

### III. SENSATIONAL SYMPATHY: “KNOWING WITHOUT THE ASKING”

*The Jungle* is invested from its beginning in describing Jurgis’s development from innocent, optimistic immigrant laborer to battered “wage slave.” As we have seen, this takes, in part, the form of phenomenological *bildung*, Jurgis’s education in the phenomenological world of the stockyards culminating in a great familiarity with and ability to interpret sensory input that was, at first blush, “perplexing.” And the night he discovers socialism it is because, haunting the cold city streets, he “saw red lights flaring and heard the thumping of a bass-drum...and he made for the place on the run—knowing without the asking that it meant a political meeting,” and that a political meeting means a warm place to nap (*J*, 270). Bound up with this phenomenological process through much

of the novel is Jurgis's concurrent education in sympathy—a term Sinclair uses liberally, though not always optimistically, with respect to his main character.

Jurgis begins his time in Chicago as a brash believer in his own exceptionalism: faced with “stories to make your flesh creep” about the decay of stockyard laborers, Sinclair writes that Jurgis “could not even imagine how it would feel to be beaten. ‘That is well enough for men like you,’ he would say, ‘*silpnas* [weakling], puny fellows—but my back is broad’” (*J*, 23). Jurgis's lack of sympathy is indistinguishable from his inability to imaginatively extend himself into the sensory world of the other—to “imagine how it would feel” to be something other than broad-backed and high-spirited. The same goes for his introduction to the idea of union action: “they were trying their best to force a lessening of the pace, for there were some, they said, who could not keep up with it, whom it was killing. But Jurgis had no sympathy with ideas such as this—he could do the work himself, and so could the rest of them, he declared, if they were good for anything” (*J*, 58). Jurgis is told that his fellow laborers are actually dying because of working conditions he finds it easy to endure, and rather than expressing sympathy with the idea that those conditions might change he turns their physical inability to work at an accelerated pace into a character deficit—“so could the rest of them...if they were good for anything”; not being good for anything, they may as well die.

In his recent *Literature and Social Justice: Protest Novels, Cognitive Politics, and Social Criticism*, Mark Bracher identifies this tendency to ignore situational determinants of “life outcomes” as a consequence of the “autonomy schema,” a faulty model of thought that suggests that character traits, independent of any external pressure, are

determinative of an individual's success or failure.<sup>44</sup> Bracher calls on critics to see literature as capable of effecting “socially transformative psychological changes in readers”—in this case, as presenting counterarguments to the false perceptions involved in the autonomy schema by providing repeated examples of external forces that overpower any individual's control over his or her destiny.<sup>45</sup> Bracher himself sees this potential as chiefly unrealized, and requiring a robust body of “schema criticism” to unlock it; his monograph is dedicated to outlining a method for such criticism based in attending to the way protest novels can be understood to correct cognitive structures that lead to social injustice.

Even if Bracher's study is ultimately aspirational, his framework is useful. The cognitive schemas that give rise to general stereotypes are, on Bracher's reading, composed of “exemplars” and “prototypes” of which literature is a great source.<sup>46</sup> Bracher maintains that literature “engages readers in... processes that psychologists have found to be necessary for correcting faulty and harmful cognitive schemas” by encouraging them to “repeatedly perfor[m] more adequate routines for processing information about other people”—by demonstrating, over and over, that character is not determinative of circumstance.<sup>47</sup> For Bracher, habits of mind formed by the reading of social justice novels can thus incline readers toward real-world ethical action, while the reverse, “Jurgis's pride in getting a job, [and] his contempt for men who don't get jobs” translates directly into “readers' admiration for Jurgis, and their indifference toward the

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<sup>44</sup> Mark Bracher, *Literature and Social Justice: Protest Novels, Cognitive Politics, and Schema Criticism* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2013), 94.

<sup>45</sup> Bracher, ix.

<sup>46</sup> Bracher, xii.

<sup>47</sup> Bracher, xiii.

jobless.”<sup>48</sup> *The Jungle* demonstrates as much on its own, as Jurgis’s own education in sympathy begins in watching and listening to his father once he, too, takes up work in the yards: “Jurgis found it a striking confirmation of what the men all said, that his father had been at work only two days before he came home as bitter as any of them, and cursing Durham’s with all the power of his soul” (*J*, 60-61).<sup>49</sup>

It is thus clear that the use of sympathy, for Sinclair, is not in relaxed, pleasurable reflection on the capacity for human fellow-feeling, or on the passive cultivation of ethical feeling via sympathetic identification.<sup>50</sup> Rather, following the logic of “What Life Means to Me,” Sinclair’s cultivation of sympathy in *The Jungle* is a key component of something like good doctoring: implicit in Sinclair’s criticism of traditional realism is the notion that the sympathetic physician is more effective than the enthusiastic but detached researcher in materially reducing his patient’s pain. Eschewing such bourgeois distance, Sinclair dedicates himself to a language of fellowship. The “proletarian writer,” unlike the bourgeois doctor, “does not find the life of his fellows a fascinating opportunity for feats of artistry...he thinks no more of ‘art for art’s sake’” (“WL,” 594). Indeed, after Jurgis’s political awakening Sinclair pauses over an element of the narrative I have described above—the link between the figure of the hog and that of the Packingtown worker—spelling out a connection he had previously allowed noise to intimate:

Jurgis recollected how, when he had first come to Packingtown, he had stood and watched the hog-killing, and thought how cruel and

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<sup>48</sup> Bracher, 90.

<sup>49</sup> Jurgis, as is the way of things, eventually becomes that which he despises, and finds that there is “no consideration for him because of his weakness—it was no one’s business to help him in such distress, to make the fight the least bit easier for him” (*J*, 216).

<sup>50</sup> For other conceptions of sympathy, see Rae Greiner, “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel,” *Narrative* 17.3 (2009): 291-311.

savage it was, and come away congratulating himself that he was not a hog; now his new acquaintance showed him that a hog was just what he had been—one of the packers' hogs. What they wanted from a hog was all the profits that could be got out of him; and that was what they wanted from the workingman, and also that was what they wanted from the public. What the hog thought of it, what he suffered, were not considered; and no more was it true with labor, and no more with the purchaser of meat. (*J*, 299)

If this rendering explicit of what had been only, if strongly, implied undercuts our idea of Sinclair's confidence in his own artistry, it also serves to dispel any confusion the reader might have felt about the metaphoric connection between man and hog. Following Sinclair's anatomization of sympathy above—his rejection of “feats of artistry” and “art for art's sake”—Jurgis's epiphany about the ultimate parity of butchered, butcher, and carnivore, though it might be read as aesthetically disruptive, reveals precisely that Sinclair considers his message more important than his fiction. If the reader already felt with Jurgis, Sinclair risks nothing; if she didn't, he takes this as another opportunity to jar her out of her indifference.

The sympathy Sinclair is seeking is anything but a foregone conclusion. For literary sympathy to work, a reader has to have both an empathetic reaction to a character—feeling what you imagine he feels or should feel, or feeling “some imagined copy of these feelings”—and then feel what you want him to feel about having those feelings (concern, say, or outrage).<sup>51</sup> The hitch is that you need not, simply by feeling

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<sup>51</sup> Darwall, “Empathy, Sympathy, Care,” 261. Sinclair himself would not have figured the question in these terms: Darwall and others point out that the word “empathy” did not enter English until 1909, when

empathy, be concerned for the person whose feelings you have replicated. So how do you extend the empathy feeling into the world of ethical decision-making, as Comrade Sinclair hopes? Psychologist Martin Hoffman differentiates between what he calls “empathetic distress” and “sympathetic distress,” wherein the former involves no real projection into another subject’s standpoint, instead taking oneself as the distressed object of comfort and relief (the Pure Food and Drug Act response); the latter is the one that takes the distress of an other as its object and gives rise to efforts to alleviate it.<sup>52</sup> In “sympathetic distress,” one relies less on the ability to imagine how one would feel in the position of the other than on how the other must feel under those circumstances; only by sharing that, the other’s feeling, can we determine what for an other constitutes an injustice. Darwall, following Smith, writes that “something is unjust only if it is proper to feel like retaliating against or resisting it forcefully,” and the propriety of that feeling is calibrated by the other’s circumstance, not one’s own.<sup>53</sup>

Sinclairian sympathy thus conceived—as a primary mechanism by which *The Jungle* proposes to educate its readership, as Jurgis himself was educated—presents a problem for Sinclairian propaganda. There is a fundamental tension between orthopraxy and sympathy: whereas orthopraxy explicitly obviates conscious objectives and “value

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Edward Titchener translated Theodor Lipps’s 1903 “Einfühlung, inner Nachahmung, und Organempfindungen,” the original “*Einfühlung*” being derived from a German verb meaning “to feel one’s way into” (Lipps himself, Darwall writes, had appropriated the word into German aesthetics from psychology); Smith and David Hume, perhaps the two most widely-cited philosophers of “sympathy,” would not have had the later term available to them, even if parts of their work can be considered to describe empathy rather than sympathy (Darwall, 262). Wilhelm Worringer’s 1907 *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* [*Abstraction and Empathy*], which draws explicitly on Lipps’s work, further popularized the term. The word “empathy” appears in neither *The Jungle* nor *King Coal*.

<sup>52</sup> Darwall, “Empathy, Sympathy, Care,” 271.

<sup>53</sup> Darwall, “Sympathetic Liberalism: Recent Work on Adam Smith,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 28.2 (1999), 143.

judgments” by its subjects, sympathy does so only partially, as it relies in some measure on both preconscious feeling-with and reasoned reaction to that feeling.

In highlighting the phenomenological noise of the laborer’s circumstances, the phenomenological education required to change faulty cognitive schema, and the cybernetic noise of his own counterpropaganda, Sinclair frequently treats sympathy itself as the desired end and action of his propaganda, giving little thought or space in his work to the mechanism by which sympathy will help the proletariat “escape from its agony.” His work toward experiential sympathy advocates action in solidarity based in phenomenological fellowship. The failure of the ruling(/reading) class to awaken to the struggle of the common man is consistently represented as a problem of hearing. On the occasion of the Rudkus family’s first winter in Chicago *The Jungle*’s narrator muses:

There is a poet who sings that

‘Deeper their heart grows and nobler their bearing,

Whose youth in the fires of anguish hath died.’

But it is not likely that he had reference to the kind of anguish that comes with destitution, that is so endlessly bitter and cruel, and yet so sordid and petty, so ugly, so humiliating—unredeemed by the slightest touch of dignity or even of pathos. It is a kind of anguish that poets have not commonly dealt with; its very words are not admitted into the vocabulary of poets—the details of it cannot be told in polite society at all. How, for instance, could any one expect to excite sympathy among lovers of good literature by telling how a family found their home alive with vermin[?] (*J*, 76)

Sinclair's longstanding messianic vein continues; in bucking the conventions of "good literature," it suggests that he alone, as distinct from "the poets," understands the true horrors of poverty, a body of knowledge that brings with it the new problem of how to introduce those horrors to the literary class, to cross the economic and political boundaries represented by "the social pit" in an attempt to move his reader to feel along with the laborer. The passage also sees Sinclair misquote a line from Matthew Arnold's "A Modern Sappho" that originally read "But deeper their *voice* grows, and nobler their bearing."<sup>54</sup> Even this change has the flavor of an emendation in context, as the text is tracking changes in Jurgis's own sympathetic heart, and is in the process interested in the sort of erasure of the voice Sinclair is concerned with in marking the difficulties of bringing up "vermin" in polite society.

It is to this last that *King Coal* turns. And the connection is not as glib as it may at first seem. For if *The Jungle* was concerned with the habituation of immigrant stockyard workers to the stench of death, *King Coal* asks what ladies of leisure might do with the same stimulus, in the process calling into question the possibility of sympathy across the economic divide.

#### IV. KING COAL: TROUBLING SENSATIONAL SYMPATHY

In April 1914, a decade after the failed Chicago stockyard strike, a yearlong labor uprising in Colorado's coal fields culminated in open combat between striking miners and a force comprised of both the Colorado National Guard and guards employed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Colorado Fuel & Iron Company. At least nineteen people,

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<sup>54</sup> Matthew Arnold, "A Modern Sappho," in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold 1840-1867* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1909), page 66, lines 31-32, emphasis added.

including several children, were killed in the guards' attack on the striking miners' camp on 20 April. In the wake of what came to be known as the Ludlow Massacre, the miners turned their anger on the mines themselves, destroying company property and continuing to fight both Rockefeller's men and a National Guard become to all appearances a strikebreaking militia.<sup>55</sup> The uprising lasted until the end of the year, at which time both the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations and the House Committee on Mines and Mining started official inquiries into the state of affairs in Colorado.<sup>56</sup> The latter inquiry—in part charged with ascertaining “[w]hether or not any system of peonage has been or is being maintained” in the Colorado coal fields—concluded that mine operators were responsible for “many violations of the law” and that militia and company guards committed illegal acts “of an immoral kind and of such a nature as to be unfit for publication” even in the government report.<sup>57</sup> The committee further noted that the Colorado coal strike represented “a conflict between capital and labor which is not confined to those in the State of Colorado, but on both sides is nation wide in its effect.”<sup>58</sup>

The Colorado labor struggle so framed—brutal in its specifics but broadly relevant in its effects; a violent confrontation between the immoral forces of capital, assisted by conspirators in the government, and laborers whose circumstances might be considered a form of involuntary servitude—provides the ideal political ecosystem in

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<sup>55</sup> See Scott Martelle, *Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre and Class War in the American West* (Piscataway: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2007). Seven days after the Massacre, under the headline “DYNAMITERS BEGIN TERROR,” the *Washington Post* reported that Colorado Senator Charles S. Thomas had approached President Woodrow Wilson to ask that federal troops be sent to the strike zone, and that he had “broken down and cried when he recited the horrors of the strike in the mining camps,” mourning atrocities committed by both guards and miners loyal to the company (“7 Die in Coal War,” *Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 1914).

<sup>56</sup> “To Investigate Colorado Coal Strike,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 Nov. 1914.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Senate, House, *Report on the Colorado Strike Investigation Made under House Resolution 387*, 2 Mar. 1915, 63rd Cong., 3rd sess., 1915, H. Doc. 1630, 3, 5, 11.

<sup>58</sup> *Report on the Colorado Strike Investigation*, 31.

which Sinclair might develop the work begun in *The Jungle*.<sup>59</sup> Inspired by the Ludlow Massacre as he had been by Armour's breaking of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen strike, Sinclair made a handful of trips to Colorado in 1914 and spent several weeks investigating conditions in mining camps, eventually turning his research into a novelistic exposé of the mining industry. Unlike *The Jungle* and much of Sinclair's other work, *King Coal* was not published serially; like the earlier novel the force of its portrayal of labor strife and its unremitting didacticism made it difficult to publish, though Sinclair prevailed upon George P. Brett at Macmillan—who anticipated but failed to remedy Sinclair's pedantic tone in reminding his author that “it is a novel you are writing and not a work of history or controversy”—to publish it without major changes.<sup>60</sup> Again unlike *The Jungle*, *King Coal* enjoyed little popular success, and its planned sequel, *The Coal War* (1976), failed to find a publisher during Sinclair's lifetime. Sinclair biographer Anthony Arthur attributes the failure of *King Coal* both to the distraction provided by the outbreak of the First World War and to the quality of the novel itself, “too thin to be good fiction and too one-sided to be acceptable history.”<sup>61</sup> Sinclair would later write simply, “No one was interested in social reform in wartime.”<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of its contemporary reception, *King Coal* represents a crucial node in Sinclair's implementation of the plan of sensational sympathy introduced in *The Jungle*. As in the earlier novel, *King Coal* is invested in calling attention to the sinking ship of the proletariat. And, as it had been in 1904, Sinclair's narrative representation of his laborers'

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<sup>59</sup> Notably, the Committee on Mines and Mining, otherwise disposed toward the strikers' concerns, determined there was no reasonable basis on which to conclude the miners were subjected to peonage.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur, 167. On the publication history of *King Coal*, see also R. N. Mookerjee, *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1988), esp. 62, 75n3.

<sup>61</sup> Arthur, 168.

<sup>62</sup> Upton Sinclair, *My Life in Letters* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1960), 183.

plight is interested in the way the creation of sympathy is tied up in phenomenological education—in a shared experience of noise. But the intervening decade has seen a strategic shift in Sinclair’s methods. Despite their similarities, *King Coal* does not represent the simple narrative transposition of *The Jungle* into a different circumstance; this is not an instance of the assembly-line production of words for dollars that might have characterized Sinclair’s ripped-from-the-headlines genre fiction. *The Jungle*’s proletariat, “bound into slavery by unseen chains,” becomes, in *King Coal*, a laboring class no less subjugated but whose problems are more intricately articulated (*J*, 296). “The trouble with the miner,” proclaims the character Old Rafferty from his decades of experience, “is that he has no one to speak for him” (*KC*, 57). But here the coal miner’s daughter Mary Burke interrupts stridently—“her voice came suddenly, alive with scorn: ‘The trouble with the miner is that he’s a *slave!*’” (*KC*, 57). What is in *The Jungle* a problem of sight, of revealing that the stockyard worker is disenfranchised and exploited, becomes in this later novel at once the existential problem of the miner’s helplessness as raised by Mary Burke and the problem of discourse raised by Old Rafferty. If the trouble with the stockyard worker was that no one could see his chains—a problem, I’ve suggested above, that Sinclair battles by engagement with noisy sensational sympathy—the trouble with the miner is that he lacks a spokesperson.

This shift reflects Sinclair’s increased attention to what *The Jungle* frames as “excit[ing] sympathy among lovers of good literature.” That is, *King Coal* points to a concern with how someone less like Jurgis Rudkus and more like Upton Sinclair might manufacture sympathy in someone like himself on behalf of an economic other. Arthur states the problem bluntly: “The hard fact was that the largely middle-class Americans,

mostly women, who bought and read books in the early 1900s were not likely to demand the end of ‘wage slavery.’ Workers’ problems for these readers were mostly distant and theoretical concerns, no matter how vividly described.”<sup>63</sup> Sinclair takes up this challenge by transforming his point-of-view character from a poor immigrant laborer into something akin to a participant-observer—a bourgeois boy in proletarian drag. Where *The Jungle* follows one working-class family and uses Jurgis and Ona’s horrific decline to model the loss of innocence and the evolution of moral outrage it aims to inspire in its bourgeois readership, *King Coal*’s protagonist, Hal Warner, is himself a member of the controlling class, dress up as a tramp though he might be.<sup>64</sup>

Hal Warner is eventually revealed to be the son of a coal magnate, but for the bulk of the novel he is known to the reader merely as a well-off college student with a penchant for breaking into song at inappropriate junctures, taking advantage of a school holiday to travel to a Colorado mine, in laughable disguise, to compare the proletarian life he has learned about in his course on political economy with the realities of working in a mining camp.<sup>65</sup> Along the way, Hal falls under the spell of the picturesque Mary Burke, a beautiful redheaded Irish girl with a rebellious streak and only one dress to her

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<sup>63</sup> Arthur, 44.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur highlights the similarities of appearance and manner between Sinclair and his protagonist, “a handsome young aristocrat, slightly built, with wavy brown hair and an engaging manner” (167). Though Sinclair himself could not be mistaken for an aristocrat, he was quite familiar with wealth, having spent a good deal of his childhood in the households of rich Baltimore relatives.

<sup>65</sup> The novel’s title recalls one of Hal’s musical interludes, an adaptation of the British nursery rhyme “Old King Cole” that reads, in part,

Old King Coal was a merry old soul,  
And a merry old soul was he;  
He made him a college all full of knowledge—  
Hurrah for you and me!

...

So hurrah for King Coal, and his fat pay-roll,  
And his wheels of industree! (*KC*, 4)

name.<sup>66</sup> Working under the pseudonym “Joe Smith” (one feels Sinclair invoking Joe Hill, who by the time of the Ludlow Massacre had been arrested in Utah, though Hal/Joe retains a certain brash ignorance of consequences that bespeaks his moneyed invulnerability), Hal takes it upon himself to act as intermediary between the mine workers and their bosses, and to call on the camp’s diverse immigrant population to unionize to improve conditions.

If *King Coal* is an extension of the work Sinclair performed in *The Jungle* to create a record of exploitative labor conditions that calls out for a remedy, the latter novel sets itself a more involved task precisely in the existence of Hal qua point-of-view character. Where Jurgis’s journey from unsympathetic observer of the unfortunates of Packingtown to one of their number models the correction of faulty cognitive schema, Hal begins his journey with just as little knowledge, if a substantially more generous tone (compare Jurgis’s “he could do the work himself, and so could the rest of them” to Hal’s higher-order acknowledgement of systems theory in his declaration that “[s]omewhere at the head of the great dividend-paying machine that was called the General Fuel Company must be some devilish intelligence” manipulating “the victims of this system”) (*KC*, 43-44). Hal’s academic education manages to set him ahead of Jurgis, who began his journey in a state of both political and perceptual naivety; for Hal there are fewer “unseen chains.” Entering the mining camp with a conception of the moral problems he anticipates finding there, Hal is in a way inoculated against the sort of capitalist gaslighting that the world

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<sup>66</sup> Mary’s blue dress was integral to *King Coal*’s finding a publisher. Sinclair’s second wife, Mary Craig, notes in her autobiography that Brett, who had previously rejected *The Jungle* for being too graphically violent, initially declined to publish *King Coal*, accepting the novel only after Sinclair and Craig revised the whole: a process that included ““putting clothes on Mary Burke’...meaning of course the psychology as well as the look of the characters” (Mary Craig Sinclair, *Southern Belle* [Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1999], 197).

tries to involve him in by maintaining that “[a]ll this dirt, ignorance, disease, this knavery and oppression, this maiming of men in body and soul in the coal-camps of America—all this did not exist—it was the hallucination of an ‘irresponsible’ brain!” (*KC*, 165). Hal, awakening to the power dynamics at play in the camps in Book Two, “The Serfs of King Coal,” laments that “if you talked to them [Hal’s own brother, or the camp’s marshal] about these conditions, they shrugged their shoulders, they called you a ‘dreamer,’ a ‘crank,’ they said you were ‘off your trolley’; or else they became angry and bitter, they called you names; they said, ‘You agitators!’” (*KC*, 165). Hal does not need to battle his way through Jurgis’s autonomy schema. He instead needs to find it within himself to accept something more visceral than the myth of bootstrapping: dirt, ignorance, and disease.

This proves to be no small task. The structural difference represented by the replacement of a Jurgis with a Hal has concrete effects on the narrative’s depiction of—and manner of building—sympathy. As Hal’s intimacy with conditions at the mine and with the miners themselves increases, so does his outrage at their treatment at the hands of the mining company and local government officials. But Hal himself operates in phasic relation to the empathy such outrage is predicated on; his relation to the miners is less a linear development into compassionate understanding than a narrative of successive attempts and failures. His troubled and incomplete identification with the miners is signaled by the deficiency of his proletarian masquerade (he is violently turned away from the first mine he attempts to infiltrate because he “looks like a dude and talks like a college professor”) as he arrives in Colorado primed to put himself in someone else’s shoes (*KC*, 11). But his ambition is quickly revealed to be at least as trivializing as

charitable: “[W]hat he had set out to do that summer [was] to take another name, to become a member of another class, to live its life and think its thoughts, and then come back to his own world with a new and fascinating adventure to tell about!” (*KC*, 256-57). As he sets out, Hal’s storytelling impulse is to exoticize the laboring class rather than illuminate its struggles.<sup>67</sup> Troublesome as his motives might be, the fact that Hal’s goal is not just to experience life as a miner but to be able to tell about it, even he intends that telling to earn him a peculiar kind of social cache, means that he begins his escapade with roughly Sinclair’s aim: to be able to communicate an experience of radical otherness.

It is not a simple proposition for either. Hal’s explicit problem in dealing with the string of enforcers, bosses, politicians, and unsympathetic journalists, and eventually a private train car full of his own college classmates, is precisely to communicate what he has learned of such torment in the process of transforming the basis of his own knowledge of “wage slavery” from the academic and imaginative to the experiential. Early in his adventure, on completing a full day of labor in the mines, Hal wonders if anyone could in fact “have imagined the torment of [working underground]—any of those ladies who rode upon the decks of steam-ships in gleaming tropic seas?” (*KC*, 68).<sup>68</sup> Sinclair, as though echoing his protagonist’s query, marks the beginning of Hal’s own education in work. As Hal and the reader are simultaneously introduced to what the novel terms “the real work of coal-mining,” Sinclair comments that “[Hal’s] imagination had been occupied with it for a long time; but as so often happens in the life of man, the

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<sup>67</sup> As if to reinforce the problem, although the natural antecedent of the pronoun in the sentence above is “a member” rather than “class,” Hal’s thoughts are of “its” life and thoughts rather than the expected “his.”

<sup>68</sup> *King Coal* offers its own portrait of ladies traveling in style with the later introduction of Hal’s fiancée Jessie Arthur and her coterie, but in this early moment Sinclair is taking a swipe at fine ladies of a variety that looms large elsewhere in modernist literature, often as sympathetic protagonists—figures such as Virginia Woolf’s Rachel Vinrace (*The Voyage Out* had been published in 1915), whose travails are decidedly more solipsistic than even Hal’s ego-driven defense of the working class. Richard Wright, as I discuss in Chapter Four, explicitly presents *Native Son* as a rebuttal to such women.

first contact with reality killed the result of many years' imagining" (*KC*, 67). "[A]bout twenty-one years of age, with sensitive features," Hal has no history with hard physical labor, and soon learns that after a day's work underground it is largely impossible to "keep his mental alertness, his eagerness and sensitiveness...to be anything, in fact, but a machine" (*KC*, 3, 69).<sup>69</sup> Doing double duty as at once a storyteller and the subject of Sinclair's storytelling, Hal is also learning sympathy in two ways: first, by exposing himself to the experience of work; second, by exposing himself to the unattractive lives of workers. In each case his lack of experience (of work, of ugliness) presents a barrier to fellow feeling.

Even as Hal's perceptual life (his "sensitive" nature) is dulled by work, it continues to be offended by his colleagues, whose features are as unfamiliar to Hal as were the odors and sounds of Packingtown to Jurgis and Ona. Sinclair writes that the colliers "spoke a compromised language, consisting mainly of English curse words and obscenities....They alleged obscenities of their mothers and their grandmothers; also of the Virgin Mary, the one mythological creature they had heard of. Poor little creatures of the dark, their souls grimed and smutted even more quickly and irrevocably than their faces!" (*KC*, 19). There is certainly judgment involved in Sinclair's depiction of the workmen's humorous but ultimately censured inclination toward blasphemy, a brand of ignorant childishness for which they are not entirely at fault but for which they nonetheless cannot be forgiven fully. But more pronounced than their "smutted" souls is the threat of the camp as a modern Babel in which noise, here manifest in meaningless

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<sup>69</sup> In language more reminiscent of *The Jungle*, an agitator later in *King Coal* whips up the crowd by declaring, "'We'll work as men—or we'll not work at all! We'll no longer be a herd of cattle, that they can drive about as the please!'" (*KC*, 298).

invocations of a shared culture of Christianity and sex, has wrested control from discourse.

How, the novel asks, “could a man of sensitive nerves”—Hal in his role as upper-class everyman—“aware of the refinements and graces of life, learn to love these people, who were an affront to his every sense—a stench to his nostrils, a jabbering to his ear, a procession of deformities to his eye?” Thus is Hal’s capacity for sympathy, posed as something like Christian love, associated with, and apparently substantially limited by, his capacity for sensation. Extending beyond discomfort with blasphemy, Hal’s aversion is importantly located in the physical presence of the immigrant workman. “Like every one who has not suffered much,” Sinclair notes, “[Hal] was repelled by a condition of perpetual suffering in another” (*KC*, 118-19). Darwall writes that, according to Smith, however much

class, race, gender, or faction narrows the scope of ‘us,’ it will nonetheless be the case that a moral judgment rendered of someone (whether from another group or not) will be of the form—‘any of us would (should) be moved or feel in such-and-such a way *were we in that person’s shoes.*’ For Smith, disgust or some other distanced ‘aesthetic’ response differs from a moral evaluation precisely in the fact that the latter can only be rendered *as from the other’s point of view*. To this extent, then, moral judgment is an engine that drives identification.<sup>70</sup>

Despite Hal’s personal experience with the dehumanizing conditions of mine work—despite direct observation of the mines’ violence “become a thing of human flesh and

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<sup>70</sup> Darwall, “Sympathetic Liberalism,” 161, emphasis in original.

blood” to sharpen his sense of the injustice of camp life—his sensitive faculties still long for the sanitizing-away of the most graphic suffering in the camp (*KC*, 178). Hal is not Jurgis, an immigrant laborer entering a situation of exploitation that defines his narrative path as one of education in higher-order theories of political community and engagement. His is an opposite journey: though familiar with the economic theory under which the mining companies are operating, Hal is unprepared for the physical sensations his voyage into poverty introduces him to, and thus requires, in order to access the sympathy his intellectual project demands, his own phenomenological education.

But Hal’s problem sympathizing with the dirty and the ill abides even after he stops seeing the laborers as an undifferentiated object of pity, long after Sinclair notes that “Hal was coming to know these people; to see them no longer as a mass, to be despised or pitied in bulk, but as individuals, with individual temperaments and problems, exactly like people in the world of sunlight” (*KC*, 32). Hal’s problem is Sinclair’s, too: how can he make the experience of suffering, basically unaesthetic as it is, sympathetic?<sup>71</sup> Hal sees this problem fairly clearly from the start, musing that

[T]he fine ladies in their precious silks and jewels would eat and sleep and laugh and lie at ease—and would know no more of the stunted creatures of the dark than the stunted creatures knew of them. Hal reflected upon this, and subdued his Anglo-Saxon pride,

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<sup>71</sup> For Sinclair as for Hal, the answer is partly in the figure of Mary Burke, the beautiful rebel girl fleshed out and clothed by Mary Craig. Mary challenges Hal’s participant-observer objectivity, his “certain degree of aloofness” maintained “that he might see this industrial world without prejudice”; “his pity for Mary had involved him more deeply” (*KC*, 42). This dynamic is perhaps more troubling than redemptive, not just because Mary herself is a caricature, but also because of how Hal elevates her to a plane of exceptionalism that justifies his feelings for her by removing her wholesale from the mass of the proletariat: “She saw farther, she felt more deeply than the average of these wage-slaves. Her problem was the same as theirs, yet more complex. When he had wanted to help her and had offered to get her a job, she had made clear that what she craved was not merely relief from drudgery, but a life with intellectual interest” (*KC*, 300).

finding forgiveness for what was repulsive in these people—their barbarous, jabbering speech, their vermin-ridden homes, their bare-bottomed babies. (*KC*, 23)

Just as strange as Hal's fixation on women of leisure—could not some of this venom be saved for the men of business and government who orchestrate these conditions?—is his insistence that the “repulsive” status of the laborer requires him to forgive them. If Sinclair was worried about how “any one [could] expect to excite sympathy among lovers of good literature by telling how a family found their home alive with vermin,” Hal himself, whose concern for the social problem of exploitative labor practices exists on a spectrum ranging from *fine ladies in beautiful clothes—bad* to *jabbering miners covered in lice—bad*, is a problematic emblem of sympathy. Leaving the mining camp at the end of the novel, Hal wonders about the extent of his own continuing responsibility:

How far shall a man go in relieving the starvation about him, before he can enjoy his meals in a well-appointed club? What casuist will work out this problem—telling him the percentage he shall relieve of the starvation he happens personally to know about, the percentage of that which he sees on the streets, the percentage of that about which he reads....To what extent is he permitted to close his eyes, as he walks along the streets on his way to the club? (*KC*, 366-67)

It is not only Hal whose incomplete sympathy is bound up with an aversion to the aesthetically unpleasant. His fiancée Jessie, faced with Mary's grief at the company's mishandling of a disastrous collapse at the mine, pulls back from her own inclination

toward sympathy and couches her detachment in an aversion to noise. She “felt the intensity of [Mary’s] excitement,” Sinclair writes, “and shared it; yet at the same time there was something in Jessie that resented it. She did not wish to be upset about things like this, which she could not help. Of course these unfortunate people were suffering; but—what a shocking lot of noise the poor thing [Mary] was making!” (*KC*, 276). Still, perhaps Jessie deserves more credit than Hal gives her when he thinks that “[t]he business of offering sympathy had been reduced to a system by the civilization which [she] helped to maintain” (*KC*, 265). When she initially rebuffs his desire for her to wander among the miners and their families as they wait for word from loved ones trapped in the mine Hal realizes that “he had grown callous since coming to North Valley; he had lost that delicacy of feeling, that intuitive understanding of the sentiments of ladies, which he would surely have exhibited a short time earlier in his life” (*KC*, 264). Indeed, his idea of the stakes of the matter for the women is nuanced: “to the ladies of the Harrington party [the disaster] was, in its details, merely sordid and repelling. If they went out in the mud and rain of a mining-village and stood about staring, they would feel that they were exhibiting, not human compassion, but idle curiosity” (*KC*, 264). Hal has himself been repelled by the miners (has, that is, failed Smith’s disgust-sympathy test); he can sympathize with the repulsion that he reads in the Harrington party’s ladies more easily than he could with the unaesthetic miners. Jessie notes later that in “the note of suppressed passion in his voice” and in his physical weariness and dishevelment it is “as if [Hal] had gone to war” (*KC*, 269), but it is ultimately strange that Hal, whose concern for aesthetics continues to rival his concern for quality of life, is the moral compass of *King Coal*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hal’s incompletely synthesized sympathy aligns Sinclair with another contemporary, H. G. Wells. Hal’s

Hal goes on to weaponize the very noise that makes it hard for him to feel with the laborer, telling his older brother that noisy protest against so-called “wage slavery” is necessary because ““a man like you can shut his eyes, but he can’t shut his ears”” (*KC*, 337). Hal is drawing on a physiological truth here, and a commonplace in sound studies. But his way of proposing responsibility as responding to environmental stimuli, to things seen and heard rather than to things thought, both brings us back to Ellul’s conditions for orthopraxy—propaganda that relies on a predicted response to a stimulus—and presents the soundscape as a primary tool in Sinclair’s political activation. It also reveals how imbricated sound and class can be, as they were in Borden’s social novels, and are in *Native Son*, as Chapter Four will explore. Hal’s point is not precisely that humans have the capacity to close their eyes but not their ears, but rather that “a man like [his brother],” an educated white man with a controlling interest in an exploitative mining operation, has the resources not only literally to “shut his eyes,” but also to live a life in which the sort of aesthetic horror that Hal has been witness to in the mining camp can be pushed away, to be replaced with art or the mahogany and leather of his club. But it is significantly harder for even the wealthy to buy their way out of noise. John Picker records that the death of the English illustrator John Leech, caricaturist for *Punch* and descendant of Richard Bentley, was “precipitated [by] noise” filtering into his home from the streets of London: “Driven nearly mad by street music over his final years, Leech allowed this to

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failure to disentangle himself from disgust is analogous, in some ways, with the problems Denton has in “A Story of the Days to Come” when he mentally berates his fellow laborers “their hostility and utter want of sympathy” for his plight as “a martyr in the civilization machine” (though it is decidedly his own folly that has landed him in that spot, and to some extent he can thus take himself as an affirmation of the autonomy schema—Jurgis came to understand the laborer as sympathetic by experiencing his own fall as distinct from a failure of virtue, but Denton’s fall is Denton’s fault) (H. G. Wells, “A Story of the Days to Come” in *Tales of Space and Time* [London: Harper, 1900], 277, 292). Arthur suggests that *King Coal* owes some of its thematic material to Wells’s *The Time Machine*, which prefigures Sinclair’s miners’ Babel of “subterranean gnomes, pent up by society for purposes of its own” (*KC*, 22) with its “cannibalistic underground creatures—formerly miners” (Arthur, 167).

exacerbate what already was for him a serious heart condition and nervous temperament.”<sup>73</sup> This is the point of penetration that Hal tries to exploit in bringing his message of economic justice home from the camp: his brother can ignore the beggar on the street, but not the agitator in his drawing room.

In a 1956 letter to the then-Chair of the Indiana University Department of History, John D. Barnhart, soliciting donations to the American Federation for the Blind, Helen Keller wrote: “Try to imagine if you can, the anguish and horror you would experience bowed down by the twofold weight of blindness and deafness. Still throbbing with natural emotions and desires, you would feel through the sense of touch the existence of a living world, and desperately but vainly you would seek an escape into its healing light.”<sup>74</sup> Keller is relying, arguably more effectively than Sinclair, on the same transitivity of experience that *The Jungle* and *King Coal* imagine can bring a bourgeois audience into sympathetic relation with the working classes. Keller, as author and activist, abides at this nexus of phenomenology and politics.

At least by 1915, when he published her “Out of the Dark” in the edited collection *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest*, Sinclair was familiar with Helen Keller’s life and political work: her selection in that volume appears under the legend “America’s most famous blind girl, born 1880, who has come to see more than most people with normal eyes.”<sup>75</sup> Both were published frequently in the

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<sup>73</sup> Picker, 42.

<sup>74</sup> Helen Keller to John D. Barnhart, 30 April 1956, Folder “containing 1956, Apr. 30,” Barnhart mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries.

<sup>75</sup> Keller, “Out of the Dark,” in *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest*, ed. Upton Sinclair (New York: Upton Sinclair, 1915), 219. As one might gather from Sinclair’s note, the propagandist was besotted with Keller’s political work. Arthur records that “[a]s an editor-advocate for the selections he had chosen, Sinclair sometimes let his enthusiasm get the best of him. Jack London... had to warn him that calling every single one of his writers ‘great’ was not only silly but ‘invidious’” (Arthur, 158).

*Appeal to Reason*, and Sinclair was friendly with John Macy, Anne Sullivan's husband and one of the influences popularly blamed for Keller's radical politics.<sup>76</sup> Sinclair profiles Keller in the December 1918 number of *Upton Sinclair's*—Sinclair's short-lived self-published monthly magazine, whose motto was “for a clean peace and the internation”—writing that in speaking with her “it takes you some time to get away from the strange feeling that you are receiving communications from another world, or from some mechanical un-human agency; but gradually you get used to the idea that behind the veil there dwells a human being like yourself, only more alive, more alert, more full of joy and excitement than you.”<sup>77</sup> Echoing his sentiment of three years earlier, Sinclair notes that Keller's perception must be considered more acute than many others, as “[s]he has become a Socialist, while nine people out of ten in America are, as you know, perfectly stupid and contented victims of the profit-system.”<sup>78</sup> If Sinclair counted it as his job to open the public's eyes, he could have been forgiven if his admiration was tinged with envy at the way Keller and her story had captivated audiences since the turn of the century.

*The Story of My Life* (1903) tells of Keller's emergence into language and subsequent education through her days at Radcliffe—a story that was and remains extremely popular, particularly (as is widely noted in Keller criticism) as a mode of

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<sup>76</sup> Macy was invested enough in Sinclair's work to write him a letter on the latter's 1928 publication of *Boston*, a novelization of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, which says in part, “You are deficient in literary tact, in adroitness; and put your reader out of sympathy with you, which means complete failure...” (John Macy to Upton Sinclair, undated, Upton Sinclair Manuscript Collection, Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington, ctd. in Dorothy Herrmann, *Helen Keller: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 140.

<sup>77</sup> Sinclair, “The Blind Who Will Not See,” *Upton Sinclair's* 1.8 (1918), 16.

<sup>78</sup> Sinclair, “The Blind,” 16. Copies of Keller's “How I Became a Socialist” were famously burned by the Nazis; Sinclair's work joined hers in the fire, along with German Socialist and Communist writings. See Frederick T. Birchall, “Anti-Semitism and Book Burnings,” in Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, *Germany Through American Eyes: Pulitzer Prize Winning Reports* (Berlin: Lit, 2010): 70-77.

inspirational and motivational storytelling for schoolchildren.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of its audience, the general effect of Keller's earliest life writing has been to cement her in the public imagination as a seven-year-old at her parents' hand pump (re)learning the word "water."

*The Story of My Life* may have gone through ten printings in its first year of publication, but there is substantially more to Keller's work than the story of her childhood education.<sup>80</sup> Keller's most enthusiastic socialism fell from public view after the First World War, presumably in deference to the economic consequences of so vocally holding such unpopular political opinions.<sup>81</sup> Yet, taken together, the bulk of Keller's writing advocates for socialist reforms. Keller conceptualizes the world through senses including those which she has lost—a circumstance that makes her profoundly aware of auditory phenomenology—and of attempting to communicate to those to whom such an experience is inherently unavailable.

In contradistinction to *The Story of My Life*, *The World I Live In* (1908) presents a detailed phenomenology of Keller's everyday life that belies the simplicity of the popular narrative of a deaf-blind child's reentry into civilization. While Keller writes that her senses of touch, taste, and smell have expanded to fill the vacuum left by her loss of sight and hearing, she defends her writing's use of visual and aural metaphor as the sort of act of cognition and imagination unquestioningly granted sighted and hearing writers. "The bulk of the world's knowledge is an imaginary construction," she writes. "History is but a

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<sup>79</sup> And not just children—various iterations of *The Miracle Worker*, William Gibson's teleplay (to-stage[-to-screen]) adaptation of *The Story of My Life*, have been produced since 1957 (including in 1959, 1962, 1979, and 2000). Barrick, Black, and others have additionally noted that, in the wake of various television presentations and new federal legislation such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Keller has resurfaced in another medium—the Helen Keller joke. See Mac E. Barrick, "The Helen Keller Joke Cycle," *The Journal of American Folklore* 93.370 (1980): 441-49; and William R. Black, "Helen Keller Jokes, Body and Soul," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47.6 (2014): 1167-79.

<sup>80</sup> See James Berger, "Testing Literature: Helen Keller and Richard Powers' Implementation H[elen]," *Arizona Quarterly* 58.3 (2002), 127.

<sup>81</sup> See Liz Crow, "Helen Keller: Rethinking the Problematic Icon," *Disability & Society* 15.6 (2000), 851.

mode of imagining, of making us see civilizations that no longer appear upon the earth” (*W*, 59). “Our ideas of the sky,” she argues later, “are an accumulation of touch-glimpses, literary allusions, and the observations of others” (*W*, 65). Though her sense perceptions may be radically different, Keller argues that she should be allowed the same transitive logic of experience available to other literary figures—having felt the “rondure” of an infant, she explains elsewhere, her imagination might grasp the curve of “far-off hills” never either felt or seen (*W*, 66). In *The World I Live In* she writes (in what reads as a nod to Kant) that she, too “listen[s] with awe to the roll of the thunder and the muffled avalanche of sound when the sea flings itself upon the shore” (*W*, 36). Almost forty years later, Keller wrote to Orson Welles that his progressive political speeches “startle[d] me with the thunder of a waking social conscience [all over] the world.”<sup>82</sup>

Neither Keller’s phenomenological observations nor her political tracts were popular on the order of *The Story of My Life*. Keller acknowledges that her earliest life writing holds the public in thrall, wryly conceding that “apparently nobody cares what I think about the tariff, the conservation of our natural resources, or the conflicts which revolve around the name of Dreyfus. If I offer to reform the educational system of the world, my editorial friends will say, ‘That is interesting. But will you please tell us what idea you had of goodness and beauty when you were six years old?’” (*W*, 66).

Nevertheless, Keller sets herself a dual task. She asserts her position within a traditional genealogy of authors and thinkers, and her right to their rhetorical conventions. Yet, to echo Rachel Hartig’s formulation of the central question of French writer and Deaf activist Yvonne Pitrois’ 1922 Keller biography *Une nuit rayonnante (A Shining Night)*,

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<sup>82</sup> Keller to Orson Welles, 26 October 1944, LMC 2009, Folder “1944 Oct. 16-31,” Welles mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries.

Keller can also be seen to ask, “How do those who are living with a difference most effectively cross the cultural divide and explain themselves to mainstream society?”<sup>83</sup> For Keller, that difference is political as well as physiological, and her “living with a difference” raises questions about discourses of class as well as disability.

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<sup>83</sup> Rachel M. Hartig, “Crossing the Divide: Helen Keller and Yvonne Pitrois Dialogue on Diversity,” *Sign Language Studies* 7.2 (2007), 177. Keller has also come to embody ideas problematic in contemporary disability studies (exceptionalism, for one—*The Story of My Life* closes by ruminating on the “thousand ways” her friends “have turned [her] limitations into beautiful privileges”—but also the practice of hand-spelling, and even an ill-fated Vaudevillean interlude) (Keller, *Story*, 115). Pitrois, Hartig writes, was distressed by the spectacle and performativity of Keller and teacher Anne Sullivan Macy’s 1920-24 foray into vaudeville, believing that it undermined deaf and deaf-blind people’s fight for respect and dignity (see Hartig, 184). For detailed analysis of Keller’s vaudeville career, see Susan Crutchfield, “‘Play[ing] Her Part Correctly’: Helen Keller as Vaudevillian Freak,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 25.3 (2005), n.p..

#### FOUR. *NATIVE SON* AND THE PANAUDICON

Some of his sentences have the shocking-power  
of a forty-four.... Certainly he does not write by  
ear unless he is tone-deaf.  
—Zora Neale Hurston, “Stories of Conflict”  
(1938)

[T]he metallic noise made Bigger grit his teeth  
until they ached. He didn’t like that noise; it  
made him feel like cutting something with his  
knife.  
—Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)<sup>1</sup>

In 1931, Richard Wright worked as an orderly at Michael Reese Hospital on Chicago’s Near South Side.<sup>2</sup> As Hazel Rowley tells it, “[e]ach Saturday morning, the city’s animal pound delivered a batch of unclaimed dogs to be used in experiments. So that their howling would not disturb the patients, the dogs had to be debarked. Wright’s job was to hold open their jaws while the doctors severed their vocal cords.”<sup>3</sup> Houston Baker picks up the story: “The awakened dogs, who lifted their eyes to the ceiling and attempted to cry, became for Wright symbols of silent suffering.”<sup>4</sup> Nine years later, the newly famous Wright, whose *Native Son* had gone through two printings and sold more than 215,000 copies in its first three weeks of publication, presented a talk at Harlem’s

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<sup>1</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, “Stories of Conflict,” rev. of *Uncle Tom’s Children*, *The Saturday Review* (2 April 1938): 32; Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 36, hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>2</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century one of the city’s wealthiest neighborhoods, by the 1940s the Near South Side would be home to some of Chicago’s most denounced slums; state legislation designed to allow Michael Reese, other area hospitals, and the nearby Illinois Institute of Technology to utilize eminent domain in putative efforts at neighborhood revitalization was a model for Harry Truman’s American Housing Act of 1949, which led to widespread displacement of black residents in the name of urban renewal. Robert Caro’s biography of New York city planner Robert Moses, *The Power Broker*, details the more than 320,000 displacements, disproportionately of poor nonwhites, made possible by the 1949 act and carried out in the construction of Lincoln Center, the United Nations headquarters, and the campuses of Fordham, Pratt, and Long Island Universities. See Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974); and *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: The Chicago Historical Society and the Newberry Library, 2004-5), s.v. “Eminent Domain,” <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/425.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (New York: John Macrae, 2001), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Houston A. Baker, “Introduction,” in Baker, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Native Son* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 19.

Golden Gate Ballroom that would become the essay “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born.” In it, Wright describes the public’s reaction to his first book, the 1938 novella collection *Uncle Tom’s Children*. “I found,” he writes, “that I had written a book which even bankers’ daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears.”<sup>5</sup> If *Uncle Tom’s Children* had shown Wright what it was like to be the Upton Sinclair of *The Jungle* and *King Coal*, *Native Son*, he was determined, would offer “those ladies who rode upon the decks of steam-ships in gleaming tropic seas” none of the cleansing solace of sympathetic tears.<sup>6</sup>

Nor would it chronicle mute suffering. For the story of Bigger Thomas, Wright’s friend and fellow South Side Communist Jane Newton recalls, “[Wright] felt he could not begin as the Victorians did sometimes, with a quiet description of place or a methodical setting forth of character in expository prose. The action must begin on the first line and proceed like a train.”<sup>7</sup> And so it begins:

*Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng!*

An alarm clock clanged in the dark and silent room. A bed spring creaked. A woman’s voice sang out impatiently:

“Bigger, shut that thing off!”

A surly grunt sounded above the tinny ring of metal. Naked feet swished dryly across the planks in the wooden floor and the clang ceased abruptly.

“Turn on the light, Bigger.”

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Wright, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” in *Native Son*, 442.

<sup>6</sup> Sinclair, *King Coal*, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Rowley, 161.

“Awright,” came a sleepy mumble.

Light flooded the room and revealed a black boy standing in a narrow space between two iron beds, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands. (3)

In the absence of light, Wright gives us the presence of sound: the dry swish of naked feet on a wooden floor; a “bed spring”; a “woman’s voice”; a “surly grunt”; “a sleepy mumble.” But in the first and most important instance, the sound he provides is unequivocally noise. The basic purpose of an alarm clock is to emit the sort of unwanted sound that will rattle its hearers out of their slumber, here to a day of labor: washing for Mrs. Thomas, school for Buddy, a YWCA sewing class for Vera, and for Bigger his first day as the wealthy Dalton family’s chauffeur. The prolonged “tinny ring” of the alarm is certainly the opposite of any quiet description, Victorian or otherwise; its cessation, rather than offering relief, is “abrup[t]” and leads to a “floo[d]” of light, a sensory experience just as overwhelming and discouraging to sleep as that caused by the alarm. “[A]s many commentators have noted,” Emily Lordi writes, the alarm’s “famous elongated ‘BRING!’ . . . not only signals the start of another difficult day for the Thomas family but also frames Wright’s novel itself as a jarring wake-up call to white America”—from the start a rebuke to the tender heart of the banker’s daughter.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Emily J. Lordi, *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2013), 33. The alarm may certainly rouse the reader as well as the Thomas family, but for Bigger such moments are more the rule than the exception; as Alessandro Portelli notes in his helpful piece of computational criticism “On the Lower Frequencies: Sound and Meaning in *Native Son*,” after Mary’s death, “half asleep on his bed, [Bigger] half dreams of ‘the heavy trunk going *bump-bump-bump* down the stairs’ and then [still later] of hurling Mary’s ‘bloody head squarely into their faces *dongdongdong*.’ In both cases, a sudden sound (a knock, a ring) startles him awake” (“On the Lower Frequencies: Sound and Meaning in *Native Son*,” in *Critical Essays on Richard Wright’s Native Son*, ed. Kenneth Kinnamon [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997], 219).

James Baldwin, for all his well-documented differences with Wright, numbers among the commentators who laud the force of *Native Son*'s agitating opening. "*Native Son* begins with the *Brrring!* of an alarm clock in the squalid Chicago tenement where Bigger and his family live," he writes in "Many Thousands Gone," which first appeared in the *Partisan Review* in late 1951.<sup>9</sup> "Rats live there too, feeding off the garbage, and we first encounter Bigger in the act of killing one. One may consider that the entire book, from that harsh *Brrring!* to Bigger's weak 'Good-by' as the lawyer, Max, leaves him in the death cell, is an extension, with the roles inverted, of this chilling metaphor."<sup>10</sup> For Baldwin, the alarm clock's "*Brrrrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng*" is a marker of setting; as his reading develops, it is apparent that the alarm is more of a sonic metonym for the Thomas' kitchenette—the site of Bigger's first killing—in all its criminal dereliction than a "wake-up call" in its own right. Baldwin's attention to the sonic character of the scenes he describes—the harshness of the sound of the alarm, and Bigger's "weak 'Good-by'"—presents Wright's novel as a simple, if unsettling, narrative progression from frantic mechanical sound into resigned human silence, from home to death row, that might be seen to mirror the "furious scream[ing]" and "long thin song of defiance" that culminates in the first scene in the rat's death by cast iron skillet.

But to read *Native Son* as a journey from noise to quiet, even a "hard and deep" and unconsoling sort of quiet, is to overlook two crucial elements of the text. The first of these is the fact that Bigger's "Good-by" is not, as Baldwin implies, the very end of the novel, as the alarm clock is its very beginning. The novel's last scene does see Max leaving Bigger to his fate, but their goodbyes are followed by a final line: "[Bigger] heard

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<sup>9</sup> James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 42.

<sup>10</sup> Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," 42-43.

the ring of steel against steel as a far door clanged shut” (430). In that second clang the novel wraps its end around to its beginning, “the clang” of the alarm clock meeting the “clan[g]” of the prison doors, inviting the reader to hear the textual echo and reflect, as Baldwin does, on the ways in which Bigger’s fate is sealed from the first bell. (If something in Wright’s cyclical noise and auditory metonymy smacks of Giambattista Vico’s *corsi e ricorsi*, it is worth noting that Wright’s *Lawd Today!*, published posthumously in 1963 but written between 1933 and 1937—that is, between *Uncle Tom’s Children* and *Native Son*—follows its protagonist through a single day studded with references to popular culture, newspaper headlines, and myth, thick with high-modernist literary allusion; Michel Fabre has documented Wright’s affinity for James Joyce and familiarity with *Finnegans Wake*.)<sup>11</sup> Joycean narrative ouroboros aside, *Native Son*’s last sentence thus leaves its reader with a final, noisy reminder of the carceral state that looms so large both in the narrative and in *Native Son*’s sensory universe.

The second component of *Native Son* that the inverted-metaphor interpretation neglects is the importance and endurance in the novel of noise in itself, free of Baldwin’s *pars pro toto* reading of its opening “*Brrring*.” Lordi and Baldwin are representative of the tendency of critical literature not to reproduce Wright’s weighty, demanding “*Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng*” in its entirety, with its seven “r”s and 19 “i”s intact. But as the rest of this study has noted repeatedly, replicating sound in its pervasiveness through space and duration through time is a constitutive mimetic difficulty of literature. In that context, Wright’s full “*Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng*” is a notably insistent challenge to the problem of sonic continuity. The textual gravity well the bulky interruption creates draws

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<sup>11</sup> See Brannon Costello, “Richard Wright’s *Lawd Today!* and the Political Uses of Modernism,” *African American Review* 37.1 (2003): 39-52; and Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, trans. Isabel Barzun (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), 146, 291.

attention, the very length of the sound on the page forcing its reader to drag his or her eyes over the word, extending its life in time. And it initiates a passage in which the auditory is—equally notably—incessant: of the first fifty words of the novel, at least ten describe a sound.<sup>12</sup>

Zora Neale Hurston’s ringing criticism of Wright—that “he does not write by ear unless he is tone-deaf”—is based on her concern with dialect in *Uncle Tom’s Children* and disappointment in Wright’s characters’ “puzzling...broken speech.”<sup>13</sup> Such criticism from Hurston must be taken seriously, and Wright’s ear for noise is certainly not infallible—consider *Lawd Above*’s early attempt to reproduce its main character’s sneeze (in quotation marks and interrupted by ellipses in the original):

“Ker...ker...kerchoossneeeeze!”<sup>14</sup> But *Native Son*’s beginning and ending in noise is anything but a happy accident, and Wright’s interest in the auditory certainly exceeds his ear for either dialect or sternutation. *Native Son* is full of noise—of the ominous “light tapping” of Baldwin’s rat in the walls (4); of the “singing” of fire in the Daltons’ furnace (154); of the “whirr[ing]” (15) and “whizz[ing]” (17) of rubber tires on asphalt and the “throbs of motors” (257) and the “rattl[ing]” (19) and “rumbling” (80) of streetcars; and of the “roar of voices” (303), “clamor” (312) and “uproar” (330) of the courtroom, and the “rumbling mutter” (373) and “shouts” (415) of the mob outside that characterize the novel’s final book. There, too, Wright’s interest in ongoing noise intensifies, with two courtroom scenes defined not just by “clamor” and one collective “sigh” (317), but by

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<sup>12</sup> Portelli writes that the “imitation of nonlinguistic sound[d]” evidenced by “Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng” (Portelli replicates the sound in full in a block quotation but avoids repeating it either in full or in part in the remainder of his essay) and the “lexicalization of sound icons” as in “grunt, swish, screech, [and] clang” are notable because “like images, they literally require no translation” when the novel is published in other languages (219). The visual is incidental to Portelli’s work on *Native Son*’s sound, but integral, as this chapter will go on to discuss at length, to Wright’s use of noise.

<sup>13</sup> Hurston, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Lawd Today!* (New York: Walker and Company, 1963), 11.

voices that “buz[z]” in the background (316), then a “buzzing” (319, 368) that underpins the proceedings—“[t]he voices behind him still buzzed” (369)—until Buckley’s performance renders the room “quiet as a tomb” (373). Just before Bigger’s capture in Book 2, these simple noises build to a wall of agential sound that serves both to heighten the suspense of the police search and highlight the damage it does to the community: “A medley of crashing sounds came, louder than he had thought that sound could be: horns, sirens, screams. There was a hunger in those sounds as they crashed over the roof-tops and chimneys; but under it, low and distinct, he heard voices of fear: curses of men and cries of children” (257-58). “[C]rashing,” “horns, sirens, [and] screams” are less ambitiously mimetic than “kerchoossneeeze,” certainly, and again wrestle with the problem, signaled by “still buzzed,” of representing sound’s duration through time. But, for all that, *Native Son*’s simpler prose is both more affecting than “kerchoossneeeze” and more effective at constructing a world of noise.

There is, of course, also a great deal of the visual in *Native Son*, often strikingly rendered—the explicitly “[n]oiseles[s]” plane Bigger watches on the novel’s first morning, “leaving behind it a long trail of white plumage, like coils of fluffy paste being squeezed from a tube; a plume-coil that grew and swelled and slowly began to fade into the air at the edges” (16); the blood seeping from Mary Dalton’s partially-severed head, “cre[eping] outward in widening circles of pink on the newspapers” under her body until Bigger, “after pausing in an attitude of prayer,” finally finishes the job with a hatchet (92). And there is also rampant blindness—figurative blindness, with the exception of Mrs. Dalton: “Jan was blind. Mary had been blind. Mr. Dalton was blind. And Mrs. Dalton

was blind; yes, blind in more ways than one” (107); “Bessie, too, was very blind” (139); “[h]ad he [Bigger himself] been blind all along? (362).<sup>15</sup> James Nagel has argued that

One of the most prominent aspects of the artistry of *Native Son* is the persistence of the images of “vision” which pervade almost every significant moment. The very frequency of these images would suggest that this book is not merely about racial violence, not only a vehicle of “chase adventure,” nor a courtroom drama, nor a study of urban mechanization. It is, rather, an analysis of “perception” which documents the effect prejudice, alienation, oppression, and isolation have on one’s ability to “see” and “be seen” clearly.<sup>16</sup>

Nagel’s argument that Bigger’s constant diagnosis of blindness in those around him encodes Wright’s diagnosis of the blindness of the American public to racial disparities is indicative of one side of what Ian Afflerbach has recently called the “competing narratives of justice and the ethical or political values that support them—in the case of Wright’s novel a choice over the meaning of Bigger’s life and death” which have structured much of the “remarkably stubborn” critical discussion of *Native Son*.<sup>17</sup> For Afflerbach, “competing claims about the novel’s literary-historical status

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<sup>15</sup> Portelli’s analysis claims forty-six appearances of the word “blind” in the novel (215). Ian Afflerbach calls this *Native Son*’s “structuring rhetorical fixation” and judges it key to a program of epistemological destabilization in the novel (“Liberalism’s Blind Judgment: Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and the Politics of Reception,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 61.1 [2015]: 93).

<sup>16</sup> James Nagel, “Images of ‘Vision’ in *Native Son*,” in *Critical Essays on Richard Wright’s Native Son*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> Afflerbach, 91. Though largely outside of the scope of my argument here, Afflerbach’s work helpfully uses blindness as the testing ground on which to parse those competing narratives. For a more thorough collapsing of “blindness” into the concept of misreading—and a reading more typically inattentive to Wright’s imagery in its own right—see Karl Precoda and P. S. Polnah, “In the Vortex of Modernity: Writing Blackness, Blindness and Insight,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.3 (2011): 31-46.

have...implicitly carried with them competing political values.”<sup>18</sup> For Nagel, the novel is chiefly “an analysis of ‘perception’” which is about the effects of bigotry, but even then about the effects of bigotry “on one’s ability to ‘see’ and ‘be seen’ clearly”—the novel’s political content incidental to its figurative content, and that in the service of a reading of perception. Confounding as this attention to “the artistry of *Native Son*” at the expense of all else may be, I contend that—once his abrogated political content is restored—Nagel’s focus on the visual elements of *Native Son* represents a positive step toward a reading of the novel that might help reconcile some of the competing narratives it has inspired.

At the same time, such a reconciliation cannot merely consider the visual. Likewise, it cannot subsume the auditory under the category of the visual, as Lordi does in *Black Resonance* in positing that “Wright’s visual imagination compels one to conceive the term ‘lyrical’ beyond its traditional association with sound and to recognize that lyrical writing...often functions as descriptive expressionism.”<sup>19</sup> Against a reading “beyond” sound, one aim of this study is certainly to credit Wright for *Native Son*’s careful attention to the auditory. And yet, prevalent as both noise and “images of ‘vision’” are, reading them as separate regimes is just as insufficient to the novel as is a wish to read only its visual elements. Instead, I argue, *Native Son* requires an intersensory reading—an audiovisual approach. If, as “Images of ‘Vision’ in *Native Son*” suggests, the novel isn’t “merely” a “‘chase adventure,’ nor a courtroom drama, nor a study of urban mechanization,” it is certainly also those things; and it is on top of that a study of crime journalism and contemporary print and visual media, including film. It is an outgrowth of

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<sup>18</sup> Afflerbach, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Lordi, 37-38. I do not here accuse Lordi of ignoring the auditory altogether—*Black Resonance* is a book-length and compelling argument to the contrary. But I do not, as I have indicated here repeatedly, wish to justify an account of noise, or of sound writ large, with how it might clarify readings of the visual realm.

some of Wright's own "literary journalism," a contribution to detective fiction, and a work of black naturalism.<sup>20</sup> I do not mean to suggest that there must be a dominant reading of the novel. But reading the audiovisual in *Native Son* allows an understanding of Wright's work that need not privilege the figurative or aesthetic at the expense of the political. Just as Michel Chion's film theory illuminates *Ulysses* in Chapter Two, audiovisual *Native Son* explains the auditory through visual schema, both through cinematic language and technique and by importing Foucauldian panopticism to the novel's sonic environment. This latter practice calls attention to a concept that I will term, after Tom Rice's anthropological work, panaudicisism.

#### I. *NATIVE SON* AND PANOPTICISM AFTER HAYS

Richard Wright loved the movies. Michel Fabre records that "he sometimes went to as many as three movies a day."<sup>21</sup> Film inflects the entirety of *Native Son*—perhaps least notably when Bigger himself goes to the movies. Peter Brunette notes that Wright "conceived of his novel largely in cinematic terms," using filmic techniques "to focus the viewer's attention, to exclude the extraneous, to serve up a never-ending stream of new narrative information."<sup>22</sup> And in 1951, a decade after the novel's publication, Wright traveled to Argentina to participate in its adaptation into film—the first of two *Native Son* motion pictures. *Native Son* "must have seemed a natural for the movies," Brunette writes. Even leaving aside Mary's murder and the chase scene at the close of Book 2, "[t]he final

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<sup>20</sup> William Dow writes that Wright, a reporter for the *Daily Worker* in the 1930s and '40s, "produced a kind of African American literary journalism," "repurpos[ing] traditional journalism...in order to promote a political solidarity with oppressed people around the world" ("Unreading Modernism: Richard Wright's Literary Journalism," *Literary Journalism Studies* 5.2 [2013]: 60).

<sup>21</sup> Fabre, 200.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Brunette, "Two Wrights, One Wrong," in *The Modern American Novel and the Movies*, ed. Gerald Peary and Roger Shatzkin (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), 131, 132.

section of the book consists of [Bigger's] trial (always a favorite film scene), the humanitarian arguments of his white Communist lawyer, and his ultimate conviction. All the raw elements for good cinema were there—and it was serious fiction to boot!”<sup>23</sup>

Popular enough in Buenos Aires, when the film reached New York it flopped decisively.

Though both are all but forgotten by the general public, it is almost *de rigueur* to discuss the 1951 and 1986 film adaptations of *Native Son* as informative paratexts. Even so, in many cases that discussion is limited to critiquing casting decisions, and primarily to laughing about how Wright, who played the part of Bigger in the 1951 film (directed by Pierre Chenal, whose credits include a 1935 French adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, concurrent 1937 French and Italian adaptations of Luigi Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and 1939's *Le Dernier Tournant*, the first film adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*), was both too old by three decades and too well-nourished to fit the part. (A parenthetical by Baldwin in his short Wright memoir “Alas, Poor Richard,” published the year after Wright's 1960 death, describes the dismay with which news of that film was received: “[T]o our horror, later abundantly justified, he himself played Bigger Thomas”).<sup>24</sup> Space is also frequently devoted to commentary on the much more significant decisions each adaptation makes with regard to Bigger's girlfriend Bessie Mears, who in the 1986 film (dir. Jerrold Freeman) is not Bigger's second victim, instead disappearing altogether after the first act, and who in the 1951 iteration is transmuted from the novel's pathetic alcoholic to a jazz

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<sup>23</sup> Brunette, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Baldwin, “Alas, Poor Richard,” in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 137. John Pyros, writing in the *Negro American Literature Forum*, argues that the 1951 *Native Son* failed because “Hollywood's racist fascism” forced Wright to work with an inferior production team, though he too notes that “Wright's own vanity” likely inclined him toward partners who not only agreed but insisted that he himself play the leading male role (John Pyros, “Richard Wright: A Black Novelist's Experience in Film,” *Negro American Literature Forum* 9.2 [1975]: 53).

singer on the verge of great success in an Eddie's Kitchen Shack transformed into a swank nightclub—a “new vision,” Lordi writes, “enabled by Wright’s collaboration with visual artists and by his work outside the United States.”<sup>25</sup> Even if, as Lordi argues, film is integral to Wright’s “revalorization” of Bessie as “a medium of alliance between black men and women,” 1951’s Bessie is still murdered by Bigger, though only after a surreal and protracted dream sequence in which a vision of his dead father convinces him, incorrectly, that she’s ratted him out to the police.<sup>26</sup> The murder is told in flashback at Bigger’s trial, in “a half-hearted attempt...to keep the audience sentiment with Bigger as long as possible by withholding until the end information that he has killed Bessie.”<sup>27</sup> The brickbat is elided.

Each film adaptation also makes a series of important decisions about sound, over and above Bessie’s career in jazz. If the first scene of the novel is devoted to heightened listening in the Thomas family’s darkened apartment—to *Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng*, creak, and clang—Chenal’s film relies instead on wall-to-wall exposition. A voiceover shellacs any auditory nuance, instead providing a description of Bigger’s life and immediate prospects as though it is introducing a documentary, and the rat, so crucial to the novel, is elided entirely. Mary’s death gets more screen time, and a more faithful rendering of the novel’s soundscape, as the fabric of the scene demands that the importance of the smallest sounds overtakes the need for explicit explanations of the action (for the most part—Chenal’s Bigger does mutter “They’ll kill me! They’ll kill me!” as his concerns

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<sup>25</sup> Lordi, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Lordi, 27, 15. For further readings of casting decisions and revisions of Bessie’s fate, see Page Laws, “Not Everybody’s Protest Film, Either: *Native Son* among Controversial Film Adaptations,” *The Black Scholar* 39.1-2 (2009): 27-33, esp. 27-28; and Jerry W. Ward, Jr., “*Native Son*: Six Versions Seeking Interpretation,” in James A. Miller, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Wright’s Native Son* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1997), 16-21.

<sup>27</sup> Brunette, 137.

mount). All the same, the scene is chiefly driven by the film's score. As Bigger smothers Mary, first with his hands and then with a pillow, the music first swells and then fades as Mrs. Dalton leaves the room. When Bigger realizes Mary is dead, the music swells again, and we understand that the score has been following not Mary's ebbing life, as we might first have suspected, but Bigger's suspense, momentary relief, and revived terror. Though capitalizing on the audiovisual field of film in Mary's death scene, the film closes with another voiceover, this time at the expense of the final "clang" of prison doors that sutures the novel's end to its beginning. The 1986 film is, by comparison, hugely faithful to the novel's soundscape, including reproducing the novel's opening, from alarm clock to screeching rat, in remarkable detail.

And then there is the question of the 1951 film's New York flop. Lordi writes of the censored version of the Argentinian film released in the U.S. that

[L]ost in the film's transit from Buenos Aires to New York was about thirty minutes—most of which was the trial scene in which Bigger's lawyer defends him. In currently available VHS versions of the film, where one should hear acute social analysis of the conditions that engendered Bigger's crime—a major set piece in the novel—one instead sees a rapid silent montage of a courtroom scene. While much of the film's new power derives from its artful marriage of sound and vision, the censors divorced sound from vision at the critical moment, leaving only a string of odd images that paradoxically announced their own silencing. In a letter to his agent, Wright wrote that "[what] did the greatest damage was

cutting the trial.... The trial is shown with arms waving and mouths moving but nothing is heard.”<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, there is no dialogue whatsoever in the trial scene, and despite the voiceover that ends the film and the viewer’s acknowledgement of Bigger’s inevitable conviction and execution the mute trial contributes to a general lack of resolution that sits oddly alongside the received idea of a courtroom scene, in which a proclaimed verdict, at least, generally lends the proceedings a measure of closure. The bizarre pantomime that instead seals Bigger’s fate in Chenal’s film cannot have helped its case in the eyes of critics or audiences stateside.

Lordi’s account of Chenal’s film does, however, characterize it in a way I would like to push against. Certainly, *Native Son* in its original form was presented in the visual medium of print, and took inspiration from another highly visual medium in film. But the importance of the “artful marriage of sound and vision” to the power of the work is by no means “new” to *Native Son* in 1951. Wright’s novel is from the start dependent on the audiovisual, from its depiction of the surveillance and moral policing that structure Book 1 to the true (and spectacular) crime elements of Book 2 and the closing gavel of Book 3’s trial. Page Laws’s 2009 reconsideration of both film adaptations argues that *Native Son* “prefigure[s] its own eventual transformation into a film adaptation” in the breadth

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<sup>28</sup> Lordi, 53. The Library of Congress released a restored version of the film in February 2016, drawing from archived Puerto Rican and Argentine sources. See J. Hoberman, “A ‘Native Son’ Film Version, Now Complete and Unfiltered,” *New York Times*, 9 Feb 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/movies/a-native-son-film-version-now-complete-and-unfiltered.html>. It is worth noting, too, that at least one critic considers Max’s Marxist monologue to be one true impediment to the success of any film adaptation of the novel. Thomas Cripps, writing in 1989, asserts that “[t]he problem, of course, is with the politics of *Native Son*. Why make a movie the denouement of which rests upon a strident, even vulgar, Marxism that its own author had repudiated almost a half century ago?... Moviemaking does not permit cautionary asides to the class nor are expository footnotes handed out at the theatre door. Thus the easy, indeed, the *only* solution for film-makers in search of a way to pay homage to a classic is to ignore politics entirely and to aim for a rendering of the artistic center” (Cripps, “*Native Son*, Film and Book: A Few Thoughts on a ‘Classic,’” *Mississippi Quarterly* 42.4 [1989]: 426).

and importance of its filmic techniques, including intentionally cinematic dialogue and a narrow focus on Bigger's experience: "Wright's goal in writing *Native Son* the particular way he did was to 'transcend mere humanist intellectualizing about the "Negro problem" and instead lend the white reader his black eyes on the world.' And he was at least partly successful, thanks to his borrowed cinematic techniques."<sup>29</sup>

Consider the scene following the novel's inaugural alarm. Having extricated himself from the kitchenette, escaping from his mother's "irk[some]" singing to nowhere in particular (10), Bigger pauses before he reaches the street:

He went down the steps into the vestibule and stood looking out into the street through the plate glass of the front door. Now and then a street car rattled past over steel tracks. He was sick of his life at home. Day in and day out there was nothing but shouts and bickering. But what could he do? Each time he asked himself that question his mind hit a blank wall and he stopped thinking. (12)

*Native Son* notes over and over again that unwanted sound is a great source of discontent for Bigger. But though he notes the sound of the streetcar (which, along with the sound of automobile tires on the street, recurs insistently over the novel's first two thirds), it is rather "shouts and bickering"—that is, speech that takes a form so distasteful to him that it is stripped of its communicative content—that looms largest in his mind. More, Bigger cannot contemplate what life would be like without the "shouts and bickering" that have come to stand for "his life at home." Trying to imagine how to escape the noise, Bigger's "mind hit[s] a blank wall" that stops his thoughts in their tracks. In other words, when Bigger contemplates a life of relative silence, his mind's eye loses its sight—the "blank

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<sup>29</sup> Laws, 29-30.

wall” functioning at once as a visual representation of his thoughts and as the absence of a visual representation of a way forward. We know Bigger follows this train of thought repeatedly, because the same thing happens “[e]ach time.” As with Wright’s earlier “*Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnng*” and later “buzz,” the repeated rattling of the streetcar down its tracks is a durable auditory clue to the passage of time as he thinks, though whether this experience of noise followed by imagined silence followed by the blindness of the mind’s eye occurs simply “[d]ay in and day out” or is in fact happening several times running while Bigger stands in the vestibule and “[n]ow and then a street car rattle[s] past” is less clear.

If this experience of sound and vision is somewhat less straightforwardly cinematic than Chenal’s, Bigger’s audiovisual experience in the vestibule is not limited to the failings of his mind’s eye. Through a framed piece of plate glass reminiscent of both still and moving pictures, Bigger watches workmen across the street putting up a poster of David Buckley, the state’s attorney who will later take the lead on his prosecution:

[Bigger] brooded and watched the men at work across the street.

They were pasting a huge colored poster to a signboard. The poster showed a white face.... He looked at the poster: the white face was fleshy but stern; one hand was uplifted and its index finger pointed straight out into the street at each passer-by. The poster showed one of those faces that looked straight at you when you looked at it and all the while you were walking and turning your head to look at it it kept looking unblinkingly back at you until you got so far from it you had to take your eyes away, and then it stopped, like a

movie blackout. Above the top of the poster were tall red letters:  
YOU CAN'T WIN! (12-13)<sup>30</sup>

Considering Buckley's future appearances in the novel ("We know what you've done. We got the evidence," he crows in Bigger's cell in Book 3), the poster seems personally tailored to Bigger—all the more so as it stares straight into his front door, barking what could be the epigraph to the entire text: "YOU CAN'T WIN!" (293).<sup>31</sup> Even without foreknowledge of Bigger's fate, it is easy to see the poster as part and parcel of what Virginia Whatley Smith has identified as the "figurative panopticon penitentiary" of Chicago's Black Belt.<sup>32</sup> Buckley's fictional poster is of a piece with historical hailing advertisements (1914's "Lord Kitchener Wants You"; J. M. Flagg's 1917 "I Want YOU" Uncle Sam recruitment poster; Smokey the Bear's "Only You") whose purpose is to arouse simultaneously in their audiences a sense of being observed and a sense of broad social responsibility that shades into culpability.<sup>33</sup> And the poster itself, apart from any cultural reference, coopts the visual field in a very specific way. Forcing its gaze on you until "you ha[ve] to take *your* eyes away," the poster, in making those it watches literally

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<sup>30</sup> The 2005 Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition of *Native Son* read here is based on the bound page proofs sent to the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1939, before its intervention resulted in significant changes to the text. Previous restored editions, including the 1966 Harper & Row Perennial Classics, have the end of the paragraph as "Above the top of the poster were tall red letters: IF YOU BREAK THE LAW, YOU CAN'T WIN!" (Wright, *Native Son* [New York: Harper & Row Perennial Classics, 1966], 16). The latter is the version of the text that informs Charles Scruggs's understanding that "[t]he poster argues not for a universal code of moral behavior but for one directed at black people alone"; without the conditional "IF YOU BREAK THE LAW," the sentiment is that much clearer (Scruggs, "The City Without Maps in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," in *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, 154).

<sup>31</sup> The novel's actual epigraph, Job 23:2, presents Bigger's case—and Wright's own—in a more auditory vein: "Even today is my complaint rebellious, My stroke is heavier than my groaning" suggests not only the bitterness of what is to come, but also that its disclosure of Bigger's plight, desperate as it is, is but incomplete.

<sup>32</sup> Virginia Whatley Smith, "Native Son as Depiction of a Carceral Society," in James A. Miller, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Wright's Native Son* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1997), 95.

<sup>33</sup> On the ease with which a two-dimensional object can be made to "follow" its observer, see Jan J. Koenderink, Andrea J. van Doorn, Astrid M. L. Kappers, and James T. Todd, "Pointing Out of the Picture," *Perception* 33 (2004): 513-30.

look over their shoulders, does the surveillance work of the state without the state having to do any more work than hang a poster (to be sure, there are beat cops in the Black Belt, but aside from one being a minor inconvenience in the boys' unrealized robbery plot, none is cited as a surveilling deterrent, or given anything like the narrative space devoted to Buckley's poster). Then, too, Wright's repetition of "you" and "it" reinforces a subject/object distinction that pulls the reader, for once (and in an echo of the poster's own "YOU"), into Bigger's position of being unceasingly surveilled by something altogether inhuman.

Nestled among Bigger's thoughts about Buckley's fleshy white face is a gesture toward another visual enterprise altogether: film. When "you" get so far from Buckley's poster that you can no longer turn back to see if it is still watching, Bigger thinks, the scene "stop[s], like a movie blackout." But just as a film cutting to black emphasizes the last shot before its sudden darkness, the effect of the poster lingers beyond the poster's physical presence, its triumphant direct address working its way into the minds of those it addresses. And if Buckley's poster is unsettling in its weaponization of vectors of observation and use of mass visual media, film itself is, in this vein, an even more interesting commodity in the novel.

The "movie blackout" effect, for instance, recurs in key moments in the narrative. Near the end of Book 2, when Bigger decides the alcoholic Bessie is too much of a liability to go on the run with and determines to kill her, the murder takes place in the dark of night in an abandoned tenement house. As in the opening scene before Bigger turns on the light in his family's kitchenette, Wright's description is heavily auditory, relying on each character's breath and grunts—and eventually on the sounds of Bessie's

body as it “hit[s] and bump[s] against the narrow sides of the airshaft” until Bigger “hear[s] it strike the bottom”—to rough out action that cannot be seen (238). But the scene is not entirely unseen, either. To guide his brickbat, Bigger turns on a flashlight, just for a moment, “then switche[s] it off again, retaining as an image before his eyes [Bessie’s] black face calm in deep sleep” (236). In thus creating an afterimage of Bessie’s sleeping face for his own ends, Bigger intentionally replicates the filmic effect of Buckley’s poster, though in the service of his direct defiance of its interdiction of crime. Very shortly afterward, driven to the rooftops by the house-to-house search for Mary’s killer, Bigger pistol-whips one of his pursuers, and again something very like a cinematic cut to black appears:

His hand stopped in mid-air, at the point where the metal of the gun had met the bone of the skull; stopped, frozen, still, as though again about to lift and descend.... The man fell away from Bigger, on his face, full length in the cushion of snow, like a man falling soundlessly in a deep dream. Bigger was aware of the clicking sound of the metal against the bone of the skull; it stayed on in his ears, faint but distinct, like a sharp bright point lingering on in front of the eyes when a light has gone out suddenly and darkness is everywhere—so the click of the gun handle against the man’s head stayed on in his ears. He had not moved from his tracks; his right hand was still extended, upward, in mid-air; he lowered it, looking at the man, the sound of the metal against bone fading in his ears like a dying whisper. (261-62)

When Bigger, bent over Mary's nearly decapitated body, pauses before striking the final blow, Wright records that he rests "in an attitude of prayer," an accidental pose made memorable by its discontinuity with the acts that surround it. Here, Bigger seems physically to duplicate cinema's blackout effect, the paradoxical extension of an image through time that its abrupt absence occasions in film: he stands, hand raised, and stays there on display while the reader examines the scene and his experience of it. At the beginning of the excerpt his "hand stop[s]" and at the end he "ha[s] not moved," and all that happens between (the man's fall, Bigger's association of the man's fall with a dreamer, Bigger's awareness of sound and figuring of it as light) is likewise suspended in time. Explicit description of an afterimage—of "a sharp bright point lingering on in front of the eyes when a light has gone out suddenly"—again appears. Crucially, though, that afterimage is not an image at all. Rather, it is Bigger's film-inflected figure for an auditory experience; eschewing the concept of the echo, the passage relies on a familiar visual phenomenon to describe how a sound "stay[s] on in [Bigger's] ears." The especially attentive reader might hear an echo—an afterimage—of the lid of Mary Dalton's trunk closing on her corpse as "Bigger eased the top down and fumbled in the darkness for the latch and heard it click loudly" (90). But it would not take special attention to hear, a mere 14 pages later, the "dying whisper" of metal clicking against bone "like a sharp bright point" revived at Bigger's inquest as his handcuffs are removed: "He heard a sharp, metallic click and his hands were free" (276).

In Wright's hands, the "blackout" wielded by his beloved movies is slowly transmuted, finally resulting in something between an afterimage and an echo—something that in a different world we might productively think of as a "sound image,"

but can perhaps best be described in available terms as an audiovisual suspension, in which a noise recalls an image and is, in the narrative's key moments, indissociable from it. Just as the clanging that bookends the novel does as much to underscore how little Bigger's circumstances may have changed as how much they have, the "click" of Bigger's handcuffs calls up the "clicking sound" of metal hitting bone, and along with it the image of the fugitive Bigger, even as Wright's description of his "free" hands emphasizes the impossibility of freedom. By the end of the process, it is the reader, rather than Bigger himself, who is the subject of the cut-to-black's sensory echo, as one "click" evokes another, and one audiovisual suspension cascades into the next.

One might regard this as the culmination of what is for Brunette is the ultimate aim of Wright's cinematic literature: "What Wright wanted was heightened feeling, preintellectual understanding that would *change* the reader by forcing him to perceive unpleasant reality in strange new ways."<sup>34</sup> For Bigger, of course, that perceptual reality is just that—a reality, not a cognitive shift—and as such is significantly more sinister. Buckley's poster and its visual effects are not literary pyrotechnics, but a tool of the surveillance and moral policing that will culminate in his execution. This remains true even when those visual effects seem to suggest the potential for escape from that very regime. Bigger, we are told, "wanted to see a movie; his senses hungered for it. In a movie he could dream without effort; all he had to do was lean back in a seat and keep his eyes open" (13-14). If thinking about his home life makes his mind's eye hit a blank wall, the movies let him dream. If Buckley's poster makes Bigger nervous, and regardless of that advertisement's filmic qualities, Bigger thinks of going to the movies as a passive, anonymous, relaxing endeavor. Each medium acts on its audience more or less without

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<sup>34</sup> Brunette, 132.

their participation, but whereas Buckley's poster forces Bigger to look, the movies are an escape for a young man "irked" by silence, "anxious to do something to evade looking so squarely" at his problems (17). In other words, Bigger welcomes the visual interference that the movies represent.

The pictures Bigger actually sees—a newsreel containing gossip about the escapades of Mary Dalton; *The Gay Woman*, featuring scenes of great opulence; and the 1931 W. S. Van Dyke film *Trader Horn*, a safari adventure shot on location in Africa—offer something more threatening than a simple escape, however. If Bigger himself seems to think of going to the movies as a helpful sensory and observational counterpoint to the poster of Buckley, the two seem in fact not to be all that different. Even were Bigger to be doing all the looking in the movie theater, staring passively at a show put on only for his benefit, he would also be looking over his own shoulder at a poster of Buckley, changing his behavior in response to a man who had no work to do himself. And we know, too, that Bigger is not in fact doing all the looking in the movie theater; his masturbation in the dark is brought up during his trial as putative evidence of sexually predatory behavior.

Wright's own love of and belief in the power of movies aside, the author himself makes a case for cinema's sinister influence in "How 'Bigger' Was Born." In the essay, Wright describes a series of the "Bigger Thomases" he has known, first in the Jim Crow South and then in Chicago, identifying "environmental factors" that made life in the city more difficult. Bigger "was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies,

and the mere imposing sight and sound of daily American life,” he writes.<sup>35</sup> “In many respects his emergence as a distinct type was inevitable”:

The urban environment of Chicago, affording a more stimulating life, made the Negro Bigger Thomases react more violently than even in the South. More than ever I began to see and understand the environmental factors which made for this extreme conduct. It was not that Chicago segregated Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago’s physical aspect—noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment—did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more obstreperous than in the South.<sup>36</sup>

Bigger is interpellated by media, the “nois[e]” of Chicago and what Nagel calls “the amorphous splendor of the white world” calling to him through the “effort[less]” dreams of the movie theater to a life to which he has no access.<sup>37</sup>

For Baldwin, Bigger’s subsequent retraction from his family and black culture more generally undermines Wright’s political effort. “Those Negroes who surround him,” he writes,

might be considered as far richer and far more subtle and accurate illustrations of the ways in which Negroes are controlled in our society and the complex techniques they have evolved for their survival.... Bigger, who cannot function therefore as a reflection of

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<sup>35</sup> Wright, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” 439.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” 439, 442.

<sup>37</sup> Nagel, 89.

the social illness, having, as it were, no society to reflect, likewise refuses to function on the loftier level of the Christ-symbol.<sup>38</sup>

As Eve Dunbar has it, “Wright’s literary rendering of black inhumanity was disingenuous due to Wright’s own unwillingness to accept the reality of black humanity.”<sup>39</sup> But, by his own admission—remember the banker’s daughters—Wright might be relying on a less canny audience than Baldwin and Dunbar. Scruggs points out that, after 1934, under the Hays Code, Hollywood was required to depict gangsters unfavorably: “[T]hey had to die as a lesson to the supposedly impressionable audience, sometimes with just the hint of Christian redemption.”<sup>40</sup> Bigger is rather emphatically not a gangster, at least if his reluctance to join in Book One’s robbery plan is any indication, and his death sentence follows a series of emphatic rejections of institutionalized religion. Still, Scruggs goes on to read echoes of the 1938 James Cagney crime film *Angels with Dirty Faces* (dir. Michael Curtiz) in *Native Son*: the “general structural similarity of plot (the poor boy turns to crime, has a brief success, and comes to a bad end), as well as Wright’s use of the name ‘Buckley’ (a crooked police captain in the movie).”<sup>41</sup> But just as interesting as any structural connection between the novel and the film is the way that Wright, following Scruggs’s premise, capitalizes on film’s effects both on his novel’s protagonist and on his novel’s reader—both “impressionable audience[s]” in their own right.

## II. *NATIVE SON* AND PANAUDITION IN THE OTHER GOLDEN AGE

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<sup>38</sup> Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone,” 43, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Eve Dunbar, *Black Regions of the Imagination: African American Writers Between the Nation and the World* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2013), xi.

<sup>40</sup> Scruggs, 168.

<sup>41</sup> Scruggs, 169.

If *Native Son* was published squarely within the Golden Age of Hollywood, it was written at the tail end of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. Margaret Walker records that Wright was “[e]specially fond of detective stories and murder mysteries,” and that he read the pulp magazines “Flynn’s *Detective Weekly* and *Argosy*,” the latter of which had, some two decades earlier, featured the work of the young Upton Sinclair.<sup>42</sup> Wright, Walker continues, “read Agatha Christie, S. S. Van Dyne, and later Erle Stanley Gardner . . . and Edgar Allan Poe’s detective tales and stories of ratiocination—‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ *The Fall of the House of Usher*, ‘Ligea,’ and *The Gold Bug*.”<sup>43</sup> *Native Son*, significantly informed by the contemporary trial of a young black man named Robert Nixon, accused of the brickbat murder of a white Chicago woman, bears witness to this education in detective and crime fiction. Wright, by then living in New York, asked Margaret Walker to send him newspaper clippings about the trial; the sensationalized newspaper reports of Bigger’s crime, flight, arrest, and trial are drawn directly from those clippings. Walker, estranged from Wright in the 1940s, goes on to call the novel “[a] detective story with crimes of murder and rape melodramatically portrayed in chase scenes[.]”<sup>44</sup> On Wright’s death, Nelson Algren wrote that in *Native Son* “[t]he challenge Wright raised was both specific and general. . . . [H]e asserted specifically that, when a crime is committed by a man who has been excluded from civilization, civilization is accomplice to the crime.”<sup>45</sup>

Rachel Watson writes that Wright’s decision to follow the criminal rather than the detective is crucially a decision to “orien[t] the familiar forms of the detective story

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<sup>42</sup> Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright, Daemoniac Genius: A Portrait of the Man; A Critical Look at His Work* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 28.

<sup>43</sup> Walker, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Walker, 121.

<sup>45</sup> Nelson Algren, “Remembering Richard Wright,” *The Nation* 192 (28 January 1961): 85.

toward the anxiety that attends *leaving* an identifying trail of evidence rather than the suspense—and relative safety—associated with *tracking* it.”<sup>46</sup> For Bigger, that trail of evidence and its attendant anxiety is material, certainly—his ransom note, Mary and Bessie’s remains, and the ransom money are all eventually used against him—but it is also perceptual. The morning after Mary’s death, as the true test of his cover-up begins, Bigger wonders “just how his words *really* did sound. Was the tone of his voice this morning different from other mornings? Was there something unusual in his voice since he had killed Mary?” (102).

Bigger’s concern with his tone is one clue that he finds himself living in a world policed not simply by what David Buckley might see, but what David Buckley might hear. Despite its name, panaudicisim is not simply the conceptual transduction of Foucauldian panopticism into the auditory realm—which transduction would exemplify precisely the sort of simple transitivity of perception and the language of perception that I have resisted throughout this work. For anthropologist Tom Rice, whose 2003 article “Soundselves” centers on a study of patients in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, in a hospital environment the soundscape “comes to be experienced as a symbol of... ‘patienthood,’ meaning that sounds are central to the patients’ experience of themselves as ‘patient selves’” and thus as subject to “certain systems of control” as determined by biomedical practice.<sup>47</sup> In other words, an authority, here a body of medical professionals, determines what the proper behavior of the patient-subject is, and “thus

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<sup>46</sup> Rachel Watson, “The Living Clue: Richard Wright’s *The Outsider* (1953),” *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora* 11.2 (2010): 55.

<sup>47</sup> Tom Rice, “Soundselves: An Acoustemology of Sound and Self in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary,” *Anthropology Today* 19.4 (2003): 4.

gives rise to a sonically constituted sense of self.”<sup>48</sup> So far so Foucault—indeed, Rice goes on to say that sound “extends the scope of panoptic possibility,” leading the patient-subject who hears the “authoritarian presence” to self-police.<sup>49</sup> In one instance, Rice’s interviews record, a patient rolling a cigarette on a windowsill thought he heard a nurse’s approaching footsteps, and responded by tossing his contraband out the window; that this was a false alarm does not mean he was any less subject to biomedical authority than if a Scots Nurse Ratched had indeed appeared. Self-surveillance is a natural end of Foucauldian panopticism (at least until it meets redundancy in the social media overshare), and it alone does not distinguish panaudicism from panopticism. Likewise, I am not arguing that the panaudicon enters the text when Bigger has to listen to white supremacist propaganda, though the shouting of movie screens, rustling of newsprint, and bluster of the state’s attorney certainly constitute important moments of listening in the novel.

What instead distinguishes the panaudicon is the role of the subject: if the panopticon relies on the surveilled’s idea that he may at any moment be being watched, it is the subject of the panaudicon who does the hearing, as though to gain a fuller understanding of the reach of the establishment to which he is bound. It is also, in certain moments, up the subject of the panaudicon to try to muffle himself—to make less noise, and therefore introduce less interference to the sonic environment of which he is an eager student. As Rowland Atkinson, expanding on Rice’s study, writes, “the implications of being surveilled by our soundprints lead us to manage ourselves in ways which reduce the sounds we make and how we make them in such a way as to avoid being traced,

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<sup>48</sup> Rice, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Rice, 8.

embarrassed, located or identified by others.”<sup>50</sup> *Was there something unusual in his voice since he had killed Mary?*

At the close of Book 1, Bigger returns to his family’s kitchenette, awaking at the beginning of Book 2 not to the sound of an alarm but to the silence of a Sunday morning, “on his back, in bed, hearing and seeing nothing” (97). Slowly, he becomes aware of the light in the room and the soft breathing of his sleeping family before he awakens fully, springing to his feet in the middle of the room in a panic, “remembering that he had killed Mary, had smothered her, had cut her head off and put her body in the fiery furnace” (97). He spends a few moments frantically planning and packing in the family’s single room, silently cursing his mother and siblings for lying (literally and figuratively) between him and his autonomy: “They were always too close to him, so close that he could never have any way of his own” (99). “This was much different from Dalton’s home,” he muses over breakfast (105). “Here all slept in one room; there he would have a room for himself alone. He smelt food cooking and remembered that one could not smell food cooking in Dalton’s home; pots could not be heard rattling all over the house. Each person lived in one room and had a little world of his own” (105). Far from the forced intimacy of the kitchenette, the Daltons’ home is characterized by the possibility of sensory isolation—the tantalizing prospect of neither smelling nor hearing someone else’s food being prepared—figured as ownership. Even Bigger might have “a little world of his own” in Mr. Dalton’s house of many rooms.

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<sup>50</sup> Rowland Atkinson, “Ecology of Sound: The Sonic Order of Urban Space,” *Urban Studies* 44.10 (2007): 1908. As in gossip and more straightforwardly encoded messages, noisy “soundprints” can be “manage[d]” in ways that benefit the subject. Tricia Rose details how rap music presents a noisy negotiation of contemporary racism and resistance in her *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1994).

One could imagine a world in which Bigger's method of disposing of Mary's body is underwritten precisely by this understanding of the supposed atomization of the Dalton home—by an imagination of a domestic space as internally segregated as Chicago's south side, where the isolation of Bigger's "room for himself alone" and the furnace room he operates from the world of the Daltons' opulence, from Mary's bedroom and Mr. Dalton's study, maps onto the insuperable two miles separating the Thomas' single room in Bronzeville from the Dalton family home in Kenwood. Under that rubric, the idea that Mary's body might be discovered by a family member's interference in the space relegated to domestic staff would be as unthinkable as Mr. Dalton personally exterminating the rats in the Thomas' kitchenette. But—fatally—Bigger's picture of the Dalton home is nothing like the truth. When he returns to work after sharing Sunday breakfast with his family he does have his own room, certainly, but it emphatically does not exist in the sensory isolation he so prizes as one of the trappings of a high-class home. Bigger completes a final sweep of the basement, confirming—he thinks—that no further trace of Mary remains, and then goes upstairs to his room to lie on his bed:

The room was quiet. No! He heard something! He cocked his head, listening. He caught faint sounds of pots and pans rattling in the kitchen below. He got up and walked to the far end of the room; the sounds came louder. He heard the soft but firm tread of Peggy as she walked across the kitchen floor. She's right under me, he thought. He stood still, listening.... He could not make out what they were saying. He stood up and looked round. A foot from him

was the door of the clothes closet. He opened it; the voices came clearly. (123)

Clearly, then, Bigger can hear other people living their lives in the Dalton home. In fact, Bigger can hear precisely what he earlier claimed not to be able to hear: the “rattling” of pots and pans in the kitchen, preparing someone else’s food. But he can hear other things, too—things that he hopes will allow him to avoid detection as Mary’s killer.

Bigger’s ability to hear into the rest of the Dalton house, even imperfectly, means that the beginning of Book 2 becomes a study of the project of panaudition that killing Mary makes all the more urgent. Bigger is back and forth to his closet and the hallway outside his room, his auditory lookout points, several times in this short span, and he manipulates the space (the “little world of his own”) to make it a more effective observation post: “He went to his room, into the closet, closed the door and listened. Silence. He came out, left the door open and, in order to get to the closet quickly and without sound, pulled off his shoes” (190). Sitting in his room after Mr. Dalton calls for Britten, his private investigator, he hears

a muffled sound of sobs. Then suddenly there was silence. What’s happening? Would Mr. Dalton phone the police now? He strained to listen, but no sounds came. He went to the door and took a few steps into the hallway. There were still no sounds. He looked about to make sure that no one was watching him, then crept on tiptoe down the hall. He heard voices. Mr. Dalton was talking to someone. He crept farther; yes, he could hear[.] (189).

Bigger, invisible, participates in the investigation into his crime only through what Atkinson called “soundprints”—his own as he creeps quietly down the hall, careful not to become in that moment a subject of sonic surveillance; Dalton, Britten, and Peggy’s, as they launch the investigation that will lead to him. He stays in his room, listening to their conversations, but also gathering other information. The next time he eavesdrops, it is to hear “the soft sound of sobbing.... He stood for a long time, listening to Peggy’s sobs and the long moan of the wind sweeping through the night outside” (190).

Wright’s detective story soon takes us into the realm of intentionally noisy inscription in the form of Bigger’s fabricated ransom note. In “I Bite the Hand That Feeds Me,” Wright claims that “[i]f there had been *one* person in the Dalton household who viewed Bigger Thomas as a human being, the crime would have been solved in half an hour. Did not Bigger himself know that it was the denial of his personality that enabled him to escape detection so long? The one piece of incriminating evidence which would have solved the ‘murder mystery’ was Bigger’s humanity[.]”<sup>51</sup> Wright’s protests about Bigger’s humanity and Hurston’s criticism of Wright’s ear for vernacular notwithstanding, there is one moment before the discovery of Mary’s body in which a concrete clue might have lead to Bigger, and in which black vernacular is—or could be—crucial. In his fabricated ransom note, Bigger writes, “Do what this letter say” (177). Doyle Walls writes that Bigger “has spelled out a tangible clue; however, rather than making the crime seem ‘insoluble,’ the paradox is that no one sees the obvious.”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps Bigger’s practiced minstrelsy, scraping and mumbling deferentially to private investigator and newspaper reporter alike, has been particularly effective, and, as Smith

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, “I Bite the Hand That Feeds Me,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 165 (1940): 828.

<sup>52</sup> Doyle W. Walls, “The Clue Undetected in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*,” *American Literature* 57.1 (1985): 127.

suggests, reinforced law enforcement's "assumptions that Negroes are illiterate and lazy" to such an extent that they refuse to believe he could have constructed even a flawed "counterdetective strateg[y]." <sup>53</sup> Or, as Barbara Johnson has it, the investigators cannot identify "Do what this letter say" as vernacular English at all, and "the identity of the author of the note remains invisible because the detectives do not know how to read what is plainly there before them. Behind the sentence 'Do what this letter say' lies the possibility—and the invisibility—of a whole vernacular literature." <sup>54</sup>

All of which points to the fact that if the phenomenological sense of noise understands it to be unwanted sound, in reading *Native Son* it once more becomes vital to consider who, exactly, is doing the wanting. At the end of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, one party's noise is the other party's signal and vice versa, and Katrin dies for it; as Bigger stands over Mary Dalton's bed on the night he kills her, her signal—first murmurs of drunken disorientation, then of protest as he smothers her—becomes, for Bigger, the sort of noise that he knows will lead to his being "traced...located [and] identified," and thus noise that must be silenced.

Mary mumbled again.... [Bigger] knew that Mrs. Dalton could not see him; but he knew that if Mary spoke she would come to the side of the bed and discover him, touch him.... Mary mumbled and tried to rise again.... He had to stop her from mumbling, or he would be caught.... [H]e pushed downward upon the pillow with all of his weight, determined that she must not move or make any sound that would betray him. (85)

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, 100.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Johnson, "The Re(a)d and the Black," in *Richard Wright's Native Son*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 119.

Everyone mumbles in *Native Son*: Mary, Mr. Dalton, Peggy, Max, Mrs. Thomas, Gus. It is one of Wright's favored speech descriptors. Bigger mumbles constantly—he mumbles submissively in response to the Dalton family, subversively at Buckley as a symbol of institutionalized racism and graft, admiringly at airplanes and the Daltons' domestic conveniences, resignedly to Jan and Max from his jail cell. He mumbles the first time we hear from him: “‘Awright,’ came a sleepy mumble.” The indistinctiveness of Bigger's mumblings carries different meanings in different contexts, but the flattening of his communications into a series of mumbles is indicative, too, of the ways his world limits his expressive capabilities as he himself polices the sounds he makes. But in this scene it is, fatally, not Bigger's own mumbling that will bring him to the attention of the white supremacist disciplinary society, not his own soundprint he must manage. As Mary's situation worsens, she “mumble[s],” over and over again, until the last breath leaves her body with “a long slow sigh” (86). If the panopticon and its cinematic echoes haunt the audiovisual field of *Native Son*, the practice of listening and concealment that the panaudicon inclines Bigger toward is a major engine of the novel's action.

It also reveals how the problems of noise, phenomenological and cybernetic, that structure Bigger's life and death are singularly inflected by both class and race. As Borden's noise writing was an attempt to bridge hierarchical social divisions and yet resisted flattening social distinctions, the panaudicon prevails across boundaries of class and race, but is in no way democratizing. Bigger is focused on the literal auditory discomfort of his family's kitchenette, a function both of his family's discontent and of the structure's inadequacies. He assumes that the Daltons' mansion, by contrast, muffles noise. Whereas the panopticon might submit to this logic—it is easier for wealth to dispel

visual discomfort than auditory discomfort—the panaudicon does not. When Bigger abstracts his phenomenological experience (and phenomenological assumptions) and concludes, incorrectly and fatally, that Dalton’s home is sheltered from surveillance and therefore constitutes an atomized space in which Mary’s body can be disposed of safely, the trap of noise snaps shut. What has been noise for Bigger—the sort of experience that reminds him of his subjugation, the experience that he seeks to mask by going to the movies—is not the same as the challenges to institutionalized white supremacist power that ring as noise for the Daltons, those steadfast philanthropists, or for Buckley, bastion of law and order. To this extent, *Native Son* is a repudiation of the vector of understanding that Borden promotes in social novels such as *Action for Slander* that, even as they reveal the flaws of the moneyed class, ask a middlebrow audience to identify with the wealthy and well-connected. More aligned with Sinclair’s efforts to bond bourgeois reader and disempowered sufferer, or with Joyce’s critique of the noise hidden in and reified by the common systems at the heart of public life, *Native Son* returns us to the animating problem at the heart of both noise and modernist noise writing: for whom, precisely, is this sound *unwanted*?

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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