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On Company Time: American Modernism and the Big Magazines

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Donal Frederick Harris

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

On Company Time: American Modernism and the Big Magazines

By

Donal Frederick Harris

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Mark McGurl, Co-Chair

Professor Michael North, Co-Chair

*On Company Time: American Modernism and the Big Magazines* situates the evolution of American modernism within its capacious mass-market periodical context, and in doing so finds that hallmark modernist texts such as Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* participate in a more complex and far-reaching print ecology than is often understood. I contend that reading modernist formal experimentation within, rather than against, popular print culture raises a new set of questions about how reactions to "mass civilization," to use F.R. Leavis's phrase, feed back into the content of midcentury mass media. By excavating the deep institutional, economic, and aesthetic affiliations that bridge the golden days of modernism and American magazine culture, this study challenges the recent focus on little magazines and coterie circles in determining modernism's cultural

circulation. Instead, through readings of Cather, Eliot, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, James Agee, Kenneth Fearing, Ernest Hemingway, and others, I argue that the influence of little magazines on modernist production and circulation looks rather narrow when compared to well-funded and massively popular titles like *McClure's*, *Time*, *Life*, and *Esquire*. Rather than simply instantiate a bland mass culture against which modernism reacts, early twentieth-century magazines comprise a heterogeneous cluster of serial publications that differentiated themselves by form, genre, and readership. This double life of modernism and magazines is equally epistemological and formal, for the authors I discuss take their ambivalences about institutional affiliation as an occasion for material and aesthetic experimentation. By simultaneously analyzing literary history, media forms, and narrative structure, I contribute to an emerging body of scholarship at the intersection of media studies, book history, and literary criticism. This study expands the material and institutional history of print culture while attending to the ways authors, genres, and literary styles can move through a literary marketplace.

The dissertation of Donal Frederick Harris is approved.

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2013

*For my parents.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	viii
VITA .....	x
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: WILLA CATHER'S PROMISCUOUS FICTION .....	20
Promiscuous Fiction.....	33
Gentlemen, Mobs, Magazines.....	39
The Genius of the System .....	45
Seamstresses and Landlords.....	52
CHAPTER 2: PRINTING THE COLOR LINE IN <i>THE CRISIS</i> .....	59
The Problem of "Plain Ink".....	68
Flattening the Picture of Race.....	75
Repeating Race.....	85
CHAPTER 3: FINDING WORK: AGEE AND FEARING IN THE OFFICE .....	95
Punching the Clock.....	104
Time-styles .....	115
Aestheticizing the Organization Man .....	122
Incorporating Modernist Authorship .....	126
CHAPTER 4: OUR ELIOT: MODERNISM, MASS MEDIA, AND THE AMERICAN CENTURY.....	144
The Outside of Modernism.....	151
Fashioning American Style .....	158
Eliot in the Atomic Age.....	162
Our Eliot.....	170
Forgetting "Mr. Eliot".....	177
CODA: RE-CIRCULATING MODERNISM.....	186
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	208



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Cover, <i>The Crisis</i> , April 1911.....	76
Figure 2: "Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois." <i>The Crisis</i> Nov 1920.....	79
Figure 3: Frank Walts, Portrait of Hazel Henley, <i>The Crisis</i> Oct 1919.....	81
Figure 4: Frank Walts, Cover, <i>The Crisis</i> Nov 1920.....	82
Figure 5: "Huh! I don't want to look at no pretty girl!" <i>The Crisis</i> Oct 1920.....	91
Figure 6. <i>The Waste Land</i> in <i>Time</i> , 1923.....	155
Figure 7. <i>The Waste Land</i> in <i>The Dial</i> , 1922.....	155
Figure 8. The Spread of the News-Magazine Idea. <i>Time</i> , 1924.....	161
Figure 9. References to T.S. Eliot in <i>Time</i> , 1923-1964.....	163
Figure 10. "No Middle Way Out of the Waste Land?" <i>Time</i> , 1950.....	171

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## PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Harris, Donal. "Finding Work: James Agee in the Office." *PMLA* 127.4 (2012): 766-781.
- . "Novel Protests: The New Left and Black Fiction in the 1960s." *Failing Gods and Angels: 20<sup>th</sup> Century African American Writers and the Left*. Ed. Kristin Moriah. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2012. 97-116.
- . "Moving Pictures: Jeff Allred's *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*," *Criticism: A Journal* 55.1 (2013): 169-176.
- . "Willa Cather's 'Promiscuous Fiction,'" M/ELT Research Group, UCLA. December 2012.
- . "Modernism, Mass Media, the American Century," American Comparative Literature Association, Providence, RI. April 2012. *Nominated for ACLA Horst Frenz Prize*.
- . "Our Eliot." UCLA Americanist Research Colloquium. March 2012.

- . "Punching the Clock: Corporate Writing and the Limits of Work," Modernist Studies Association Conference, Buffalo, NY. October 2011.
- . Invited Lecture, "Making the News New: *Time* and Information Anxiety," UCLA Freshman Seminar, America in the Sixties. April 2011.
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- . "Novel Protests: The Politics of Race in *The Man Who Cried I Am*," NEXUS Conference, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. March 2008.

# INTRODUCTION

What follows is a study of the evolution of twentieth-century American literature by way of its connection to contemporaneous commercially minded periodicals. More specifically, it addresses American modernism and mass-market magazines, and what the relationship between the two reveals about the formal and economic preoccupations of print culture in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. It contends that reading modernist formal experimentation within, rather than against, popular print culture raises a new set of questions about how reactions to “mass civilization,” to use F.R. Leavis’s phrase, feed back into the content of midcentury mass media. I argue that mass-market magazines – what I call the “big magazines” – play a central role in the funding and production of literary modernism during this period, and that they help to circulate the authorial reputations and textual interpretations that will canonize American modernism as a dominant literary category after World War II.

This project challenges, on the one hand, accounts of literary modernism’s formal, financial, and textual autonomy or self-enclosure; and, on the other, critical traditions that treat popular print culture as homogenous, formally conservative, and uninterested in aesthetic experimentation. It looks to writers such as Willa Cather, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, James Agee, Kenneth Fearing, and Ernest Hemingway to excavate the deep institutional, economic, and aesthetic affiliations that bridge the golden days of modernism and American magazine culture. In the process, it provides a literary history of modernism’s path from the sharp edge to the comfortable middle of American culture in the twentieth

century. At the same time it argues that, rather than simply instantiating a bland mass culture against which modernism reacts, early twentieth-century magazines such as *McClure's*, *The Crisis*, *Time*, *Life*, and *Esquire* consciously place themselves in an American literary tradition while differentiating themselves by form, genre, and readership.

If we look at literature from the first half of the twentieth century through the cultural lens of contemporaneous American magazines, we see several strange sights. For example, we find T.S. Eliot in *Time* transforming from *agent provocateur* in 1923 – a representative of a “new kind of literature” that is foreign, aristocratic, and meaningless (“Shanti” 12) – to *cause célèbre* in 1950, when he graces the magazine’s cover as an emblem of American literature’s ascension in the world republic of letters: “The 20th Century needed a poet (at least) to explain it to itself,” the magazine writes, “and a good place for a 20<sup>th</sup> Century poet to be born was St. Louis, Mo” (“1,000” 32). At the same time Eliot’s poem, *The Hollow Men*, travels from the pages of the *Dial* in 1925 to *Life* in 1948, with its final four lines synecdochically standing in for the nation’s uneasiness at the prospect of postwar cultural internationalism during “The American Century.”

Eliot would seem to disagree with his own status as representative of some wider cultural current. In his Introduction to Djuna Barnes’ lyrical and extraordinarily strange novel *Nightwood* (1937), he insists that the quality of writing between its pages does not exist in mass culture, nor could it be produced by someone with ties to that world. “Most contemporary novels are not really ‘written,’” he explains, because their content consists of “an accurate rendering of the noises that human beings make in their daily simple needs of communication.” This banal everydayness is reinforced by “a prose which is no more alive than that of a competent newspaper writer or a government official,” and the demands made by a novel like *Nightwood* simply surpass the capabilities of an “ordinary novel-reader” (xviii).

This antagonism between the “prose rhythm that is prose style” (xviii) of writers like Barnes and the lifeless language of the newspaper writer is a common trope in both modernist literature (Eliot’s satire of *The Boston Evening Transcript* being one example) and comments about it. The great trouble, though, is that Barnes was a newspaper and magazine writer, and before writing *Nightwood* she worked the “freak beat” in New York for a number of American periodicals, reporting on the burgeoning bohemian scene in Greenwich Village, hunger-striking suffragettes, and the cultural life of Coney Island. That is, her occupation was to mediate between the avant-garde and the general public, to make sure that the “ordinary novel-reader” remained apace of the extraordinary happenings around town. More telling for the interaction between big magazines and modernism, though, is that she first travels to London and Paris on assignment for *McCall’s* – a popular women’s magazine – and first meets Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce because both *McCall’s* and *Vanity Fair* asked her to conduct interviews of the modernist luminaries. So it isn’t *just* that Eliot may overstate the literary limitations of the newspaper writer, but also that those newspapers and magazines invest resources in bringing modernism into the fold of mainstream print culture, and that the two are connected by an interest in bringing life to dead prose style.

Eliot’s and Barnes’s literary career in the pages of big magazines are not the only ones that look different under the spotlight of popular periodical culture, and the picture grows more complex when one looks inside the editorial offices. After twenty successful years as a columnist and editor for increasingly profitable and influential magazines such as *Home Monthly* and *McClure’s* – the latter of which is often referred to as the first modern American magazine – Willa Cather remakes herself as one of the great theorists of the modern novel – the “novel démeublé,” or unfurnished novel, which she first formulated in an article for *The New Republic* and most fully realized in *The Professor’s House* (1925). W.E.B.



Du Bois's long and tendentious history with *The Crisis* shows how racial difference might be thought of in terms of printing technology, as well as the fraught stakes of contributing to a popular African American monthly in a media environment that demonizes racial visibility. James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), originally written on assignment for *Fortune* in 1936 and often held up as Agee's grand statement against the brutalities of mass media, models how one might turn stylized iconoclasm into a viable career option in the editorial ranks of a magazine that writes about the uneven distribution of political representation, only to write that concern off as an issue of aesthetic representation.

In short, this study takes up how a number of American modernists, including those listed above, circulate through the editorial rooms and periodical pages of mass-market magazines, and it provides a genealogy for the post-World War II redefinition of literary modernism as a mainstream, rather than outsider, cultural enterprise. This entails tracking how writers' names and works appear within periodicals, and in what contexts; which writers become affiliated with big magazines, and in what capacity; what formal and rhetorical traces we can read between mass-market magazines and literary writings, and what makes particular narrative techniques transportable; and, finally, the ways that managerial and editorial innovations taking place within mass-market magazines redirect the economic and cultural value associated with artistic works – and artistic work.

“Big magazines” is a purposefully loose term in this study, and I use it to describe a range of periodical genres – the women's magazine, the African American monthly, the newsmagazine, and the photomagazine. What they have in common, beyond the necessary qualification of being unapologetically commercial, is a conscious effort to expand their readerships by way of their form. In this way, the category of big magazine is useful in

providing a third position that differentiates it both from the nineteenth-century “quality” magazines and from the early-twentieth-century “little” magazines, two periodical genres that have received much attention in the last ten years or so. The scalar categories “big” and “little” may seem incompatible with one of “quality,” but in truth the big magazine is the outlying term. This is because quality and little magazines have little to do with physical size and everything to do with restrictive readerships. Part of this has to do with cost.

According to Frank Luther Mott’s capacious history of American magazines, the quality journals are those that purposefully priced themselves out of the average reader’s budget, thus ensuring that their brilliant ideas would not fall into the hands of the impressionable, irrational masses (*History, Vol. 4* 3-10). *Atlantic, Harper’s, Century*, and other periodicals not only marketed themselves to a socially elevated readership centered in the American metropolis, they also actively dissuaded a more expansive circulation by setting their cover price above what lower classes could afford.

This method of circulatory restriction is quite different than what we see in the little magazines, though “little,” like “quality,” is also a misleading adjective. As Ezra Pound outlines in his 1930 essay “Small Magazines,” size – either the size of readership or size of the actual document – matters much less than “motivation,” which is far more difficult to quantify:

The significance of the small magazine has, obviously, nothing to do with format.

The significance of any work of art or literature is a root significance that goes down into its original motivation. When this motivation is merely a desire for money or publicity, or when this motivation is in great part such a desire for money directly or

publicity as a means indirectly of getting money, there occurs a pervasive monotony in the product corresponding to the underlying monotony in the motivation. (689)

Pound explicitly compares journals like *Broom*, *The Little Review*, and *The Dial* to the same “somnolent” journals that Mott classifies as quality: *Atlantic*, *Harper’s*, *Century*, *Scribner’s* (690). Small magazines, Pound surmises, display a “pure intention” that “makes them worthwhile” (699). Though small magazines occupy the opposite economic pole as the quality magazines – halfway through his essay, Pound begins referring to them as the “free magazines” rather than small ones (702) – they enclose themselves from a popular readership just as aggressively as the quality titles.<sup>1</sup> He says that there is “a vast and impassable ... gulf” (694) between the truly intelligent audience who appreciates pure artistic intention and the evaluative capabilities of the general population, which unconsciously subscribes to the backward-looking standards of the quality magazines.

So the quality magazines and the little magazines foster their limited readerships in different ways, but both imagine restrictiveness as both means and end to their periodical project. More than this, though, Pound suggests that one’s affiliation with the little magazines can make or break a career, and that giving up on the possibility of getting paid is what makes both writers and periodicals stand the test of time. “The work of writers who have emerged in or via such magazines outweighs in permanent value the work of the writers who have not emerged in this manner,” he writes, and the front line of literary history takes places in these journals.

The history of contemporary letters has, to a very manifest extent, been written in such magazines. The commercial magazines have been content and are still more

than content to take derivative products ten or twenty years after the germ has appeared in the free magazines [...] The heavier the “overhead” in a publishing business the less that business can afford to deal in experiment. This purely sordid and eminently practical consideration will obviously affect all magazines save those that are either subsidized (as chemical research is subsidized) or else very cheaply produced (as the penniless inventor produced in his barn or his attic). (702)

Without explicitly naming it, Pound sets up the “purely sordid and eminently practical” matter of an economics of cultural capital, where the showy turn away from finance insulates an artist from the market and avails her of an aesthetic autonomy. “There is nothing new about this,” he assures us, and there is nothing particularly new about noticing literary modernism taking part in this social game, the same one that Eliot plays in his Introduction to *Nightwood*. Nor is Pound’s insistence on the “ten or twenty years” of cultural lag from coterie experimentation to mainstream acceptance particularly surprising, as the whole point of the avant-garde for Pound is to blaze new paths through which the uninspired masses will follow.

Little magazines, then, are one of the “institutions of modernism,” as Laurence Rainey famously refers to them, that have occupied center-stage in studies of “how modernism negotiated its way among the ‘contrived corridors’ of its own production” (78). However, the “contrived corridors” of the little magazines look rather narrow in comparison to those at the big magazines, which very early on both show an interest in covering modernism and, as the case of Djuna Barnes makes clear, hiring writers with predilections for formal experimentation. The bigger point is that the professional self-enclosure of modernism, most lucidly laid out by Thomas Strychasz, is almost immediately pried open

by mass print culture, and that understanding modernism solely as a coterie affair overlooks a robust relationship between those on the inside and those outside. One laudatory review in *McClure's*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Esquire*, or any number of massively popular and widely read periodicals could instantaneously explode modernism's closed system of accreditation and bankroll numerous subsequent works for an artist. These magazines legitimized modernist writers through reviews and editorial space, but they also took a more direct role in subsidizing artistic practices by staffing their newsrooms with novelists, poets, and playwrights. Alfred Kazin, himself a former staff-writer for *Fortune*, goes so far as to claim the "poet-reporter" as the dominant figure of twentieth-century American authorship (*Starting* 104). What this study shows is that Kazin's hyphenated authorial identity is made possible by a new type of periodical.

For all of this focus on restricting readerships, it might be useful to quickly survey the early twentieth century periodical market that Pound finds so distasteful. If nothing else, it was overrun with readers. It was crowded and competitive, comprised of over two thousand daily newspapers in America – fourteen in New York alone – and a weekly magazine market dominated by the *Literary Digest* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Beginning with the penny press in the 1830s and the technologies that made the production and distribution of print materials fast and cheap the nation saw a drastic rise in the number of options for reading material, as well as their size. The economic and field-specific processes of journalism were certainly erratic, and the actual content and appearance of these journals were also amazingly schizophrenic affairs. Both the older titles like the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies Home Journal*, and newer ones like *McClure's* and *Munsey's*, attempted to include something for everyone, or at least for each demographic represented in the middle-class home, as Richard Ohmann demonstrates in his introduction to *Selling Culture* (1995). These

different audiences result in the collage of genres that defines this period in magazine history – fiction, letters, recipes, gossip, celebrity profiles, and travel articles, all butting up against one another, framed by advertisements. This kitchen-sink approach belies the desire to increase circulation by any means necessary. Advertising space sold at a fixed rate that was determined by circulation, so the more people who bought the magazine, the higher the ad rates and the greater the profit. As many scholars have shown, this is the first time that advertisements rather than the cover price of the magazine paid the bills, a change that Ohmann sees as a response to the “crisis of overproduction” and the birth of both “the consumer” and mass culture (25).

Not only were these magazines a collage of disparate genres, authors, and narrative voices, but they were physically enormous. A typical issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1926 exceeded two hundred pages, and it was not uncommon for *Cosmopolitan* or *McClure's* to close in on one-hundred fifty pages (a 1926 *Ladies Home Journal*, the largest printed to-date, was two hundred seventy pages) (Marchand 7). In both size and scope, then, early twentieth century mass-market magazines were a messy affair. Simply paging through the two largest of these magazines, to say nothing of actually reading them, became a time-consuming practice. A similar process was taking place in the daily newspapers, which followed the same trend of expanding their size to make room for advertisements. Even before the ubiquity of radio and television news, one can see the vertiginous amount of information available to the literate American citizen in the early 1900s. The sheer volume of print communication made it impossible for a single person to read, process, and remember all of the news that made its way onto the page each day. And, as Niklas Luhmann argues, when communication becomes faster and more complex, it also makes knowledge more quickly obsolete (85). In other words, the “information economies of scale” tip towards the side of

strategic ignorance: there is a decreasing payoff for working to stay current as the time-span of “current” shrinks and the amount of information in that period expands.

The big magazines that will occupy this study take these competing economies of capital and attention as their motivating force, and they take the opposite approach toward both contemporary circulation and lasting literary value as the little magazines. Instead of tying literary value to restricted circulation, they seek a form that both boosts readership and differentiates itself from the masses of overly abundant print culture. In doing so, they open up the insulated aesthetics of modernism to readers and interpretations that are outside of the coterie’s control. In various ways, the big magazines attempt to expand their reading publics beyond class-based or regional designations, and what is most interesting about this process, from the perspective of a literary scholar, is how often this expansion is figured as a formal project in dialogue with that of modernism. Part of the reason for this is the influx of novelists, poets, and playwrights to the editorial offices of an expanding magazine business. As George Jean Nathan explains in a 1911 *Bookman* article, the “staff system” at this time began to replace freelanced content and more and more writers moved from the outside to the inside of the modern periodical office. Chapter One, which addresses Willa Cather at *McClure’s*, and Chapter Three, which takes up the Time Inc. media corporation, address the specifics of how particular companies sought out and incorporated literary figures to fill their pages with formally inventive writing that would distinguish their magazine from its competitors.

For now, suffice it to say that the magazine revolution – a revolution, it should be said, that also helped make Pound’s free magazines possible – only gets more pronounced in the late 1920s and 1930s. Though many of the art magazines go bankrupt when their tiny profit margins and wealthy patrons disappear with the economic bust of the Great

Depression, the big magazines generally flourish. And, in a period with few paths to financial solvency, more and more writers in the United States find their way to big magazines. As Malcolm Cowley writes of the writers and artists returning home after the Great Depression made it nearly impossible to survive abroad: “Modestly, they were rebelling once more,” only in the U.S. they are not “exiles and refugees” but office workers. The path outward and back, as Cowley tells it, “seems to follow the old pattern of alienation and reintegration, or departure and return, that is repeated in scores of European myths and continually re-embodied in life” (*Exile's* 289). “They hadn’t time to be very unhappy,” writes Cowley. “Most of their hours were given over to the simple business of earning a living” (*Exile's* 214). Though the phenomenon becomes more pronounced in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the appearance of modernists in an emerging corporate media environment, and the pronouncements of artist’s uneasy circulation in mass-market magazine culture, can be traced back much further.

Looking for the literary strategies of mass culture, and more specifically mass print culture, has a relatively long and prestigious pedigree. However, when one surveys the scholarly literature, it becomes glaringly obvious that treatments of periodicals almost always flip the page directly to the advertisements and disregard the magazines’ homegrown content when they discuss the relationship between modernism and magazines. Roland Marchand’s *Advertising the American Dream* (1985) provides a groundbreaking account of the “the reality of a cultural dilemma” over the benefits and degradations of economies of scale in the early twentieth century; that is, consumers enjoy the affordability of mass production, but they resent the anonymity of mass consumption. For Marchand, advertising – and specifically a genre of advertising that appropriates the narrative strategies of fiction to make the consumer an active participant in the image and text – helps to ameliorate the negative



feelings by playing into a perceived nostalgia for a bygone day of face-to-face economic interaction (12). Both Jennifer Wicke's *Advertising Fictions* (1988) and Catherine Turner's *Marketing Modernism Between the Two Wars* (2003) make this connection between fiction and advertising even more explicit: Wicke reassesses modernism's rejection of consumer culture by showing how both modernist fiction and modern advertising developed in the same magazine pages; Turner argues that the publishing houses that distribute and advertise modernist art, and the writers who produce it, advertise reading as a cultural competency required for self-improvement, and that the advertisements place new writers within a literary tradition to make the newness of young writers' styles more palatable.

Even the rise of “periodical studies,” which Robert Scholes and Sean Latham celebrate in their aptly titled 2006 *PMLA* article “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” tends to focus its energy on the role of advertising in both big and little magazines. While they acknowledge the magazine as a dialogic text, constructed from many discourses and genres, they still devote more than half of their article to the importance of advertising in early twentieth century magazines. They decry the “hole in the archive” created by previous generations of librarians who simply cut the advertisements out of periodicals when they bound copies together (520).<sup>2</sup> This scholarly tradition from Marchand through Scholes and Latham shares an implicit argument about the outsourcing of editorial power from the magazine to the advertising agency. As publishers depend more on advertising and less on subscriptions for revenue, they become increasingly indebted to the advertisers that supply that capital. Therefore, the actual content of the magazine is only important insofar as it tailors itself to the advertisements.

This argument for the primacy of advertising justifies why these critics might ignore the words that fill the space around the images. However, I see several problems with this

methodology. Though it claims to treat all cultural material as implicated in the market, which would ostensibly level the “great divide” of cultural distinction, what it really does is reframe all of mass culture as a modernist text. Instead of modernism being about markets, advertising becomes self-reflexively engaged with narrative practices and require the same close reading skills necessary for experimental fiction. This doesn't close the great divide so much as it expands the catalog of cultural objects that one can close read – the methodology with which literary scholars are most comfortable.<sup>3</sup> More important for this study, though, is that focusing on advertising and advertising agencies makes it difficult to account for the changes occurring in the homegrown content of the magazines, and how that content both reflects and is shaped by changing ideas about the role of periodicals in intellectual life. If one does not look at the articles, one does not notice changes in editorial style; and related to this, one can neither see the way that the names of the newsroom personnel and the advertised authors begin to overlap, nor the impact this institutional realignment of two types of writing has on literary modernism and mass-market magazines. This advertisement-directed methodology makes a title like *McClure's* or an institution like Time Inc. nearly invisible, despite the fact that in 1904 *McClure's* is one of the most-read magazines in the country, and by the middle of the century Time Inc. is one of the most profitable companies in the United States.

By dealing with the salaried work of authors, I hope unpack how corporate and personal economics come together to influence style across print culture. This is a profoundly un-modernist task, if we take Pound seriously in his indictment of those who openly follow the money. Yet, pursuing Michael Szalay's injunction to “take cultural capital literally” strikes me as increasingly important because, as he points out, “contemporary culture is underwritten – financially and otherwise – [...] by a small cartel of media

conglomerates,” and to overlook the institutions that play such a substantial role in the dissemination of cultural objects is to “concede the field to the modern multinational” (*New Deal* 2).<sup>4</sup> There are plenty of reasons why this reciprocity between employment and aesthetics has played a minor role in literary studies, but this project argues that a methodology that sidesteps the text of a magazine, on the one hand, and the work relations of the people behind the text, on the other, makes it nearly impossible to piece together how the incorporation of modernism into the big magazines changes the way that both fields conceptualize their readership, convey their content, and re-define what counts as writerly work.

This is not to say that a tradition of treating journalism as aesthetically worthwhile does not exist. In fact, plenty of work argues just this fact. However, the approach that these studies often take either begins with the question and ends with the assertion of the inherent literariness of certain pieces of journalism, or it suggests certain pieces of literature display a journalistic investment in objectivity and the authenticity of facts. That is, these studies primarily are interested in genre and the instability and slipperiness of categorical markers, or in questions of objectivity versus subjectivity or fact versus fiction. One need only glance at several titles to see this: Barbara Foley's *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (1986); Phyllis Frus' *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative* (1994); John Russel's *Reciprocities of the Nonfiction Novel* (2000). My aim is not to deconstruct genre or to argue that literary scholars should take journalism's aesthetic merits more seriously. In fact, this study will rather crassly ignore the question of these aesthetic sub-categories in favor of an approach that emphasizes the importance of “company time.” That is, I argue that all of the work published by the magazing modernists recursively accounts for its own production, or its institutional affiliation. My argument, therefore, is not about generic

divisions between the news article and the poem or novel, or ontological categories of truth and fiction; instead, I claim that the house style of magazines reaches beyond its pages and into the works that ostensibly are produced in rebellion against or ancillary to them. The primary reason for this change in scope depends on the way in which social and institutional relationships between employers and writers-as-employees redistribute the terms of aesthetic value along economic and media-specific axes.

I begin my analysis with chapter-length studies of the formal and thematic repercussions of three distinct periodical types on literary form: the women's journal, the African American monthly, and the 1920s newsmagazine. Chapter One, "Willa Cather's 'Promiscuous Fiction,'" argues that Cather's ideal of the "unfurnished novel" must be read against the background of her prodigious and wildly popular writing for the *Home Monthly* and *McClure's*. I argue that Cather incessantly thematizes the productive tension between an overabundant, feminized, "promiscuous" mass print media and a vision of the novel as singular, autonomous, and abstinent. She does so through the central objects in her novels: the overburdened bridge in *Alexander's Bridge*, the cracking "vessel of one's throat" in *The Song of the Lark*, and even the character of S.S. McClure in her ghostwritten autobiography of him. Chapter Two, "Printing the Color Line at *The Crisis*," moves from the formal and thematic division of novels and periodicals to their materiality, discussing W.E.B. Du Bois's and Jessie Fauset's long tenures at *The Crisis*, the most popular African American magazine of the early twentieth century. This chapter tracks how Du Bois's and Fauset's interest in new printing technologies – multigraphs, linotypes, and halftone reproduction – develops by way of an aesthetic of racial flatness. Du Bois's essays repeatedly invokes the black ink and white page as the material precondition of racial representation, while Fauset's serialized

magazine stories depict racialized bodies as media-like in their capacity to archive and transmit, but also hide, information.

Chapter Three, “Finding Work: Agee and Fearing at the Office” triangulates the women’s magazines and black monthlies with the rise in the 1920s of the overtly masculine newsmagazine, particularly *Time*. Time Inc., at one time the largest media conglomerate in the world, strategically hired poets and novelists to develop a uniformly stylish periodical voice, and in different ways James Agee’s and Walker Evans’ *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Kenneth Fearing’s *The Big Clock* formalize the felt erasure between personal writing and salaried corporate work. Taken together, these three chapters exemplify how the generic differentiation of twentieth century big magazines is integrally related to the institutionalization of American modernism, and, related to this, how the most vitriolic attacks on an overabundant mass culture are increasingly waged from the inside mass print media.

Chapter Three ends by tying Agee’s reclamation in the 1960s to a shift in the status of the outsider artist, a figure that William Whyte’s *The Organization Man* – also originally a Time Inc. essay – describes paradoxically as the epitome of postwar corporate life. Chapter Four picks up this theme of the outsider on the inside to theorize an emerging postwar *mass modernism*. Here, I turn from the materiality of authorial production to the exigencies of cultural circulation, using T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway as paired case studies of how modernism’s stylized alienation informs mainstream postwar ennui. “Our Eliot: Modernism, Mass Media, and ‘The American Century,’” studies the mid-century explosion of articles about and reproductions of T.S. Eliot’s work in the pages of *Time*, *Life*, and the *Atlantic*. These magazines repatriate Eliot as a Howellsian realist and read his poetry, especially *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, not as opaque and cosmopolitan but as an American realist

account of the complexity of an overly baroque Continental culture. The argument of this chapter, like the first, addresses how individual texts instantiate a periodical ecology, but it also expands that discussion to include how critical methodologies frame our understanding of what constitutes the difference between mass culture and modernist literature. This section brackets questions about authorial intentionality – that is, whether postwar appropriations of modernist texts are an affront to or dilution of aesthetic and material autonomy – that play an important role in the previous chapters. Rather, it asks how paying attention to what gets printed, where it circulates, and how it looks can help contextualize literary close reading practices. This is not to supplant issues of artistic craft or formalist reading, but instead to extend those modes of inquiry to the materiality of print culture itself

I end this study by briefly looking at two encounters between Ernest Hemingway and periodicals as touchstones for the cultural style of a new mass modernism: his long tenure with *Esquire*, which culminates in a little known legal skirmish over re-publication rights in 1958; and the appearance in 1952 of *The Old Man and the Sea* in *Life* magazine, which sold five million copies in two days. Hemingway's ambivalence over the reproduction and imitation of his stylistic flatness provides a way to read his late fiction as an interrogation of the temporal problem of print media forms – that is, the singularity and historicity of the book against the serial newness of the magazine. Eliot and Hemingway offer complimentary accounts of modernist writers as the content of big magazines; but more importantly they argue that these journals remap Eliot's and Hemingway's exilic authorial personas as versions of a conflicted postwar nationalism.

In the 1950s, Hemingway became something like a cultural style all of his own, and the drastic changes to his place in popular print media can be seen in a late narrative form that draws attention to the ambiguous depths of literature. This vision of culture as

something that is “global, yet American” and actively interested in dissolving representational surfaces into pastiche, have long been markers of postmodernism (Jameson 12). And, at the end of this dissertation, I’ll begin making a connection between the modernist Hemingway of the 1920s, the celebrity Hemingway of the 1950s, and the afterlives of modernism and magazine culture in the 1970s by way of Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* and Robert Coover’s *The Public Burning*. Both of those works are narrated in part from the point of view of *Time*, and both contrast their own aesthetic singularity against an overabundant mass print media. And, importantly, both are produced within or about different institutions than the big magazine: the university, for Coover, and the federal government (specifically the military), for Mailer. However, I contend that Coover and Mailer, in their inclusion of the corporate voice of big magazines, evince competing ideas for the mass media that we will see have deep roots in the modernist period. First, a discomfort with a public sphere that they feel to be completely saturated in the content of bland, monotonous media. But, along with this, both articulate something close to nostalgia for a historical moment fantasized as one of informational totality, metonymized as a single, ubiquitous magazine. Thus, my readings of Mailer and Coover feed back into an early premise of this project, that modernism’s ambivalence toward big magazines registers its felt obsolescence as film and television begin to displace print – novels, poems, and periodicals alike – as the dominant media.

With the recent announcement that *Newsweek* has stopped its print edition and Time Inc. has spun off its magazine business into an independent and financially doomed shell company, the longstanding fear that we have witnessed print’s final, dying fall at the hands of faster and more responsive media takes on added poignancy. This is also a time when the aesthetic difficulty of modernism, as well as the close reading practice that helped justify that

difficulty, have faced serious and sustained doubts from many different fields. Joe Cleary's salient articulation of an emerging "realism after modernism" is one of many attempts to articulate contemporary literature's desire to find something outside of modernist influence. This change in the content of literature and literary criticism is accompanied by calls to change the form of critical methodology as well, as Franco Moretti's "distant reading," Best's and Marcus's "surface reading," Heather Love's "descriptive reading," Peter Brooks' "reading for the plot," and other non-hermeneutic approaches to literature push back against the dominance of close reading, a practice that one could quite plausibly argue was developed to justify reading modernist literature in the first place. Though one must be skeptical of such obituaries, the time seems ripe to look back on the long history that forecasts this situation; that is, to see how the fields of literary modernism (and its attendant reading practice) and mass print culture, so often treated separately, arrived simultaneously at their current morass. There are many ways to do this, and in what follows I will carry out one of them by parsing out how the "golden age" of both modernism and magazine culture operated. First by way of their differentiation, then their cultural dominance, and finally their projected demise.



## CHAPTER 1

### WILLA CATHER'S PROMISCUOUS FICTION

*"Some of the figures of my old life seem to be waiting for me in the new."  
– My Ántonia*

#### Personifying Periodicals

Halfway into *The Professor's House* (1925), Tom Outland enters the novel by way of a magazine. "I just got in this morning, and your name was the only one here I knew," he tells Godfrey St. Peter, the titular professor, as he emerges through the bushes into St. Peter's backyard and provides the provincial historian with the inspiration he needs to finish his magnum opus on the settling of the Americas. "I read an article by you in a magazine," Tom explains, "about Fray Marcos. Father Duchene said it was the only thing with any truth in it he'd read about our country down there" (114). St. Peter is a private man at home in his isolated mid-western hamlet, and he writes histories because "the desk was a shelter one could hide behind, it was a hole one could creep into" (161). Yet the magazine offers simultaneous privacy and connection; he can make friends while hiding behind his desk

when he decides to write for and circulate his work in the pages of a national periodical. Although he envisions his scholarly mission as fundamentally at odds with the zeitgeist, what he writes is both popular and accessible enough to be published and distributed by a mass-market magazine, and subsequently enjoyed by priests and autodidacts several thousand miles away. St. Peter's magazine work connects him to Tom Outland as it links Hamilton, a town claustrophobically described as "flat and heavy ... small and tight and airless," to the invigorating openness of the West (150).

Outland is a breadth of fresh air in St. Peter's sleepy life, and the method of his entrance into the novel doubles within the plot the way that "Tom Outland's Story," the middle section of the novel, works in the novel's structure. It was originally written as a short story for magazine publication, and Cather said that the long section comprised of Outland's diary was meant to unlatch "the square window that let in the fresh air off the Blue Mesa" (*On Writing* 31). In this way "Tom Outland's Story" fulfills the edicts of Cather's manifesto for modern fiction, "The Novel D meubl " (1922), another product of the magazines, first published in *The New Republic*. In that article, Cather chastises a type of fiction that has become "over-furnished" in both content and practice. "The property man has been so busy on its pages," she writes in the opening paragraph, "the importance of material objects and their vivid presentation has been so stressed, that we take it for granted that whoever can observe, and can write the English language, can write a novel." A real novel is not composed with "the gaudy fingers of a showman or the mechanical industry of a department-store dresser" (5). In place of the commercialism of the department store, she ends the essay with an image of the novel as a house, much like the Professor's house – which his family has abandoned for more a more luxurious arrangement – with all of the

furniture thrown out, all the “meaningless reiterations” and “tiresome patterns” expunged (6).

By the measure of “The Novel D meubl ,” Outland’s journal is the best kind of novel because he is not trying to write a novel. It is a diary of Tom’s heartbreak, an ostensibly private record of his “discovery” of an ancient Cliff City that is not intended for either public showing or mechanical reproduction. In this way it is also like Jim Burden’s memoir in *My  ntonia* (1918), which Jim only writes because he made a deal with the fictional “Willa Cather” he met on a train. Burden says he did not “arrange or rearrange” his remembrance of  ntonia. “It hasn’t any form. It hasn’t a title, either” (xiii), he says, which resembles St. Peter’s claim that Outland’s “plain account” of his expedition and eventual betrayal by his partner “was almost beautiful, because of the stupidities it avoided and the things it did not say. If words had cost money, Tom couldn’t have used them more sparingly” (*Professor* 262). Here, Cather offers a different relationship between literary form and economic interest than that of the writer-as-property man; she transforms the economy of “material objects” represented in fiction into words themselves, words that Tom figuratively must purchase rather than sell for publication. Unlike a department-store dresser who must hock his wares, Tom becomes a buyer. He even becomes something like an editor, a description made more compelling by the fact that this passage comes from St. Peter, who unsuccessfully tries to edit Outland’s diary for publication – and just like “Willa Cather” in *My  ntonia*, whose only contribution to the plot is in setting up the frame. No worthwhile writer actually does any writing in Cather’s novels, they all simply reorganize what was already there.

Outland’s appearance in the novel, both in body and in “Tom Outland’s Story,” looks like the re-entry of the editorial model of the magazines into the unfurnished space of

the art novel. In fact, *The Professor's House* as a text could be said to come out of the magazines; the two sections that frame Tom's diary, "The Family" and "The Professor," roughly take their plot from a 1902 short story, "The Professor's Commencement," published in *New England Magazine*. This elongated and outward-looking composition process of *The Professor's House* is much different than the ideal form of writing that occurs within the novel, which resists notions of revision or creative activity. This is why, it would seem, St. Peter has such a hard time writing his prefatory notes Tom's journal. "Tom Outland's Story" doesn't need an apparatus because, like its subject, its compositional method is dictated by "convenience," which "very often dictates sound design" (PH 119). In this way it is also like St. Peter's eight-volume history, which comes to him already complete. While laying on his back one day, "the design of the book unfolded in the air above him ... and the design was sound. He had accepted it as inevitable, had never meddled with it, and it had seen him through" (106). St. Peter simply transfers the content from the air to the page, and he also becomes something like the ideal novelist in the process – one whose work does not entail writing.

When Cather removes the work of composition and revision from both *The Professor's House* and *My Ántonia*, she also removes the first thirty years from her professional life, years that were defined just as much by a national network of magazines as by the isolated prairie towns for which she is known. As an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska, Cather wrote for three different periodicals, and magazines such as *Home Monthly* and *McClure's* are what brought her from the Great Plains to Pittsburgh and later New York. The periodical work that occupied her for most of the first half of her life is usually referred to as, at best, her "long apprenticeship" before becoming a novelist or, at worst, an enormous waste of her literary talents and endless cause of artistic frustration.<sup>1</sup> Rather than

address the interaction between Cather's two careers by making evaluative judgments about whether her fiction suffers from the commitments of her journalism and editorial work – or, alternately, whether she heightens the form of journalism because of her literary predilections – this chapter claims that the two modes of writing are mutually constitutive in how she conceptualizes authorial production. The sheer quantity of time and words she devoted to magazines are an integral context for understanding Cather's theory of the novel, as well as how that theory plays out in her texts. In addition to this, the specific institutional setting of *McClure's* and the type of work it required provide a way to link the formal and thematic concerns of her fiction to the more banal space of the editorial office.

Attending to Cather's magazine work exposes a rather strange problem with the formulation that "Tom Outland's Story" opens a window onto something outside of *The Professor's House*. Tom and his story, both of which originate in relation to magazines, are figured as breaths of fresh air from a story that also originates in a magazine – a print form that often provides a symbol of the most banal, passive, and lazy style of reading. More than this, the figure of the ideal novel as an uncluttered house that we find in both *Professor* and "The Novel D meubl " can plausibly be traced back to the contemporary figure of an ideal magazine, which the longtime publisher of *Ladies Home Journal* Edward Bok describes as organized like a middle-class home, rationally divided into sections for everyone who lives there (Ohmann 226). In this way, Cather's vision of the artistically sound, "unfurnished novel" that "Tom Outland's Story," the Professor's eight-volume history, and *The Professor's House* at different levels are meant to exemplify – and that she hoists above the crassness of "machine-made" novels and consumer-oriented writing – rests upon an active engagement with the background noise of mass print culture. Tom and St. Peter allegorize Cather's own conflicted double life in magazines as an editorial worker and fiction writer.

This connection is most clear in Cather's incessant thematization of the productive tension between an overabundant, feminized, "promiscuous" mass print media and a vision of the novel as singular, autonomous, and abstinent. She does so through the central objects in her novels: the overburdened bridge in *Alexander's Bridge* (1908), the cracking "vessel of one's throat" in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), the dual-purpose sewing room and study in *The Professor's House*, and even the character of S.S. McClure in her ghostwritten autobiography of him. The impetus toward a singular, unfurnished, isolated, and self-enclosed book form – an ideal that finds its thematic corollary in her nostalgia for the cloistered lives of pioneers, precocious children, immigrant farmers, self-consciously single women, and anti-social artists – runs up against the messy, collaborative social relations instantiated by the magazines that supported her for so long. The bureaucracy and organization of her magazine work provides a rather comfortable vantage point from which she can theorize an alternative model of literary circulation, a model that in important formal ways reinforces the highly ordered and closely administrated version of writing – and very often writing that should be undetectable, as she compressed or expanded other writers' work in her capacity as editor – she learned in editorial offices. Along with this, her formulation of the relationship between the "art novel" and the "machine-made novel" brings with it gendered notions of writing and reading that depend on a vision of overabundant mass culture that is both feminized and mechanized.

As other critics have emphasized, Cather's theory of the novel as laid out in "The Novel D meubl " champions "the inexplicable presence of the thing not named," insisting that "whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there – that, one might say, is created" (6). In recent criticism, this "presence" felt but not named has been taken as the open secret of her sexuality – the love that dare not speak its name. Sharon O'Brien,

Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jonathan Goldberg, Christopher Nealon and others have produced powerful accounts of Cather's narrative withdrawal, articulating the thing not named as Cather's conflicted sexual desire. Though critics have drawn different lines between Cather's sexuality and her fiction, each insists on what Heather Love calls Cather's "backwardness." By this, Love refers to Cather's awkward fit into an affirmative "queer literary genealogy," or really any genealogy that seeks positive connections between Cather and her period, because of the ambivalent attitude Cather's writing puts forward about affiliations of any kind.<sup>2</sup> As Love surmises, the common problem of Cather's fiction and biography is that the "desire for intimacy is coupled with the threat of destruction and disconnection" (73). As these feminist and queer readings point out, Cather repeatedly writes about how she doesn't want to write about certain things, calling attention to "the thing not named" by pointing out that something is not there.

I want to build off this strand of Cather criticism that attempts to unravel what lies at the heart of the thing not named, but do so by pursuing a different line of argument about what Cather doesn't want to talk about, something that was just as much an open secret in her life. This chapter will take up her long career in magazines, something she actively avoided talking about after becoming a novelist. This is one part of a much larger attempt by Cather late in her life to close off her biography from her texts; she burned all her letters and made stipulations in her will that forbade biographers and scholars to quote her unpublished work. On top of this, she refused to let her books be adapted for other media (theater, radio play, film) or even reprinted as trade paperbacks (a decision her executor later overturned). In this vein, her attention to the 1937 Autograph Edition of her collected novels might be seen as springing from her unhappy experience of leasing the movie rights for *A Lost Lady* as well as a one-time lease of her novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* to the

Modern Library. She subsequently regretted both of these decisions, the latter especially, because it made for “cheaper editions” that circulated so widely that readers young and old, rich and poor, might feel “compelled to read her” (Knopf 211). To make sure this would not happen again, when she died in 1947 her will stipulated that her novels and stories could not be made into movies, nor could they be used for television or radio scenarios; and, though her estate eventually rescinded, she originally banned her work from being included in anthologies or reprinted in paperback, even though (or perhaps because) both would bring down the cost of publication and spread her work across a much wider reading public

Taken together, these insinuations on the material specificity of her books as books, and Cather’s epistemological separation of what happens inside her fiction from her own experiences, are retroactive attempts to insulate them from the taint of writerly work that she associates with her editorial experience. Though Cather’s editorial work provides her with the platform and professional skill set with which she can circulate her theory of non-circulation to an enormous readership, we will see that changing attitudes about the relationship between literature and journalism, and, relatedly, literary modernism and mass print culture, shape her ambivalence toward the big magazines.

The figurations of a workless writing laid out above are not isolated to *Professor’s House*. Cather described her earlier novel, *O Pioneers!* (1913), “as a sudden inner explosion and enlightenment” that took on “an inevitable shape that is not plotted but designs itself” (Qtd in Stouck 285), which *also* elides the simple fact that the novel began as three magazine stories: “The Bohemian Girl,” “Alexandra,” and “The White Mulberry Tree.” Even the poem which serves as an epigraph was repurposed from magazine publication. This periodical pre-history of *O Pioneers!*, a novel which was never serially published, points to the way that the “inevitable shape” of Cather’s novels always occludes the more mundane task



of revision, and the more workman-like context of magazine publication from which all of her writing until 1912, and much of it after that date, emerges. This erasure of the work of writing within the novel closes it off from the economics of professional authorship, a context that Christopher Wilson and Linda Peterson, among others, have argued causes a shift in attitudes about what actually constitutes literary work in the late nineteenth century in the United States and England. In the most basic sense professionalism entails writing for pay, but it also brings with it a set of epistemological protocols for determining what counts as the work of writing – and for whom.

As Leon Edel has pointed out, Cather grew up as the professionalization of authorship was taking hold in America. “She was not a child of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” and like so many other writers of the late nineteenth century the most advantageous path to a literary career was through the big magazines (2).<sup>3</sup> However, by the time Cather begins to publish her manifestoes about the work of writing, the competences of writing literature and mass-market journalism no longer coincide. John Macy’s entry on “Journalism” in Van Wyck Brooks’ and Harold E. Stearns’ *Civilization in the United States* (1922) chalks this up to the general disrespect for the work of news gathering. This is not a conscious disrespect, exactly; it might be seen as an unhappy symptom of the very methods of compositional standardization that Wilson describes. According to Macy, the form and function of newspaper writing is taken for granted because of its national uniformity: “From Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon [...] you cannot tell from the general aspect of the newspaper you pick up what city you are in [...] Editors, except those in charge of local news, move with perfect ease from one city to another: it is the same job at a different desk” (36). Aesthetic form replicates bureaucratic form in this situation. The nineteenth-century model of news writing, based on the masculine dignity of investigative writing – on uncovering “the

new” and bringing it to public light – has lost its luster because of its association with repeatability, with the doldrums of routinization; in the most pejorative sense, news writing has become an information factory. This degradation of the homogeneity of news practices would be especially unattractive to twentieth century authors tasked with “making it new.” As Archibald MacLeish says, his generation was told through the pages of magazines like *Paris Review* to “avoid the practice of journalism as they would wet sox and gin before breakfast” (“Poetry and Journalism” 3).<sup>4</sup> That is, the work associated with writing copy for magazines was positioned as antithetical to that of “serious” writing. Cather’s model of authorship as simply reigning in or transcribing a “sudden inner explosion” would seem to turn away from the model of writing as work, transforming her task instead into something like editing – selecting and arranging things that are already present rather than creating from whole cloth, which allows her to take advantage of the professionalization of writing without admitting that she actually writes. By recasting the heavy lifting of composition and elongated temporal frame of magazine publication in this way, Cather’s model provides a perfect cover for the many layers of periodical mediation that run through *The Professor’s House*. Or, to adapt Macy’s choice phrase, Cather’s inner explosion offers a way to repress the fact that the Professor and Cather write their serious work and their magazine work behind the same desk.

This line of inquiry into Cather’s career provides a way of thinking about one strand of American literary modernism that develops interdependently with mass print culture, and how that institutional interdependence can broadly be read back into literary form. When St. Peter thinks back to the moment of first encounter with Outland, he has mixed feelings that might stand in for Cather’s, as well as a whole host of twentieth century American authors who conceptualized their disengagement from the commonplace from within the very

institutions they ostensibly abhor. St. Peter “had noticed before that whenever he wrote for popular periodicals it got him into trouble” (114). Which is true, in a sense: when he writes the article that finds its way into Outland’s hands, he inadvertently upsets a relatively stable and happy family, as well as what today we usually call a pleasurable work-life balance. In more ways than one *The Professor’s House* couches St. Peter’s intellectual work, so often figured as outside of the twin banalities of family and mass culture, as a by-product of those two forces. His “two lives” as author and family man occupy separate mental registers, but they are deeply connected in their materiality. His home office doubles as, and is only ever referred to in the novel, as a sewing room, full of reminders of the feminine domesticity and “cruel biological necessities” that tether him to genteel middle-class life (*PH* 19). Outland’s appearance “troubles” this order; and the aftermath of this particular foray into the magazines ends up providing the substance of *The Professor’s House*. There would be no novel, furnished or otherwise, without the magazines.

The open secret of Cather’s editorial work for mass-market magazines could also be said to be the open secret of American modernism in general. For this reason *The Professor’s House* provides a microcosm of the overlapping periodical and literary histories that this project examines, as well as some of the formal and thematic repercussions of reading modernist literature through the lens of the big magazines. This emergence of an intellectual and artistic autonomy theorized from within the confines of a market-oriented periodical culture comes to dominate a version of American literary modernism that one can trace in widely divergent ways from Cather to W.E.B. Du Bois to James Agee, and one that can also be read into the post-WWII appropriations of writers like T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway by American magazines. In this way, St. Peter’s and Outland’s affiliation, which begins with their mutual participation in popular magazine culture yet retroactively gets figured by St.

Peter as being the only thing insulated from being “commonplace like everything else” (61), allegorizes the often overlooked productive friction between early twentieth century writers’ visions of aesthetic autonomy and the massively popular, unapologetically successful economic and institutional worlds in which that autonomy is formulated.

By excavating the deep institutional, economic, and aesthetic affiliations that bridge the golden days of modernism and American magazine culture, this study challenges recent accounts of literary modernism’s profound aesthetic and social insularity, an insularity that authors such as T.S. Eliot, W.E.B. Du Bois, and James Agee painstakingly manufactured, just as Cather does. Certainly, modernist writers and early critics register a felt incompatibility between an emerging consumer culture and their own literary goals, and many scholars have unpacked how individual writers managed what Andreas Huyssen has so compellingly theorized as an “anxiety of contamination.”

Without denying that anxiety, what follows takes what can seem like a rather banal historical detail about the surprising number of modernist writers who also spent huge amounts of time doing office work at big magazines as an occasion to think about the repercussions of what Willa Cather refers to as “the double literary life” that necessarily accompanies writing for a paycheck (*W&P* 776). By turning from the self-consciously little to the unapologetically big magazines, I follow what French sociologist Bernard Lahire similarly calls the “double life of writers” inside coterie literary circles and in mass-media culture. As we will see, the instances of institutional and aesthetic feedback between two versions of artistic production that Archibald MacLeish referred to as “the two ends of the typewriter” provide a much more complex version of both literary modernism and the big magazines that help to pay so many of its proponents’ rents (3).

When she decided to start writing novels at the age of thirty-eight, she had already been a professional journalist since she was a kid, publishing her first articles in the local Red Cloud, Nebraska paper at the age of fourteen. Thus, as others have noted, her writing career bridges what often is figured as a divide between two genres and their overarching attitudes toward reportage; that is, the broadly conceived realist association of literary writing with journalism as an attempt to professionalize intellectual work, and the modernist aversion to an artless insistence on the objectivity and transparency of representation. The formal and epistemological resonances that we find in Cather's careers as editor-journalist and novelist offer a way to unpack the reciprocity between these two modes of writing that are increasingly figured as antagonistic. Even more than this, her conflicted notion of gendered intellectual work makes more sense when one considers the multiple ways that writing gets coded by a set of authors as either masculine or feminine. Tellingly, these attributes often are lumped under evaluations of style in such a way that overlooks different contexts of circulation – the magazines, publishers, and print runs that determine how far and wide one's readership will be.

This chapter, then, initiates a study that reads both Cather's fiction and the mass-market magazine context within which it is produced as more interdependent and more conflicted than they initially appear. Though her most famous works – *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, *One of Ours* (1922), *The Professor's House* – all return to the isolated pioneer towns of her youth for their setting, her formative years are just as much marked by the thoroughly modern and nationally networked context of the editorial office, a setting that, in 1911, George Jean Nathan describes as uniformly organized by the “general mechanics” of a “staff system,” even in the small towns (34). The “mechanics” of this well-oiled machine that produced enormous volumes of printed information for American

readers stands in stark contrast to the authorial isolation Cather attempts to write herself into, and the relationship between these two models becomes the organizing principle both inside the fictional worlds she creates and in her literary career. Thus, my goal here is to complicate the doubleness of Cather's literary life by showing the ways that the periodical form and writing-based occupations commonly marked as literature's Other create the terms by which Cather and others can project their own literary self-enclosure.

### **Promiscuous Fiction**

Cather got her start as a writer by penning theater pieces and literary reviews for a Nebraska weekly, and from the beginning one can see her preoccupation with the writerly overlap of periodical and literary work. In 1895, she was on the verge of moving to Pittsburgh for her first real job as managing editor of the *Home Monthly*. She dedicated her column in the Lincoln *Courier*, called "The Passing Show," to the strange ways that books and people can move:

The other day I saw an elevator boy intently perusing a work of literature. I glanced at it and saw that it was Ouida's *Under Two Flags*. I could remember when I first met that book and read it quite as intently as the elevator boy was doing, and I was inclined to be patient with him when he took me to the wrong floor, for I knew that he was envying Bertie Cecil his beautiful boots or that he was pondering upon the peaches of great price that Bertie used to throw at the swans to please his sweetheart, and it struck me that it is rather tragic that one of the brightest minds of the last generation should descend to become food for elevator boys. (*W&P* 273)

There is a rather neat symbolic logic at work in this anecdote, so that the novel experiences a double descent in social standing and in physical space. It travels between classes, from “one of the brightest minds of the last generation” to a lowly elevator boy (and indirectly to a childhood Cather), and this decline in social distinction gets mirrored by its path up and down the length of the building while the young man reads it. Likewise, as Cather moves into and out of the mind of the elevator boy her own prose style expands, replicating in her over-stuffed sentence all the features of bad writing she spent so much time speaking out against, especially in female writers. In fact, as she begins writing about Ouida’s bad writing and the improper identifications it imposes on the elevator boy, Cather’s own prose becomes like the sentences in *Under Two Flags*. Ouida’s “greatest sins are technical errors, as palpable as bad grammar or bad construction, sins of form and sense. Adjectives and sentimentality ran away with her, as they do with most women’s pens” (*W&P* 274). Along with tracking the social and spatial trajectory of Ouida’s novel, then, this column also ends up mimicking the stylistic flourishes Cather associates with bad female writers. In different ways, the passage finds Cather, her prose, and the book that sparks the anecdote ending up in places they were not supposed to go: Cather on the wrong floor, the book in the wrong hands.

The “adjectives and sentimentality” that mar the literature of women writers is ripe for the bad reading practices that Cather associates with the working class. In other places, she extends this criticism to include the over-description and over-identification of a particularly workmanlike model of reporting. She puts it most succinctly in a preface to the work of Sarah Orne Jewett, a writer that exemplifies the empowering limitations of fiction. “A reporter can write equally well about everything that is presented to his view,” she argues,

“but a creative writer can do his best only with what lies within the range and character of his talent” (“Jewett” 50). Unlike journalism, which expands outward and can convey any information in equally compelling prose, fiction must close itself off from this desire to impinge itself on the world. This leads her to the counterintuitive claim that journalism is by far the more imaginative mode of writing. Reporters, rightly, mold the story into the most amenable framework, but a novelist “who tries to improve upon his subject-matter with his ‘imagination’ can at best produce a brilliant sham” (51). Or, as she writes elsewhere, periodicals “gave us, altogether, poor standards – taught us to multiply our ideas instead of condense them” (“Art of Fiction” 101). The attitude that outward expansion is always better, something Frank Luther Mott refers to as the magazine’s influence on the “Era of More of Everything,” also inflects the fiction of the period. When ideas multiply, according to Cather, so do the number of half-baked books that house them, which strains a reader’s ability to stay abreast of the market. “Really, it’s terrible to think of, the mass of fiction that is thrust upon us every year,” she laments. “Nowadays if one pretends to half way keep up with current fiction he has absolutely no time for anything else. If you did a thorough job on it you would not have time to sleep” (*W&P* 273-4).

The ease with which texts circulate between people, and styles move between writers and print forms – from novelist Ouida to periodical writer Cather – provides a different way of thinking about the criticism of female writers that Cather makes above. The problem, it would seem, is that their writing moves too freely from one place to another, and from one person to another. This is not a problem solely for women, but she does portray it as peculiarly feminine. In a different context, she decries the “bewildering productiveness” of writers whom she at one time admired, such as Sinclair Lewis, as part and parcel with what she felt to be a general decline in contemporary fiction. “It is a solemn and terrible thing to



write a novel,” she claimed. “I wish there was a tax levied on every novel published. There would be fewer ones, and better,” a formulation that foreshadows the strange economics of Tom Outland’s relationship to literary production (*W&P* 273, 276). There is a similarity between the terms of feminized writing and the female writer, but not a full correspondence.

The gendered component of overabundant writing becomes sex-based, and sexualized, most clearly in the earliest criticism of Cather’s work. When she finished her first book of short stories, *The Troll Garden* (1905) – a collection overrun with stories about artists concerned with circulating their work to an unreceptive (or wrongly receptive) public – none other than Henry James raises concerns about the relationship between writers, readers, and forms of print. Her editor Witter Bynner sent *The Troll Garden* to James hoping for a positive blurb to help advertising. When Bynner followed up after a long silence, James responded, “I not only haven’t yet read it, but haven’t even been meaning to.” His silence is not a personal attack, James insists, but instead a matter of policy, one that he hopes will stop a certain type of person from writing. According to James, his act of refusal

register[s] the sacred truth. The sacred truth is that, being now almost in my 100<sup>th</sup> year [he was 68], with a long and weary experience of such matters behind me, promiscuous fiction has become abhorrent to me, and I find it the hardest thing in the world to read almost *any* new novel. Any is hard enough, but the hardest from the innocent hands of young females, young American females perhaps above all.

(*Letters* 395)

Cather’s book, here, suffers a different fate than Ouida’s; instead of falling prey to the lower classes, *The Troll Garden* fails to scale up into the higher register of respectable readers. And

James makes the issue of improper movement that we find in Cather's column more explicitly about erotic affiliations; books can be promiscuous for James, and their quality of affiliation is located in the ways that they move among individuals other than the writer. Cather's book, and her editor's decision to pass it along, fit into a model of casual engagement that James describes in "The Future of the Novel" (1899). Here, he scathingly writes of the "immense public, if public be the name" that "subscribes, borrows, lends, that picks up in one way or another, sometimes even by purchase" one of the novels that collectively constitute a "a flood at present [that] swells and swells" (*Essays* 100). All of this over-sharing amounts to something like a reading orgy, and as books wantonly pass from reader to reader, the "public . . . grows and grows each year" (100). That is, the over-proliferation of books produces more readers, rather than the more common understanding that higher literacy rates and mass education produce the market for more books. According to James, giving this public the title of "readers" might be going too far, though, because for all the "association" (100) between people and books – they subscribe, borrow, lend, and grow – nowhere does James say that they actually *read* the stuff on the page.

James's oracular "sacred truth" about Cather's promiscuous fiction is of a piece with attitudes about mass print culture in general, which at the beginning of the twentieth century is overwhelmingly figured as too big for its own good. Yet the truth James lays out is a strange one, as it establishes an inverse relationship between the fidelity of books and their authors, who are in this case figured as women. The "innocent hands of young females" are the primary agents of "promiscuous fiction," so that the bodily abstinence of women translates into their ability to churn out new books. In some ways this echoes an old saw of the nineteenth century, most famously captured in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1855 screed against the "damned mob of scribbling women" whose "quantitative dominance" in the

literary market is at fault for killing the careers of better, more-deserving male writers (Smith 47). Cather's interest in models of textual affiliation that we see in her column, in this light, can look like a preemptive absolution of her sin of womanhood, a symbolic alignment with those illustrious male writers who, as figured here, are small in number but large in reputation.

Cather counters this tendency toward readerly and writerly wantonness that gets associated with women in her discussions of her own books. "I wrote this book for myself," she says of *O Pioneers!*, and she hoped that it "would remain faithfully with me, and continue to be exclusively my property" ("First Novels" 93, 95). The filial capability that Cather expects of a novel – that it can and will reciprocate the author's monogamous, exclusive attention and not traipse off with other readers – also figures into the content of *O Pioneers!* When young Alexandra Bergson learns that her closest acquaintance is moving to the city, the biggest problem appears to be that the bonds of friendship will loosen from a one-to-one correspondence to something more social. "We've liked the same things and we've liked them together, without anybody else knowing," she tells Carl. "We've never either of us had any other close friend. And now' – Alexandra wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, 'and now I must remember that you are going where you will have many friends'" (53). The circulation of books and young boys are equally tragic, because the faceless "many friends" threaten the singular quality of how Alexandra and Cather "liked the same things" and "liked them together"; that is, how they helped constitute each other's aesthetic evaluations by offering a two-person taste-making coterie, one that is internally self-similar and outside of the public eye.

Put another way, Alexandra's and Cather's shared anxiety about the over-circulation of the things and people they love trades on the overlap between the adjectival and verbal

uses of “like” – that is, two things being *alike* versus the aesthetic evaluation of *liking* something or someone. As Jonathan Flatley points out, there is a long history of suggesting that “the apprehension of similarity – what Walter Benjamin calls the mimetic faculty – is the condition of possibility for affective affiliation” (73). For Flatley, an ethics and politics of “liking” and looking for likeness offers up utopian possibilities deeply at odds with current critical practices, which alternately critique or elevate a given object or author to make it/him/her unlike everything else. Liking, though, opens up “queer forms of emotional attachment and affiliation”: loosely but positively connected, spreading out to provide a model of connection outside of the same-different binary (72). Whereas Flatley imagines this as a mode of being particularly fit for late capitalist social life, liking and likeness in Cather’s work is positioned against the way that most individuals connect with people and property. In fact, the insular faithfulness of Cather to *O Pioneers!* and Alexandra to Carl within that novel refuses one of the primary facts of publishing that Cather learned as an editor. That is, the financial tenability of her aesthetic project, as well as her livelihood as a writer, relies upon a print culture that can reproduce many identical copies of the same text for other people to buy, read, enjoy, and otherwise affiliate with outside of the author’s control.

### **Gentlemen, Mobs, Magazines**

These concerns about the gendered circulation of books fit into a wider contemporary discussion about the changing shape of mass print culture, a process that in many ways Willa Cather was at the center of. When she rails against the “machine-made

novels” that are “manufactured to entertain great multitudes,” she claims that they are the descendents of “the dazzling journalistic successes of twenty years ago, stories that surprised and delighted by their sharp photographic detail and that were really nothing more than lively pieces of reporting” (“Fiction” 101). What she does not say about the “dazzling successes” of twenty years ago that have hamstrung innovation is that she was a key player in manufacturing them, and that the expansive editorial work of her former life fundamentally informs her ideas about literature’s social and artistic function. Before “The Novel D meubl ,” where she theorized an unfurnished, uncrowded, and seemingly non-circulating novel, she spent the first half of her life writing for a number of wildly popular magazines. In fact, if one simply looks at the advertisement next to her article about Ouida, the future looks preordained. Directly under her column in the Lincoln *Courier*, there is an advertisement for *McClure’s* magazine; if the reader buys a two year subscription to the *Courier*, she will also get a free subscription to what an early reviewer called a journal that “throbs with actuality from beginning to end” (Qtd. in Woodress “McClure” 171).

*McClure’s*, the *Courier*, and Willa Cather. The intersection of these two journals and one writer shines a light on the variable levels by which we might look at turn-of-the-century periodical culture: the level of the individual author, the regional journal, the national magazine, or – as the case of Cather makes clear – a cross section of all three. *McClure’s*, founded in 1893 with seed money from S.S. McClure’s profitable news syndication business, is described by James Woodress (who also wrote a biography of Cather) as standing out from its contemporary periodicals “like Gulliver among the Lilliputians” (“McClure” 171). It did so amid a periodical culture that was exponentially expanding at the end of the nineteenth century: between 1893 and 1905, monthly magazine circulation more than tripled and became, according to Richard Ohmann, the “major form of repeated cultural experience

for people in the United States” (29). The ritualistic feel of magazine reading described by Ohmann was intended, according to S.S. McClure, to be an outgrowth of the everydayness of *McClure's*. He claimed that his magazine succeeded by seamlessly insinuating itself into the common life of readers and by projecting a unified worldview: he wanted a magazine that “people read from cover to cover” (“McClure” 184). This holistic approach to readerly attention was defined more by contemporaneity than by genre or field; the first issue claims that it will only present “articles of timely interest,” which includes “the newest book, the latest important political event, the most recent discovery or invention – in fact, what is newest or most important in every department of human activity” (*Muckrakers* 104).

*McClure's* achieves its lofty goal of holding together “every department of human activity” by both embracing its intermediate position in the news information cycle and by striving for what Ohmann calls “a certain consistency of voice,” one that we will see makes explicit claims to both gender and class (8). First, though, we’ll look at the temporality of the magazine, which occupied the middle space between newspapers and books in recording innovations to everyday life. McClure sees the unique qualities of his print form, which publishes slower than the newspaper but faster than a book, to be “the ability to analyze events and reconstruct them in perspective” (*Muckrakers* 81). Or, as Arthur Reed Kimball put it in his July 1900 *Atlantic Monthly* article, “The Invasion of Journalism,” “the office” of magazines like *McClure's* “interpret the significance of life as it is being lived, after it is mirrored, *en passant*, in the press, but before its perpetuation in the book” (Ohmann 234). In this way the magazine’s role is that of both an observer and cultural interpreter, something like a periodical *flâneur*. Though today *McClure's* is primarily remembered as the progenitor of muckraking journalism, the more common persona that the magazine adopts is that of a slightly bemused aristocrat. S.S. McClure described the magazine’s style as replicating that of

a “gentleman” on a social visit to the readers’ homes, maintaining a level of propriety and loose intimacy that would ingratiate rather than shock the public. The language, topics, and images would be those found “in ordinary conversation in the family gathering,” he reasons, because a gentleman would not enter someone else’s house “with oaths on his lips, or with words that violate the universal canon of good breeding” (*Muckrakers* 197). The goal – one that seems to have worked, if circulation numbers can stand for public sentiment – is for *McClure’s* to be “representative of many people’s interests,” always aiming to be “still more representative” (200). This figuration of the magazine as a polite gentleman who works his way into the houses of every reader brings together the conflicted ideas of reading and class that enveloped magazine culture in this period. In 1893, *McClure’s* was one of the first American magazines to sell each issue at a loss, and instead localize its profits in advertising revenue. It offered a similar content as the “quality” magazines like *The Atlantic* and *Harper’s* at a fraction of the price: ten cents per issue rather than thirty-five cents.

These two components of the success of *McClure’s* – a newly standardized house style and a lower price than the quality titles – open up Cather’s concern about the improper movement of books and authors to a contemporaneous conversation taking place about the role of magazines. An 1895 editorial in *The Independent* asks how the low cost of *McClure’s* and its stylized populism will affect the older journals:

It may not be easy to foresee; but it seems probable that they will not find it wise to reduce their price to a like figure ... The reason is that they will wish to maintain that higher, purer literary standard which succeeds in securing the best but not the most numerous readers ... They cannot change their constituency beyond the comparatively cultivated class which appreciates them. They cannot, half a dozen of

them, secure half a million purchasers apiece, for there are not so many families of their sort in the country ... The rest may or may not be sturdy citizens, may count in the militia and the population and the lower schools; but they are not the ones who delight to seek the instruction they need most. (Mott *Vol. 4 7*)

Much like Cather's fear of *Under Two Flags* falling into the wrong hands, we can see a similar anxiety over the downward social mobility of the "higher, purer literary standard," and what Matthew Schneirov describes as the commercialization of literary taste.<sup>5</sup> The lower classes that *McClure's* sells its version of gentlemanliness to, in these attacks, are simply unfit for the type of reading that actual gentlemen must do.

The above column, in light of McClure's goal to make a uniformly "quality" house style become representative of the American reading public, forecasts an odd conclusion. That is, it argues that the "higher, purer literary standard" will be victimized by the popularization of high literary taste. Or put another way, that the routinization of literary taste will bring an end to literary taste as such. The assumption here is that restrictiveness is an inherent characteristic of quality; this is the model that *McClure's* upends by selling the genteel culture of the quality magazines to the readers of penny dreadfuls. By making a house style out of gentlemanliness, and then disseminating it to a nascent professional class, McClure opens up fashionable elitism to a new crowd who can now replicate the voice of the gentleman. In effect, he exposes the insider game of elitism to the outsiders.

As George Jean Nathan's *Bookman* article "The Magazine in the Making" (1911) describes, this routinization of style and taste on the pages mass-market magazines is replicated in the way they are written. Nathan claims that even what Cather terms the Escapists are developing administrative skills, as the best writing (creative and otherwise)



increasingly is not only published in but also assigned from the same place as mass culture. According to Nathan, “magazines today are being filled more and more as newspapers are filled – by ‘assignments,’ more and more by the members of regularly employed staffs ... and less and less through the propitious accidents of the United States mail” (416). He describes this internal organization of the editorial office as a process of magazine offices’ increasingly insularity; they rely less on unsolicited submissions from amateurs and unknowns, and more on a stable set of staff workers. Referring to *McClure’s*, its off-shoot magazine *The American*, and other “publications of this class,” he claims that “there has been developed over the past decade a gradual tendency toward the staff system ... Within the last two or three years, the staff seed that was planted in that portion of the decade preceding this period has sprouted into a lively plant” (414). What used to be the work of what he terms “outsiders,” by which he means engaged readers who also write, has now been transferred to the inside. This administration of writing even extends to poetry and fiction: “Despite the loud wails that have to do with ‘inspiration,’” he writes, “a monthly magazine placed orders with three recognized writers of fiction for as many series of short stories on assigned topics” (35). Yet, as Nathan makes clear, this institutionalization of authorial production, as the seed-to-plant metaphor alludes, is not necessarily a bad thing and could even be thought of as natural. It “is practically a necessity” for the monthly that, like *McClure’s*, devotes itself equally to in-depth reporting and serialized fiction (414).

This internalization of writerly production is a matter of producing a consistent tone, one that readers can depend upon from month to month. The term “general interest” magazine that often gets leveled on the newer, cheaper periodicals that take off in the latter part of the nineteenth century actually hides how these journals attempted to differentiate themselves from one another by developing unique editorial and visual styles. In Chapter 3, I

will discuss how bringing novelists and poets into the fold of editorial work – with its attendant questions of authorial and aesthetic autonomy, etc. etc. – emerges as a productive topic for a number of “poet-reporters,” to use Alfred Kazin’s term for those writers now under the big tent of mass-market magazines. For now, suffice it to say that along with reliable quantity, the staff system also allows for reliable quality. As Nathan describes, “It may be said for the benefit of skeptics that the assignment idea in point has been found to fill the magazine with greater effectiveness and satisfaction than had been the case before the system had been introduced into the editorial room” (416).

### **The Genius of the System**

The sea change of the “staff system” Nathan describes coincides with Cather’s introduction into professional editorial work, and her inclusion in the system exposes how the gentlemanly voice of the big magazines was increasingly written by women. Between 1893 and 1903 she produced almost six hundred articles, reviews, and essays for popular magazines that were distributed to tens of thousands of readers across the United States. She wrote for *McClure’s* for another ten years, only quitting full-time editorial work in 1912. During her time at *McClure’s* she wrote only a handful of short stories, citing the overwhelming responsibilities of managing the office as the primary reason. Even though exact numbers for her journalistic output during this period are not readily available, it is safe to assume she was just as busy with editorial work as the previous decade, which means that over the course of twenty years she wrote around 1,200 articles – a number that averages out to one magazine article ever six days until her thirty-ninth birthday. In quantitative terms, Cather was wildly successful in this milieu, both as a writer and as a manager. In her first

year as managing editor, the magazine's circulation increased by sixty thousand, and S.S. McClure hand-picked her to ghostwrite his autobiography because of her mastery of writing for a popular audience.

In "Ardessa" (1918), one of Cather's few stories actually set in an editorial office, she firmly associates this administrative ability with the modern working woman. The title character serves as secretary to O'Mally, publisher of "The Out-Cry," a thinly disguised version S.S. McClure and his magazine. Ardessa's job consists of responding to O'Mally's mail, keeping at bay the mass of bad writers who are looking for their big break, and taking care of the currently popular writers who are all too engrossed in their single "line" of expertise to deal with the banalities of office life. Ardessa throughout is described as the calm, unmoving, unflustered center around which the office operates, as "being at the heart of things" (169). The repeated references to Ardessa's "contentment," and the general freedom to work at her own pace and adjudicate unpleasant tasks to her underlings, quietly undoes the image of a frantic and male-dominated newsroom. Ardessa's unmoving serenity within the managerial milieu, and through her the office's association with a properly functioning human body, follows Nathan's account of the naturalness of administrative order. In fact, Ardessa's comfort with the editorial office might be seen as an ironic model of the "quiet centre of life" that Sarah Orne Jewett famously told Cather she must find before becoming a real novelist. Jewett told Cather that dividing her attention between office work and fiction will hobble her growth as a writer, but the portrayal of Ardessa raises questions about the unfitness of the office for quiet contemplation.

The plot of "Ardessa," to the extent that there is one, finds Ardessa and O'Mally as opposite models of modern managerial thinking, though both versions are created, reproduced, and made popular by their magazine work. O'Mally, the narrator makes clear, is

perfectly attuned to the twentieth-century periodical market. Like Tom Outland in *The Professor's House*, he comes from the West and succeeds because, as an outsider, he can see the problems with periodicals that those on the inside cannot. He can “manufacture celebrities” out of “cheap paper and cheap ink,” though at first it is unclear whether the writers or the robber barons that fill their muckraking articles are the bigger celebrities (169). In some ways it does not matter; celebrity primarily is a matter of circulation without moralization – its motto asserts that any press is good press. The problem for O’Mally, though, is that he cannot manage his magazine-as-celebrity-machine when it starts feeding back on itself. The manufactured talent starts “staring at their own faces on newsstands and billboards” as they begin “venerating themselves,” a situation that makes O’Mally “more or less constrained by these reputations that he had created” (168). The muckraking journalism that O’Mally (and McClure) make popular requires the writers to uncover the unknown, to bring an ever-wider range of modern vice into the purview of the public, but in “Ardessa” the producers of this content quickly, self-reflexively become unable to see beyond themselves. The insularity of the office’s staff system threatens to undo its organizational achievements.

Ardessa’s genius is in keeping the balance between inward looking self-satisfaction and outward expansion by maintaining a backlog of writers to feed into this system. She is “the card catalogue” of the magazine’s “ever-changing personal relations,” and one of Ardessa’s young female protégés is called a “cold-blooded adding machine” that the magazine needs to stay afloat (170). Rather than the Romantic artist outside of social relations – the image that often gets associated with Cather-as-author – here we find a heroine who is the artist *of* social relations, whose genius precisely consists of administering networks of authors, editors, and publishers. And, in the story, this is a uniquely literary

talent: Ardessa's value to O'Mally is that she is "steeped in literary distinctions and the social distinctions" that the art world brings with it. Her mechanical efficiency, then, is not the absence of cultural knowledge but its greatest manifestation. While the division of labor here remains gendered – the quixotic, unaccountable male publisher; the organized, managerial female editor – the story realigns which half of the population is unfit for the strictures of the modern professional office. Ardessa's problem, at the end of the story, is not that she cannot do the work required of her or that it takes too much time; instead, it is that she is so good at delegating and managing that she has worked herself out of having any work. Worse, she has turned her female subordinates into more perfect versions of herself. She teaches Becky, a new girl "who never ceased to tremble," how to be "impersonal, unreproachful, and fairly pan[t] for work," and the boss decides Becky is of "better material" because, unlike Ardessa, she looks like she is trying (180).

At the end of "Ardessa," there is a new and improved Ardessa in Becky, which is a more direct version of James's "sacred truth" about the strange ways that women reproduce culture for future generations while remaining "innocent" of procreative coupling. Another version of this, more specifically attuned to female authorship, turns up in "The Willing Muse" (1907), which trades the administrator of authors for the administrative author. The story literally narrates the marriage of an unproductive male writer named Kenneth Gray to Bertha Torrence, a woman who is deeply engrained in the "public consciousness" and writes with unceasing regularity (113). In the story, her skillful management of her social and literary productivity ends up cancelling out any objections one might have to her as a remnant of Hawthorne's scribbling woman: "She made a point of looking astonishingly well, of being indispensable in an appalling number of 'circles,' and of generally nullifying the traditional reproach attaching to clever women" (115). Put another way, the narrator

describes her true art to be the unfailing ability to affiliate with untold numbers of influential people and to write about it. Cather populates the story with men of letters trying to make sense of Bertha Torrence and her productivity, and her new husband Kenneth Gray is the most pure version of their idea about what writers should be. He “was born an anachronism” and holds onto the idyllic life of his Ohio hometown (unsubtly named Olympia) where he can be the center of literary life by sheer will of force without actually writing anything (117).

In this way Gray is much like Ray Kennedy in *The Song of the Lark*, another big personality with deep-set convictions who cannot write. Ray is a railway worker, an unschooled but naturally gifted storyteller who courts the heroine, Thea Kronborg, when she is young. Though Ray can talk, he cannot write, because he “had the lamentable American belief that ‘expression’ is obligatory” when it comes time to set pen to page (128). The pages of his notebook, “Impressions on First Viewing the Grand Canyon, Ray H. Kennedy,”

were like a battlefield; the laboring author had fallen back from metaphor after metaphor, abandoned position after position. He would have admitted that the art of forging metals was nothing to this treacherous business of recording impressions, in which the material you were so full of vanished mysteriously under your striving hand. (128)

Ray’s insistence on treating writing as expression, rather than production, makes the task impossible. If only he were a little more mechanical, more like the heroine Thea, who is

described not long after this description of Ray as “vibrating with excitement, as a machine vibrates from speed” (156).

This juxtaposition of mechanical women and wrong-headedly expressive men guides “The Willing Muse.” More specifically, it sets up the possibility that the former can positively influence the latter. The hope that Bertha’s productivity might rub off on Kenneth is what brings him into her company. When Gray moves to New York, the narrator – a boyhood friend of Gray who also makes a living in letters – views Kenneth’s new relationship as a lifted burden, assuming that Bertha’s industry will help his notoriously slow-working friend. But after the wedding, the opposite happens. Gray almost completely stops writing; he becomes so self-conscious about it that he cannot even finish a letter with one of Bertha’s admirers. All the while, his wife’s fiction keeps coming out faster and faster. The narrator declares

I never picked up any American periodical that Bertha’s name was not the first to greet [his] eye on the advertising page. She surpassed all legendary accounts of phenomenal productiveness, and I could feel no anxiety for the fortunes of the pair while Bertha’s publishers thought her worth such a display of heavy type. There was scarcely a phase of colonial life left untouched by her, and her last, *The Maid of Domremy*, showed that she had fairly crowded herself out of her own field. (117)

Bertha’s ability to touch on any “phase” of life and transform it into her own material would seem to align her with Cather’s pejorative definition of a reporter. It is a trait that leaves her with the peculiar problem of her books getting in their own way, published so closely on one another’s heels that they compete for readerly attention, “crowd[ing]” herself out of the

market. To the narrator's surprise, though, the writing gets better the faster she produces it. "The real wonder was, that, making so many, she could make them so well – should make them, indeed, rather better and better" (117). Here, quantity produces quality, so that as Bertha standardizes her writing process and becomes ever more efficient, the product also becomes increasingly well-made.

Yet as she becomes more productive, she also seems to become less human. Bertha writes behind a partition in her home, and the narrator cannot separate her from "the sharp, regular click of the machine" (119).<sup>6</sup> At the end of the story, Kenneth leaves his wife and absconds to China because, according to the narrator, "His brain was beaten into torpidity by the mere hammer of her machine, as by so many tiny mallets" (123). The affinity that Cather describes between Bertha and writing machines is not necessarily unique, as the turn of the century is full of gendered allegories of modernity, perhaps most famously Henry Adams's differentiation of the Virgin Mother and the Dynamo, in which the fecundity of the female body gets replaced by the mechanical reproduction of modern industry.<sup>7</sup> As Jennifer Fleissner points out, these models hinge on an anxiety that biological reproduction is in the process of ceding to mechanical reproduction, the repercussions of which often gets placed onto the female body. According to this logic, the "cold, metallic non-mothers" have stopped making babies and started making just about everything else, including books (Fleissner 520). However, Cather's version subtly differs from this. In "The Willing Muse," the older, anachronistic model of organic production is associated with the men – virginal men who are equally incapable of making books and babies. Rather than the disappearance of the Virgin Mother, the story recounts how a version of the Romantically pastoral male writer has been replaced by a better female model.



In this way, the central problem of the new, public woman's mechanical productivity is neither that there won't be any children, nor that women are inferior in this industrial role, at least in "Ardezza" and "The Willing Muse." Instead, women possess some preternatural affinity for being productive in the regimented world of editorial offices, and their mechanicity is creating a new model of authorship that brings with it an entirely novel valuation of circulation. As "The Willing Muse" closes, the narrator conjectures that Bertha "has passed all the limits of nature, not to speak of decorum. They [her books] come as certainly as the seasons, her new ones, each cleverer and more damnable than the last" (123). Biological and ecological cycles are replaced here by Bertha's mechanical efficiency, and she and her books become something of an ecology all their own. As the narrator sits around with his friends ponder the nature of literary success, they do not seem to think Kenneth is the real story. Instead, the last lines are devoted to Bertha. In their view her textual overabundance has not ruined literary culture; if anything, they are jealous: "Bertha is a wonderful woman – a woman of her time and people; and she has managed, in spite of her fatal facility, to be enough sight better than most of us" (123). What constitutes her "fatal facility" never comes to light, but the two differences between her and the "us" that identify it are her gender and her popularity.

### **Seamstresses and Landlords**

The proliferation of Berthas, or at least individuals just like Bertha, across the cultural landscape that happens when she is declared "of her time and people" also happens at the end of *The Professor's House*. With his family off exploring Europe, Godfrey St. Peter sits in his nearly empty house and attempts to write an Introduction for Tom Outland's

journal. However, like Kenneth Grey, St. Peter cannot write, and instead he “s[its] motionless, breathing unevenly, one dark hand lying clenched on his writing-table,” thinking about “eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation” (274, 272). A gust from the storm outside blows out the flame on the old stove that heats his room, but Augusta, the family’s seamstress with whom he shares a workspace, saves him before he asphyxiates. Just at the moment when he decides that he does not, “being quite honest with himself, feel any obligations toward his family” (281), he fully aligns himself with Augusta. “He would rather have Augusta with him just now than anyone he could think of,” he thinks, and as his family recedes from his frame of reference, he decides “there was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound” (281). St. Peter’s discomfort with the domestic, heterosexual model of affiliation has been taken up by many critics, often emphasizing the way that he replaces his legal and biological family with homosocial models. But here, at the moment when he removes himself from the model of biological reproduction that constitutes his wife and children, we find him projecting and identifying with an endlessly proliferating and endlessly self-similar figure who represents to him “a definite absence from the world of men and women” (279). And when the Professor projects his affinity with a working class individual who saves him from asphyxiating in his work room, Augusta becomes another Tom Outland. Both Tom and Augusta bring with them the fresh air that rejuvenates the Professor, and I want to conclude by showing that August is also figured as connecting the Professor’s work to periodical circulation.

One might read St. Peter and Augusta as a more complex retelling of the gendered notions of authorial work in “Ardessa” and “The Willing Muse,” a notion that I’m arguing arises out of Cather’s ambivalent institutional affiliation with big magazines that are simultaneously figured as too mechanical, too abundant, and too feminine, but nonetheless

provide both economic support and a national readership for her literary work. This identification of St. Peter and Augusta, and particularly their two models of work, is alluded to early on in the novel. They share office space, and what we might call their respective archives end up getting intermixed in a large storage chest.

At one end of the upholstered box were piles of notebooks and bundles of manuscript tied up in square packages with mason's cord. At the other end were many little rolls of patterns, cut out of newspapers and tied with bits of ribbon, gingham, silk, georgette; notched charts which followed the changing stature and figures of the Misses St. Peter from early childhood to womanhood. In the middle of the box, patterns and manuscripts interpenetrated. "I see we shall have some difficulty in separating our life work, Augusta. We've kept our papers together a long while now." (22)

The masculine intellectual work of writing here finds its twin in Augusta's "little rolls of patterns, cut out of newspapers" that link together feminine domestic work with mass periodical circulation. The box is an archive of the familial life that St. Peter always keeps at arm's length, but it is also evidence that his elevation above or removal from that model of feminized, overabundant circulation covers over how they are "interpenetrated."

For Cather, though, the interpenetration of these two registers of work is complicated by the fact that, from a certain perspective, they are always the same thing. Though she attempts to cordon off the editorial office from her vision of artistic production, it keeps coming back. Thea Kronborg, the pianist-turned-opera singer in *Song of the Lark*, puts this in slightly different terms, arguing that for true artists there can be no division

between one's work and one's life. In a thoroughly Jamesian parlor scene, a friend tells Thea that her life has come out of balance because she has sacrificed all of the pleasures of friendship and leisure to her artistic ascent. She responds that when one is fully dedicated,

[y]our work becomes your personal life. You are not much good until it does. It's like being woven into a big web. You can't pull away, because all your little tendrils are woven into the picture. It takes you up, and uses you, and spins you out; and that is your life. Not much else can happen to you. (443)

This vision of a "big web" of work that "takes you up, and uses you, and spins you out" would seem to bring together, at least metaphorically, the already "interpenetrated" work of St. Peter and Augusta, as it uses the language of sewing to describe her own artistic production. When Thea sings in *The Song of the Lark*, the novel calls it "voice production," as if "a healthy and powerful organ has found its own method" (175). Or later, as "if her body were absolutely the instrument of her idea," which makes the gendered body of the artist a material on which some larger, more encompassing content is conveyed. This replicates the mechanical vision of female writing, yet it also transforms female writing into a kind of editing similar to that of the Professor, Tom Outland, and Jim Burden. Thea is not emotively creating when she performs; instead, she is simply the media through which something else operates, though being receptive to such a model of artistic unproductivity took a lifetime of self-discipline. At its best, then, the path of creative production looks a lot like the mechanized and heavily standardized models of mass print culture.

The awkward coupling of overabundance and self-enclosure, and of writing as mechanized work while also being an escape from it, can also shed light on the over-

identification of artists and their art objects in her works. In *Alexander's Bridge*, the narrator describes the titular character, an architect famous for his bridges, as “look[ing] as a tamer of rivers ought to look,” his shoulders “strong enough in themselves to support a span of any one of his ten great bridges” (11). Thea Kronborg describes a sonata she is practicing as non-existent unless in her presence: “it isn’t here unless I have it – not for me ... Only what I hold in my two hands is there for me!” which makes her musicality coterminous with her bodily presence (162-3). For Thea, this identification stretches beyond what she makes to include everything she likes. When she visits the Chicago Art Institute and sees the painting from which the novel takes its name, she thinks:

That was her picture. She imagined that nobody cared for it but herself, and that it waited for her. That was a picture indeed. She liked even the name of it, “The Song of the Lark.” The flat country, the early morning light, the wet fields, the look in the girl’s heavy face – well, they were all hers, anyhow, whatever was there. (182)

Alexander and his bridges figuratively collapse into one another, and the novel ends with the bridge literally collapsing on top of Alexander, so that Cather kills the architect, architecture, and narrative at the same time. *The Song of the Lark* brings its main character into contact with “The Song of the Lark,” a painting that anachronistically appears to be an image of the novel’s own protagonist, enacting a similar collapse between the metaphoric and the literal within the narrative.

The self-similarity between characters, aesthetic objects, and the books that contain them can begin to look rather claustrophobic, a feature that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s refers to as her narratological “viscosity” (174). The viscosity of Cather’s prose emerges from the

impetus toward stillness, a refusal to circulate that we've seen associated with failed male writers but also with Cather's ideas of her own books. In practice, the viscosity emerges at these moments of metaphoric over-identification, when character and objects and the narrative itself all come into such close proximity that the wheels fall off. When Alexander becomes one with his broken bridge and Thea looks at the painting that inspired her own creation, Cather seems to give up the foundational lie of artistic production: that, in some basic way, it is a creative act. As Mark McGurl argues, literary modernism manages its "double mediation" of the fictional world in the book and the social world in which it operates "by resisting the last degree of narrative self-consciousness that would simply collapse the world in which the titular object circulates, admitting that it's all just print, disabling the fictive dream" (31). As we see in *Alexander's Bridge* and *The Song of the Lark*, a character, an object, and the narrative about the two all become so closely identified, so overburdened with significance, that the novels seem to give up the lie of fictionality.

The over-identification of characters and objects in the novel, as well as the narrative space of the book with its materiality can help us to make sense of Cather's retroactive erasure of her life in the magazines. At the low point of Willa Cather's critical reputation in the 1930s, embattled by critics such as Granville Hicks who for years had accused her of retreating into "heroism and romance" of frontier life by way of her "simple, poetic idyll," Cather defended herself by claiming that "Art and economics are strangers" (Hicks 706, "Escapism" 27). Rehashing the image of the hermetic artist who is too wrapped up in her own world to think about the one she lives in, Cather argues that authors and their texts must be valued differently than other people and objects. The best writers "were valuable, like powerful stimulants, only when they were left out of the social and industrial routine which goes on every day all over the world," and that most exemplars of true literary talent

“have managed their own budget and their social relations so unsuccessfully that I wouldn’t want them for my landlords, or my bankers, or my neighbors” (20-21). Novelists have enough to deal with, so “industrial life has to work out its own problems” (21).

By separating out her work from the “novel of amusement,” which relies on quantity rather than quality, Cather adeptly closes off both her novels and her task as a writer from questions of poor craftsmanship or false sentiments, while at the same time aligning her critics with the unthinking multitudes. Her self-enclosure into a world of purely aesthetic problems – problems that aren’t really problems, because they answer themselves “unconsciously,” the forms “select themselves,” as she writes in “On the Art of Fiction” – is a powerful rejoinder to the rather narrow lens of Popular Front criticism. More importantly, though, by siding with the socially and economically incompetent outsiders Cather elides her own adeptness at managing the “social and industrial routine” that ostensibly exists outside of her artistic purview. She might have been a bad neighbor, but many years spent overseeing budgets and corralling writers at *McClure’s* would have made her an excellent landlord.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRINTING THE COLOR LINE IN *THE CRISIS*

In his turn-of-the-century novel *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), Charles W. Chesnutt literalizes what Richard Yarborough and others have called the period's "war over images" (206) of African Americans, figuring an emerging mass print culture as synonymous with racial difference and, by the novel's end, with racial violence. Because of Chesnutt's two-pronged career as author and stenographer, it makes sense that he would have in mind the ways that different print forms – the magazine page versus the legal document or, in this case, the page of the novel – inflect the representation of race. Yet a telling conversation in *Marrow* takes the periodical as the medial baseline for conversations about social uplift. As the white Dr. Burns and black Dr. Miller, two physicians headed South for different but eventually overlapping professional reasons, ride a train from Philadelphia to the fictional town of Wellington, North Carolina, Burns explains to Miller, his former student:

It is a tremendous problem, Miller, the future of your race ... a tremendously interesting problem. It is a serial story which we are all reading, and which grows in vital interest with each successive installment. It is not only your problem, but ours. Your race must come up or drag ours down. (34)



Burns is not talking about a specific serialized story that takes racial discord as its theme; instead, he figures the “interesting problem” of African American integration into the political body of the United States as a serial story itself, something that develops in “successive installment[s]” and that one experiences collectively through the cultural practice of reading. Put another way, it is not just that the “war over images” – which in *Marrow* begins with white racists reading an article in a black-owned newspaper, then later reprinting it in their own paper to stir up racial antagonism before an election, which ends in the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 – exists as a subset of a more expansive battle between a cultural and political movement for social equality and its attendant racist backlash. Instead, Burns, a Northern white observer, interprets what W.E.B. Du Bois refers to as “the problem of the color line” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903 quite literally as a problem instantiated in black and white on the pages of newspapers and magazines.

*Souls*, it should be noted, began as a series of magazine articles, and this periodical pre-history insinuates an underlying connection between twentieth century print media and racial discourse. Du Bois’s 1926 *Crisis* article, “Criteria for Negro Art,” more directly makes this point, as it echoes Chesnut’s coupling of race and periodical form. The essay, which appeared one year before *The Crisis* instituted the Charles Waddell Chesnut Honorarium for outstanding writing, is most famous for its coterminous definition of “Beauty” and “Propaganda.” But Du Bois also points out that periodicals are without question the best place to look for a political aesthetic, specifically the “the positive propaganda of people who believe white blood divine.” Two paragraphs after his statement that “All art is propaganda,” he specifies that his claim becomes most abundantly clear in the collective experience of reading the popular press:

You all know the current magazine story: A young white man goes down to Central America and the most beautiful colored woman there falls in love with him. She crawls across the whole Isthmus to get to him. The white man says nobly, “No.” He goes back to his white sweetheart in New York. (“Criteria” 367)

As it expands the scope of racial discourse beyond the nation, this archetypal story that “you all know” gets retold with different names and places, in different literary and journalistic forms, and in different media, but Du Bois frames the “current magazine story” as the foundation for narratives of racial difference. As Russ Castronovo cogently argues, Du Bois’s nuanced understanding of “Art” and “Propaganda” differentiates between the “rather fine and orthographic distinctions” between “art” that ends in itself and “Art” that, like *The Crisis* as a whole, envisioned “the political uses of formalism” as “an arena for crafting hegemony” (1444). “Art” is not interchangeable with “art” in *The Crisis*. But, as we will see, neither is “Negro” interchangeable with “negro.”<sup>1</sup> This attention to typographic differences on the page, I will argue, connects aesthetic, racial, and media form in *The Crisis* in counterintuitive ways.

It is in its malleability to typographic and representational experiments that the popular magazine, with its wide readership and iterative composition, becomes an ideal site for Du Bois and others to imagine the collectivizing possibilities, and the formal limitations, of print media for articulating African American identity. In “Criteria,” Du Bois has little to say about the specifics of the “the magazine story”; the important point seems to be its *magasin*-ness, its adaptability and proliferation as a function of one particular type of reading

material. As Richard Ohmann points out, the openness of magazines to other media, genres, points of view, and methods of address – a characteristic often also attributed to the novel, and one shared by Du Bois’s own generically unwieldy literary efforts – is embedded in its etymology, from the French for storehouse, with the implication of a physical location for the collection of disparate goods (and later a portable receptacle for bric-a-brac) (223-230). As we saw in Chapter 1, the trope of the magazine as storehouse becomes a problem for Willa Cather as she imagines a properly circulating print culture. And in Chapter 3, we will see how this same trope becomes quite useful in positioning a more disciplined and uniform aesthetic principle to newsmagazines from the mid-1920s through the Great Depression. The trope is useful to think about here, because the stylistic and formal openness of the magazine is often given a democratic slant, in that it allows for an eclectic, pluralist conception of authorship, citizenship, and media alike. Yet Du Bois’s attention to the way that this openness works for the benefit of racist caricature also exposes another aspect of his essay’s goal: to point out how the ostensible transparency of a magazine’s content can, in practice, belie a whole host of systematic and institutional misidentifications. The rest of this chapter will examine how in essays, images, and fiction Du Bois and a group of writers and artists clustered around *The Crisis* attempt to theorize a racially inflected *magasin*-ness for the magazine. That is, how the magazine’s constituent seriality, collective production, and openness to other media offer a peculiarly apt location for conceptualizing the parameters of African American artistic production. For black intellectuals and artists like Chesnut and Du Bois, but also Jessie Fauset and the visual artist Frank Walts, the technological production and material form of the magazine page offers both a physical

place and an allegorical model for experimenting with the possibilities and limits of racial representation – in both the aesthetic and political valences of that term.

As many have noted, the early days of the twentieth century witnessed a revolution in print technologies of all kinds that exponentially increased the size, spread, and circulation of the print marketplace, a situation which the newly minted discipline of Periodical Studies takes as its methodological springboard. This “magazine revolution” (Ohmann 24) fundamentally changed the relationships among authors, audiences, and publishing institutions, and these innovations can appear either radically democratic or intellectually suspect, depending on where one stands along the cultural divide.<sup>2</sup> As Jerome McGann compellingly argues, transformations in the materiality of print culture were accompanied by an increased attention to the act of writing and technologies of publication. This is most prevalent in what McGann calls the “literalist” approach, an exploration of the “broadly institutional” and “immediately physical” “expressive possibilities of language’s necessary material conditions” (20). Others, such as Michael Fried and Walter Benn Michaels, also historicize a broad “metaphorics of writing” that arises during this period (Fried 104). McGann claims that the “Renaissance of Printing” defines the formal and thematic concerns of the era; it invigorates the “free forms of modernism” and encourages “freedom and innovation in the publishing and distribution of texts,” most notably in a self-conscious consideration of how the spatial field of the printed page might best attract and consolidate a readership (20, 21).<sup>3</sup>

Studies of the New Negro movement and Harlem Renaissance often begin by connecting the expansion of racial types available in mass media with this expansion of print technology.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Gates and others have pointed out, this period also gave rise to an

increasing number of racist images with which African American writers and artists had to compete.<sup>5</sup> In their prose and fiction, Du Bois and Chesnut register the often overlooked limits to the utopian ideal of the formal and institutional freedom and innovation that an emerging mass print culture signified. The simultaneous attention to the materiality of print culture and the ways that one's racial identity inflected his or her access to that print culture, I argue, elucidates a number of formal features of African American magazines during this time. Naddell summarizes the opinion of African American intellectuals like Du Bois, William Stanley Braithwaite, and others as "object[ing] to the mechanism by which these representations operated. Specifically, the critics objected to the way in which literary and visual images, ranging from 'caricature' to 'sentiment,' made the Negro into a 'genre stereotype'" (23-24). The term "genre stereotype," which she takes from Alain Locke's introduction to *The New Negro* anthology (1925), perfectly encapsulates the way that a new vision of African American "Public Self" ("Trope" 129) is at once reliant on print technology, generic convention, and formal innovation. Put another way, African American writers' and intellectuals' shifting position in American culture at large offered an ideal vantage point for seeing how uneven access to institutions of cultural production placed limits on the openness of this new print market, as well as the pages on which its ideas circulated. Yet, we can also track both thematically and formally an impulse among writers and artists such as Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, and Frank Walts to imagine a periodical form specifically suited for representing African Americans, one that takes the seemingly simple contrast of black ink on a flat, white page as an allegory of "the problem of the color line" at large.

By emphasizing *The Crisis's* interest in the media-specificity attendant to the production and immediate archiving of an emerging African American print tradition, I join a conversation that foregrounds the materiality of cultural circulation in describing the work of writers from the African diaspora. As Brent Hayes Edwards, Katherine Biers, Madhu Dubhey, Mark Goble, and others have argued, a “phonocentrism” that stresses vernacular forms and tropes of orality has guided African Americanist criticism since the late 1970s. Perhaps there is good reason for this elevation of orality. As George Hutchinson, Ann Duccille, and others have compellingly argued, such studies move “African American cultural studies out of the realm of the intellectual, where the written words of the literati have been privileged, into the world of the material, where other cultural forms such as the blues await analysis” (Duccille 419). Yet, in Duccille’s conceptualization of the field, we find a false division between the “written words of the literati” and “the world of the material,” as if intellectual discourse existed outside of the constraints of physical media. In fact, certain members of the black literati (such as Chesnutt, Du Bois, Fauset, and Walts) have proven inordinately engaged with this exact issue; that is, with the media-specificity of African American intellectual work and literary practice. Theorizations of the racial “sound” of texts to which “we *listen*” (*Break* 32), along with tropes of the “Talking Book” and the “speakerly text,” tend to sidestep how writers and artists account for the messy materiality of the print artifact; how the idiosyncrasies of different media shape their representational capabilities; and, as Chesnutt and Du Bois make clear above, how the material characteristics of print media can supply their own thematics of African American artistic production.

Along with this overview, I should make clear what this chapter does attempt. It is not a history of African American periodicals in the early twentieth century, nor is it a survey

of the various available magazines that played a role in supporting and circulating the New Negro movement or the Harlem Renaissance. These would both be fascinating projects, and other critics have begun this work.<sup>6</sup> I do briefly situate *The Crisis* in the field of African American periodical when I feel that information is pertinent, but this is not the primary goal of my chapter. Also, this is not an evaluation of the role *The Crisis* plays later in the 1920s in its alternating support and denigration of African American authors. Du Bois and Fauset, as well as other staff members, certainly did this and the magazine played a tangible, if conflicted, role in publishing and reviewing the work of young black artists that we now associate with modernism. Each of these projects would be valuable and novel contributions to our understanding of the periodical context of African American letters in the first decades of the twentieth century, especially because of Du Bois's ambivalence toward, if not outright rejection of, a new generation of artists (not to mention other magazines).

Enough with the negatives. The goal of this chapter is to show how *The Crisis*, as the largest African American magazine of its time, both enters into and separates itself from the debates around mass print culture that I began to lay out in Chapter 1. I want to position *The Crisis*, and Du Bois as its guiding force, as one of many possible versions of what a big magazine can look like and the formal concerns it can raise. Du Bois and *The Crisis* attempt to revive a particular American literary tradition that they associate with Chesnut, and to place their experiments in representing race within that tradition so as to legitimize their efforts. As we will see, this project is simultaneously technological, epistemological, and formal, as Du Bois aligns his ideas about racial representation with changes taking place in

periodical culture – how magazines are made, where they circulate, and the readerly assumptions that accompany their consumption.

When one focuses on the overlap of race and media forms in this way, questions like “How Shall the Negro Be Portrayed?,” which *The Crisis* asked a number of leading intellectuals in a 1926 questionnaire, begin to look doubly loaded. Gates describes the questionnaire’s force as the “concern over the nature and function of representation, of what we might profitably think of as the ideology of mimesis” (*Signifying* 180). This is most certainly the case, but I’d also like to point out that the questionnaire’s interrogative “how” is not just about the content and ideology of racial representation – the “obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he [the artist] will portray” (“Questionnaire” 219) – but also about the equally fundamental technologies and materialities of an emerging black periodical culture. That is, the questionnaire asks how one can produce, print, circulate, and otherwise materially instantiate an archive of black intellectual work within popular print culture. Related to this, it asks how one best takes advantage of the twentieth century’s technological leaps in print media to typify a model of African American character that at once acknowledges the particularity of personal experience and coalesces into a politically viable collective identity. For *The Crisis* and Du Bois, the magazine’s most active and vocal proponent, these rather abstract political questions find their roots in deeply formal, even typographical issues inherent in making a “record of the darker races,” as the magazine’s sub-title says.



## The Problem of “Plain Ink”

As one of the most visible spokespeople for African American civil rights in the first half of the twentieth century, Du Bois’s primary medium of promotion and argumentation was the printed page, and specifically the periodical page. Along with editing *The Moon* (1904-1906), *The Horizon* (1906-1910), *The Crisis* (1910-1933), and *Phylon* (1940-1944), he contributed articles to the *New York Times* and the *Post*; H.L. Mencken’s *Smart Set* and *American Mercury*; quality journals such as *The Atlantic*, the *Nation*, and *New Republic*; specifically African American journals such as the *Independent* and Booker T. Washington’s *New York Age*; and the American literary magazines *The Dial* and *North American Review*. Du Bois lived the majority of his adult life in the magazine business, yet as early as 1907 he voiced his ambivalence about the possibilities of the form for initiating substantive intellectual discourse or political change. In an article for his magazine *The Horizon*, Du Bois laments that “we are magazine mad – a magazine-devouring nation,” and that magazines, dailies, and especially Sunday newspapers are “festering abominations,” a “hodge-podge of lie, gossip, twaddle, and caricature” (“Books” 5).<sup>7</sup> As Du Bois drew up plans for *The Crisis* in 1910, Allen Pillsbury wrote to him that making another magazine was a mistake: “Periodicals are as numerous and as pestilential nowadays as flies were in Egypt, and most of them meet with the very same reception” (*Biography* 409). F.H.M. Murray, a co-editor at *The Horizon*, echoes this disapproval of interchangeable, “regulation size” magazines that are nothing more than “big bundles of wood pulp with ... garish covers,” which conjoins the physically “pulpy” roughness of magazines with a heavy-handed editorial style and roughshod intellectual work (“Magazinelets” 22).<sup>8</sup> Murray goes on to specify the print technology that brings periodicals into this situation:

Strange it is that most people shun a large book but “dearly love” a big newspaper or a fat magazine. And so it come[s] about – paradoxically – that the most formidable enemy of truth in the world today is the linotype. It serves the cause [sic] of truth – not knowledge mark you, for the most that we know ain’t so – in about the same degree that gunpowder fosters liberty. (23)

To say that the linotype produces “truth” in the same way that “gunpowder fosters liberty” suggests if the existence of an open and free press is the bedrock of American democracy, then the relationship between the two is less utopian than one might imagine. New technologies of print culture work by way of aggressive, violent coercion rather than positivist enlightenment and contemplative reflection.

These extended reflections about the fluctuating role of African Americans within print culture register what Brent Edwards refers to as the “compulsively documentary” side of the New Negro movement, the “flood of energy in modern print culture” that took collectively produced print forms (for Edwards, especially the anthology) as a place to “fram[e] race ... [and] articulate[e] an epistemology of blackness” (44). However, Du Bois’s, Pillsbury’s, and Murray’s hesitancy about periodical culture and the technologies by which magazines and newspapers circulate also exposes the mental burden for African American readers who had to square the individuality and intra-racial difference they felt in their daily lives with the flattened character types they encountered on the printed page.

Especially as black periodicals like *The Crisis* began to reach wider audiences in the middle to late 1910s, they confronted their readers’ varied and often ambivalent response to

their pictorialization of African American life. Du Bois makes this explicit, complaining in the 1920 *Crisis* article “In Black”: “Colored folk, like all folk, love to see themselves in pictures, but they are afraid to see the types which the white world has caricatured” (263). The irony of this statement resides in the fact that Du Bois is discussing black readers’ negative response to an image of a black woman on the cover of *The Crisis*, rather than the caricatures of what he calls the “‘grinning’ Negroes, ‘happy’ Negroes, ‘gold dust twins,’ ‘Aunt Jemimas,’ [and] ‘solid’ headed tacks” that dominate the collective American imagination (263). Du Bois sees the image under question as a nuanced, robust version of black personhood, but it elicits the exact opposite reaction out of his audience.

Our photograph of a woman of Santa Lucia, with its strength and humor and fine swing of head, was laughed at by many.

Why?

‘O – er – it was not because they were black,’ stammer some of my office companions,’ but they are *too* black. No people were ever so----‘

Nonsense! Do white people complain because their pictures are too white? They ought to, but they do not. Neither do we complain if we are photographed a shade ‘light.’ (“In Black” 263, 265)

The negative reaction to this photograph taps into certain readers’ intra-racial color prejudices. However, as Du Bois recounts the conversation here the description of race becomes simultaneously, if not primarily, a conversation about print technologies. The move from “It was not because they were black” to “they were *too* black” subtly shifts the site of

discomfort from racial identification – light-skinned African Americans identifying with darker-skinned African Americans, and, more broadly, blackness as a social, cultural, or political identity – to the mechanical limits of reproduction. It is a move from blackness and group identity to blackness as an excess of ink, and hence an inaccurate transmission of visual information about a single body’s physical appearance.<sup>9</sup> When the unnamed office companions complain about the image being “*too* black,” they question the magazine’s ability to accurately reproduce skin tone on the periodical page. And when Du Bois distinguishes between these two versions of black, he shifts the crux of the article from a racial to a technological problem. That is, Du Bois articulates how the readers’ discomfort is not necessarily about the content of representation; instead, it is about the uneven valuation of reproductive inaccuracies. Above Du Bois writes that African Americans are “afraid to see the types” that circulate in print culture, but in a later essay he phrases the issue in a way that foregrounds the issue of print-based reproduction: “The Negro race was a little afraid to see itself in plain ink” (“Editing,” xxix). Like Chesnutt, Du Bois literalizes the link between racial types and printed type so as to make sense of the way that representing African Americans is always read as a charged and uneven activity – notice the article’s title, “In Black,” as opposed to the colloquial “in black and white” – even when done with the best intentions.<sup>10</sup>

One can rightly frame Du Bois’s article as taking part in a long tradition that questions the assumed transparency and objectivity of the photographic image, but it goes further than that. Du Bois not only reminds the reader that the photographic image is not co-extensive with the world but also surmises that even the most sympathetic and adept representations of racialized bodies will be undermined simultaneously by a history of racist

caricature and the material limitations of reproducing skin color with cheap ink on cheap paper, the two innovations that ushered in the magazine revolution in the first place. Thus, Du Bois points out the simultaneously technical and psychological impediments he faces when trying to “document the ‘fact’ of blackness” as an “object of knowledge production” (Edwards 8).

As a magazine editor in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Du Bois was in a unique position to recognize how the technologies underlying the documentary impulse belie any straightforward transmission of “the ‘fact’ of blackness.” New technologies like the linotype, the stereotype, the multigraph, and halftone printing, all of which were popularized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, allowed Du Bois, Murray, and other intrepid souls to begin printing their own magazines and, as Gates puts it in a different context, to “re-present [African Americans] public selves in order to reconstruct their public, reproducible images” (“Trope” 129). The linotype allowed typesetters to tackle an entire line at a time, rather than set a page character by character, and thus drastically increased the speed of printing. Stereotypes were made from plaster or papier-mâché molds of an original metal plate, rather than the original itself, and made it possible to give the same page of text and images to different printers in different geographic areas, pushing forward the standardization of page layout and informational content across periodical titles and their distribution areas (Cramscie 112).<sup>11</sup> Because Du Bois was economically and professionally dependent upon the material production of periodical culture, he also was aware of the contingent practices that went into creating the appearance of representational transparency. From the beginning of his career in periodicals, Du Bois realized the integral role of these technologies in creating “a proper Journal” and circulating “certain ideals, racial and cultural,

[that] must be brought home to the rank and file” (“Proposed Negro Journal” 77). He also understood the role they could play in legitimizing his own endeavors. In a fundraising letter for his first magazine, *The Moon* (1906-7), he emphasizes that he and a partner had purchased a printing plant and itemized its holdings:

new type,  
one (1 horse power)  
electric motor,  
1 Whillock cylinder press,  
1 Job Press (7 x 11) in exchange,  
1 perforating machine (“Journal” 80)

Alongside this list he estimated the cash value of each piece of equipment and the expected income from serving as the go-to print house for the black community in Memphis (80). By playing up his technical knowledge of the mechanics of printing, he contrasts his potential magazine with the “small weekly sheets” and “thousands of small papers” that “have sprung up and died” in the last fifty years, as well as monthlies like *Colored American* and *Voice of the Negro*, which he describes as “fairly good periodicals of the ordinary sort,” even though “they lack (a) careful editing on broad lines, (b) timely, readable articles, (c) an efficient news service, (d) good illustrations, (e) modern aggressive business management” (“Journal” 78). Or, to summarize his list of grievances, the other journals lack every positive characteristic that could expand the circulation and revenue of a popular periodical. “By combining a knowledge of modern publishing methods with a knowledge of the Negro people,” Du Bois

confidently writes about his singular expertise, “a man may hope for success here and in time for a possible circulation of 50,000–100,000” (79).

Du Bois’s emphasis on the mutual necessity of “modern publishing methods” and “a knowledge of the Negro people” evinces his concerns about the technologies that help manifest the content of African American periodicals. *The Moon* never reached these kinds of numbers, but Du Bois’s prediction accurately foretells the eventual circulation of *The Crisis*. It peaked in 1919 at just fewer than 100,000, making it far bigger than other race magazine of the time, whether one chooses to compare it to turn-of-the-century journals like *Colored American* and *Southern Worker*, politically oriented competitors such as Booker T. Washington’s *New York Age* and Marcus Garvey’s *The Negro World*, or the literary and cultural magazines of the 1920s like the Urban League’s *Opportunity* and A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen’s *The Messenger*.<sup>12</sup> *The Crisis*’s popularity justified, for Du Bois, the purchase of their own multigraph for typesetting and page design, which both made production cheaper and allowed for more freedom in establishing the magazine’s unique visual style. In a letter to Joel Spingarn, who was a perennial hard-sell on the usefulness of *The Crisis* in achieving the goals of the N.A.A.C.P., Du Bois mentions the multigraph as a primary example of his own editorial, as well as economic, ingenuity (*Correspondence* 203). Along with saving the organization around fifty dollars per month in printing costs, Du Bois claims, the machine allowed the magazine to mock up layouts and made it extremely easy to make multiple copies of every letter, memorandum, and internal communication. Thoroughly documenting and archiving the production of *The Crisis* becomes just as important as the magazine’s documentation of uplift, which he assures Spingarn is proof that “the real machinery of the N.A.A.C.P can be perfected” (204). For Du Bois, establishing this kind of

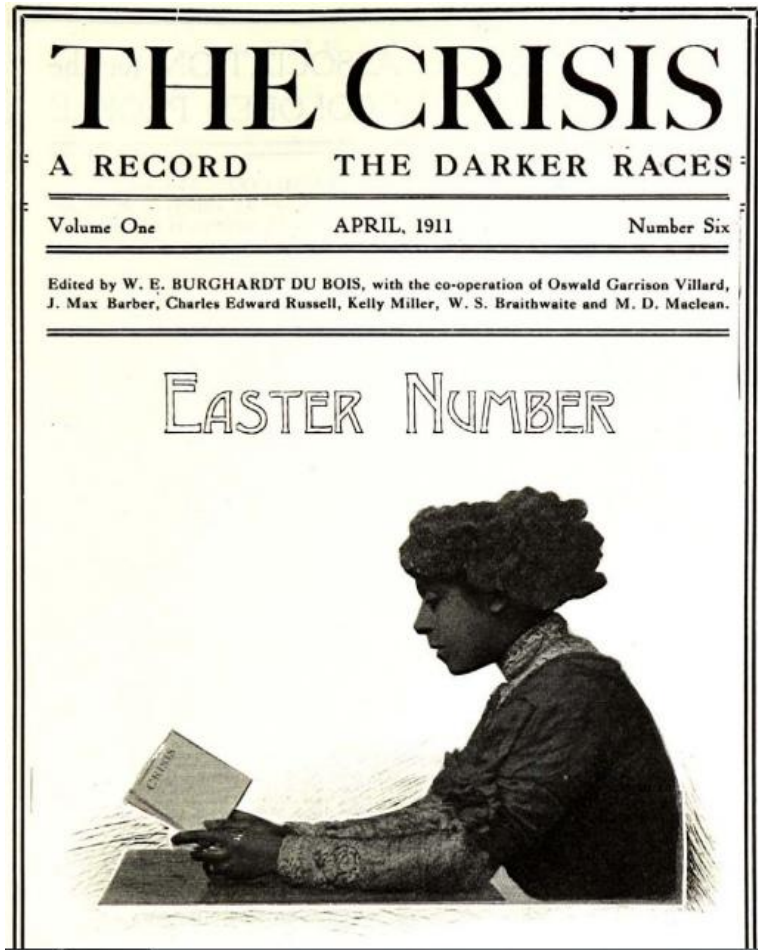
paper trail of intellectual work – the paired tasks of publicly circulating images in periodical form and cataloging the process of producing those images – was tantamount to racial progress. We might take Du Bois’s interest in the reproducibility and documentation of the work that went into creating *The Crisis* as an extension of his concern over the fear of “plain ink.” By connecting the character types represented in print culture with the reproductive capabilities of, for Du Bois, the multigraph, and, for Murray, the linotype, we find a group of African American intellectuals who foreground the processes through which race is materialized, rather than the content of the representations.

### **Flattening the Picture of Race**

Neither Du Bois nor *The Crisis* are often characterized as particularly interested in the contingencies of mimetic practice, or questions of the materiality of the signifier, however broadly those interests are defined. Rather, Du Bois’s fiction and magazine work are known for a realism that, if anything, verges on the allegory and abstraction of romance. Critics often highlight *The Crisis*’s portrayal of contemplative light-skinned women, successful black businessmen, and well-proportioned babies. These images are taken as signs of the political promise of projecting a black bourgeoisie, but they are in constant contrast with other, less easily abstracted versions of African American identity, as the “In Black” article exposes. The pictures of uplift are often taken as evidence of Du Bois’s aesthetic conservatism (Goesser 104), or, more sinisterly, his unconscious internalization of the period’s eugenic discourse (English 297-300). Yet, even these uplift images can present complex questions about the relationship between mimesis and identification. Take for example *The Crisis*



cover from April 1911, which visualizes a version of its own readership. Here, a light-skinned woman reading *The Crisis* is so absorbed in the content that she seems unaware of being photographed (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Cover, *The Crisis*, April 1911.**

Rhonda L. Reymond has shown how *Crisis* covers, especially those by Albert A. Smith, often use a formal convention called *repoussoir* that “brackets or pushes back objects within an image,” portraying an embedded viewer standing in front of a painting or historical scene, so that the magazine’s visual imagery dramatizes itself as both an aesthetic and pedagogic object

(216). Yet the above example takes the opposite approach; rather than allegorizing the textually based pedagogy of *The Crisis* into another representational register, it keeps the lesson within the periodical form, specifically within *The Crisis* itself. As Garret Stewart argues, depictions of “seen reading” like this arrest the narrative process of the depicted reader, so that instead of the psychological depth” of interiority or subjectivity required by reading – and formally conventionalized in the spatial depth of *repoussoir* – such images outline “the composition of an inner event,” or tell “the story of reading rather than the reading of story” (135). Put another way, they cannot visualize the psychological movement or depth of reading, so they instead flatten the reading subject into her context. Likewise, the “seen reading” on *The Crisis* cover undoes any pedagogical message that one might read into it; unlike a political cartoon or historical drawing (both of which *The Crisis* often included), there is nothing specific to learn from this image. Whatever educational value the depicted reader takes away from reading *The Crisis* is absent from the page. As Michael Fried has theorized, such depictions of contemplative absorption dialectically engage with the “theatricality” Raymond describes in Smith’s work. As opposed to the theatrical gesture, the motif of absorption offers a way to close off the implicit structural similarity between the artist’s fixation on the act of painting and the viewer’s rapt attention on the aesthetic object – the painting does not return the viewer’s attention, and thus it is a way to “screen that audience out, to deny its existence, or at least to refuse to allow the fact of its existence to impinge upon the absorbed consciousnesses of [the painted] figures” (*Theatricality* 69).

Solitary, silent, absorbed, with eyes averted from the reader of *The Crisis* who is watching her read *The Crisis*, one might interpret this depiction of a female reader as projecting one version of the magazine’s ideal reader onto its own cover, an interpretation

that would re-enforce the magazine's bourgeois ideals. But we can just as easily argue that this image, with its aestheticization of reading, points to the materiality of black intellectual work. It emphasizes the context rather than the content of periodical reading, a context anchored by reading *The Crisis*. In the visual logic of the image, the audience does not identify with the woman reading, but with the reading material itself; the shared term between the representation of reading and the real-world in which it circulates is *The Crisis*. The woman depicted is oblivious to the eyes of the viewer, but the magazine and its title are on full display, looking out off the page and theatrically (in Fried's sense) reciprocating the viewer's gaze. It is not the reader's eyes that are doubled in the image, but the face of the magazine, which prominently displays the title *The Crisis*. Thus, the woman's absorption is contrasted with textual self-presentation, its flattening of itself into the visual space of its cover.

This literalization of the flat space of the page cuts against a critical position which posits that the magazine's visual grammar, though complicated, is always invested in reproductive transparency. That is, it takes for granted the noiseless and clear transmission of information from the mind of the producer, to the hand, to the page, to the eye and mind of the reader, and finally to the collective reception of an audience. *The Crisis* repeatedly calls the neutrality and transparency of this process into question. Its interest in the impact of an ostensibly value-neutral media and a value-laden typology of racial characteristics can be read into Du Bois's self-presentation in *The Crisis*, which often thematizes the racial overtones of white paper and black ink. As Friedrich Kittler points out, first writing and then mechanized printing "revers[e] the relation of figure and ground" found in the natural world, where the presence of light allows one to experience visually what would otherwise be dark and go

unseen (192). For Kittler light is the first media, providing the material through which communication takes place. But print media inverts the communicative logic of light/dark by making the distinction between black ink and a white background the operational baseline of textual information. Du Bois's by-lined contribution, called "Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois," begins with a similar visual metaphor of enlightenment (see Figure 2).

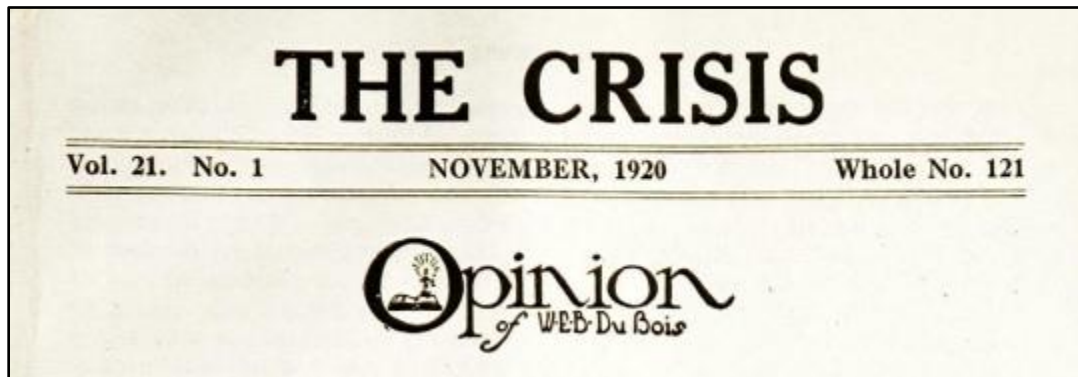


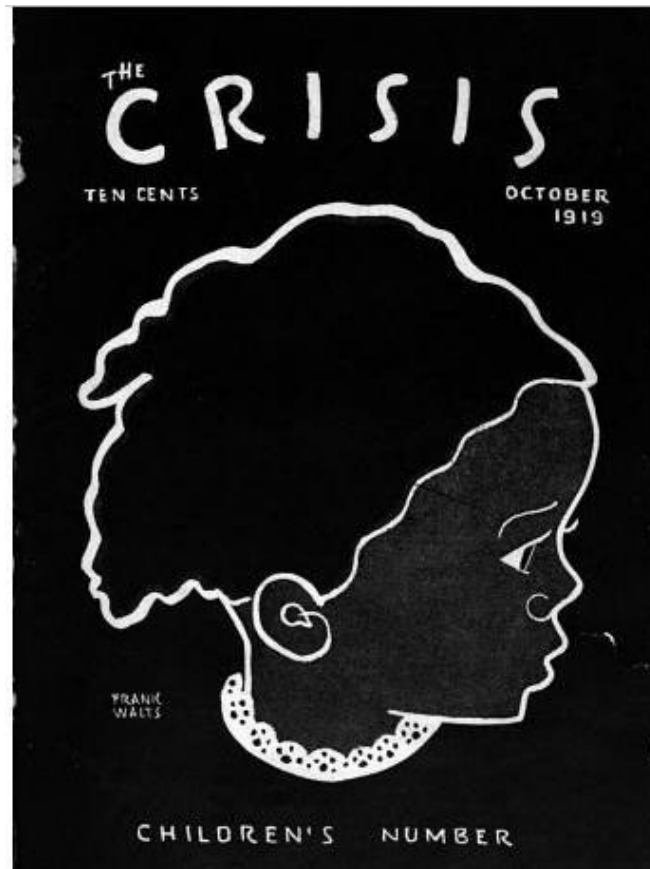
Figure 2: "Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois." *The Crisis* (November 1920) 5.

In the capitalized "O" of the section title a lit candle sits on top of an open book, which visualizes the metaphoric abilities of a book to enlighten its reader. The representation, both of the flame and the beams of light that the candle emits, consist of black lines on a white page, so that illumination, and the knowledge that a candle metaphorically represents, are literally created with the imprint of blackness. Du Bois's "Opinion," then, is double-coded as black: first because of his status as an African American who writes the text, and second, typographically, as black ink on a white page. *The Crisis* figures itself as a media technology that is inherently keyed to "the color line" because it makes meaning by drawing lines in color.

*The Crisis* began titling this section "Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois" and using the black candle graphic in 1919 at the very height of the magazine's popularity. It was not the only

place where the magazine tropes on the link between black ink and black intellectual work during this period. A more prominent thematization of textual blackness can be seen on a series of covers by Frank Walts, whom Du Bois directly names in the “In Black” article. Along with the photograph of the woman from Santa Lucia, “In Black” mentions that Walts has received an inordinate amount of complaints: “In the last few years a thoughtful, clear-eyed artist, Frank Walts, has done a number of striking portraits for *The Crisis*. Mainly he has treated black faces; and regularly protests have come to us from various colored sources” (263). Walts’s visual art for *The Crisis* and other magazines has received relatively little critical attention, even though he provided almost twenty covers for *The Crisis* between 1917 and 1922, as well as over half the covers for *The Masses* from 1915 to 1917 (Zurier 182-3).<sup>15</sup> He supplied three covers in 1920, the year of “In Black,” and each was a portrait or bust of an African American woman or child, like many *Crisis* covers. Walts’s work engages with similar issues that Du Bois addresses in “In Black,” and his thematization of the relationship between print media and “the color line” offers one way to explain the immediate backlash against his work.

Unlike the *repoussior* technique of Albert A. Smith, Walts’s cover portraits for *The Crisis* thematically play with the spatial flatness of the page. They offer a challenge and possible corrective to the anxieties surrounding racial visual grammar that Du Bois feels permeate periodical culture. Though Walts often worked in pastels or with charcoal on a white page for *The Masses* and the *Liberator*, many of his *Crisis* covers invert this arrangement, so that the black body represented is the same color as the background it stands out against (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Frank Walts, Portrait of Hazel Henley, *The Crisis* October 1919.**

Like the image of the middle-class female reader, the child portrayed here for the Children's number averts her eyes from those of the reader. But unlike the previous image, it would be hard to characterize Walts's portrait as realist – by which I mean that one cannot argue that it strives for a mimetic identification of the viewer with a realistic representation of a projected, idealized reader. Instead, this image flattens the representational space, so that everything depicted seems to reside on the same two-dimensional axis, as opposed to providing the illusion of three-dimensionality.<sup>14</sup> Here and elsewhere in Walts's work for *The Crisis*, the pictorial style emphasizes its flatness, which I suggest is primarily an emphasis of its physical surface: a flat piece of paper that circulates in a magazine.



Figure 4: Frank Walts, Cover, *The Crisis* Nov 1920.

This flatness is even more apparent in the November 1920 cover of *The Crisis*, which immediately follows the issue in which “In Black” appears. Walts depicts another female figure, but here she is even more abstractly drawn (see Figure 4). Once again, the figure refuses to make eye contact with the reader, this time appearing to look over her own left shoulder and off to the right-hand side of the page. There is even less detail here than the previous image, with the entire outline of her hair, neck, and face comprised of only three lines. This is characteristic of the spontaneity, almost off-handedness, of Walt’s style for *The Crisis*.

Along with his emphasis on the flatness of the page, Walts's *Crisis* work often transposes the typical white background and black foreground of the magazine, making the distinguishing lines of his figures white. These two images are literally "in black," making the informational content of the image – the black female figure – dependent on the presence of white lines. The color field of the black body and its undifferentiated background are exactly the same, both a uniform shade of black, and both coequal in their representational flatness, occupying the same two dimensions as the page on which they are drawn. In effect, Walts turns the magazine page into a "colored" material, so that the racial and periodical forms correspond. Along with Du Bois's "In Black" article, Walts makes thematic use of the presence of ink on the page, making both the represented skin color of the pictured figures and the black background co-equal with the page space itself.

Walts's work for *The Crisis* is not the only place one finds this literalization of textual blackness in periodicals associated with the New Negro movement. Aaron Douglas's silhouettes and Winold Reiss's line drawings, as others have pointed out, use the stark contrast between black and white on the page to "negotiate the boundaries between type and individual identity," though in quite different ways (Naddell 48). In a letter to Langston Hughes, Douglas claims he wants to establish an "art era. Not white art painted black ... Let's create something transcendently material, mystically objective" (Qtd in Goesser 2). Goesser argues that Douglas turned to silhouettes in his art because of their easy "typification": the silhouette "clarified the contours of the form while refusing to specify particular internal information. For example, the silhouette would not allow the reader to discern the specific hue of the figure's skin" (21). The two-tone silhouette is also remarkably well-suited for the periodical, as its flatness mirrors the printed page. The cover of the lone



issue of *Fire!!* emphasizes both representational flatness and the transposition of color while providing a useful way to contrast what I think Walts and *The Crisis* are doing. The cover deploys a perspectival trick so that the image of a Sphinx initially appears to be part of a repeating figurative pattern, and only after closer attention does one notice that it is a piece of jewelry hanging from the ear of a flattened, heavily stylized silhouette. With its geometric shapes, refusal of spatial depth, and binary color scheme the *Fire!!* cover pushes the boundary between racial and representational abstraction. The black space on the page initially appears as a background against which the earring stands out, which forces the viewer to toggle between competing visions of what is the primary aesthetic object on the page. Like in Walts, the stylistic flatness literalizes the spatial plane of the print media. And, as Goesser points out about Douglas's silhouettes, the flatness here refuses interiority or depth of consciousness in favor of highlighting the medium specificity of the periodical.

Naddell argues that the *Fire!!* cover “looks more like a work of art than a mere medium for conveying information about price and publication, for in no way does it call attention to itself as a commercial enterprise” (76), a reading of its aesthetic singularity that is bolstered by the magazine's miniscule circulation and failure to get beyond one issue. This highlights the very different periodical contexts that the *Fire!!* cover and Frank Walts's *Crisis* covers enter into and thematize. Walts made dozens of covers for the most popular black magazine, so there is no illusion of a self-contained and singular object that exists outside of publishing economies. Rather than reading this as a failure or negative commercialization of Walts's work, though, we might read his repetition of similar figures in similar poses, his seemingly spontaneous style, and his spatial flatness and transposition of color, as thematizations of the materiality of the popular black periodical. In this way Walts's work

doubles down on the ephemerality and iterativeness of the periodical, refusing the implication that a commercial magazine cover and an aesthetic object cannot be the same thing.

Between 1919 and 1926, *The Crisis* is inundated with articles and images that link representations of race, intellectual work, and the print material on which such work and representations circulate. As I have been arguing, this extends *The Crisis's* engagement with the mediation of race by literalizing its status as a black periodical. Rather than emphasizing (positively) the link between affect and political change, or (negatively) the formulation of economic and political uplift in terms of biological reproduction, Walts's cover images re-center issues of representation in terms of the materiality of artistic production. This attention to the materials of cultural transmission is not limited to Walts's entries in *The Crisis*; as the next section will show, Jessie Fauset's short stories, especially "The Sleeper Wakes," also thematize the political implications of racial flatness. As will become more evident in my discussion of Fauset, *The Crisis's* repeated invocation of the link between race and print media can also be read in terms of the inherent seriality of its periodical circulation. Unlike a stand-alone book, *The Crisis* reiterates its message about race and media on the first day of every month when its cover image hits news racks and the subscribers' mailboxes.

## **Repeating Race**

Jessie Fauset served as literary editor between 1919 and 1926, the same period that the other visual and typographical tropes of blackness take place. During that time she was an integral part of the journal's staff and, as David Levering Lewis makes clear, did much to secure its cultural standing (*Harlem* 122). For these reasons it is not surprising that her

serialized short stories engage with similar issues as Du Bois's and Walts's work. In particular, her three-part novelette "The Sleeper Wakes" thematizes the way that media consumers are already fantastically efficient at internalizing the things they read and see. The story appears in *The Crisis* from August to October 1920 and ends in the same issue in which "In Black" appeared, so we might read its inclusion as a further elaboration of the particular problems Du Bois and the magazine faced regarding the possibility of representing race in a periodical journal.

Fauset's quasi-passing narrative follows the racially ambiguous Amy, a foster child raised by African American parents, as she runs away to bohemian New York, marries an aristocratic Southerner and moves to his Georgia home, and, in order to save a black servant, outs herself as having been raised by African American foster parents even though she is unsure of her own race. At one level, Fauset's treatment of the "tragic mulatto" motif is thoroughly generic: the sentimentalism and heavy-handed moralism, the culture clash of Old South and Modern North, the treatment of the female body as the site of political conflict.<sup>15</sup> However, she spins the story's premise in two ways. Unlike other contemporary versions of this plot, such as Mary Ovington's *The Shadow* (1920), Charles Chesnutt's *Paul Marchand, F.M.C.* (1998), and Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Amy's race is never disclosed.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Fauset treats Amy's life as black then white then black again as comprised of something like a personal style that can be changed, "some phase such as cubism or syncopation" without recourse to an originary or authentic form ("Sleeper" 172). I will come back to the connection between "phases" and Fauset's invocation of artistic movements, but first I want to unpack how the iterations of Amy's racial identification relate to the flatness I have discussed in Du Bois and Walts. The story's first paragraph links the

iterative quality of Amy's racial identification with her simultaneous experience of media and "color" as such:

Amy recognized the incident as the beginning of one of her phases. Always from a child she had been able to tell when "something was going to happen." She had been standing in Marshall's store, her young, eager gaze intent on the lovely little sample dress which was not from Paris, but quite as dainty as anything that Paris could produce. It was not the lines or even the texture that fascinated Amy so much, it was the grouping of colors – of shades. She knew the combination was just right for her [...]

The saleswoman slipped the dress over the girl's pink blouse, and tucked the linen collar under so as to bring the edge of the dress next to her pretty neck. The dress was apricot-colored shading into shell pink and the shell pink shaded off again into the pearl and pink whiteness of Amy's skin. The saleswoman beamed as Amy, entranced, surveyed herself naively in the tall looking glass. (168)

The first sentence emphasizes the seriality of Amy's life without disclosing what "the incident" or "phases" to which "the incident" alludes. Instead, the story turns to Amy's "young, eager gaze intently on the lovely little sample dress" in a shop window. The fabric and female body "shad[e] off" into one another, blurring both their visual appearance and their materiality. The gradation of apricot-colored cloth into the "pear and pink whiteness" of Amy's skin transforms the politics of her racial identity into something both aesthetic (the beauty of the "grouping of colors") and media-like: the "whiteness of Amy's skin," like both

the colored cloth she wants to buy and the white page on which the reader encounters Amy's story, becomes a material on which information is housed and circulated. Yet it also shows her medium-like whiteness to be anything but self-evident: Amy's skin tone obscures her itinerant upbringing and potentially mixed-race ancestry. The material visibility of her past is the one thing that does not show up on her skin, yet the factuality of her ancestry is left completely untouched by Fauset, suggesting that her concerns are elsewhere.

Those concerns seem to be about the limits of media. The "incident" that initiates the story, it turns out, hinges on a film that Amy recently saw; or, more accurately, on Amy thinking about how a specific kind of "looking" extends from inside the world of the film to her encounters in the clothing store, outside the movie house. As she shops for dresses, she watches in a mirror as two men stop to look at her.

Two men walking idly though the dress-salon stopped and looked – she made an unbelievably pretty picture. [...]

'Jove, how I'd like to paint her!' But it was the look on the other man's face that caught her and thrilled her. 'My God! Can't a girl be beautiful!' he said half to himself. The pair passed on. (168)

Here Amy's skin projects her youth and fitness as a female consumer, but also how Amy as an individual can simultaneously be abstracted through her sexual and aesthetic objectification. The whole experience feels like *déjà vu* to her: "She had seen it before in men's eyes, it had been in the eyes of the men in the moving-picture which she had seen that afternoon" (168). The complicated refraction of gazes – from Amy to the men through a

mirror, from the men to Amy through a shop window (and metaphorically through a painting), from the men to other men through Amy's memory of the film – is portrayed by Fauset as the experience of sometimes competing but often combinatorial frames through which to process information: the mirror, the window, the picture, the movie screen, and ultimately the periodical page on which the story takes place. Because both the conveyance and obscuration of Amy's racial information operate analogously to the "phases" of art movements (cubism and syncopation), Fauset positions race as a serial aesthetic experience dependent, as is this story, on the presupposition of past knowledge built into the serial periodical form.

By including references to the European visual arts and American music (cubism and syncopation, respectively), Fauset situates her discussion of race and serialized fiction within contemporary discourses of aesthetic form and nationhood that attempted to delineate between national and cosmopolitan modernisms and to establish an authentic African American literature. Fauset was deeply involved in these discussions on multiple fronts throughout her life, but here the characterization of these artistic movements as mere "phases," analogous to the phases of a young woman's maturation and growing self-awareness, minimizes both the newness and singularity of these ostensibly modern styles. Instead, Fauset emphasizes how modern painting and music are easily folded into Amy's experience of the contemporary media landscape. Cubism and jazz happen alongside the melodramatic films she sees and romance novels she reads.

Rather than arguing that new styles of artistic expression either respond to or influence the way Amy organizes her life, Fauset implies that Amy's experiences are fundamentally made of narratives from different media that subtly blur into one another –

just as the materials of her dress and skin do – and into her ostensibly unmediated life outside of the theater. Early on the narrator explains, “The only reading that had ever made any impression on her had been fairy tales . . . and descriptions in novels or histories of beautiful, stately palaces tenanted by beautiful stately women,” the same type of women who are gazed upon by the men in the movies and girls like Amy from the audience (169). In fact, the film she sees before going to the shop seems to be about her, about “a girl – such a pretty one – and she was poor, awfully. And somehow she met the most wonderful people and they were so kind to her. And she married a man who was just tremendously rich and he gave her everything” (169). Even her own teenage *ennui* is overrun with the language and tone of the stories she reads and watches. “‘Trenton is stifling me,’ she would have told you, in her unconsciously adopted movie-diction” (170), which suggests not so much a chosen affective posture as an “unconscious” internalization of the narratives around her.

This also happens in the drawings that accompany Fauset’s story in the magazine, such as one that shows Amy, having returned from her trip to the movie theater and dress shop, talking with her adoptive family.



**Figure 5: "Huh! I don't want to look at no pretty girl!"**  
*The Crisis* Oct 1920. 169.

Her adoptive father reads a newspaper, her mother reads a magazine, and her younger brother plays the coronet while Amy stands in the middle, the only figure whose skin is not inked over as black and the only person who is not engaging with some kind of media device. This image visually reinforces the story's attention to the coupling of race and media, and it doubles back on Amy's own interiority as self-mediation; when she prepares for sleep at night, "in the mirror she apostrophize[s] the beautiful, glowing vision of herself. 'I'm like the girl in the picture,'" she exclaims (170), which can refer both to the female actor in the "pretty girl picture" she saw and to the picture of Amy that shares page space with her pronouncement. Her foster father warns, "You'd better stop seeing pretty girl pictures, Amy ... They're not always true to life" (169). But, in Amy's life as it plays out in Fauset's



novelette, “pretty girl pictures” are exactly like life. Or life is exactly like “pretty girl pictures,” because Amy narrates her experiences as one of many iterations of that genre.

Amy, in this regard, offers a narrative equivalent to Walts’s pictorial flatness. The lines between her interior motivations and the world outside are sketchy at best, so that she becomes nearly coterminous with the media environment in which she exists. In Fauset’s telling, there is nothing overly tragic in this tragic mulatto story; Amy is all surface, she does not have the psychological depth to sustain such personal or even historical tragedy. The political liabilities of this are treacherous, to say the least. But Amy’s superficiality, or her existence as a pure surface on which alternately to house and hide information, takes on its own positive evaluation by the end of the novelette. Broken into three serialized sections, the story narrates Amy phasing from black to white, then phasing from white to black, and finally it brings her back to her adoptive family. Just before deciding to write the family she abandoned years before, her ex-husband visits to ask her to become his mistress. When she goes downstairs to let him in the door, “Some leaves – brown, skeleton shapes – rose and swirled unnoticed about her head”:

She took him into the drawing room – a wonderful study in browns – and looked at him and looked at him [...] As she sat there in the big brown chair she was, in her yellow dress, like some mysterious emanation, some wraith-like aura developed from the tone of her surroundings [...] She sat down heavily in the brown chair, all glowing ivory and yellow against its somber depths. (269-270)

The “brown, skeleton shape” leaves, the room as a “wonderful study in browns,” the two references to a brown couch – each of these serves to contrast the “glowing ivory and yellow” of Amy’s skin and figuratively aligns her with the Walts line drawing. It also inverts the way that the reader has been encountering Amy – that is, as black ink on a white text – by describing her as white set out against a dark background.

Yet Fauset suggests that Amy, a character comprised of typed letters on the page, at once depends upon the media that has made up her life and transcends it. She is “some mysterious emanation, some wraith-like aura developed from the tone of her surroundings,” to repeat the passage. Amy’s flatness is an emanation of her environment, but it is also still extremely intriguing and intellectually appealing, as all the other characters in the story make clear. Even though Amy is flat, she still elicits the narrator’s attention. And with this, Fauset draws attention to the narrative limits of taking media literally; she shows how even a story about a character who is all surface can, “wraith-like” and auratic, expand outside of the ink on the page into a collective body of periodical readers. Though entirely flat, the multiple perspectives that continuously look at Amy and that she returns – “she looked at him and looked at him” – provide an illusion of perspectival depth that goes beyond the flat representational field of the periodical page.

It is at this moment, sitting on a brown couch, that Amy gains some perspective on her own situation. She asks if she has turned out “like the women in those awful novels? ... Not like those women!” (272). Alone, she strikes herself in the face: “You *thing!* She said to the image in the glass, ‘if you hadn’t been so vain, so shallow!’” (272). This self-objectification makes explicit the literal shallowness of Amy’s characterization, though it also makes available to her, however late, a self-awareness of the story’s connection between race

and typographic form. It also makes the mental image Amy conjures when deciding to return to her adoptive family all the more loaded. The decision, which requires her to pass as black just as she previously passed as white, is prompted by a memory of her younger brother, Cornelius, “spelling out colored letters on his blocks, pointing to them stickily with a brown, perfect finger” (273). The “brown, perfect finger” that spells out “colored letters” brings together racial identification and typographic form, while doubling back on Fauset’s own magazine composition. More than this, though, it shows how Du Bois’s concern about the contagiousness of magazine stories finds a fictional counterpart in his own journal, as it transforms the flat black and white of the page into a vehicle for imagining the possibilities and limits of representing racialized intellectual work in print.

## CHAPTER 3

### FINDING WORK: AGEE AND FEARING IN THE OFFICE

*“The author is, in the last analysis, merely a working-man, and is under  
the rule that governs a working-man’s life.”*  
– William Dean Howells

*“I always begin to get suspicious when I hear a poet talking about his work.”*  
– Kenneth Fearing

*“I wish I knew how to work.”*  
– James Agee

What kind of work is writing? This is the question the last two chapters have been grappling with, particularly as the institutions that support both literary and journalistic writing begin to differentiate and to produce many valences of what writing can mean. Historically, the rise of modernist aesthetics – or, put another way, the standardization of the protocols of modernist work – runs parallel to a different kind of work: the ever-increasing organization and differentiation of industrial labor. While the former often is posited as at least a turn away from the latter, if not an outright excoriation of it, the legitimization of the intellectual work of writing – but also as we saw with Willa Cather, reading, and with W.E.B. Du Bois, seeing – is structurally bound to changes in industrial work. And as much as

modernist authors define their artistic production as antagonistic to the world of mere commodities and markets, there are many ways in which mental and physical work in the early twentieth century come together. We saw in Chapter 1 how Willa Cather's many years managing and editing general interest magazines like *Home Monthly* and *McClure's* feeds into her theory of the novel as something both elevated above and insulated from a mass print culture figured as "promiscuous" in its circulation of print material. In Chapter 2, we saw how Du Bois and Jessie Fauset both literally and figuratively used print technology to confront the uneven expansion of national print networks, conceptualizing racial representation as something both media-like and media-bound.

In this chapter, I want to take a closer look at how two ideas about writerly work converge in new mass media outlets that figure their cultural and technological field as separate from Fordist labor yet somehow deeply embedded in it. Specifically, I will explore how a set of writers enter into the emerging periodical genre of the newsmagazine, and how this newly organized approach to writing and work forces them to think about both of those terms in a way that, previously, was either unavailable or unnecessary. As antithetical to Romantic conceptions of the lone literary genius as writing on company time might seem, we will see that the systematization of modernist writers can look, if not pleasant, than at least highly productive. In fact, many writers working in these corporate positions list productivity as one of the most important outcomes of their company time. "I got more of my own work done in my years at *Fortune*," Archibald MacLeish fondly recalls, "than in any other comparable period in my life" ("First Nine Years" 10).<sup>1</sup> The interpenetration of journalistic workmanship on extra-curricular writing, in MacLeish's case, is something to be proud of. In fact, MacLeish's many careers after returning from Paris in 1929 – first as an education writer for *Time*, then a managing editor at *Fortune*, a director of the Office of Facts

and Figures during World War II, a literature professor at Harvard, and finally the director of the Library of Congress – make him something like the Platonic ideal of an “administrative artist,” fully ensconced in the institutions that surround aesthetic production.

There are two dominant discourses on the development of literary work in the twentieth century. First, as Christopher Wilson and Thomas Strychacz have argued, the birth of modern authorship can be linked to the professionalization of all labor in the 1890s, and specifically to the mental labor employed in the production of mass media. Wilson writes of a new “character” of writer emerging with the expansion of mass media, one based on “strenuousness, political activism, and outdoor life” and opposed to the amateurish position of the nineteenth century “man of letters,” for whom writing is a supplementary skill to some other type of work (57). Wilson sees the work of writing come into its own in the Progressive Era, with its own set of professional standards. Both journalistic and literary writing share a model of masculine publicity, of investigation, an “ethos of exposure” and “the ideal of *reportage*” (17). Hence, according to Wilson, we find naturalist literature written by individuals (almost exclusively male) who also have served an apprenticeship in the news industry.<sup>2</sup> Creating a literary professionalism entails writing one’s cultural work into the public sphere; it conjoins literary work with mass cultural writing, which simultaneously democratizes access to the world of ideas and extends the influence of the market into the field of letters.

By the 1920s, however, the competences of writing literature and mass-market journalism no longer coincide. John Macy’s entry on “Journalism” in Van Wyck Brooks’ and Harold E. Stearns’ *Civilization in the United States* (1922) chalks this up to the general disrespect for the work of news gathering. This is not a conscious disrespect, exactly; it might be seen as an unhappy symptom of the very methods of standardization that Wilson

describes. According to Macy, the form and function of newspaper writing is taken for granted because of its national uniformity: “From Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon [...] you cannot tell from the general aspect of the newspaper you pick up what city you are in [...] Editors, except those in charge of local news, move with perfect ease from one city to another: it is the same job at a different desk” (36). Aesthetic form replicates bureaucratic form in this situation. The model of news writing, based on the masculine dignity of investigative writing – on uncovering “the new” and bringing it to public light – has lost its luster because of its association with repeatability, with the doldrums of routinization; in the most pejorative sense, newspapers have become information factories. This degradation of the homogeneity of news practices would be especially unattractive to creative writers tasked with “making it new.” As Archibald MacLeish says, his generation was told through the pages of magazines like *Paris Review* to “avoid the practice of journalism as they would wet sox and gin before breakfast” (“Poetry and Journalism” 3).<sup>3</sup> That is, the work associated with writing copy for magazines was positioned as antithetical to that of “serious” writing.

Thomas Strychacz argues that even though the protocols for mass cultural writing and modernist writing differentiate into competing competences, one considered low and the other high, modernism’s social and aesthetic function can still be explained through a culture of professionalism; one simply needs a more accurate definition of “professionalism.” The term, for Strychacz, entails “having status based on the possession of symbolic capital,” and the coordination of modernist authorship with the organization and institutionalization of literary criticism aligned the bulk of symbolic capital with literary, rather than journalistic, activities (25). High and low writing, or mass and modernist, define themselves in opposition to one another; and though the debates surrounding what truly constitutes either term often take place within mass-media forums,<sup>4</sup> the debate itself

reinforces the difference between the two types of cultural work.

The theory of literary professionalism laid out above might be described as a theory of limitation. It focuses on boundaries, on both the physical discipline and aesthetic protocols that define one type of work against another – professional mental labor against professional manual labor – and, subsequently, one type of writing-as-work against another – the interchangeable journalist against the intellectual artist. As the move from Wilson to Strychacz makes clear, the teleology of professionalism entails increased sub-divisions based on specialization. First, all writing is defined by what it is not (it is work, it is not play), then different types of writing as work branch out like a family tree (literature is a fine art, it is not journalism). Yet one might also argue that the development of literary work in the twentieth century follows a process of expansion. In *The Cultural Front* (1996), Michael Denning argues that all cultural production, including writing, went through a “laboring” process from the late 1920s until the end of World War II. Rather than read the protocols of writing as a method of cultural distinction, Denning argues that in “the age of the CIO” we find an appeal to the commonalities of work. Along with rhetorical strategies, there is also an attempt among writers to replicate the organizational institutions of manual labor, which draws attention to the work of cultural production within the “cultural apparatus” or “culture industry,” depending on which terminology one prefers (xvi). Denning tracks the rhetorical markers of industrial work on cultural artifacts, as well as the expansion of what constitutes work in this period. There is a migration of cultural work’s “front” from a specific set of disciplines to all sorts of attitudes and position-takings. As Kenneth Burke writes in his controversial 1935 address to the American Writers Congress, the work of a writer, or a “total propagandist,” becomes “a process of broadly and generally associating his political alignment with cultural awareness in general.” In place of limitation he wants



dissemination, for cultural workers to “take an interest in as many imaginative, aesthetic and speculative fields as he can handle” (Qtd. in Denning 102-3).

Limitation or expansion, distinction or dissemination: these are the two ways that the phenomenon of literary work is theorized. I want to consolidate these approaches into a unified argument about the position of writing in the first half of the twentieth century, as it is imagined both as cultural work – how meaning attaches to art objects as they circulate through the social field – and as disciplined activity – the value and competences associated with the task of setting pen to paper. Though the limitation and expansion theories approach from different angles, both models establish a fundamental antagonism between an elitist minority culture – the limited definition of an aristocratic high culture – and a comprehensive version of culture, either mass or popular. I do not want to do away with the experiential reality of that antagonism; indeed, I hope to draw attention to a literary-historical issue of the late 1920s that produces an enormous amount of intellectual grist from the “great divide.” At the same time that the work associated with mass-cultural and literary work splinter into structurally parallel yet internally differentiated practices, there are many writers who grow up with the tenets of literary modernism and, for a number of reasons, find themselves plying their trade as staff writers or editors for large circulation, mass-market magazines. Poets and novelists of a certain age, hoping to make use of their most prized skill set – the ability to write well – enter these publications at the moment that periodicals fundamentally change in size, scope, revenue sources, design, distribution, and, perhaps most importantly, operational organization. When one begins to look closely at the materials of mass culture in the early decades of the twentieth century, the social space of mass media – rather than being a homogenous field of commercial and corporate production – looks just as dynamic and contentious as we know modernism to be.

Certainly, not everyone was so gracious about the opportunities afforded by writing on company time as Archibald MacLeish, but, as we've seen in the case of Willa Cather, the ambivalence toward affiliation can produce rather interesting literary feats. James Agee, who shared a newsroom with MacLeish at *Fortune* magazine in the 1930s, exemplifies the ambivalence that self-styled modernists tended to feel under corporate writing contracts. He petitioned hard for the job, desperate for a way to use his writing to stay afloat during the Depression. Yet, as Robert Fitzgerald explains in his memoir about his time with Agee, his aesthetic "vocation, at least at that point and as up to that point meditated by himself and inflamed by his recent experience, was in competition with *Fortune*" (40). Whereas MacLeish saw magazine writing and "his own work" as two sides of the same coin, each potentially beneficial for the other, Agee imagined them at cross purposes. Dwight MacDonald (yet another Time Inc. writer) chalks this up to Agee's inability to be "workmanlike"<sup>5</sup> when dividing his time among writing tasks (*American Grain* 165), and Agee's second wife remembers him questioning just what exactly counts when considering writing as work: "the waste of talent is perhaps not so much a real waste, i.e., not having done enough writing, but a discrepancy between the talent and the tasks to which it was put" ("Faint Lines" 155).<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will map several different implications of taking seriously the impact of the co-evolution of the newsmagazine, here predominantly represented by *Time*, and a group of writers who grew up in the wake of literary modernism and attempted to square its formal experimentation with writing for a paycheck. When these writers make their way into the organizations of mass culture, they begin to question which writing is really their writing, and which work really counts. The tension between bureaucracy and individual agency, as it plays out here, gets reframed as competing protocols for writing – either "on the clock" or "for oneself." Despite a wide variety of reactions to the proximity of these two types of

writing, the fact of their interdependence works its way both into the content and form of a range of works from this time period. Because the tools of each trade (journalism and literature) are in essence so similar – MacLeish characterizes them as “the two limits of the typewriter keyboard” – the assumption of synonymous competences repeatedly butts up against professional protocols of staff writers and modernist authors that have evolved to preclude one another (“Poetry and Journalism” 3). Staff writing and literary writing: two types of work with so much *materially* in common, but the potential to be dispositionally at each other’s throats. Fitzgerald, in discussing Agee, hypothesizes that staff writing stood in the way of writing as a “vocation.” Writing as a trade versus writing as a calling, then, are positioned at opposite ideological ends of a continuum of writing types: Marketable skill and the voicing of the Muse. The simple binary, we will see, appears in many different forms during this period. And, hopefully, this set of contexts bring us back to a more specific set of queries that branch out from the original question: What does it mean to work as a writer? If work-writing is done for someone (or something) else, is “my own work” qualitatively different? What do I owe to my employer? When or where does company time end and personal time begin?

Following the path of modernist work includes not only how individual authors imagine the process and product of labor both inside and outside of the employer-employee relationship; it also includes the way in which social and institutional relationships between employers and writers-as-employees redistribute aesthetic value along economic and media-specific axes. To make the process I describe more concrete, this chapter will take one media corporation, Time, Incorporated., as a case study for how authors, institutions, and aesthetics come together in the first half of the twentieth century to change the way that the specific competences necessary for writing are thought about. This selection is strategic: Time Inc.

incorporated in November of 1922 and by the end of World War II was the largest media company in the United States. Despite its enormous presence in all aspects of twentieth-century media production and distribution, little attention (outside of company-sponsored histories) has been paid to its effect on the production and distribution of print media, its incorporation of literary writers as staff workers, or the paired cultural and economic prestige that it lent to its employees. As I will show, media institutions like Time Inc. organized physical bodies and their work, but also authors' reputations and literary careers hinged on their proximity to administration.

To restate the stakes in slightly different terms: the relationship between writing and work drastically shifts at the experiential level when one takes seriously an author's corporate-writing day job. This is to say, rather than taking sides in the scrum over what constitutes real aesthetic work, or what counts as authentic artistic production as opposed to selling out, it might be useful to take for granted the fundamental "double life of writers," to use sociologist Bernard Lahire's recent formulation. As Lahire points out, the vast majority of novelists and poets must work at something other than creative writing to subsidize their literary endeavors, and for many of them, especially in the middle part of the twentieth century, that work entailed news writing for corporations. He writes, "Unlike those people who experience their profession as a central and permanent part of their personality, writers who, for economic reasons, work a 'day job' have a cultural and 'personal' foot in literature and a material (and sometimes also 'personal') foot outside of literature (the second foot freeing the first from dependence on market constraints)" (445). While Lahire may overestimate the fullness of personality achieved through non-artists' professional work, it serves us well to investigate the implications of his argument for American literary history: the literary field as experienced by the artist, from a statistical standpoint, almost always butts

up against other fields because of economic necessity, and these abutments influence the shape of literary production. I want to extend Lahire's sociological investigation of "the double-life of writers" into an analysis of literary form, showing how the interlocking steps of the "personal foot" and "material foot" – or which writing counts as work in a given context – might help us interpret the specific aesthetic concerns of mid-century American writers.

## **Punching the Clock**

Kenneth Fearing's anti-detective novel *The Big Clock* (1946) provides a useful example of how we might think about modernism's relationship with staff-writing for two reasons. First, the detective novel, as a genre, often marks a special place in the juxtaposition of modernist aesthetics and mass culture. As Mark McGurl argues, the form "has functioned as a privileged site in the domain of modern fiction for the negotiation of the 'high' and the 'low.'" The "high" because its early twentieth-century form is both "masculine" and "intellectualist"; the "low" because of its rampant availability and what looks like an insatiable appetite among readers for more (*Novel* 158). Tied to its intellectualism, the genre takes its form from the professional work of reporters and private eyes – investigation, deduction, public engagement – and transforms it into an aestheticized spectator sport, where one can have an authentic experience by reading. The second reason to begin with *The Big Clock*: this novel in particular thematically registers the interaction between artists and mass-media organizations, between the corpus and the corporation, because its author "day-lighted" as a staff writer for most of his professional career.

Fearing's point of view from both sides of the cultural divide makes its way into the novel's plot. The text is set primarily in Janoth Enterprises, a large media corporation modeled on Time Inc. It follows an editor, George Stroud, who is assigned to locate an unidentified assailant suspected of murdering Earl Janoth's girlfriend, Pauline Delos. The organization places Stroud in charge because he is "about the very best man on the staff to direct it"; however, the majority of the novel's dramatic irony arises from the fact that Stroud's higher-ups do not know that he is the person they are looking for (*Clock* 80). Stroud is an agent of the organization, but he also understands its perfect bureaucratic movement ("smooth and infinitely powered") to be "blind, clumsy, [and] unreasoning," so he prolongs the search until he can out the real killer (91). He reasons, "If I picked the right kind of staff, twisted the investigation where I could, jammed it where I had to, pushed it hard where it was safe, it might be a very, very long time before they find George Stroud" (84). The text's title doubles as its organizing metaphor, and all of this pushing, jamming, and twisting of the investigative machine is just, as Stroud repeatedly says, "the big clock running as usual." The official search and Stroud's shadow investigation, then, rehearse the conflict between bureaucratic structure and personal volition, the dialectical positions that one might crudely identify with the socializing tendencies of mass culture and the self-willing individual operating within that culture, respectively. "The big clock" describes the media corporation, Janoth Enterprises, but within the text the location and influence of the clock never takes on a single manifestation. Stroud uses the metaphor to describe the cocktail parties, dingy bars, second-hand stores, and motels that come into focus through their relationship to the Janoth or one of his employees. And, like a set of Russian nesting dolls, "the big clock" also names the novel, a textual object that contains Fearing's representation of the corporation, which itself circulates through a mediated "big clock" of producers, editors, publishers,

distributors, and readers. The multiple layers of the time-piece suggest that bureaucracy *as such* regulates the way that individuals, information, capital, and works of art interact. Even when working in self-interest against the Clock, Stroud works from within it: figuratively, in the clock-like corporation, and literally in the pages and words of the novel.<sup>7</sup>

The novel interrogates bureaucracy and individual agency for corporate workers, but the ubiquity of administration in the novel also extends to the production and evaluation of aesthetic objects. Stroud, along with being the subject of his own investigation, collects the abstract paintings of an unfashionable artist, Louise Patterson. One in particular becomes closely associated with the murder, so much so that it serves as a stand-in for the murderer himself: articles are written about its centrality to the case, the magazine sends a team of investigators in search of it and the person who painted it, and, as one *Crimeways* reporter puts it, “we’d automatically find the picture when we found the man,” a phrase that both semantically and syntactically prioritizes the radically singular artwork over the nondescript identity of a common criminal (153). In the course of all this publicity for the painting – which depicts two hands exchanging a gold coin and is alternately called *Toil* by a dealer, *The Temptation of St. Judas* by a potential buyer, and *Study in Fundamentals* by the artist – its price tag skyrockets, as does the reputation of its artist. By the end of the novel, Patterson paintings are the new trend in art, and *Study in Fundamentals* the most valuable piece. As information about the painting circulates among artists, dealers, collectors, and popular magazines, it begins to look like the novel recursively accounting for its own reputation; more than this, by suggesting that economic exchange is “fundamental” to aesthetic production (“toil”), this gesture suggests that avant-garde works and a text like *The Big Clock* are distinguishable by their access to mass cultural forums, rather than authorial intention or an intrinsic value. Both types of work take place in and through the market, even if one side

pretends to turn a blind eye.

A crime procedural – an institution in itself by the mid-forties – that satirizes the machinations of mass-market periodicals, and then suggests that the “blind” activity of information networks dictates trends in aesthetic appreciation (even its own), makes for an interesting example of how literary work might be administered by mass culture. Especially when one considers Fearing’s career up to that point, which, like the detective novel, ping-ponged back and forth between avant-garde aspirations and less prestigious writing. After attending the University of Wisconsin (where he fell one credit short of graduating), Fearing moved to New York to find work as a writer. Throughout the twenties and thirties, he was a fairly well-known Leftist poet; he associated with the Dynamo school, published several books of poetry that received high marks from reviewers, and even was awarded two Guggenheim fellowships. All of this cultural capital, however, did not quite translate into the kind that consistently pays the rent. To make ends meet he wrote for *Time*, *Newsweek*, and several other news publications, and he also wrote pornographic crime stories for pulp magazines.<sup>8</sup> In some ways, one might read the autonomous artistic production of Louise Patterson and the staff-writing job of George Stroud as complimentary autobiographies of Fearing’s critically disassociated, yet mutually constitutive careers. As Robert M. Ryley describes the situation, Fearing was a “professional freelance writer,” a job title he wore with an embittered pride (xiii). Fearing as a professional freelancer, like Stroud as an anti-investigative news worker, occupies a position inside of mass cultural organizations that retains a self-image of outsider-ness, somehow unassimilable.

By the time Fearing wrote *The Big Clock*, though, he was a full-time staff-writer at Time Inc., which is why, one might assume, Janoth Enterprises so closely resembles that corporation, and why Earl Janoth resembles Henry Luce, co-founder of Time Inc. Stroud



registers some of Fearing's ambivalence towards this situation in the novel: he carries a long and varied work history with him to *Crimeways*, and considers the work no better nor worse than any other job. Yet Fearing places the murder weapon in the hands of Janoth, transforming his surrogate boss into a killer who spends the bulk of the novel attempting to set someone else up for his misdeeds. On top of this, he concludes the novel with the death and public shaming of the Founder, which might be read as an assertion of authorial autonomy against the vulgarity of staff life. In fact, this corporate patricide takes on extra significance when one considers Fearing's source material. The plot of *The Big Clock* adapts that of a Samuel Fuller novel, *The Dark Page* (1944), which also is set in a news office and populated by staff writers. However, in the earlier novel Stroud's counterpart truly is the murderer, and the cat-and-mouse game plays out between the guilty editor and his protégé cub reporter. One of the many things that Fearing adds to the story is the layer of corporate-sponsored malfeasance, represented through the culpability of the figure most closely associated with the media company. Fearing intimately depended on staff-writing for his livelihood, but his best-selling novel about staff-writers suggests at least discomfort with the manager-worker relationship, and probably something closer to a sublimated feeling of persecution, if not violent hostility.

Despite the disapproval of his former literary circle, which interpreted Fearing's attempt to take the detective novel seriously as giving in to economic demands, a laudatory review in *Time* was followed by brisk sales and popular approval.<sup>9</sup> Fearing always supported himself by writing, but this is the first time he earned a significant amount of money from his literary endeavors. All told, he made over \$60,000 from royalties, republication rights – including a condensation for *The American Magazine* – and the sale of film rights. Ironically, it is only when he thematizes the inane networks through which art objects travel that he finds

financial success. If one can read publication history back into the novel, then *The Big Clock*'s grand statement about its relationship to the market is rather ambivalent. From the outside, "the big clock" may seem monolithic, cold, and inhuman, "look[ing] into space with five hundred sightless eyes" (138). But Stroud, with his jamming and pushing, discovers the opposite: he finds out how easily, even if unintentionally, the gears can be manipulated by someone who is reflexively aware of the way that administration functions. As an outsider on the inside, so to speak, Stroud can make the system work for him. Fearing juggles the various possible proscriptive models for aesthetic production: *The Temptation of St. Judas* is only one way of naming an aesthetic object with popular appeal – tellingly it is the name the buyer chooses, not the artist – and only one way of naming the incorporation of one's work into the system.

By reading *The Big Clock* as an allegory for Fearing's career I want to draw attention to the ways that modernism is publicized, distributed, and evaluated by mass-market publications that often are made up of other modernists. And, related to this, how this incorporation affects these employee-writers' understanding of writing as work. Definitions of modernism often operate self-reflexively, boiling down to what Michael Fried calls art that is in a process of self-definition.<sup>10</sup> This process of self-definition usually means turning inward and is often diametrically opposed to mass culture. The past two decades have witnessed an increased attention to the functionaries of this self-naming system. Little magazines, anthologies, and a wide array of other "institutions of modernism," as Laurence Rainey famously refers to them, provide the infrastructure for "how modernism negotiate[s] its way among the 'contrived corridors' of its own production" (78). But these "contrived corridors" look rather narrow in comparison to the high ceilings, wide hallways, and fat paychecks of the big magazines, where one laudatory review in *Time* or *Newsweek* could

single-handedly explode modernism's closed system of accreditation and bankroll the production of numerous subsequent works for an artist. The likelihood of this type of publicity increases as experimental authors flood the editorial offices of mass-market publications in the 1930s. While magazing, authors not only found a steady source of income, but they also gained access to insider knowledge about how to best circulate oneself within the ecology of periodicals. Like George Stroud and Louise Patterson, who toward the end of the novel is paid handsomely by Stroud's magazine to simply come in and mingle among its staff, these writers occupy the position of outsiders on the inside of the production of mass culture.<sup>11</sup> They become more than the producers of aesthetic objects; they also become the organizational agents that publicize, evaluate, and distribute modernist art to a popular audience.

Wide hallways and large paychecks: these are the complimentary draws of the big magazines for modernists. By the time Fearing walked through the doors of Time Inc. the office had been crawling with artists for over a decade. Alfred Kazin, the great chronicler of the American intellectual scene of the thirties and forties, recounts with awe visiting a friend who worked at *Time*: "Part of the fascination of going up to see Harriet [his friend] in the new *Time* offices in Rockefeller Center was running into James Agee, Walker Evans, Robert Fitzgerald, John Hersey." When Kazin's colleague John Chamberlain became an editor at *Fortune* in 1936, he met Ralph Ingersoll, Dwight MacDonald, Archibald MacLeish, Robert Cantwell, Louis Kronenberger, and James Gould Cozzens. "Never as in the Thirties," Kazin writes, "when history proclaimed itself every day in the significances of daily struggle, could a story in *Time* have seemed so significant to a writer" (104-5).

*Time's* utter squareness today could not be further from its reputation in the first half of the century. In fact, as Kazin lets on, it was a desirable job and a respected title. A big

part of that reputation came from the magazine's active interest in the aesthetic form of news language and concerted effort to hire creative writers who might mold that form. Henry Luce, justifying his approach, said, "It is easier to turn poets into business journalists than to turn bookkeepers into writers" (Elson 129). Once poets are in the door, the practice becomes mutually reinforcing as a staff of artists lobby to hire their friends who are also artists. If *The Little Review* is the magazine "read by those who write the others," then *Time* is the magazine written by those that read the others – and read by everybody else, too.

Take, for example, James Agee, who might be the first American writer to stake his literary career on making fun of his employer. During his undergraduate years at Harvard, Agee studied the work of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, took classes with I.A. Richards, and fashioned himself as a Southern romantic poet. He was relatively well-known among the campus literati; his first and only volume of verse, *Permit Me Voyage* (1934), was published in the Yale Younger Poets series and consisted mostly of work composed during college. In 1931, however, he was a senior looking to land a job, and corporate journalist promised a far more secure route than professional poet. As the president of the *Harvard Advocate*, he dedicated six months to compiling a parody issue of, in the words of his biographer, the "newest, flashiest, and most successful magazine around, *Time*" (Bergreen 103). His premise was simple: he imagined *Time* unhinging itself from contemporary coverage and reporting on major historical events of the Western world: for instance, he wrote about "J.G. Caesar," who "scribbles a good deal; not for publication, just for the pure fun of the thing," and reviewed the first performance of Aeschylus' *Electra*, his "latest nerve-shatterer," a play "well worth a trip to the new State Theater" (105-6).

Unfortunately the young Agee could claim neither the lucrative occupation that allowed Caesar to write for personal amusement nor the literary prestige (and state subsidies)

of Aeschylus. However, he did possess a growing number of literary-minded acquaintances who worked in the growing Time Inc. media empire.<sup>12</sup> Thus, he sent multiple publicity notices to *Time's* offices before the *Advocate's* publication as a means of self-promotion. In one particularly forward letter he begged Roy Larsen, a manager at *Time* who also had cut his journalistic teeth at the *Advocate*, to

Imagine your staff set down in Ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Palestine, with an uncommonly long nose for news, several amphoras of rye, vivid but confused recollections of the 20th century, a somewhat cockeyed sense of TIME, and no sense whatever of chronology; and take note. *The Harvard Advocate* has already imagined you there; has used this as a device whereby to parody TIME ... (Bergreen 103)

To parody *Time* – a news magazine by definition attached to and dependent upon contemporaneity – Agee deploys the “device” of temporal dilation: Aeschylus rubs shoulders with Caesar; Rome, Egypt, and Greece sit side by side in a version of history that ignores the pesky problems of anteriority. This temporal dilation takes the form of spatial compression, as he neatly fits all the major talking points of Western history between the covers of a single, slim volume. Which is to say, Agee takes what he learned from *The Waste Land* – immense historical perspective combined with radical spatial compression – and applies it to parodying a news magazine. What initially looks like Agee’s apt pun on a “cockeyed sense of TIME” ends up not being a pun at all, but instead a substitution of the common noun for the copyrighted one. As chronological specificity falls away, the tonal uniformity of *Time*-style steps in to take its place. In Agee’s formulation, “TIME” has little

to say about lowercase “time”; any notion of either the writer’s or the subject’s historical context is “vivid but confused,” with the writing itself providing the only correlation between one instance and the next. In this trade of title for temporality, the linear timeline on which *Time* operates stretches so thin that it disappears, and narrative style replaces historicity as “TIME”’s operative logic. As long as one writes like *Time*, any subject is up for grabs.

Agee was born in 1909, graduated college in 1932, and arrived on the doorstep of adulthood during the Great Depression, a period that largely did away with the bohemian dream of moving to Paris and either finding a patron or eking out a living by writing for the little magazines. A far more likely scenario for someone like Agee was finding work as a staff writer for a large media outlet.<sup>13</sup> This is because, along with global economic upheaval, the 1930s witnessed the rise of new media corporations, most notably Time Inc., that specifically sought out poets and novelists to fill their editorial ranks. The intertwining of these literary-historical observations about changing modes of artistic patronage has deep consequences for understanding mid-century literary production. As poets and novelists come under the big-tent of media corporations like Time Inc. as salaried staff writers, they must square their definitions of “personal” writing with their employer’s understanding of writing “on the clock.” James Agee’s introduction to the institutional context of media corporations, and how that might be read back into what he considered his own work, offers a useful example for approaching the unique situation of American authors faced with the prospect of writing on company time.

If we return once more to the end of *The Big Clock*, the novel suggests a similar ambiguity between the inside and outside of the media corporation’s influence. As the narrative approaches its conclusion, the murder plot falls away and Stroud becomes privy to

a larger issue: Janoth Enterprises' merger with another media company. At the exact moment that witnesses are to identify Stroud as the subject of the investigation, the whole "plot" fizzles out because the editorial body that initiated it dissolves in a hostile corporate takeover. When Stroud tells an underling "The assignment is killed," the story, and the structure of the corporation itself, suffers a death parallel to that of Earl Janoth. Human bodies and the organizations that employ them are equally susceptible to mishandling. As the new management removes Earl Janoth from his position, he begs for Stroud to "keep alive the spirit of the old organization in the new one," turning the detective story into something like a corporate ghost story. Or, maybe it would be more accurate to characterize it as bureaucratic afterlife, with the employees of a dead organization living on in a new corporate body. Though Janoth's chair and office are re-assigned, removing him from both the media corporation and the novel, Fearing takes this haunting one step further by reintegrating him back into the publication as content. The novel's last lines depict Stroud in a taxi: as he "looked out of the window [he] saw a newspaper headline on a corner stand. EARL JANOTH, OUSTED PUBLISHER, PLUNGES TO DEATH" (166). The novel ends with the only instance of news copy represented in the text, and it transposes the figurehead of the corporation into a headline in the news organ. Even when "the clock" no longer needs an individual to fill a position – Janoth as head of corporation, Janoth as character in a novel – the act of remediation can still re-purpose his character as content to keep the organization, built on the act of transmitting information, running smoothly.

The fluidity between organizational structures and the content that fills them can also shed light on the narrative form of Fearing's novel. The nineteen chapters are each narrated in the first-person by a single character, with the chapter title corresponding to that narrator's name. Throughout the course of the novel, we read Stroud's point-of-view, his

wife's, other employees' at Janoth Enterprises, Louise Patterson's, and Janoth's own, none of which ever gain access to the others. The novel form itself holds the narrative voices together, as "the big clock" within the novel provides the structure through which each of these characters operate. The form here also raises an epistemological question, because the "whole story" is never available to any of the characters; it only comes together in the aggregate. In this way, we see the novel once again recapitulating the investigative models that it describes. No single worker at *Crimeways* can access all of the information that is uncovered; instead, each related-yet-independent informational meme only comes together in the magazine itself. What Stroud calls "an empire of intelligence" looks quite different than mass cultural homogeneity. Instead, it looks like institutionally produced and corporate-sanctioned iconoclasm. All of the characters get their radical individuality in the novel, unimpaired by the other characters or a pesky omniscient narrator. And, as I have been alluding to, this ambivalent freedom inside the system is more like solipsism masquerading as collective rebellion. Stroud is the most prominent renegade employee in "the big clock," but he is only one of many voices the reader encounters. There is endless room in the company to house any opinion, but there is no outside of the inside of the system that one can define "my own work" against.

## **Time-styles**

Setting Fearing's and Agee's tumultuous relationships with corporate employment aside for a moment, I would like to look at how Time Inc. theorized the specific competences of staff-writing. From Time Inc.'s inception, Henry Luce and Britton Hadden planned to add "an appreciable something to American prose" (Qtd. in Elson 5). And in



1923, that “appreciable something” had everything to do with form and little to do with content. Or, to be more accurate, it had to do with developing a form that made the content easily digestible. The emphasis on style can be seen as a response to what Luce and Hadden saw as an overproduction of information in the newspapers and an inattention to the wants and needs of the average reader. “As it is now,” wrote Luce in the early 1920s, “people have to think too hard as they read” (Elson 6). The root cause of this problem can be traced to there being too much to read, with no way of evaluating the relative worth of words before actually reading them. An advertising circular from 1925 dramatizes this in the most explicit terms. A distraught character identified only as “Busy Man” sits sadly in his living room surrounded by newspapers. He laments, “I bought this mass of printed matter to find out what is going on in the world, but it’s no use! I am not abreast of the news in anything outside of my business.” His wife, “Busy Woman,” concurs. Lo and behold a third character, “TIME,” knocks on the door and saves the day. TIME represents “a new idea of journalism. In my twenty-six pages is every fact of significance in all those newspapers and periodicals on your floor” (Brinkley 136).

A big part of its reputation comes from the magazine’s active interest in the aesthetic form of news language and, as the above list suggests, a concerted effort to hire creative writers who might mold that form. Justifying his approach Henry Luce said, “It is easier to turn poets into business journalists than to turn bookkeepers into writers” (Elson 129).

Take, for example, the opening paragraph of *Time’s* coverage of the Scopes trial, from 1925:

Scene. In the fastnesses of Tennessee, the quiet of dawn is split asunder by wailing screams from a steam siren. It is the Dayton sawmill, waking up villagers and farmers for miles around. From 5 until 6:30 the blasts continue. The hamlet and the fantastic

cross between a circus and a holy war that is in progress there come slowly to life.  
(“The Great Trial”)

The “wailing screams” of the steam siren replace the bucolic calls of the rooster, forcefully waking the town to a new day of industrial technology. The mill does not wake its own workers; instead it intrudes upon the pastoral harmony of “villagers and farmers” who, at least in the representation above, have no tie to the lumber industry. In *Time’s* rendering the Scopes trial becomes a logical extension of a broader shift toward the scientific rationalism of modernity, and also how those very proclamations of social progress might belie elaborate confidence games. The passage depicts Dayton as “split asunder” like a plank in the mill by, on the one hand, the businessmen who orchestrated the legal battle as a means of publicizing the city and, on the other, the fundamentalists who use that publicity as a religious calling. Which side represents “a circus” and which “a holy war” remains ambiguous, but it is clear that both factions are interlopers on the “the hamlet,” using it as a soap box at the expense of those townspeople awoken by all the racket. The narrative voice, then, becomes analogous to the siren; it comes into being with the aural representation of industrial progress, and it situates the technologies of communication as fundamental for bringing this scene “slowly to life,” as well as shaping the terms in which one can discuss it. Throughout, the authorial staging of this scene is explicit, and it is accomplished by drawing attention to the narrator’s own position in reconstructing the cultural-historical significance. The extradiegetic marks of “Scene,” and later “Jury” and “Trial,” italicize the literariness of the informational content, as well as the performative aspects of this “circus” trial. The novelty of reading *Time* is the novelization of news information.<sup>14</sup>

By “novelization of news information,” I mean that *Time* emphasizes formal

coherence and strong narrative over either scooping stories or depth-of-coverage. This perspective ran in the face of journalistic trends that date back to the first mass-market news outlets. Beginning with the penny press in the 1830s and the technologies that made the production and distribution of print materials fast and cheap, the nation saw a drastic rise in the number of options for reading material, as well as their size. Older titles like *Atlantic*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Harper's*, and newer ones like *McClure's* and *Munsey's*, attempted to include something for everyone, or at least for each demographic represented in the middle-class home, as Richard Ohmann demonstrates in his introduction to *Selling Culture* (1995). Edward Bok, long-time publisher of *Ladies Home Journal*, explicitly links the production and distribution of informational content with material consumption: "A successful magazine is exactly like a successful store: it must keep its wares constantly fresh and varied to attract the eye and hold the patronage of its customers" (293). In both fields, the repetition of novelty and expansion of coverage offer the best chance for success in a crowded market. As the content of individual titles becomes increasingly varied so as to stay "fresh," the number of periodicals also dramatically increases.

Not only were these magazines a collage of disparate genres, authors, and narrative voices, but they were physically enormous. A typical issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1926 exceeded two hundred pages, and it was not uncommon for *Cosmopolitan* or *McClure's* to close in on one-hundred-fifty pages (a 1926 *Ladies Home Journal*, the largest printed to-date, was two-hundred-seventy pages) (Marchand 7). Even before the ubiquity of radio and television news, one can get a sense of the vertiginous amount of information available to the literate American citizen of the early 1900s. And, as Niklas Luhmann argues, when communication becomes faster and more complex, it also makes knowledge more quickly obsolete (85). In other words, the "information economies of scale" tip towards the side of

strategic ignorance: there is a decreasing payoff for working to stay current as the time-span of “current” shrinks and the amount of information in that interval expands.

Aaron Jaffe argues that the modernism of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot developed in reaction to a similar proliferation of information, specifically a flooded literary market that faced competing claims about what exactly constitutes “the literary.” He ties Pound’s Imagist revulsion with adjectives and Hemingway’s insistence on the *mot juste* to a blanket “aversion to oversupply” (8). The empty repetition of literary forms by commercial authors crowds attention away from the truly valuable trait of literature: originality. One could go so far as to define the genre of the high modernist novel as engaged in a Trotsky-tinged permanent revolution, continuously making itself new by producing each authentically modernist text as a radically individual form. In *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930), F.R. Leavis hypothesized a link between superfluous literary choices and a decline in literary taste: “Not only does the modern [reader] dissipate himself upon so much more reading of all kinds: the task of acquiring discrimination is much more difficult” than it was when one only had to read Wordsworth to obtain taste (18). The worst offender in this assault on culture is “The Press,” whose degradation of language is far more harmful than Woolworth’s or other commodity-based enterprises. In Leavis’ Spenglerian vision of decline, the fall of language occupies one side of a linguistic double helix, with the rise of the newspapers taking the other. The consequence of dissipative reading? “There is no longer an informed and cultivated public,” he argues (18). Leavis presents a scenario in which mass literacy leads to mass writing and reading, both of which not only bring down the average value of all writing, but also inhibit the truly excellent: “lots and lots of writers and handfuls of memorable, rather than great, poetry” (18).

The culturally conservative fear of intellectual dissipation, stretching back to

Matthew Arnold and forward at least to Alan Bloom, is a familiar story. However, the epistemological and material foundations of Time Inc. forces a reconsideration of this trajectory: it suggests that a crisis of mass culture's informational overproduction was also felt *within* mass culture. And the answer the magazine offers is not modernism's "logic of scarcity," or, put another way, as a logic of limitation; it is the massification of aesthetic taste, an expansion of linguistic and cultural skills. However, their task of expanding taste paradoxically also entails a contraction of content. While Edward Bok and his fellow publishers of general interest magazines expanded to appeal to ever-widening categories of readers, Luce and Hadden consolidated the genre of their stories, as well as the manner in which they were written, explicitly making their periodical both masculine and intellectualist, like a high-brow detective novel. In the Prospectus, they call their solution to the debilitating mass of printed matter "a complete ORGANIZATION of the news," and in the first issue, they write that the goal is to "compartmentaliz[e] the news into 22 departments, written to be read from the first page to the last at one sitting in the span of the hour" – an edict that recalls Edgar Allen Poe's single-sitting time limit for fiction.<sup>15</sup> By front-loading the work onto consolidating the form of the news, the magazine reduces the effort that goes into reading while expanding the benefits of that activity; one need only consume *Time* and replicate its language to remain current and culturally viable. *Time* decides that a news organ matters, to quote the Prospectus one last time, "not in how much it includes between its covers – but in HOW MUCH IT GETS OFF ITS PAGES INTO THE MINDS OF ITS READERS" (Qtd. in Mott 295).

William Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song* (1939) satirizes this devotion to the cultural improvement of readers by inserting a Time Inc. subscription salesman into a long line of other snake oil charmers, each one offering the magic salve to cure the psychological and

economic ills of the Great Depression. The salesman, David F. Windmore, literally defines himself as someone who blows hot air. He gives his potential subscribers a mnemonic device to remember him that is equal parts tautological and false: “Think of wind for wind. Think of more-or-less for more: Windmore. Think of David and Goliath for David, and think of Frank for F, although the F is actually for Fenimore” (Saroyan 71). The benefit of *Time*, according to Windmore, is sociability. “A well-read man is a well-bred man. He is a man who can carry on a lively and intelligent conversation on any topic with anybody, and therefore his company is desirable on all sides” (72). Reading and breeding, in a fully modern world, are now coterminous, and one’s ability to partake in conversation makes “his company” an asset to his company. We saw a similar conflation of reading habits and social affiliation early in Chapter 1, when Willa Cather imagined her books to have the capability of circulating to other people in unsavory ways. In Saroyan’s treatment, reading and breeding, personal company and corporate viability, are all fused in *Time*. The couple that Windmore makes his sales pitch to certainly agree with this assessment of modern character: The husband enthusiastically goose-steps and gives the Fascist salute, yelling “Time Marches On!,” and the wife listens in awe to the almost unending list of managing editors, editors, writers, and researchers that Windmore reels off (73). The names, like the applicable uses of any other panacea, convince the skeptic through sheer number. Though Saroyan mocks *Time’s* mission statement just as much as Kazin respects it, both authors attest to the centrality of the magazine in the cultural imagination. With all those workers and all those readers, both reason, something important must be happening in its pages; it’s just not clear whether it is a savior or a curse.

Along with this attention to the organization of information, the company also hoped to re-model the work of news gathering. Time Inc. did not employ “reporters”;

instead it hired “editors” who would read the dailies and, like a Dadaist collage, remake the content of newspapers into an aesthetic object. As the first news magazine, *Time* heavily emphasizes the creative task of writing, rather than the more journalistic activity of “reporting,” a competence closely identified with the professionalization of both journalism and literary authorship in the Progressive Era. As the linguist Joseph Firebaugh writes about *Time*, “Here for the first time is a popular medium of information whose editors are using the language so freely and boldly as to suggest conscious experiment” (232). Style, both in prose and physical design, would be far more important than timeliness, or depth of coverage, or investigative prowess. And *Time* had style in spades. In fact, it had more than any old style, it had *Time*-style, a narrative strategy that emphasized both linguistic concision and novel phraseology. It consisted not only of highly compressed news stories (no more than four-hundred words apiece), but also the compression of words together: “cinemactor,” “socialite,” “filmen,” “Hindenburglary,” and “detectifiction” are only a small sample of *Time*’s portmanteaus.<sup>16</sup> One might mark the transition from using “News-Magazine” to “Newsmagazine” as a sub-title in 1927 as the full internalization of this tendency.

## **Aestheticizing the Organization Man**

Time Inc. saw organizational precision and aesthetic freedom as complementary, rather than antagonistic, characteristics. In fact, it saw strict administrative control and creativity as necessary for those working as writers. The combination of these two approaches became a composition method in its own right. Because *Time*-style, more than

any specific coverage, was the magazine's most marketable feature, the authors hired to write for *Time* mimicked it with increasing consistency. Though it began as a result of Britton Hadden's editorial influence, the style slowly matriculated from his personal affect to a work ethic distributed evenly across the corporation. As Alan Brinkley argues in his recent biography of Henry Luce, "The emerging organizational culture actually cemented and standardized the style and tone that Hadden, in particular, had imposed upon the magazine through sheer force of will in the magazine's early days ... Indeed, by institutionalizing the style and tone of the early *Time*, the staff was also in some ways expanding and exaggerating the magazine's peculiarities" (125). William Gottfried, a long-time Time Inc. employee, describes how the magazine's doctrine of compression and compartmentalization, and the stylistic tics that accompanied these aesthetic practices, quickly moved from material constraint to self-censure: "The original Prospectus said that no story would occupy more than about seven inches of type. We tried to write this way, but gradually we found our medium changing under our hands [...] *Time*-style became not a formula of words, but a kind of mental discipline" (Elson 84). What he describes is the mutation of formal or spatial constraints into an approach to thinking about writing, and then into an automatic way of writing that no longer requires thinking – a reflex, in the non-self-reflexive sense. Thus, we can see how an aesthetic innovation, a formal experiment in the content of the magazine, shapes the way that workers approach the task of writing.

They were certainly not the first magazine to assign articles to a regularly salaried staff rather than freelancers; as George Jean Nathan wrote in a 1911 *Bookman* article, "magazines today are being filled more and more as newspapers are filled – by 'assignments,' more and more by the members of regularly employed staffs ... and less and less through the propitious accidents of the United States mail" (414). Nathan describes the culture inside



magazine offices as becoming increasingly insular, as well as the production of editorial content relying less on “outsiders,” meaning readers, and more on a staff of professionals. He says that this administration of writing even extends to poetry and fiction: “Despite the loud wails that have to do with ‘inspiration,’” he writes, “a monthly magazine placed orders with three recognized writers of fiction for as many series of short stories on assigned topics” (415-16). Though the staff-system precedes Time Inc., the corporation expands the trend by crossing the line between the two types of writing that Nathan describes. Fiction writers are not contracted to write fiction, but to use their competence with the form to spruce up news writing. Dwight MacDonald summarizes Time, Inc’s writing philosophy: it consolidated the competences necessary for acceptable work, while at the same time expanding the ends to which those competences could be used. Henry Luce, he said, “had a theory that a good writer could write on anything ... He thought it somehow immoral that a writer should do only what he was best at,” so he would assign staff writers to stories for which they had no expertise (MacDonald 165). The work of writing, for Luce, was equally adaptable to all subjects and genres.

The administration of creative work that Nathan documents runs in the face of a Post-Romantic conception of aesthetic production centered around the iconoclastic genius. The repugnance for such bureaucratic arrangements goes beyond writing, though. Indeed, by the end of World War II the fear of an institutionally disciplined workforce became a fairly common concern. David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956) lash out against the deleterious effects that modern institutions have had on the American entrepreneurial spirit. For both, the incorporation of individuals into incomprehensibly vast systems represents the dark side of modernity (rather than modernity itself), something that inhibits entrepreneurial ingenuity *as such* rather than the

originality of writers in particular. Whyte's critique especially caught on in public discourse, partly because it provided an instantly quotable name for the phenomenon he described, and partly – and in some sense relatedly – because the first articles on the subject appeared in *Fortune* magazine. In fact, Whyte was a managing editor at the magazine when he formulated his hypotheses about the bureaucracization of creativity; he, ironically, was one of the staffers whose entrepreneurial spirit was supposedly being hampered by institutions like Time Inc. Though his study does not directly mention the working conditions that he faced everyday, it is not hard to imagine him looking out over his desk and seeing the poet Archibald MacLeish, the economists Daniel Bell and John Kenneth Galbraith, and Whittaker Chambers, who recently returned from testifying in the Alger Hiss case, and thinking that something interesting is happening to the nature of work.

Whyte gave the transformation he saw an enthusiastic thumbs down. Individuals' reliance on corporate work has created an uncritical championing of "the social" over one's own needs, robbing the worker of the "intellectual armor" required to fully participate in society. It might come as a surprise, then, that his great investigation into the dulling of American ingenuity by organizational thinking was assigned to him by a manager. As he recounts in "How to Back into a *Fortune* Story," "Managing Editor Del Paine called" and asked him "to do a story on the current college seniors" at Yale; supposedly "they were the best crop in years – wonderful for business." Whyte, in his interviews, discovered exactly that: they were wonderful for business because they had no real desire to strike out on their own. Instead, "they wanted a storm cellar for the great depression ahead. And so, on the verge of the greatest peacetime boom in history, the class of 1949 girded for the future, looking to big business for security" ("Backing" 191). Whyte contrasts this point of view with his own. Sure he worked for a corporation, as did all of the other rampant iconoclasts

in his office building, but he saw a difference: “We went with the big organizations but at least we talked individualism in our bull sessions” (191). Even though they were all organization men, too, they paid lip service to the desire to be outsiders when they hid from the Depression in corporate newsrooms. In the example of William Whyte, we find another version of George Stroud several years after the appearance of *The Big Clock*: a staff worker whose competing desires for autonomy and security manifest themselves into the form of his work. *The Organization Man*, born in the newsroom as a “corporation story,” works both inside of and against the influence of Time Inc.

While Whyte might not have been conscious of the effect his own institutional surroundings were having on the methodology of his work, he certainly paid attention to the way it influenced how that methodology worked on the level of language. If the company’s writing style expressed the speed, attention, and sociability of the modern manager, then Whyte’s writing offered a model of how not to get ahead. He confesses, “Herb Solow, who detested ornamentation and the elaborate metaphors and analogies I delighted in, thought my leads were models of bad writing” (189). Time Inc. publications fixated on brevity, on the compression not only of sentences but of words, and Whyte’s florid prose did not quite fit with the program. Instead, he recalls off-handedly how his writing became a negative example of how staffers should commit themselves to ink. “I was so bad that I was not fired, but kept on as a kind of exhibit,” he writes, evidencing a different type of writerly discipline than William Gottfried found to be the case (189).

## **Incorporating Modernist Authorship**

Alfred Kazin, writing about his friend at Time Inc., captures how this conflation of

discipline and freedom affected the employees' view of their company work:

Even the writing of a story now became to Harriet a scholarly feat because of the masses of uncollected facts that had to be collected, and a literary feat because of the harsh stylistic frame to which a story had to be fitted ... if you pleased the row of bosses waiting to pass on your copy, you got paid well, praised as only great writers are ever praised, and felt that you were an artist, of sorts. (104)

“Of sorts”: the prepositional diminutive that begins to unravel the utopian dream of well-paid, well-read, well-respected writers with the security of corporate employment and the freedom of autonomous aesthetic decisions. There are several ways that the vision of exploitation-free labor gets lost in translation between institutional mission statement and physical instantiation. The valence of “of sorts” means something different to individual writers. Kenneth Fearing, in “Reading, Writing, and the Rackets,” lays out the problem of attribution. If *Time*-style resides somewhere above the individual, in that it is some form of “corporate voice,” and it exerts itself outside of conscious thought as a “mental discipline,” then how much style can actually be attributed to the writer? Authorial agency in the corporate structure is uniformly dispersed:

The writer is paid (and very well paid) by the sponsoring corporation, while he himself has become a corporation writer, one member of a large team that includes an account executive, a station program executive, a network public relations executive, the sponsor's public relations executive, a producer and his human package... (xvi)

Attenuated authorial control, in this instance, is the price one pays for the security of a staff job. The work of writing loses the glamour associated with creative endeavor; it is closer to mechanical recording. Worst of all, he does not get credit for the writing, nor do people buy it because they know he is the author. “The writer has a private name, probably, and he probably has a distinct personality. But his divorce from the transmitted material is complete,” Fearing complains (“Reading” xvi).

The extraction of an authorial trace from the finished aesthetic object, as Fearing states here, is a by-product of the staff writing system, exemplified by Time Inc. His critique might be read as an inchoate version of what Autonomist theorists refer to as the increasingly performative quality of work. Specifically, Fearing describes a version of writing as work that cannot be directly associated with an end product. A material exists, but its attachment to a specific person or activity is ambiguous. Paolo Virno describes this type of work as taking on the traditional features of political action: *poiesis* looks more and more like *praxis* – style over substance, originality over repeatability. In fact, Fearing’s characterization of staff writing comes close to Virno’s discussion of “virtuosity,” the highly skilled activity that does not end in a product; that is, a type of work in which the value is the competence itself, rather than something extractable. Virno argues, paradoxically, that all contemporary work done within mass culture takes on this definition. “The finished products which can be sold at the end of the productive process are surely not scarce,” he concedes. However, the “services rendered by the living labor” – unlike the reproductive processes of the printing machines – resemble “linguistic-virtuostic services” because of their separation in space, time, and attribution from the finished product (50, 58). For Virno, the performativity now disseminated throughout all cultural work – as well as traditionally

industrial jobs – is quite positive. The newly “de-politicized multitude” only appear de-politicized because all work has taken on the tenor of political *praxis*. Because of global media systems and the automation of industrial labor, work no longer requires a specific site or machinery; the labor force can migrate to the conditions best suited for its own survival. However, Fearing – and, we will see, James Agee – describe the darker side of virtuosity. Not only has the “author function” become emaciated, but also the definitions and defining characteristics of work-writing and non-work-writing seem to disappear. It is not that work increasingly looks like play, it is that all the time one used to have off the clock now feels like work. The vocational model of writing gives way to a vocational model of work, a system in which all activity is seen as representative of one’s employer. If, as Virno argues, all work is now structurally performative, then how do you know when you are writing on the clock and when you are on your own time?

According to Henry Luce and Time Inc., one’s own time does not exist. As the company style becomes both a disciplined competence and method of work that can be applied equally to all subjects, then to write for oneself would be theft. Dwight MacDonald recounts a scene that bears this out. While writing for *Fortune*, MacDonald also wrote for a little magazine, *The Miscellany*, in his “spare time.” When he sent a copy to Luce, he received an irate letter in return, stating that writing for someone other than his company is a “betrayal of Time Inc.” His company

was not just a job, it was a vocation worthy of a man’s whole effort, and pay was thought up by so-and-so [one of my fellow editors] late one night on the West Side subway between the Seventy-second and the Seventy-ninth street stations .... This is a twenty-four hour profession, you never know when you may get an idea for us, and

if you're all the time thinking about some damn little magazine ... (MacDonald 33).

MacDonald does not finish the thought, but he doesn't have to, as the definition of writing has become both so attenuated and over-determined in the Time Inc. model that it is unclear exactly where work and non-work begin and end.

This is all to say the "divorce" of product and productive act that Fearing describes potentially has deeper significance than losing a by-line; it raises the issue of where the authorial act went if the time and material of writing now belong to someone, or something, else. James Agee, in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), strikes a similar note about the erasure of the work of writing. In a text that could reasonably be described as one long, breathless tirade against the indignity of bureaucratic abstraction, Agee early on attempts to lay out what non-exploitative aesthetic work might look like. "If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement" (*Famous* 10). Along with his petition to have the work printed on cheap newsprint so that it might disintegrate before the next generation has a chance to read it, this might be the most famous example of Agee's Pyrrhic desire for textual self-immolation. The authentic representation that he strives for would not be representation at all; it would be direct transmission of the thing itself, along with its smell, taste, sensuality, desire, and waste.

Of course, the irony lies in the fact that Agee does "do" writing, and lots of it. The conditional form of "If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here," attests to the impossibility for Agee to abstain from writing. He is compelled to write because his livelihood depends on it, just as his co-worker Walker Evans must take photographs, and just

like Kenneth Fearing must write news stories that will not be attributed to him. This passage has often been read as evidence of Agee's ambivalent shame for inserting himself into the lives of his subjects, an acknowledgment of the unfortunate mediation that he necessarily creates between the Ricketts', Grudgers', and Woods' stories and the reader. Ostensibly, to replace writing with the shapes, sounds, and smells that these lives emit is to let the families speak for themselves. The problem, though, is that sending a plate of food and a bag of feces to *Fortune* as his report on the plight of tenant farmers does not exactly meet the requirements of his job. Agee finds work because of his aesthetic prowess, and to refuse to write eliminates his one marketable skill. While this passage may be about the ideal of direct transmission, in context it looks to be about something far more banal: work. More specifically, he is chafing at the way that writing has become a particularly attenuated type of work, and the way that writing-as-work and writing-as-escape-from-work have dissolved into one another. Not writing – that is, not working – would allow him to square the circle, to erase any trace of his own labor from the document he is supposed to be compiling on his subjects. In other words, or in Agee's words, to remove the work of writing from the equation resembles displaying “plates of food and excrement” side by side: the raw material and the waste sit next to one another without acknowledging the digestive work in the middle.

Unfortunately for Agee, his trip is underwritten by Time Inc., so he must write. The time and words he devotes to the families do not actually belong to him as he writes them, a sentiment he repeatedly reinforces in letters and the diary he kept while writing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Because of this schism between the work of writing and the finished product, Agee laments that even when working at his best the activity provides little sense of accomplishment: “I’ve been so deeply sucked into work that I’ve been lonely, rather than



satisfied in the work, in which I cannot be satisfied as it is going.” (*Letters* 103). In his 1937 Guggenheim fellowship application (an award he did not receive, but that Kenneth Fearing did) he alludes to the trait that makes his reportorial writing for *Fortune* and his creative writing interchangeable: a lack. He states that each falls equally short of an assignment which, technically, now resides in limbo between work and not work. Because Luce refused to print the manuscript but refused to give up the publication rights, Agee did not own the work that he considered his great artistic statement. In October of 1937 when Agee writes the Guggenheim application, the fate of his manuscript, which he is still writing and editing though not “working on,” in the staff-writing sense, is undetermined. In the application, he states that the text about three tenant families aims “to tell everything possible as accurately as possible: and to invent nothing. It involves therefore as total a suspicion of ‘creative’ and ‘artistic’ as of ‘reportorial’ attitudes and methods” (“Plans” 150). The authorial autonomy of creative work gives way to the legal and bureaucratic strictures of corporate employment, creating a vacuum where neither writing on the clock nor writing for oneself adequately represents his subject. Agee’s discomfort with his work-writing situation was not special; in fact, the very representativeness of the work history of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* can help us, finally, to understand how the dissolution of work-writing and non-work-writing both affects and can be read through the form of literary works produced under the big tent of Time Inc.

As we have seen, Kenneth Fearing imagines the changing properties of work in a temporal register: “the big clock.” This issue of overlapping temporalities could also be thought of as an allocation of material resources. Alfred Kazin writes about the problem of the Time Inc. “poet-reporter” in exactly those terms: “[Luce] might own their typewriters, but he would never, never own their souls” (104). Kazin draws attention the means of

production – the same machines that a writer uses to work against the corporation in his own work – and the possibility that the staff workers who use them are merely “typers,” or communication machine operators rather than creative writers. MacLeish’s quip about journalism and literature occupying “the two limits of the typewriter keyboard,” when framed both in terms of writerly competence and in terms of authorial autonomy, suggests that the work of writing is just as much a spatial concern as it is temporal. This spatial concern can also be seen in the itinerant quality of Agee’s writing. Rural Alabama was a long way from the fiftieth floor of the Chrysler Building, where *Fortune*’s offices were in 1936 when he began his assignment on three tenant families, and a comparably distant locale from the Brooklyn apartment and the suburban New Jersey house that Agee rented to complete the manuscript. With these locations in mind, the above quoted passage from *Famous Men* becomes even more complex, for where is the “here” that Agee does not want to write? Is it in the Grudgers’ front room, where he wrote at a desk by lamplight in a school-child’s notebook during his trip? Is it his office desk at *Fortune*, where he finished the draft that would eventually be rejected by Luce? Is it the writing desk in his New Jersey home, to which he would retreat in order to escape his failing marriage? Or, even more attuned to the location of writing, is it the page on which he makes marks?

The proliferation of places and times in the text, and places and times for writing the text, are at their most confusing when the physical act of recording is closest to the time of the action being recorded; for instance, when Agee recounts the night and following morning of Emma’s departure from the Grudgers to live with her husband. The temporal register shifts seamlessly from night to day, from Agee documenting the household preparing for bed to the awkward scene in which George Gudger says goodbye to Emma in town. Or at least it is seamless until Agee inserts himself back into the narrative to draw

attention to the temporal-spatial manipulation taking place: “But here I am going to shift ahead of where I am writing to a thing which is to happen, or which happened, the next morning (you mustn’t be puzzled by this, I’m writing in a continuum), and say what came of it” (56). To call this passage self-referential is to overlook one of the stranger, yet more consistent features of the text. The narrative reflexivity is abundantly clear. What remains unclear is which “self” exactly is being referenced. The very act of drawing attention to the text’s discursive production also emphasizes the multiple locations that the work of writing could occupy: “on site” in Alabama, “in the office” in Manhattan, or off the clock “at home” in Brooklyn or New Jersey. The “here” of the passage and “where I am writing” are extracted from one another at the exact moment they converge on simultaneity. This rupture occurs after Agee has spent several paragraphs describing his writing desk, his lamp, and the utensil with which he marks. He is “sit[ting] at a table, facing a partition wall looking at a lighted coal-oil lamp which stands on the table close to the wall and just beyond the sleeping of my relaxed left hand; with my right hand I am from time to time writing, with a soft pencil, into a school-child’s composition book” (44). As this material specificity dissolves into temporal ambiguity, Agee focuses all of his attention on the mechanics and fuel of the coal lamp, discussing the texture of the “thin, brittle, rusty feeling” oil between his right fingers, the same ones with which he is writing the page.

“The light in this room is of a lamp,” he writes, yet now it is unclear which room and which light he refers to (46). What makes this passage even more troublesome is that Agee always wrote by lamplight and with a pencil, inside and outside the Grudgers’ home. His writing room in Brooklyn had lamps rather than electric lights, as did the New Jersey home he wrote in later. “I cannot unqualifiedly excite myself in favor of Rural Electrification, for I am too fond of lamplight” (185), he writes later in the text, echoing the sentiment he voiced

in an earlier *Fortune* article on the Tennessee Valley Authority's attempt to bring modern electric power to rural Southern areas. Also, almost as a matter of pride Agee wrote in long hand. He was rather well-known for his tight, almost illegible print "which made reading a slow and at times trying and well-nigh impossible task" (Flye 13). With this, we find another way that one might rebel against the writing that has mutated from only occurring in the office to taking over one's whole life: write, but write so that no one can or will read the output. If Luce owns the typewriters, Agee will write with pencil; and if Luce determines what Agee will report on, then Agee will refuse to ever finish his report. The tenant family story, originally slated for a three-week turnaround, extends out to a six-year project, and even at that point he is forced to simply stop and publish by the third media company associated with the work.

If one way to work through the commingling of work- and non-work-writing is to extract the writing from the finished product, then another avenue, and the one that guides *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, is to never stop inserting text so that the finished product never reaches completion. As Agee writes in the Preface,

Ultimately, it is intended that this record and analysis be exhaustive, with no detail, however trivial it may seem, left untouched, no relevancy avoided, which lies within the power of remembrance to maintain, of the intelligence to perceive, and of the spirit to persist in. (x)

"The present volume is merely portent and fragment" of that impossibly detailed goal, which ideally would incorporate letters from readers, alternate accounts of tenant life, other journalistic attempts to describe the situation, and pretty much anything else that will keep

the text from ending (xi). In practice, this encyclopedic aesthetic results in the laboriously intricate descriptions of the houses, furniture (or lack thereof), and worn accoutrements that occupy the same space as the tenant families. These often begin as relatively unencumbered observations, like the one that surveys the structure of the Gudgers' house:

Two blocks, of two rooms each, one room behind the other. Between these blocks a hallway, floored and roofed, wide open both at front and rear: so that these blocks are two rectangular yoked boats, or floated tanks, or coffins, each, by an inner wall, divided into square chambers. The roof, pitched rather steeply from front and rear, its cards met and nailed at a sharp angle. The floor faces the earth closely. On the left of the hall, the two rooms, each an exact square. On the right a square front room and, built later, behind it, using the outward weatherboards for its own front wall, a leanto kitchen half that size. (138)

Even within this relatively straight treatment of the physical structure, we can see how description can proliferate either by increasing the magnification of the microscope – a vertical boring down into the material – or by lateral movement, forever describing the same object in different terms: the two rooms as “two blocks,” “yoked boats, or floated tanks, or coffins.” This lateral move occurs within sentences like in the above passage, as well as providing a way to structure the image of the house in its most general terms. After several pages of ever-increased material specificity, so that “each texture in the wood, like those of a bone, is distinct in the eye as a razor: each nail-head is distinct: each seam and split” (142), the narrative eye moves sideways, offering another option:

by another saying:

‘In all this house:

‘In all this house not any one inch of lumber being wasted on embellishment, or on trim, or on any form of relief, or even on any doubling of walls: (143)

And then another, “On symmetry” (144), then another, “Or again by materials” (145), so that the end result is a fifty-three page owner’s manual describing every nook and cranny in a series of parallel registers. Rita Barnard characterizes Agee’s aesthetic as “the ‘anorexic’ response to consumer culture” because of its “fascination with the authenticity of scarcity” (6). But *Famous Men’s* form is anything but anorexic; he is fascinated by the fact that, when he looks closely, these people are surrounded by an indescribably complex array of things that he simply must describe so as to do his subjects justice. If we stay with Barnard’s metaphor of pathologized eating, then Agee exhibits something much closer to compulsive ingestion. His method of giving each minute part of every object its due does not erase the “digestion into art,” nor does it simply refuse to take part in the consumption-production loop (which would be Barnard’s formulation). Instead, Agee takes Time Inc.’s work model to its epistemological limit. If all of his sensations belong to his employer, and his job is to write, then everything he experiences must be documented. He transforms productive “workmanship” into pathological graphomania.

With this methodology, it is conceivable that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* could spread out forever by inserting more and more text into the middle, thus removing itself from market relations of corporate writing by drowning them out with textual noise. In *Famous Men* the result of this approach is something like an inversion of fractal geometry, in which scalar levels that superficially look the same are actually infinitely unassimilable. He

writes, “How am I to speak of you as ‘tenant’ ‘farmers,’ as ‘representatives’ of your ‘class,’ as social integers in a criminal economy, or as individuals, fathers, wives, sons, daughters, and as my friends and as I ‘know’ you?” (100). Agee expresses a desire for the historical, personal, and contextual specificity that is erased in Time Inc.’s disciplinary and aesthetic model. Yet just as soon as Agee arrives at this formulation, the sheer existential weight of infinitely regressive singularity falls apart:

I might suggest, its [the text’s] structure should be globular: or should be eighteen or twenty intersected spheres, the interlockings of bubbles on the face of a stream; one of these globes is each of you ... We should first meditate and establish its ancient, then more recent, its spreaded and more local, history and situation: how it is a child of the substance and bowels of the stars and of all space: how it is created forth of an aberration special to one speck and germ and pollen fleck this planet, this young planet, on that broadblown field. (101)

Telling the tale of three families quickly becomes the mind-numbingly vast project of cataloging the particularity of every atom in the universe. And even if he could complete this universal encyclopedia, the structure is absolutely arbitrary, a jumble of spheres bumping up against one another that are interlocking *but interchangeable*. Eighteen, twenty, twenty thousand: when forced to organize, we are back in the realm of representativeness and commonality. Even more, Agee must think in *Time’s* analogical mode to even conceive of this particularity: the structure is arrived at by metaphor, “bubbles on the face of a stream.” He atavistically re-imagines the unassimilable humanness of each of the tenant farmers as surface phenomena of the natural order, hollowing out any singularity that might be

achieved by endlessly specific description. The house he describes is unoccupied, and while he can take pleasure in the solipsistic isolation of nails and boards, his description hollows out the human. The bubbles that float on the stream are empty, except for air.

With this in mind, we can see how Agee's attempt to write outside of the Time Inc. model by continuously supplementing information fits right in with the editorial style he hopes to be rid of. This happens in the most basic organization of the text, which is not exactly "globular," though it is repetitive. The original tripartite structure of the magazine article survives in the recurring "On the Porch" sections, which provide the nominal beginning, middle, and end of the work. They narrate two people, ostensibly Agee and Evans, laying on the Gudgers' porch and preparing for sleep. As the house goes silent, they hear a call and response between two animals they take to be foxes, whose noises become a stand-in for the ideal form of Agee's text, "never repeating a pattern, and always with what seemed infallible art ... the frightening joy of hearing the world talk to itself, and the grief of incommunicability" (468-9). Here the desire for radical singularity, the complete lack of repetition, comes together with his desire for a now undisciplined, because "incommunicabl[e]," transmission outside of language. As the foxes take over, they push Agee and Evans so far out of the narrative that they become senseless and inanimate. They are "left like dim sacks at one side of a stage" as these "two masked characters, unfortold and perfectly irrelevant to the action, had ... what at length turned out to have been the most significant, but most unfathomable, number in the show" (470). Agee and Evans remain in this unconscious sack-state until their talk "drained rather quickly off into silence ... until at length we too fell asleep" (470-1).

Each of the three sections of "On the Porch" expands from the last, reusing the closing words of the previous installment to begin the next. The first opens with a



description of the house, as it and “all that was in it had now descended deep beneath the gradual spiral it had sunk through; it lay formal under the order of silence.” The passage ends with a parenthetical, italicized restatement of the section’s title, “*We lay on the front porch:*” (19, 21), which is picked up and promoted to the diegetical level for the opening of “On the Porch: 2.” Then in the second paragraph, it expands: “We lay on the front porch to the left of the hall as you enter” (225). Paralleling the sentence’s expansion, the section itself dilates into a long diatribe against journalism, art, science, abstraction, naturalism, realism, and description as such before returning to the porch and foreshadowing the entrance of the foxes: “From these woods a good way out along the hill there now came a sound that was new to us” (253). Just as the second “On the Porch” begins with the last words of the first, “On the Porch: 3” begins with a restatement of the new sound Agee hears. It then re-describes the silence of the opening section before ending at what appears to be the beginning of the first “On the Porch,” with everyone asleep and the house standing alone without the intrusion of human consciousness. These sections make the text an endlessly repeating loop, narratively closing off the possibility of the text reaching completion.

The entirety of “On the Porch” in the published version pushes seventy pages, but it began as a five-line poem in the journal he kept after returning to *Fortune* from a vacation with his wife in 1936:

On the porch.

We got back to town late in May.

The winter before.

The shape of the mind.

Home. Friends. Back to work. (*Rediscovered* 21)

“The porch” he describes here does not seem to be the Alabaman porch he shared with Evans, because the “we” alluded to above is not he and Evans but he and his wife. In fact, the last line, “Home. Friends. Back to work.,” predates the *Fortune* story completely, suggesting this aesthetic reverie does not exist outside of, and must always return to, writing as work. Though Agee attempts to extricate himself from *Famous Men’s* narrative loop by playing dead and letting the foxes take over, the actual lesson of “On the Porch” is the translation of his personal writing into *Time*-style. Even in the poetry he writes about vacation he must come back to his day job. But the affiliative pull of Time Inc. goes even deeper, because as these five lines expand into the skeleton of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, they also find Agee de-personalizing his own work, giving over individual volition to the demands of a higher organization. His last gesture is to erase himself from the narrative so that the organizational position of “On the Porch” stands on its own, absent of an authorial conscious. He imagines it as nature narrating itself through the two foxes at the end of the text, but the evacuation of personal voice from the finished product looks surprisingly like what Luce and Hadden expected of their writers all along.

By refusing to stop working, Agee turns *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* into a metaphor for the relationship between mass cultural writing and experimental authorship. To accept the simultaneity of organizational discipline and aesthetic freedom would be to give up the lie of authorial autonomy. Worse than that, it would be to suffer “the emasculation of acceptance,” as Agee puts it (11). “Swift, Blake, Beethoven, Christ, Joyce, Kafka, name me a one who has not been thus castrated. Official acceptance is the one unmistakable sign of fatal misunderstanding, and is the kiss of Judas” (12). This is not the only way that Agee attempts to distinguish himself from the popular appeal of the mass-

market magazines from which he took a paycheck. Along with the physical violence of castration, he takes on any number of identifications that he finds structurally equivalent to his “outsider” disposition at Time Inc.: he identifies his work with the agricultural work of the tenant families, the choral singing of a group of African-American farm workers, and even with the social situation of Southern blacks more generally described in Richard Wright’s autobiographical novel *Black Boy* (1945), with whose protagonist he “identified so intensely ... that he considered himself more of a black than a white Southerner” (Bergreen 289). Each of these radical versions of othering that Agee aligns himself with, however offensively naïve, attempt to conflate his own discomfort with inclusion in corporate modernity with whole groups of people who were categorically *excluded* from that system, be it because of race, class, gender, or region.

Without mocking the histrionics of Agee’s ceaselessly proliferating identifications, the great irony of his rolling out references to Joyce, Kafka, and Wright to signify his difference from them – that, because unsuccessful he is still in some way bodily whole – is that he ends up exactly like all of them. *Famous Men* was an unbelievable commercial flop in 1941, barely selling six-hundred copies – a commercial disaster that, in the context laid out above, looks like it was by design: the failure of a text that goes on forever metaphorically brings together the removal of writing and its endless proliferation by making sure no one reads the ceaseless stream of words. However, after David McDowell edited and published *A Death in the Family* (1956), which won the Pulitzer Prize, Agee’s fortunes changed. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, out of print for nearly twenty years, was republished in 1960 to quite a different social situation. His showy anti-bureaucratic stance and dedication to the difficult necessity of authenticity, after aging for twenty years, fit right in when baby boomers made radical individuality the new normal. *Famous Men* became the canonical text of the

Documentary aesthetic and a reclaimed forerunner to the New Journalism that would become wildly popular in the sixties. By the time of its republication, the lessons of Whyte's *The Organization Man* had time to flower; employees, not to mention writers, are not tacitly allowed to rebel, they are *expected* to bite the hand that feeds. In his attempt to be radically unassimilable into corporate and intellectual life, Agee becomes the model for corporate individualism. His work, both the fiction and the journalism, are retroactively championed as most accomplished versions of their respective forms. As the range of biographies and critical studies of his work attest to, everyone can now claim a piece of "the legend" of Agee: Catholics and atheists, communists and Jeffersonian democrats, journalists and artists, naturalists and modernists and postmodernists.<sup>17</sup> In a way, Agee could be said to have fallen on the same fate as Earl Janoth in *The Big Clock*. Though he is expelled from the mass-media corporation, he is endlessly re-integrated as the content of popular form journalistic articles (most recently an article in the April 2010 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, "Let Us Now Trash Famous Authors"), literary critiques, and even full-on recreations, like Dale Maharidge's and Michael Williams' *And Their Children After Them* (2008), which revisits the Alabaman families that Agee and Evans documented. The big clock, it seems, is running as usual.

## CHAPTER 4

# OUR ELIOT: MODERNISM, MASS MEDIA, AND THE AMERICAN CENTURY

*“My business is with words; yet the words were beyond my command.”*  
– T.S. Eliot, 1948 Nobel Prize Speech

### The Uses of T.S. Eliot

“Has the Reader Any Rights Before the Bar of Literature?,” asks the inaugural issue of *Time News-Magazine* in March 1923. It raises the question in response to the recent news that because of *The Waste Land*, the American literary magazine the *Dial* has awarded T.S. Eliot its second annual Outstanding Service to Letters prize, and the hefty sum of \$2,000 that accompanies it. Instead of directly answering his own rhetorical question about readerly rights, the unnamed writer<sup>1</sup> lays out what he sees as the contemporary field of letters: “There is a new kind of literature abroad in the land, whose only obvious fault is that no one can understand it” (“Shantih” 12). The broken signal between poet and reader is not an accident, because according to *Time*, “It is rumored that *The Waste Land* was written as a

hoax,” which means that “lucidity is not part of the auctorial task” (12). The hoaxers are not limited to poets and novelists; they also publish, review, and publicize this new literature by raining down American literary awards on it. That is, the scam is not just a matter of writing poetry, but also of the writing about poetry. *Time* lists the critics who stand behind Eliot’s work: Burton Rascoe at *The New York Tribune*,<sup>2</sup> Edmund Wilson at *Vanity Fair*, and John Middleton Murry at *The Athenaeum* (referred to only as “a British critic”) all positively review modern poetry, and by doing so legitimize it.

*Time* and its parent-company Time Inc., according to most accounts of twentieth century journalism, mark something fundamentally new in the style and substance of the American mass-market periodical press. The magazine quite consciously experimented with the form of news-writing, developing a narrative voice commonly referred to as “Timestyle” that distinguished it from the wide array of other printed matter.<sup>3</sup> However, in its very first “Books” section it mocks Eliot’s literary experiments, as well as those periodicals that have bought into his purposeful difficulty. Thus, from the onset of the modern news magazine, we find modernism as news. More than this, we find the news of modernism from other periodicals re-articulated as news about the unhealthy state of literary culture. *Time*’s initial statement of disapproval serves several purposes. First, and perhaps most obviously, *Time* positions itself as an arbiter of literary taste. It can digest the “new kind of literature” and make evaluative claims so that the magazine’s readers need not waste their time. Second, the appraisal of literary modernism as the new thing implicitly suggests that *Time* stands behind, and hence becomes, the old thing, the thing that the reader already knows and enjoys despite having never read it before. The magazine takes this stance despite the fact that in 1923 this “new kind of literature” was not all that new anymore and, if we are to believe Ezra Pound (admittedly a big if), had more or less run its course ten years before.<sup>4</sup> On the facing page of

its review of *The Waste Land*, *Time* makes this very claim about Cubism, quoting Clive Bell, “English critic and pontiff of modernism,” who argues that Cubism “has served its purpose . . . and is in danger of becoming itself a mere convention” (13).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in the pages of *Time* the newness of this literary movement becomes associated with a formal difficulty (“no one can understand it”) that hides an organizational underhandedness on the part of its adherents. That is, the infamous difficulty of the “new kind of literature” breaks the realist contract in which one says what one means, and this fissure between writers and readers formalizes the duplicity of authors, magazines, and reviewers who are having a laugh at the expense of a reader whose rights have been violated. Specifically, we find *Time* insinuating that shady dealings lay behind the financial backing of modernism by a periodical; that is, we find overlapping networks of poets, publishers, reviewers, and capital – both economic and cultural. As a corollary, we see from the beginning that Eliot’s circulation within the pages of American mass-market magazines focuses on the collation of his roles as poet and marketable figurehead for this literary movement. It is not just that he wrote a difficult poem, but that his obscurantist aesthetics are subsidized by a well-oiled public relations system tipping the scales in “the economy of prestige,” to quote James English. Yet for Eliot, as *Time* points out, the symbolic capital of literary prestige also brings with it the old-fashioned kind of economics. And unfortunately, the instigators of this hoax are not concerned with the public’s opinion about their intentions; to them, intention is “immaterial” and literature is “not concerned with intentions, but with results.” (12). As much as the reviewer may not like it, this poem certainly sees results. It may not make sense, but it wins lucrative prizes – American prizes, no less – that support more of this “new kind of literature.”<sup>6</sup> *Time* mocks the claims of

Eliot and his ilk, basically calling it a readerless literature; but that doesn't keep it from getting press, even if it is negative.

In several publications Lawrence Rainey meticulously works out the facts of what *Time* suspected; as it turns out, the cards really might have been stacked in Eliot's favor concerning the *Dial* prize. There is no evidence that the editors at the *Dial* read *The Waste Land* before offering Eliot the prize, and a number of well-placed reviewers and poets presented the poem as a watershed without actually seeing it. Rainey's investigative work into the backroom dealings of poets, little magazines, and their intermediaries – a collective body he refers to as the “institutions of modernism” – has produced an entire sub-genre of Eliot criticism intent on getting to the bottom of the systemic malfeasance that produced modernism as the dominant literary movement. This anthropology of popularity that comes down to us from Rainey (or, taken one degree further, from Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* [1987]), sets its sights on dismantling the aura around modernist authorship and the movement's apparent historical and aesthetic singularity. It replaces pronouncements of a market-blind writerly craft with much more banal, yet at the same time unseemly, writerly careerism. It portrays authors as power-hungry, yet deeply insecure individuals overcome with the “anxiety of contamination” (Huyssen's phrase), constantly monitoring the uses and abuses of their names and texts to make sure they neither completely slide out of literary networks nor fall over the divide into celebrity.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps because T.S. Eliot offers such a ready caricature of the pretensions of Culture, his literary output and biography have undergone quite a bit of this deflationary critical practice. David Chinitz's *T.S. Eliot and the Great Divide* (2003), the most comprehensive study of Eliot's relationship to mass culture, presents itself as an antidote to the plague of cheapshot attacks on his cultural elitism.<sup>8</sup> He sets out to prove that the poet's



“actual relations with popular culture were far more nuanced and showed a far greater receptivity than either his supporters or his detractors, today or during his lifetime, have realized or cared to admit” (4), and “at every stage of his working life, Eliot was productively engaged with popular culture in some form, and neither his work nor the overall significance of his career can be properly apprehended without attention to this engagement” (12-13). Chinitz’s goal is to produce a “multi-dimensional thinker and artist”, a “richer and more engaging figure” than the stodgy sourpuss we all think we know (6). Several recent studies, influenced by both New Modernist Studies and by the onset of Periodical Studies, find in Eliot’s life-long investment in magazine culture, both avante-garde and popular, that he really might have sought some version of a mass readership. Patrick Collier’s *Modernism on Fleet Street* (2006) shows how Eliot, who published reviews and essays in a wide range of American and British newspapers and magazines, thought about his literary pursuits as a critical outgrowth and response to mass periodical culture. Jason Harding’s critical study of *The Criterion*, the journal that Eliot edited from 1922 until 1939, argues that Eliot’s politics and aesthetics look far more nuanced when we consider the range of articles he was willing to publish.

It is hard to argue with the claim that Eliot was a “multi-dimensional thinker and artist” and relatively easy to imagine that there are endless depths to be mined in regards to Eliot’s biographical, psychological, or social understanding of his place in culture, both minority and mass.<sup>9</sup> However, I want, at least temporarily, to bracket Eliot’s own interests and, instead, study the ways that his poetry, his name, and his image circulate in the American periodical press and acquire meanings that he could not control.<sup>10</sup> To closely read the above *Time* review is, for the moment, to ignore the complicity or antimony between modernism and mass culture, as well as the careerism of writers and reviewers. Instead, it is

to accept modernism – and, in this instance, T.S. Eliot as shorthand for that term – as an artifact that circulates through mass culture via the mass media. Put another way, the methodology of this chapter refuses to make evaluative claims about the uses and abuses of the mass media by modernist poets or vice versa; and, by clearing away the need to praise or criticize the way an author plays the literary field – or how mass media outlets appropriate an ostensible autonomous and singular aesthetic object – I hope to give an interpretation of that field. Or put yet another way, I want to contextualize modernism’s “anxiety of contamination” by showing how its contaminators had their own anxieties about the changing shape of (broadly) print and (specifically) literary culture.

This chapter tracks what we might think of as the afterlife of Rainey’s Eliot as he circulates in American periodical culture. When one is relatively unknown to the general public, as Eliot was in the run up to the first three publications of *The Waste Land* in 1922 and 1923, controlling one’s public image may be laborious, but it is a reasonably well-defined endeavor. However, after the initial spark of infamy, which really comes into being with the announcement of the *Dial* prize, managing the narratives that circulate about Eliot becomes an increasingly attenuated project. Rather than refuse to read *The Waste Land* or any other of Eliot’s own work, *pace* Rainey and a host of other New Modernist projects, I want to read the American popular-press readings of Eliot’s literary, cultural, political, and national significance. I want to see what happens when Rainey’s “institutions of modernism” have their doors pried open by larger, wealthier, more popular, and profoundly more influential mass-market magazines like *Time* and *Life*. In other words, instead of attempting to parse out Eliot’s own feelings about mass culture, I want to begin with the premise of T.S. Eliot as a mass cultural artifact; to trace his circulation from the mid-twenties until the mid-fifties in a group of American mass-market titles; to see how and why the tenor of coverage changes

over the inter- and immediate postwar period; and, finally, to theorize how the Eliotic public image feeds back into how he writes about himself in the 1950s. This change in methodological perspective – from a tight historical focus on the little magazines of the 1910s and 1920s to a broader overview of the massification of terms associated with Eliot, and by extension with literary modernism, in “big magazines” – allows a circulatory reading of Eliot, rather than one attuned to literary production. What becomes available from this perspective? I see a gradual reclamation of Eliot as an American writer and thinker, as well as a recasting of the competition between modernist and journalistic practices of the 1920s as paired cultural endeavors, with each side attempting to develop an appropriate language for a culture defined by its glut of printed material and the informational surfeit that makes “the real Mr. Eliot,” and the real everything else, increasingly hard to pin down.

That is, as twentieth century American periodical culture begins to register a fear of informational overabundance – a point I will return to later – a group of self-consciously popular and self-consciously new magazines find in Eliot, and the literary movement they metonymically invoke through him, a body of writers and their works to position themselves in relation to. When we follow how the big magazines write about Eliot from the 1920s through the 1950s, we also see how they imagine themselves. Their coverage of his poetry and literary persona offers a reflexive account of their own place in American print culture. More than this, we see how they thematize the frictions between competing visions of a prospective national literature – or, more accurately, how they transform the modernist trope of exilic alienation into their own Cold War-image of America Everywhere. Popular American magazines, most notably *Time* and *Life*, first position their own cultural nationalism against a cosmopolitan Eliot; then after World War II, they repatriate him as a symbol of American culture’s global ascendance. After working through this change in the

coverage of Eliot and his writing, I will show how the reinvention of an American Eliot in *Time* and *Life* plays an integral role in the postwar discourse of “The American Century,” a term and ideological position that originate with Henry Luce, co-founder of Time Inc., in the pages of *Life*.

## **The Outside of Modernism**

When the emphasis changes from the role of the little magazines to that of the big ones, the context of the “new kind of literature” associated with T.S. Eliot looks a little different. This is because Time Inc. is not concerned with their role in contaminating the aesthetic with the commercial or the elite with the mass, at least not in the same way Huysen means. Rather, the more interesting point that *Time* makes in their March 1923 summation of modernism is that the impenetrability of this new poetry mirrors the closed social system it occupies in relation to the public. When the reviewer paraphrases the belief that “Lucidity is not part of the auctorial task,” he means that the texts need no longer be clear; however, the phrase also suggests that this new idea clouds over the standards by which texts are evaluated and circulated. *Time* repeatedly fills its “Books” section with these types of questions about the openness of the literary market, and it often implies that the lack of transparency (both in the aesthetic and organizational registers) signifies a threat to American nationality. In April of 1923, one month after its review of *The Waste Land*, the magazine asks, “Is there a ‘Literary Dictatorship’ in New York?” It echoes a “charge” that “has been repeated” against American literature from its own shores, in towns like Boston

and Chicago. Writers in these cities fear being shut out of the inner circle by a “semisecret cabal of radical young critics”:

the youthful intelligentsia, occupying strategic positions in the publicity section of the literary world as editors and contributors to the ‘highbrow’ weeklies, critics of books and drama, colyumnists [sic] and readers for publishing houses, [who] have combined to form not alone a mutual admiration society; but also an exclusive literary coterie, admission to which is denied candidates who have not the personal friendship of the charter members. Only thoroughgoing social radicals are welcome. Clearness and cleanness, coupled with a sound belief in American institutions, is a fatal bar. (“Free for All?”)

The “charge” that laudatory reviews mark the borders of a “mutual admiration society” certainly do not originate with *Time*, nor do they end in the 1920s. Similar accusations can be found in Harold Stearns’ *American and the Young Intellectuals* (1921), Brander Matthews’ 1922 *New York Times Book Review* article about “juvenile highbrows,” and Joel Springarn’s manifesto from the same year, “The Younger Generation,” which explains that this new class are a “somewhat narrow and unorganized but very articulate group” (Qtd. in *North Reading* 142). However, the terms here are a little counter-intuitive; stories of limited access and uneven playing fields usually decry the unfair privileges and social connections of a well-established aristocracy. Above, *Time* takes the opposite stance, claiming that the “youthful intelligentsia” and “social radicals” have shut everyone else out. In some ways, *Time* describes an alternative history of the simultaneous professionalization of literature and its criticism. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (1993), Thomas Strychacz argues that

twentieth-century literature and its criticism invented parallel professional jargons so as to transform the production and criticism of literature into a special knowledge, one closed off from the general reading public. Modern literature, at least that “serious” brand of modern literature, then, becomes an insider’s game only accessible to the insulated few that are in the know. However, *Time’s* 1923 review of *The Waste Land* provides a view from the outside – a tentative and skeptical picture of the insiders from the perspective of those who can only access the system of modernist prestige from afar, through the cloudy window of inscrutable texts. And, when we think about this as the opinion of the newly excluded American mass culture, the implications of the terms of the debate take on national significance. *Time’s* review is not an anti-populist rant against the traditionless rabble; instead, it tells of a literary market quietly overrun by a minority of young “highbrow[s]” who deny access to their forebearers as well as the unconnected or “traditional” younger writers. As the references to a “semisecret cabal” and a “literary dictatorship” make clear, this new social formation is profoundly undemocratic – and the denial of meritocratic access to the literary field quickly mutates into a charge of un-Americanism. As the article states, “a sound belief in American institutions” ensures one’s exclusion from the new world order. “Clearness and cleanness” are “coupled” to American nationality, both in literary production and in the social fields that encompass individual works.

My point here is not to show that the free market of ideas has never actually been all that free, nor is it to archly mock the outrage of a new mass-market periodical that has stumbled upon this hypothesis. Instead, I want to point out how the projection of a meritocratic literary market, and the recognition of the shortcomings of that projection, quickly transform into a discussion of national character – an American “clearness and cleanness” positioned against its offshore opposite. In a move that may seem strange from

our vantage point, which has inherited a vision of Eliot as the embodiment of royalism, classicism, and Anglo-Catholicism, the article goes on to say that the “social radicals” that can be found walking the halls of *The Dial* and *Vanity Fair* are scheming “to ‘put over’ T.S. Eliot as the greatest modern American poet” on an innocent reading public (“Free for All?”). The threat that the “social radicals” and their metonymic leader represent, then, is not only the rise of difficult texts, or even that of a literary cosmopolitanism in competition with a nationalist tradition. Instead, the problem is the redefinition of which poetry counts as both legitimately modern and canonically American, as well as the periodical context in which it circulates. *The Dial*, *Vanity Fair*, and Eliot become synonymous with treason: to camp in their corner is supplant what it means to be American.

This becomes clearer with the section of Eliot’s poem that *Time* reprints, and how it chooses to do so (see Figure 6). It excerpts the last eight lines of *The Waste Land* with no attempt to contextualize how they relate to the rest of the poem. If one wants to make Eliot’s poetry appear as unintelligible as possible, this final section certainly does the job. Five languages, only three lines in English (one a nursery rhyme, one typographically marked as antique); references to London Bridge and “Le Prince d’Aquitaine”; no discernible meter, rhythm, narrative, or any other organizational logic to provide an interpretive scaffolding. Unlike the poem’s opening “April is the cruellest month,” or one of the scenes from “A Game of Chess,” or even the typist’s tryst with the young man carbuncular, this section is completely dependent on the preceding four-hundred-twenty-five lines for even the most basic of interpretations. The poly-lingual section is made even more difficult by the specific typographical appearance of this reproduction. The quoted lines are pushed tightly together, almost bleeding into each other. Also, the font size is noticeably smaller than the rest of the article, making it more difficult to read.

*The Dial* has awarded its \$2,000 prize for the best poem of 1922 to an opus entitled *The Waste Land*, by T. S. Eliot. Burton Rascoe, of *The New York Tribune*, hails it as incomparably great. Edmund Wilson, Jr., of *Vanity Fair*, is no less enthusiastic in praise of it. So is J. Middleton Murry, British critic.

Here are the last eight lines of *The Waste Land*:

“London Bridge is falling down falling  
down falling down  
*Poi s'accose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam ceu chelidon*—O swallow  
swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*  
These fragments I have shored against my  
ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad  
again.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
“Shantih Shantih Shantih”

The case for the defense, as presented by the admirers of Messrs. Eliot, Joyce, et al., runs something like this:

Figure 6. *The Waste Land* in *Time*, 1923.

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling  
down

*Poi s'accose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam ceu chelidon*—O swallow swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*  
These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad again.  
*Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.*

*Shantih shantih shantih*

Figure 7. *The Waste Land* in *The Dial*, 1922.



The American and British periodical publications in the *Dial* and *Criterion*, or the book publication by Boni & Liverlight, present the lines (mostly) intact, center the text with wide margins, and provide plenty of kerning space between lines, which gives the poem a visual integrity (see Figure 7). As Jerome McGann has argued, small press magazines and vanity book publishers treated the materiality of the page and presentation of the poem as artistic practices that were equal to the content of the words (1-12).

*Time's* reprint of these lines, then, shows the darker side of how the space of the page can inflect interpretation. By refusing Eliot even the logic of his line breaks, *Time* takes away the excerpt's basic formal logic. It excerpts the last eight lines of *The Waste Land* with no attempt to contextualize how they relate to the rest of the poem. If one wants to make Eliot's poetry appear as unintelligible as possible, this final section certainly does the job. Five languages, only three lines in English (one a nursery rhyme, one typographically marked as antique); references to London Bridge and "Le Prince d'Aquitaine"; no discernible meter, rhythm, narrative, or any other organizational logic to provide an interpretive scaffolding. Unlike the poem's opening "April is the cruelest month," or one of the scenes from "A Game of Chess," or even the typist's tryst with the young man carbuncular, this section is completely dependent on the preceding four-hundred-twenty-five lines for even the most basic of interpretations. The poly-lingual section is made even more difficult by the specific typographical appearance of this reproduction. The quoted lines are pushed tightly together, almost bleeding into each other. Also, the font size is noticeably smaller than the rest of the article, making it more difficult to read. The American and British periodical publications in the *Dial* and *Criterion*, or the book publication by Boni & Liverlight, present the lines (mostly) intact, center the text with wide margins, and provide plenty of kerning space between lines, which gives the poem a visual integrity (see Figure 2). As Jerome McGann

has argued, small press magazines and vanity book publishers treated the materiality of the page and presentation of the poem as artistic practices that were equal to the content of the words (1-12). *Time's* reprint of these lines, then, show the darker side of how the space of the page can inflect interpretation. By refusing Eliot even the logic of his line breaks, *Time* takes away the excerpt's basic formal logic.

When the magazine quotes and reproduces these lines as representative of Eliot, and claims Eliot as representative of "a new kind of literature abroad in the land," it marks both the individual and the artistic movement as examples of a foreign decadence antithetical to a definition of American literature based on "clearness and cleanness." All of these non-English languages crashing against one another become like the meaningless string of syllables in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which *Time* describes as composed of "some half million assorted words – many such as are not ordinarily heard in reputable circles – shaken ... up in a colossal hat, [and] laid ... end to end" (12). Only now it isn't just words that are meaningless: cosmopolitan cross-cultural sampling becomes a suspect formal mode.

Though the terms change a little, one can trace this reading of an un-American Eliot in *Time* through at least the 1939 article "From Tom to T.S.," which takes great pains to mock Eliot's collegiate affectations, as well as his bourgeois banality. After establishing the bright field of Harvard graduates from which Eliot arose, the magazine writes that his contemporaries in college mockingly "say he was English in everything but accent and citizenship ... and dressed with the studied carelessness of a future dandy" (35). They cast Eliot as an outlier at Harvard, but not for the usual reasons given in his biographies. His alienation often is attributed to his two-pronged identification with St. Louis and Boston, a simultaneous homesickness for the Mississippi River and northeastern pines; or in other words, a feeling of permanent exile produced by his identification with two versions of

American regionalism.<sup>11</sup> In *Time*, though, Eliot sticks out because of his lack of an authentic American grounding and his European pretensions. During a visit to Boston, he “seemed to enjoy flaunting his English ways: ‘I tend,’ said he, ‘to fall asleep in club armchairs, but I believe my brain works as well as ever, whatever that is, after I have had my tea’” (35). In this representation, he is the dandy turned avante-garde poet turned couch potato. The magazine insinuates that for all his British characteristics – which he thinks mark him as cosmopolitan, worldly, intellectual – he actually has grown into the stodgy bourgeoisie that he spent so much time mocking in his earlier poetry. The article never mentions Eliot’s American birth, nor his family’s long history in the country. Instead, it casts him as an effete aristocrat who shows no interest in the current state or future of an American literature: he “winces at Americanisms” and “admit[s] he had little knowledge of U.S. Poetry or interest in it” (35).

## **Fashioning American Style**

*Time* certainly does not stand alone in its equation of Eliot with modernism, nor in its skepticism about his cosmopolitan style. Early critiques of modernism often conflated literary experimentalism with a perceived threat of foreign infiltration, so much so that in 1923 Royal Cortissoz would brand it “Ellis Island Art” (Qtd. in *Reading 1922* 143).<sup>12</sup> The point of tracing this de-nationalization of Eliot, then, is not to position *Time* Inc. as Eliot’s lone critic, or to uncover the corporation as unlikely New Modernists. Instead, I want to show how *Time* marks modernism’s version of formal experimentation as foreign, opaque, and undemocratic so as to create space for their own “new kind of literature” that can now

be read as the sole descendent of the American tradition. Though Time Inc. magazines have come to be something like background noise among popular magazines in America, in 1923 the company found itself in a rather similar situation to T.S. Eliot and other modern authors: attempting to differentiate itself among a field of more established and reputable competitors. Henry Luce and Britton Hadden, the magazine's founders, publishers, and editors-in-chief, explicitly planned for their editorial style to mark itself as recognizably new, as "add[ing] an appreciable something to American prose" (Qtd. in Elson 5). More specifically, they hoped to represent in their pages a "faith in the things money cannot buy," "respect for old manners," and "interest in the new" – three tenets that could sit comfortably next to Eliot's version of the literary "Tradition," which reads true innovation as consciously speaking to and augmenting the past (Qtd. in Elson 5). The magazine's version of experimentation, then, could very well suffer the same critique that they level against Eliot – and in fact it does, again and again. The inverted sentence structures, chatty tone, and aggressive compression of content and words that define the magazine's eponymous *Time*-style was consistently mocked by other publications. Perhaps the most famous is Walcott Gibbs' 1936 *New Yorker* profile of Henry Luce, in which his joke about *Time*-style, "backwards ran sentences until reeled the mind," originates (21).<sup>13</sup> In this light, the authors of *Time* had to worry not just about the competition of Eliot and his new literary movement, but that they might be mistaken for a similar group of hoaxers.

To understand this claim, it is useful to back up and look at the problem in American prose that *Time* saw itself responding to, and how that response differs from the innovations of modernism. "As it is now," wrote Luce in the early 1920s, "people have to think too hard as they read" (Qtd. in Elson 6). In this period, modernist literature took most of the blame for the mental difficulties of reading. However, Luce's most immediate referent is not "the

difficulties of modernism,” to use Richard Poirer’s phrase for the “proposition that the act of reading should entail difficulties analogous to those registered in the act of writing” (126). Certainly, these difficulties are plentiful; one might convincingly, if vaguely, define modernist style as that which requires people to “think too hard.” And as we have seen, *Time* repeatedly disparaged modernism. However, above Luce is responding to the difficulties of an over-saturated print landscape, one that does not offer a method of evaluating the relative worth of publications before actually reading them. Counterintuitively, Luce points out the difficulty of mass culture, which is difficult precisely because there is so much of it. For *Time*, modernism and mass culture both fall short of the reader’s needs, though they do so in different ways: the former by a dearth of readily available meanings, the latter by supplying too many.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, *Time* combats the overabundance of information available to its reading public by compressing vast amounts of information into four-hundred word stories, and attempting a “complete ORGANIZATION of the news,” to quote its 1922 Prospectus. This organization depends upon a single corporate voice that can corral all of mass culture into a single conversation, providing a unified point of view. Time Inc.’s advertising material will later describe this tone “as if by one man, for one man,” a phrase that Marshall McLuhan reads as indicative of Time Inc.’s attempt to fight back the “irrationalism” of periodical culture by providing the reader with an identifiably “smart” perspective that predigests national and world events (3).<sup>14</sup> The point of experimenting with “American prose,” then, is to streamline American culture, to transmit it more efficiently as well as to make its content more uniform. In this way, the issue of editorial form becomes a problem of national competitiveness. And *Time*’s “organization” becomes a way to tie into the professional-managerial class’ desire for specialized knowledge, as well as mark itself as

the torch-bearer for a national American culture – “Curt, Clear, Complete,” to quote another *Time* self-description that diametrically opposes the magazine’s representation of the “secret cabal” of youthful literati. Yet, just when the new magazine *Time* enters the print ecology hoping to contribute something to American prose, the new kind of literature represented by Eliot’s *The Waste Land* starts winning American literary awards and making a name for its own experimentation. The magazine marks modernism as simultaneously foreign and meaningless so as to distinguish its own formal experimentation as the rightful descendent of American letters.

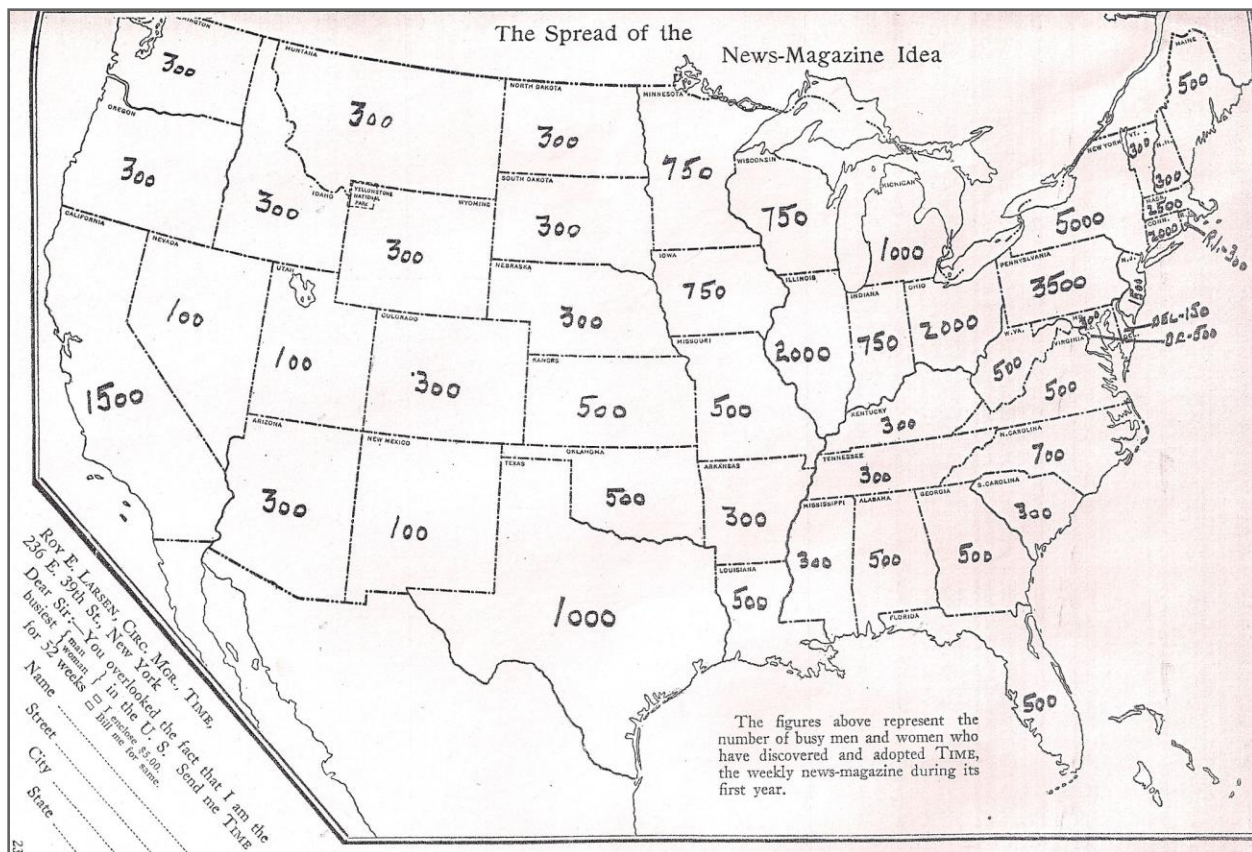
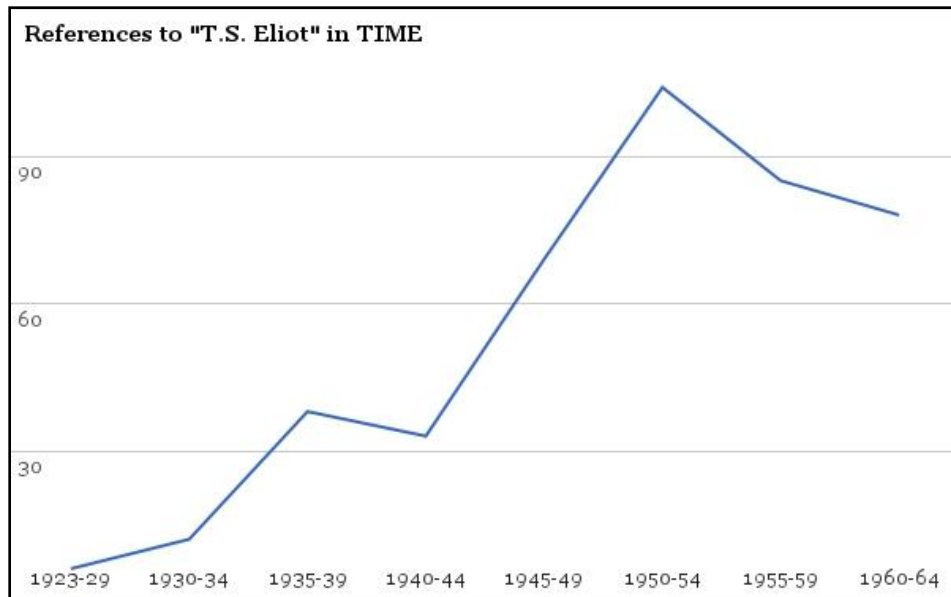


Figure 8. The Spread of the News-Magazine Idea. *Time*, 1924.

Time Inc. places itself as the true innovator of American letters at the same time that it invents a nationalized readership in its own image. The desire of *Time* to become a mouthpiece for America can be seen in a 1924 advertisement boasting the consistency of subscription numbers across the continent (See Figure 8). Making allowances for differences in population between states, the advertisement numerically visualizes its own spread from New York to California. From here, one can see the implicit nationalizing project of *Time*: if everyone is reading the same news magazine, and that magazine makes sure that everyone has the time and inclination to read it cover-to-cover, then readers separated by geographic distance can still occupy and participate in the same informational and textual space. It specifies Benedict Anderson's imagined community from all of print culture to a single magazine. In the publishers' minds, *Time's* famous red border becomes a national border, as well as a recognizable corporate insignia.

## **Eliot in the Atomic Age**

So far this chapter has asserted a connection between *Time's* formal experimentation with news writing and its condemnation of T.S. Eliot, who for them metonymically represents cosmopolitan modernism at large. This story lines up chronologically with how and when Eliot and Eliot-as-modernism are usually positioned: the early 1920s as the height of their cultural importance. However, when one looks quantitatively at Eliot's appearance in a mainstream American magazine like *Time*, the historical location of his dominance looks a little different (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9. References to T.S. Eliot in *Time*, 1923-1964.**

Between its first issue in 1923 and 1929, *Time* only mentions him five more times, all but ignoring (or forgetting) the colossal threat that Eliot and his ilk posed in the first issue. In fact, as this chart shows, Eliot's peak in *Time* does not happen until after World War II, when between 1950 and 1954 he is mentioned over 100 times, with over 60 occurrences between 1950 and 1951. Granted, this is only one magazine, and it could be the statistical idiosyncrasy of looking at a single title; however, in important ways I want to suggest that this one magazine is *the* magazine of mid-century American culture.

To make sense of how Eliot transforms from an international threat to American letters into a self-portrait of *Time's* own nationalist project, we need to address several aspects of postwar print culture. By the 1940s, *Time* and the other Time Inc. publications, especially *Life*, unquestionably stood on top of the American print marketplace.<sup>15</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, Luce had amassed the largest, most profitable print empire in the world, while the little magazines that helped circulate and partially subsidize modernist print culture were almost completely wiped out by the Great Depression.<sup>16</sup> Whereas in the 1920s *Time*



attempted to forge a single national voice through its magazine, beginning in the 1940s the emphasis shifted to broadcasting that voice to an international audience.<sup>17</sup> The first clear statement of this goal can be found in Henry Luce's "The American Century," published in *Life* in February 1941. The essay makes the case that Americans suffer something like national *ennui*, an anxious boredom located in their refusal to take responsibility for the fact that "their nation became in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the most powerful and the most vital nation in the world" (63). Luce's essay begins, "We Americans are unhappy. We are not happy about America. We are not happy about ourselves in relation to America. We are nervous – or gloomy – or apathetic. As we look out at the rest of the world we are confused; we don't know what to do. As we look out at the rest of the world, we are confused" (61). Unlike the British, who "are calm in their spirit not because they have nothing to worry about but because they are fighting for their lives," Americans "do not have to face any attack tomorrow or the next day ... so now all our failures and mistakes hover like birds of ill omen over the White House, over the Capitol dome and over this printed page" (61). The "ill omen" hanging over the page will only recede when the reader realizes that "we are in a war to defend and even to promote, encourage and incite so-called democratic principles throughout the world" (62).

While Luce's essay often, and rightly, is read as an argument against Roosevelt's perceived political and military isolationism (and an argument, paradoxically, for full-on militarization as an antidote to the fear of world war), it ends by stating that the binary between isolation and interventionism is a false one. The global scale thoroughly colors all aspects of one's daily life, and a general ignorance of this fact, ultimately, underlies American dissatisfaction. Luce's real goal, as the essay closes, entails transforming the basic experience of global connectedness into a specifically American enterprise. "We can make a truly

*American* internationalism something as natural to us in our time as the airplane or the radio,” writes Luce (64). For him to imagine the global proliferation of American influence in terms “as natural to us” as transportation and communication technologies underscores the strangeness of such a statement. Airplanes and radios connect different people in different places, but Luce’s vision of an American Century is the world as a singularity, something Marshall McLuhan describes as the periodical press’ presentation of the “the world as one city.” (5). In Luce’s American Century there would be no real need for airplanes or radios because everything and everywhere would be exactly the same.

The best way to begin this process of American internationalism, he conjectures, is to piggyback the political sphere onto the one on which “we” Americans already have a foothold. Once we commit to the idea of national dominance over the international community,

We shall be amazed to discover that there is already an immense American internationalism. American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products, are in fact the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common. Blindly, unintentionally, accidentally and really in spite of ourselves, we are already a world power in all the trivial ways – in very human ways. (65)

The soft power of American culture seeped over foreign borders without even knowing it, and he explains that one cannot argue against the eventuality of American cultural hegemony any more than one can argue against America’s involvement in the war. Though Luce’s statement follows a long tradition of American exceptionalism, and foreshadows most neo-

conservative formulations of the moral imperatives of nation building, his vision of cultural imperialism is unique for three reasons. First, it begins with an insistence on the fundamental dissatisfaction that “we Americans” feel after taking over the world. Luce’s jingoism registers a deep skepticism about the prospects of an American Century. Second, as Andre Malraux would later echo, it carries a great excitement about the possibility that America has gone half-way toward becoming a world power without trying to do so – or, put another way, that global influence was beyond intentionality and instead followed some pseudo-Hegelian internal logic of world history. Lastly, he asserts the fundamental need to export a unified American culture as the seedbed for “so-called democratic principles” and the free-market capitalism that will allow his magazine to thrive elsewhere.

What connects the first two points – that American internationalism is both beyond intentionality and bears an epistemological skepticism – to the last is the emphasis on culture. The “trivial” yet “very human ways” to expand American influence depend on a powerful image and a unified message, “a vision of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to which we can and will devote ourselves.” This “vision” must encapsulate “from Maine to California the blood of purposes and enterprise and high resolve” (65). For Luce, the best way to achieve this, as he alludes to above, is by targeting the “human” element. The technologies of cultural transmission belong to America – the cinema, the radio, industrial machinery, intellectual property, airplanes, radios – yet he desires a well-crafted content to capture hearts and minds. In a different context he explains, “No idea exists outside a human skull – and no human skull exists without hair and a face and a voice – in fact the flesh and blood attributes of a human personality” (Qtd. in Elson 86). And the most effective way to affix ideas to skulls, as the cover of almost every *Time* and the photographs of every *Life* show, is to focus on a single person who can stand in for everyone else. According to Luce, “People just

aren't interesting in the mass. It's only individuals who are exciting," and the visual language of *Time* and *Life* bear out this Great Man approach to effective news reporting, as well as cultural imperialism (Qtd. in Brinkley 130).

Because the exportation of American culture depends on its internal cohesiveness, "The American Century" argues that both regionalism and provincialism are things of the past: "America is already the intellectual, scientific, and artistic capital of the world. Americans – Midwestern Americans – are today the least provincial people in the world" (65). And now that the uninteresting national mass has become a bunch of exciting individuals, they need a representative. For the majority of the 1940s and 1950s, Time Inc. will attach its American internationalism to the "hair and face and voice" of T.S. Eliot, whose own path runs from Midwestern provincialism to international renown. As *Time* explains in the opening sentence of its article covering Eliot's 1948 Nobel Prize, "The 20th Century needed a poet (at least) to explain it to itself, and a good place for a 20th Century poet to be born was St. Louis, Mo" ("1,000" 32). Since the mid-1920s, Eliot's place in literary culture had changed just as drastically as that of Time Inc. He became a British citizen in 1927, converted to the Anglican Church, made his famous tri-partite assertion of royalism, classicism, and conservatism, quit Lloyd's Bank and became an editor at Faber & Faber, edited the little magazine *The Criterion*, received honorary doctorates from the most prestigious American and British universities, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948, and wrote several successful plays, most recently *The Cocktail Party* (1949). In short, Eliot had migrated from the leading edge to the comfortable middle of the world of letters. Like Luce's characterization of America's ascendance, Eliot's gradual move toward the center of culture also appeared unconscious. When Anders Osterling presents Eliot with the 1948

Nobel Prize in literature, he claims that Eliot is unlike his predecessors because his rise to literary fame seemingly happened against his own will:

His career is remarkable in that, from an extremely exclusive and consciously isolated position, he has gradually come to exercise a very far-reaching influence. At the outset he appeared to address himself to but a small circle of initiates, but this circle slowly widened, without his appearing to will it himself. (431)

Osterling presents a somewhat different take on the intentionlessness of modernism. Rather than a specific account of literary style, it is attuned to the way an author's reputation travels outside of his control.

The themes that Osterling brings up in his assessment of Eliot forecast many interpretive trajectories of Eliot's career: he "has arrived at a meditative music of words," he "rises from the ocean like a rocky peak and indisputably forms a landmark," his work is "impressed with the stamp of strict responsibility and extraordinary self-discipline," and he "has been an eminent poser of questions, with a masterly gift for finding the apt wording" to express the difficulties of his time (432). He is singular, self-disciplined, and has a knack for turning complex questions into aptly worded musical phrases. More than this, his poetry – especially *The Waste Land* – has proven especially transportable in its interpretive possibilities, so that "his catastrophic visions still have undiminished actuality in the shadow of the atomic age."<sup>18</sup> "Just in our time," Osterling contends, Eliot's poetry displays "a capacity to cut into the consciousness of our generation with the sharpness of a diamond" (431-2). Eliot is particularly fit for moving from a "consciously isolated" to a central position – one that can represent an entire generation (any generation) – because of the congruity between his

formal difficulty and the ease with which one can “impress” upon that form whatever cultural anxieties seem most pertinent at the time. According to Osterling’s summation, Eliot’s poetry is uniquely suited to presentist interpretations. Eliot can be championed as a relevant “atomic age” poet only when one trades the context of a text’s production for that of its reception, creating an infinitely moving historicism always attuned to the now.

Eliot in the atomic age may feel like an anachronism, but this is not the only site of this strange vision. Eliot appeared on the cover of *The Atlantic Monthly* in February of 1951; the magazine published “Poetry and Drama,” a speech he gave in November 1950 as part of the Theodore Spencer Lectures at Harvard. The next article in the magazine was one written by the novelist and long-time *New Yorker* editor, Philip Wylie, called “A Better Way to Beat the Bomb.” It forecast an age in which the threat of atomic destruction would drive urban populations out of city-centers, clogging the bridges and roads that leads out American metropolises. This is a quite different picture than the Dante-esque millions undone while crossing the bridge into London that Eliot writes of in *The Waste Land*, but this juxtaposition of modernist poetry and atomic fallout suggests that there is something to Osterling’s statement of Eliot’s continued and continuous relevance

In other words, Eliot’s circulation in the postwar period relies upon the reluctance to pin down a definite interpretation of either him or his work. More accurately, Eliot’s usefulness depends upon him being receptive to all comers. An example from Osterling’s speech, the one most relevant to Eliot’s re-patriation as an archetypal American writer, cites his simultaneous localism and cosmopolitanism. He was “born an American,” but “his years of study as a young man at the Sorbonne, at Marburg, and at Oxford, clearly revealed to him that at bottom he felt akin to the historical milieu of the Old World” (433). Like Henry James before him, Eliot is the modern American abroad, the perfect vessel through which to

perceive the changing of the cultural guard from “Old” European to “New” American.<sup>19</sup>

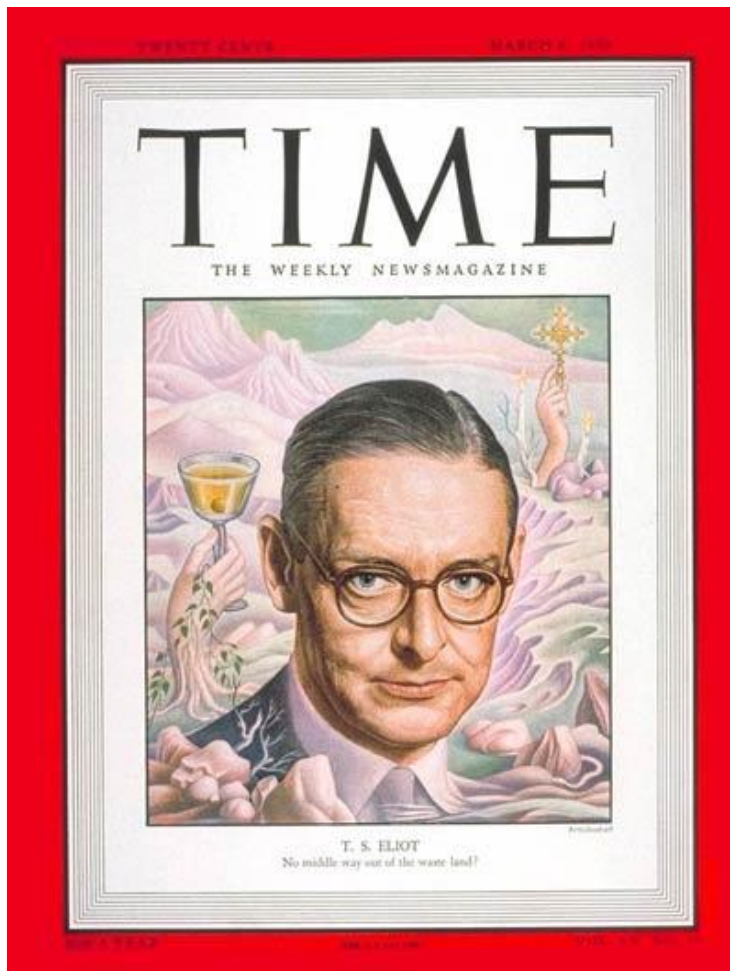
This institutionally sanctioned and thoroughly canonized image of Eliot provides the perfect body and voice to which Luce can attach his American Century because, like the media technologies championed in his essay, Eliot is already both American and abroad.

A 1954 *Life* article by T.S. Matthews says that “In England he seems synthetically American; in America he seems synthetically British” (56). The same article praises Eliot’s post-war oeuvre for being “as smooth as a gumdrop,” and for the fact that it “can be taken in with the same lack of effort.” Though Eliot addresses serious topics and themes like “the mystery of reality, and loneliness, and love, and paying the piper,” “none of these themes intrudes itself in any painful or even provocative way” (54). *Time*’s coverage of the 1948 Nobel Prize makes a similar claim about his pre-war poetry, specifically *The Waste Land*, the same poem that it lambasted in 1923 as the beginning of the end of literature as such. With 25 years to think about it, the magazine intriguingly refers to *The Waste Land* as “not mere poetic journalism,” even though it has “the immediacy of a headline” and “the memorableness of a song that is easy to hum” (“1,000 Lost Golf Balls” 32). That is, rather than the hallmark of what Richard Poirier refers to as “the difficulty of modernism,” it now might be mistaken by readers as too clear. *Time* sees itself saving the poem from oversimplicity. The magazine claims that “the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had no difficulty in recognizing itself” in *The Waste Land*, but that it is more than mere reportage.

## **Our Eliot**

In March of 1950, exactly twenty-seven years after that first review of *The Waste Land*, Eliot appears the cover of *Time*. If we look at the visual representation of Eliot the

magazine leads with, there are very few edges at all (see Figure 9). Over the caption “No middle way out of the waste land?” Eliot’s stern visage occupies the middle of a depopulated natural landscape, full of mountains, canyons, and flowing streams. Two disembodied arms, one on either side of him, raise a chalice wrapped in laurels and a golden cross, which we can take to be the paired symbols of his literary and theological projects to set culture back on its correct Christian path.



**Figure 10. "No Middle Way Out of the Waste Land?"**  
*Time*, 1950.



Whereas the *Time* of the 1920s took great pains to distance Eliot from an American setting, here we find him re-centered in a national milieu, the majesty of these purple mountains alluding to their native American grounds. Eliot, along with the hands that raise up his cup and cross, seem to grow directly out of the soil, with the river in the foreground blending seamlessly into his tie and shirt. The landscape speaks through Eliot, and the poet, looking directly into the face of the reader, speaks directly to *Time's* audience.<sup>20</sup> The “middle way out of the waste land” visualized here is none other than Eliot – the poet as an extension of a Romantic American character.

The accompanying article attempts to extend Eliot's influence beyond the “few Americans” who care to know him, but it also re-positions him as having always been one of them. Some of Eliot's poetry might be opaque, but in habit and temperament he is as American as the day is long. The magazine refers to him as “The American Master” who taught his English students how to play baseball; it emphasizes the “human Mr. Eliot who loves Bourbon and the Bible, both of which he used to keep on his night table (in austerity England he settles for pink gin)”; it quotes Conrad Aiken reminiscing about “tall, dapper Tom Eliot” in his Harvard days, who alternately takes up boxing, “proudly sports a shiner,” and often jovially stumbled out of a “punch party” held at the *Lampoon's* offices (23). Baseball, bourbon, the Bible, bloodsport: short of homemade apple pie or a fondness for John Philip Sousa, the author runs down the list of recognizably “American” characteristics and attaches them to someone who has voluntarily expatriated for the last thirty years. And that, it would seem, is the point: In *Time's* telling, Eliot serves as an ambassador of national culture. He already exports America to other countries via his chosen exile and his cultural work, be it the poem or the classroom – or the poem in the classroom.

As to why, of all possible professions, a poet should take up this role, we might turn to Eliot's own Nobel lecture, in which he extols the transnational and utopian possibilities of poetry. Poetry, unlike sculpture, painting, architecture, or music, is inherently tied to one's language: it is "the most local of the arts. Poetry, it might seem, separates people rather than uniting them" because of the basic fact that one's reading is tied to one's fluency. Yet, Eliot surmises, one need only look at the Nobel Prize itself, its "function" and "peculiar symbol," to witness the "supra-national value of poetry" (436). Different nations, cultures, and languages interact through the "small minority" who can "acquire an understanding of each other which, however partial, is still essential" (436). The transmission and circulation of language, and especially difficult language like poetry, can create a "world republic of letters," to use Pascale Casanova's term. Eliot espouses his belief in the collaborative project of writing, so that a poet always represents one's own "tradition," and comes to be the physical medium by which that tradition runs up against and changes other traditions. A poet writes in "the voices of all the poets of other languages who have influenced him ... and at the same time he himself is speaking to younger poets in other languages, and these poets will convey something of his vision of life and something of the spirit of his people" (436). Certainly, this statement of cross-pollination between languages and cultures might be read as the height of a global utopian ethics; and this very well might be the meaning behind Eliot's statement. However, it isn't hard to see how Luce could turn this statement about poetry's ability to influence the intellectuals of other nations into another form of American internationalism. Another way of framing a poet's transmission of "something of the spirit of his people" into the minds of other types of people is to say that the "American Century" will be won discursively.

Time Inc.'s version of Eliot has two feet firmly planted in American soil, even if he spends most of his time in England, professes allegiance to the Anglican Church, and gave up American citizenship in 1927. For the writer here, Eliot's British passport cannot undo his ancestral Americanness. The article goes to many lengths to show this. Unlike the 1923 review of *The Waste Land*, it repeatedly emphasizes Eliot's familial roots. It provides a standard biography of the mid-western boy from a Boston family, playing up the man who loves both the Mississippi and Massachusetts. It also takes a different tack than the 1936 "Tom to T.S." article by showing how his fondness for Americanisms has survived his new citizenship, and how this emotional attachment might be read as a version of cultural nationalism. "Once, on the Fourth of July, at a solemn board meeting of Faber & Faber," the author writes, "he set off a bucketful of firecrackers between the chairman's legs" (25). Here, the foreign insurrection that Eliot's indecipherability transforms into a patriotic rebellion against English seriousness. It is an infantilized American revolution that stands up to the boringness of board meetings, and for the inalienable right to not work on holidays.

*Time* also reinterprets Eliot's poetry as an outgrowth of his native pragmatism. Instead of casting him in the role of avant-garde antagonist, the *Time* writer sees the poet as he sees himself, and also how he imagines all readers see themselves. In fact, *The Waste Land* now stands as a metaphor for the the unity and clarity of Eliot's entire social policy. The author writes that the poem resembles a "kaleidoscopic mirror held up to the age – a patched mirror which at first seems to reflect only a heap of broken images, but which, to a longer view, blends them into a single bizarre picture, at once as strange and as familiar as one's own face (or one's own city)" (24).<sup>21</sup>

Instead of quoting the last eight lines to exhibit the senselessness and unoriginality of *The Waste Land*, the author salvages the micro-level disarray through its macro-level order, a

“patched” mirror out of “broken images” that “blends” rather than fragments. In this revision, the age itself was indecipherable until Eliot reintegrated it into a unified “tableau of aimlessness” (rather than aimlessness itself), full of “sharp, unsentimental lyricism” that “touched a hidden spring in the century’s frightened, shut soul” (24). There is a similar permeability between literary form and social formation here as in 1923, the difference being that now the poem-as-mirror clearly sheds light on complexity, rather than being complex and unclear for its own sake.

Rather than embodying the threat of European culture on American values, the poem is read as a comment on that threat from a nationalist perspective. The contemporary barrenness in *The Waste Land*, according to the author, is a specifically Continental problem:

More & more clearly, Eliot saw and recorded the crumbling of European civilization; more & more sharply, his verse photographed the human ruins – an old man waiting for death in a rented house; a tuberculous courtesan calling for lights in decaying Venice; Apeneck Sweeney at an all-night party where, in a soaring descant above the all-erasing vulgarity, “The nightingales are singing near / The Convent of the Sacred Heart ...” (25).

*European* society is falling apart under the weight of its own aristocratic rituals, its courtesans, its decadence and vulgarity. Neither the mechanical automation of subjectivity (the typist’s grammophonic arm) nor the vulgarization of high culture (“O O O O that Shakespearean rag”) – two decline narratives often positioned as specifically American failings – are the problem. Instead, continental culture becomes its own worst enemy, and, for *Time*, an American Eliot is the great chronicler of aristocratic demise. In 1923, a “semi-secret cabal”

tried to “put over” Eliot as the greatest American poet, but here the literary society he represents looks like an Electoral College: “the lost generation . . . voted Eliot their most representative poet,” his old coterie retroactively figured as literary democrats. The article, in all of its representations, places him at the center of an ascendent democratic impulse that it thoroughly associates with America and, now, with Eliot.

The final irony, or maybe inevitability, of Eliot’s re-patriation is that in this new interpretation, he bears a strong resemblance to *Time*. The “complex thoughts in catchy (if complex) rhythms” that the reviewer praises in Eliot begin to look a lot like what the magazine saw itself contributing to American print culture. If Eliot and his “new kind of literature” must be deported in 1920s so as to differentiate Time Inc.’s own identification with American prose, then the goal of American internationalism can recast Americans abroad as images of the global circulation of national culture. More than that, the article can re-position the 1920s Eliot as engaged in the same project as *Time*: they both describe the contemporary scene in more accurate and efficient language. The magazine can also claim that readers enjoy Eliot for the same reason that they enjoy *Time*: “They like Eliot for being clever, and at the same time clear,” which sound remarkably like the characteristics that *Time* wants for itself – and diametrically opposed to the unclear and unclear social radicals that *Time* aligns with Eliot in the ‘20s. In the article writer’s hands, the work that goes into writing and editing *The Waste Land* is analogous to the process of collating an issue of *Time*. “The splinters” that Eliot brings together “mirror images from other poems, from legend, or from history,” which situates Eliot alongside Time Inc. as a second-order observer of modernity, piecing together previously existing texts into a single work more congenial to the cultural situation of its readers. In their reformulation, modernist poetry no longer withholds meanings or forces the audience to read difficult texts; instead, it is exactly like

*Time*, shedding light and aggregating disparate types of knowledge. As T.S. Matthews writes in *Life*, Eliot's poetry works so well "because it put the modern situation into memorable words. Almost anybody who could read it could see and recognize that the waste land is the modern world. Almost anybody, whether he appreciated all the poem's ironies or not, could feel the force of [his] lines" (58). Eliot's work not only holds a mirror up to his readers, but to Time Inc. and its two most successful magazines as well. And in this way, the poet's face in *Time* is a redundancy, a self-portrait on its own cover, a comment not only on Eliot's reputation and cultural capital but also on those features of *Time*.

## Forgetting "Mr. Eliot"

*"One seems to become a myth, a fabulous creature that doesn't exist."  
– T.S. Eliot (Ackroyd 289)*

In a *Time* piece from 1960, T.H. White contends Eliot has become one of the "poets unfashionable." "He is out – due for the chop. Eliot is no longer cool. He's square" ("People"). The rough exterior of Eliot's modernist aesthetic have been smoothed away so that he becomes predictable and approachable, reshaped by the most damning of judgments: "square." And to be called "square" by an author of young-adult fiction in the pages of *Time* (the blurb that follows this Eliot article carefully dissects the impact Bob Hope's rheumatoid arthritis on his comedic persona) must be a truly difficult pill to swallow for one of those formerly outrageous "Men of 1914." As Peter Ackroyd summarizes, around this time "he was wondering if his fame meant that his writing had only a contemporary appeal ... he complained that people now thought of him as a celebrity rather than a poet." Or, even

worse, that he “had ceased to be a poet and had become an institution” (300). In this last section, I’d like to unpack how in postwar interpretations of Eliot the judgment of difficulty moves from the poetry to the poet, and how this transposition of terms bleeds into his postwar writings. The goal here is to end by suggesting how we might read the periodical appropriations of Eliot’s image back into how he envisions the cultural significance of his past work.

The ease with which his name takes on meanings in *Time* and *Life* seem in direct conflict with the gravitas of his work and professional carriage. The 1950 *Time* cover story gestures toward this incongruity by, of all things, quoting Eliot’s early poetry. It reprints the most famous of Eliot’s “Five-Finger Exercises,” which begins:

How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!  
With his features of clerical cut,  
And his brow so grim  
And his mouth so prim  
And his conversation, so nicely  
Restricted to What Precisely  
And If and Perhaps and But ... (“Reflections” 22)

Along with its display of the about-face Time Inc. has taken in representing Eliot’s poetry, this selection suggests that the site of Eliot’s obscurity has shifted. The “exercise” of the poem finds Eliot ironizing his own public image, the interpretive leap from Eliot as author of Prufrock to Eliot-as-Prufrock that both enables and limits the poet’s reputation. If Eliot arrives at poetic impersonality through the masks of other narrative voices, then here we

have the rather strange situation of *Time* suggesting that, at the level of authorial personality, “Mr. Eliot” is also one of many personae. The *Time* author explains that there are “many different Mr Eliots – the shy and the friendly, the sad and the serene,” and – the one most amenable to a popular readership – the “Mr. Eliot who expresses complex thoughts in complex (if catchy) rhythms” (23).<sup>22</sup> Eliot the poet has replaced his texts as the uninterpretable artifact. Hugh Kenner’s *The Invisible Poet* formulates this point in slightly different terms, defining Eliot’s poetic masks – Prufrock in particular – as “a name plus a Voice” or a “pseudo-person” (40, 41). In fact, Kenner’s entire theory of Eliot’s poetics starts from a similar position to that espoused by *Time*; he writes that Eliot “can give, for readers and interviewers alike, consummate *imitations* of the Archdeacon, the Publisher, the Clubman, the Man of Letters in Europe, the Aged Eagle, the Wag, and the Public-Spirited Citizen ... The only role he refuses to play is the Poet” (x). Yet for all the self-fashioning that Kenner lays out, Eliot’s “Five-Finger Exercise” reinforces the caricature of Eliot-as-Prufrock rather than deflates it; it finds Eliot playing up his caricatured persona. The playful Edward Lear-style in some ways simply extends the quotation-based composition model that helped create the image of Eliot as a bookish and bloodless killjoy in the first place. Eliot transitions from composing poetry that footnotes other poets to quoting his own public image, the “Mr. Eliot” who was produced equally by his own poetry and by his reputation circulating in the printed words of others.

In Kenner’s reading, the poetry now makes sense: “it is no longer necessary to testify to his lucidity” (ix). Instead it is the poet, the identity behind the texts, who achieves his authority through “inscrutability” (x). More specifically, he argues that Eliot’s authority comes from said “inscrutability” coupled with the fact that “his prose is *so quotable*” (x).

And, to address why Eliot can become the face of the American Century for Time Inc., this



formula of inscrutability plus quotability seems to be a big part of the answer. As *Time* writes, “[The] few Americans [who] have had the dubious pleasure of meeting Thomas Stearns Eliot” only know him as “an expatriate, obscurely highbrow poet who wrote an unreadable poem called *The Waste Land* and fathered a catch-phrase about the world ending not with a bang but a whimper.” Now, “Thanks to a Broadway hit called *The Cocktail Party* (*Time*, Jan. 30), his name at last was beginning to be more frequently encountered” (“Reflections” 22). Notice it is “his name” that comes up and not “his poems” or “his work.” This article provides a record of the dramatic change in the nature of Eliot’s inscrutability; from the “unreadable” difficulty of *The Waste Land* (1922), to the “catch-phrase” closing lines of “The Hollow Men” (1925), to the legitimate popularity of *The Cocktail Party* (1949) – from coterie poet to *cause célèbre*, from inscrutable poems to inscrutable person.

The axiomatic quality of “The Hollow Men” provides a vehicle for getting from Point A (indecipherable, obscure, and, importantly, foreign expatriate) to Point B (legible, popular, and worthwhile for Americans to engage with on their own *terra firme*). The poem’s final lines offer a gateway into, if not a better version of, Eliot’s earlier work because of their relative transparency; they are a more accessible gloss of the difficult truths of *The Waste Land*, an epistemological and aesthetic difficulty made more palatable by its memorable phraseology. “This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper” may be dreary in its anti-climatic millennialism, but its sober assessment of the world fits into a quatrain – and better yet, a quatrain that only really has two lines to remember. “Much of his poetry does require close attention,” the *Time* writer explains, “but none of it is muddled and much of it is as catchy as a song hit” (23). As we have seen it is also like a catchy song because it can become

shorthand for a whole host of ideological baggage. It can quickly and parodically describe the Bay of Pigs incident, that infamous failure of American military planning, as it did in 1963 when *Time* began its coverage of that fiasco by quoting “April is the cruellest month breeding /Lilacs out of the dead land ...,” concluding that Kennedy “could subscribe to the notion of April’s cruelty” (“Foreign Relations”). Or, to bring this discussion back to the national unhappiness glimpsed in Luce’s “American Century” essay, Eliot’s poetry can describe the American disposition, as it did in a 1948 *Life* “symposium,” in which the magazine gathered a handful of prominent intellectuals to work through the “pursuit of happiness” in postwar American society. Erich Fromm, Stuart Chase, Sidney Hook, Beatrice Gould (editor of *Ladies Home Journal*), and Henry Luce, among others, came together and produced the “Report of the Round Table,” with all of its Arthurian overtones. The report quotes the title of Eliot’s “The Hollow Men” as representative of the younger generation’s dissatisfaction with the version of happiness available to them, what they see as a blithe social flexibility that “has no moral center from which to build on” (Davenport 98). In the immediate postwar culture of the U.S., Eliot’s name, and the words coupled to it offer a pop-sociological diagnosis for the state of the union – something along the lines of David Reisman’s “other-directed individuals” from *The Lonely Crowd* (1960), only punchier, more provocative, and more transportable. However, the frictionless removal of the final lines of “The Hollow Men” from the rest of the poem, and their rebirth as a slogan of postwar American disaffection, make for strange bedfellows. There is an uneasy slipperiness to the lines’ temporality when they are used to identify the specific experience of several different generations. In 1926 I.A. Richards claimed that Eliot’s poetry voiced the “plight of a whole generation” (278); yet he was referring to his own generation, the one that lived through the Great War. Twenty-two years later, Eliot’s 1925 poem stands in for the discomfort of

*another* generation of young people who are accusing the older generation – that is, Eliot’s generation – of refusing to offer a version of social being that answers to their need for a balance between individuality and *communis sensus*.

When Eliot voices his concern over becoming an institution, or of fading into myth, perhaps he refers to the interpretive slippage and strange inconsistencies that can occur when words and symbols outlive the intentionality of their original context. He addresses such a possibility in a 1956 lecture, “The Frontiers of Criticism,” the context of which attests to his peculiar place in postwar popular culture. It was part of The Gideon D. Seymour Memorial Lecture Series at the University of Minnesota, established to honor a famous Minneapolis journalist by convening once a year to discuss the overlap between journalism and an adjacent discipline. For Eliot, that discipline is literary criticism; two years later Archibald MacLeish will talk about journalism and poetry. Eliot’s lecture was given in a football stadium in front of 14,000 people, what Allen Tate calls “surely the largest audience ever assembled to hear a discourse on literary criticism” (1).

Ironically, the minority culture that T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, and others hoped to create through their work was unprecedentedly large in the postwar period. However, Eliot opens his speech by alluding to the disconnect between his popularity and how much people actually read his work. The talk bills itself as an excursion on “the frontiers of criticism,” but over half of it is a lament for the fact that the last thirty-five years of his work have been reduced to “a few notorious phrases which have had a truly embarrassing success in the world” (7). Despite the forward-looking promise of the speech’s title – to strike out for the “frontier” and take on those topics standing at the limits of culture – he immediately goes about defining the issue by way of references to his 1923 essay “The Function of Criticism.” He says the audience probably knows the essay well, but that perhaps, like most traditions,

its specificity is fading into the cultural ether and taking him with it. The irony, of course, is that Eliot's "embarrassing success" is embarrassing only in so far as it re-enacts the very cultural forgetting that he rails against: for half a century he championed an artist's familiarity with Tradition, and when he becomes a tradition he finds himself decoupled from his own history.

The argument of "The Function of Criticism," which is itself an explicit elaboration of his earlier "Tradition and the Individual Talent," seems to forecast the inevitability of Eliot's eventual personal dissipation. The essay begins as a somewhat surly response to biographical approaches to literary criticism. It ends by asserting his belief in the smallness of literary biography, which focuses almost entirely on individuals, and the more substantial "possibilities of cooperative activity" (76) when one gives up biography, with the caveat that "only the man who has so much to give that he can forget himself in his work can afford to collaborate, to exchange, to contribute" (69). However, when he tries to summarize the context and content of this argument during his delivery of "The Frontiers of Criticism," Eliot claims to have "found it impossible to recall to mind the background of my outburst" (3). Not only this, but upon reading his own work he was "rather bewildered, wondering what all the fuss was about," because he could "not recall a single book or essay, or the name of a single critic" who represent what he apparently found so offensive (3). Part of this calculated befuddlement could very well be an enactment of his earlier piece's success. That is, he cannot remember the names of those functionless critics because he and his followers thoroughly scoured them from the literary field. His own method of reading and writing about literature bludgeoned all contenders into non-existence, so that they neither exist in his mind nor in the paper trail of the archive. While this is at least partially true, this literary cleansing seems also to have taken his own pre-"Function" memory along with it. In fact,

he has a hard time remembering anything he wrote or thought. He says, “I turned to see what I had said,” “I must have thought well of this essay ten years later,” “it would seem that I must have had in mind,” all within a single paragraph. He concludes his reading of “The Functions of Criticism” by giving up: “I did not, on rereading, find it at all helpful” (3). His “rather bewildered” take on his own writing would suggest that even if the audience of 14,000 is familiar with the actual work that made Eliot someone worth listening to, he is unfamiliar with himself.

What is the point of all this circumlocution? What can we say about this strange scene of T.S. Eliot, the great authority on Culture, standing in the center of a mid-fifties American football field unable to remember exactly what authoritative positions he held in the past that made people want to listen to him? Finally, what connects the inverted trajectories of Eliot’s growing public image and more circumscribed readership? To begin his lecture this way bespeaks the peculiar place he occupies at this time – as a poet, a critic, a cultural authority, and not least of all, as a celebrity intellectual. More than likely, the large crowd was familiar with the Eliot who began gracing the covers of mass-market periodicals in the immediate postwar period. An *Atlantic Monthly* cover from 1951 seems to foreshadow this very scene, overlaying Eliot’s head in front of a giant, empty Greek theater that shares a passing resemblance to the stadium Eliot will fill in a couple years.

Eliot seems aware of the fact that his fame might have taken on a ritualistic dimension, rather than being tied to his specific literary work; it would explain why he found it necessary to give a short summary of his earlier critical project while mocking its youthful vitriol. He is well-known, but he is not necessarily read all that often. His postwar ambition to establish himself as a popular dramatist and to develop what he called a “public speech” could only exacerbate the trend, as it entirely does away with the necessity to read his work

at all. It is fairly easy to conjecture what he thought about being more read about – when one of his “few notorious phrases” is quoted out of context in a magazine or newspaper – than read. Several years before in a cover story for the *University of Chicago Magazine*, he bemoaned the “new illiteracy” that finds an increasing “part of the population which has had its elementary schooling but has become illiterate through lack of occasion to use what it has been taught” (11). The “new phenomenon ... is aggravated by the effect of radio and cinema, and by the replacement, in popular periodicals, of words by pictures” (11). The media-damaged readers “can be classified by the size of type to which they can give attention.” He goes on: “There is a large number who can read a few paragraphs, if the type is large enough. There is an increasing proportion of the population which can only read headlines” (11).

Yet, as we have seen, for thirty years Eliot had provided the content of those headlines that are ruining the intellectual capacity of readers. And, ironically, the mass media appropriates those “notorious phrases” that bring Eliot such embarrassment as catch-phrases to describe the exact social ills that Eliot describes above. In this way, the “frontiers” that he hopes to establish metaphorically cordon off the places that criticism should not tread – that is, his own past – as well as limit the use of his own name and words. Or put another way, he couples the frontiers of criticism to the limits of his own literary reputation. If nothing else, he acknowledges the promiscuous way that print culture can decouple his words from their context, and, in the process, from his ability to manage the spread of his own likeness.

CODA:

## RE-CIRCULATING MODERNISM

From 1933, when he submitted his first article to the first issue of *Esquire* magazine, until the 1964 appearance of his “Paris Sketches” in *Life* (a month before the publication of *A Moveable Feast*), Ernest Hemingway’s literary career was defined by its relationship with mass-market periodicals, and the changes that it represents help us look forward to a new configuration of the literary and the popular after World War II. In titles such as *Time*, *Life*, *Parade*, *Look*, *Holiday*, and *Esquire*, Hemingway appeared as a columnist, a reporter, a short story writer, a memoirist, and, perhaps most frequently, as the photographed face of an internationally circulating American literary culture rooted in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> Hemingway and the big magazines sustained one another, both economically and aesthetically, both literally and figuratively. Periodicals often underwrote the exploits that he would use as the basis for his most popular fiction, such as when the publisher of *Esquire*, Arnold Gingrich, paid \$3,000 towards the purchase of the fishing boat *Pilar* to ensure that Hemingway would write deep-sea fishing stories for the magazine. The resulting “Letters from the Gulf Stream” series brought *Esquire* into the national spotlight as the premiere men’s magazine of the 1930s, but it also provided Hemingway with the kernel for *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), his most popular and critically acclaimed work since *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and the most

immediate cause for his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.<sup>2</sup> Based in nonfiction writing for *Esquire*, *The Old Man and the Sea* also solidifies his relationship with another title, as it is first published in *Life* magazine. With a cover photograph of Hemingway's brooding face staring straight back at the reader, and an assurance that the novella is "an extra dividend" to the normal content of the photo-magazine, the issue sells out of its five-million-copy run within two days. The feat also earned Hemingway the following week's *Time* cover, though he had to share it with the semi-fictional fish from his magazine story.

Along with T.S. Eliot's 1954 "Frontiers of Criticism" speech, which he gave in honor of a newspaper journalist inside of a Minneapolis sports arena to a crowd of 14,000 people, we might read the path of *The Old Man and the Sea* from a column in *Esquire* to a centerfold in *Life* as signaling a new phase of literary modernism's relationship to mass print culture, one characterized not by its posture of insulation from popular print forms, but instead by its full incorporation into both American print culture and what Pascale Casanova calls the "world republic of letters." That is, it stretches to both poles: the high and the low, the national and the cosmopolitan. But, it also stretches to encapsulate both the timeliness of the news and the more lasting ranks (if not necessarily timelessness) of the literary canon and university syllabuses. Hemingway and literary modernism in general are anything but the stuff of a "minority culture," even if, as Paul Goodman argues, literature itself has become a peripheral artistic form, "no longer an art of either the mass-audience or the elite audience" (217).

*The Old Man and the Sea* seems to leak out from itself in all directions, signifying anything but the market-blind, autonomous aesthetic object that so often gets associated with modernist literature. Hemingway wrote a puff piece for himself in the preceding issue of *Life* in which he says that being included in the magazine makes him "much happier than to have a Nobel Prize" – a statement that hindsight fills with dramatic irony (Bucoli 121).



*Life* writes a response to Hemingway's letter, emphasizing that "we are not in the fiction business," but that *Old Man* is part of their mission to "publish a round account of what goes on in the world," urging its audience to find "time to read it during the last long weekend of the summer" ("From Ernest" 124). Hemingway then writes his own introduction to the magazine's publication, he writes a follow up piece in *Life* explaining that there are no symbols, he gets a cover story and review in *Time* the next week ... and the list goes on. If, as Catherine Turner argues, in the 1920s Scribner's (Hemingway's publisher) found ways to ally the "monotonous style and penchant for profanity" of *The Sun Also Rises* with changing definitions of literary quality based on honesty and authentic experience (146), then the publication of *Old Man* may serve as signpost for another epoch characterized by Hemingway's, and literary modernism's, total saturation of the print market.

Certainly, by this point in the century, and by this point in Hemingway's career, it seems fair to ask if we are still talking about modernism at all. After World War II, Hemingway is the most popular writer in America, having undergone what Loren Glass refers to as "the signature career arc" of modernist writers "from the restricted elite audience of urban bohemia and 'little magazines' to the mass audience of the U.S. Middlebrow" (6). Along with this move from the edge to the middle, his status as "writer" recedes to a secondary property of his new celebrity. If two of the key components of literary modernism are formal difficulty and a posture of ambivalence (at least) toward mass culture, then one could argue that the Hemingway of "Letters from the Gulf Stream" and *The Old Man and the Sea* has degenerated into some other generic classification – the middlebrow, the masscult, the popular, the celebrity.

But perhaps a more productive line of inquiry would be to consider how the flattening of Hemingway's reputation into a "signboard for himself" (North 186), and the

accompanying transformation of his literary style into a mass cultural affect, might be seen as an extension of the relationship between American modernism and mass-market magazines that I've been tracing over the last four chapters. What is intriguing about the reduction of Hemingway's fiction to memoir, while at the same time considering it on par with photographs of world news, and of Hemingway-the-novelist's transformation into Hemingway-the-celebrity, is that there is something compellingly literary about it. In interviews he is repeatedly asked about the spread of "the Hemingway style." Malcolm Cowley, in a *Life* article says that anyone who spends any time around him "starts speaking in Hemingway's style" and that his greatest contribution is that he "gave the young people attitudes to strike and patterns of conduct to follow" ("Mr. Papa" 86, 98). According to *Time*, "From Paris bistros to Chicago saloons, he is known as a character – not the sallow, writing type with an indoor soul," but the kind of person that other people want to imitate ("American Storyteller" 70). That is, the affectless monotone prose that characterizes Hemingway's fiction becomes a widely circulating cultural artifact; Hemingway is a character, and a rather flat character whose literary reputation hinges on an almost parodic version of masculinist showmanship – hunting big game, chasing German U-boats off the coast of Florida, attaching himself to any military regiment that will have him during the Allies' invasion of Italy, and pretending like he talks as little as possible while giving interviews to just about any magazine that asks for one.

Rather than characterizing Hemingway's showmanship as a retreat from the fictional into the experiential then, I want to conclude by presenting modernism's cultural saturation of print culture in the 1950s as something like a national style, one that extends fiction into the world outside. Of course, any attempt to parse out exactly what constitutes the "real" has proved a problem in Hemingway's self-construction. From the dust jacket for the

French edition of *in our time* (1924) forward, his prose has been framed as another version of the objective, affectless style of the periodical press. The cover of *in our time* consists of newspaper headlines and advertisements that suggest something both exciting and mundane about the cultural situation the book responds to. The bold, block letters of the newsprint read “Learn French,” “More Americans Arrive in Paris,” “Ritz Carlton,” and “W.E. Corey Makes Plans to Leave America Forever,” and they all connect the literature inside Hemingway’s volume to a contemporary moment defined by transatlantic travel and tourism, as well as the burgeoning cultural industries that help make international exchange easier – everything from language classes to fancy hotels.

The difference between 1924 and 1952, though, is that modernist literature is not only the content of books but also the content of headlines about those books. The quantitative shift in scale from *in our time*’s print run, which numbered in the hundreds, to the five-million copies of *The Old Man and the Sea*, brings with it a move from the periphery to the center of international print culture, as well as a move from the timelessness of literature to the timeliness of the news. Hemingway, who once wrote headlines, is now the topic of them. More than this, the attributes that elevated literary modernism above the banality of the newspaper no longer apply. As Eric Bennet shows, Hemingway’s coupling of “disciplined language” and “disciplined character,” an insistence on the connection between prose form and authorial persona, “aim[s] to attach, or reattach, modernist prose to normative principles of conduct” (548). The irrelevance of abstract ideas, the valorization of concrete experience, and the tempering of political content that mark Hemingway’s best known works get simplified into a version of personal autonomy based on, but not particularly interested in, the modernist conception of aesthetic autonomy. This is well-suited for increasingly diverse population of universities, according to Bennet, as the specific

historical or political context of something like “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” gives way to the “pure present” of literature in the classroom (556).

But along with an increasingly pluralist university public, this re-appropriation of modernist aesthetic autonomy as individual freedom makes Hemingway extraordinarily well-suited to represent a burgeoning middle-class reading public, even if they don’t read anything except the ads. In the 1950s, he can be found everywhere from a centerfold advertisement for Ballantine Ale in *Life* (“You have to work hard to drink it. But I would rather have a bottle of Ballantine Ale than any other drink after fighting a really big fish.”) to an endorsement for Pan American Airlines in *Holiday*. The latter piece mimics Hemingway’s famous paratactic sentence structures: “After the old Key West-Miami-Havana-Bahamas early days, there was the Pacific when you took a day to Midway – another to Wake – one more to Guam – one to Manila – and Hongkong.” The syntactical juxtaposition of place names mirrors the iterative path of the modernist exile, and it lets the reader follow in Hemingway’s hard-scrabble journey from America to the Far East. “Flying in China you had to sweat out many things,” the advertisement informs us, but the one thing “you” don’t have to worry about is getting to Europe safely and cheaply. The headline of the two-page advertisement explicitly situates the postwar reader as a descendent of Hemingway’s Parisian past, stating that now any American can and should lay claim to the lost generation’s legacy. “*Ernest Hemingway says*: Each generation of Americans has to Re-Discover Europe ... Why? Because you’ll see your own country’s destiny more clearly if you spend your next vacation abroad” (Buccoli 112-13, 137-38, emphasis in original). Both advertisements bring together Hemingway’s transnational mobility – what used to be a mark of his place on the periphery – with the postwar globalization of American culture. Everyone now feels like an outsider, or at least wants to have the option of self-exile – and cheap intercontinental transportation has

made that dream possible. Both the Grand Tour and Caribbean adventure have descended from the rarified air of Boston Brahmins and bohemian writers, and settled in the middle of an audience of five million who read *Life* magazine. It is now a national duty to take part in “your own country’s destiny” by spending time abroad: the middle-class now models itself on the style of modernism.

If one looks at the content of midcentury big magazines, it can feel like literary modernism has taken over. Yet contrast this vision of total cultural saturation with a roughly contemporary essay by Malcolm Cowley, “Mr. Papa and the Parricides,” which sounds the alarm that no one actually reads the modernists, especially Hemingway, anymore. The essay, something like a literature review of recent popular treatments of Hemingway, tracks a gradual slimming down of what should be considered the author’s greatest hits. Quoting passages from Leslie Fiedler, Dwight Macdonald, John Thompson, and Vance Bourjaily, Cowley finds that since Hemingway’s death, he has suffered a reverse canonization, where the critical consensus keeps pushing more and more of his work out of circulation every year. First Hemingway was admired for everything up to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, then it was everything up to *The Green Hills of Africa*, then it was *The Sun Also Rises* and all of the short stories, then *The Sun Also Rises* and a handful of stories. Finally, the novels are cut out all together: “The fact is Hemingway is a short-story writer and not a novelist,” he quotes from Dwight Macdonald (“Mr. Papa” 24). While Cowley is helping to construct an American literature anthology, someone argues that they should “omit any reference to his novels” and include only “Big Two-Hearted River.” He goes on:

The next step would be to chip that story down to a single paragraph, presented by critics as the only true essence of his work, from which they could infer the rest of it

much in the fashion that paleontologists reconstruct the skeleton of an extinct animal from a single bone. (25)

“Does nothing survive of the work but a few short stories? Why not toss them out with the novels and finally reduce the Hemingway canon to a blank page?” he concludes (32). And Hemingway’s career is only the most drastic example of this “sapping and pruning” of writers’ life works down to representative phrases; similar fates have befallen Thomas Wolfe and John Dos Passos, and Cowley fears the day when Faulkner and Fitzgerald will see the majority of their work relegated to the dustbin of an ever-tightening canon. What we are faced with, then, if we can keep this double picture of Hemingway Everywhere and Hemingway Nowhere in mind, is a situation in which modernism as a cultural signifier is so widely recognized, almost too obvious, that no one feels the need to actually read it.

But, if one looked at Cowley’s lamentation from the point of view of Hemingway’s own philosophy of composition, the simultaneous outward expansion of the reading public’s knowledge of modernism, and the gradual disappearance of actual texts, seems almost inevitable. In fact, it is exactly how Hemingway describes the logic of the “iceberg theory” in relation to *The Old Man and the Sea*:

[The novel] could have been over a thousand pages long and had every character in the village in it and all the processes of how they made their live, were born, educated, bore children etc. That is done excellently and well by other writers. In writing you are limited by what has already been done satisfactorily. So I have tried to learn to do something else. First I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience to the reader so that after he or she has read something it

will become a part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened. This is very hard to do and I've worked at it very hard.

[...] I've seen the marlin mate and know about that. So I leave that out. I've seen a school (or pod) of more than fifty sperm whales in that same stretch of water and once harpooned one nearly sixty feet in length and lost him. So I left that out. All the stories I know from the fishing village I leave out. But the knowledge is what makes the underwater part of the iceberg. (*Writers at Work* 235-6)

In this version of the “iceberg theory,” there is a gradual shuttling of what one “knows” about the subject from the inside to the outside of the text, or from the surface of the page to below it, “the underwater part.” And as the story begins “conveying experience to the reader,” and as it becomes “a part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened,” the transition from the unknown to experience to knowledge, and hence from what should be included to what should not, continuously empties out the content of his work. In this way, the two versions of Hemingway – the one everyone knows, and the one that no one needs to read – are fundamentally linked together by way of his own aesthetic vision. If one already knows him, he can be left out of the story.

He comes close to this formulation in a small legal skirmish with *Esquire* in 1958. In the 1930s, he published three thematically connected stories about the Chicote's Café during the Spanish Civil War in the magazine, and Gingrich planned to include them in a literary collection called *The Armchair Esquire*. The briefing that Hemingway's lawyer submitted as part of his injunction against using the stories makes it clear that the inside of literary texts are anything but timeless, and that as the cultural context in which they are circulated changes, so does the formal demands of the work: “The passage of time can affect the

writings of authors either favorably or unfavorably.” “Sometimes I correct a story forty or fifty times,” continues Hemingway. “I don’t consider something published unless it is in a book [...] When I looked over those *Esquire* stories I told myself, ‘I can write better than that!’” (Qtd. in Beatty 9,11). And what “better” means, when these stories are eventually published, is a distillation of three into one. A single story, “The Butterfly and the Tank,” survives the transition from magazine to book between 1938 and 1958, which would seem to put Hemingway in the same camp as those that Cowley despises for pruning his corpus of the works that are not absolutely necessary.

Hemingway was famously literal about what *The Old Man and the Sea* contained: “The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The fish is a fish and the boy is a boy. The sharks are sharks for better or for worse” (*Letters* 780). As Thomas Gordon Perrin argues, this reversion to the most literal summation of what is actually inside the story responds to the biographical and psychological interpretations that attempted to make it speak for something outside of itself by finding something beneath the surface of the text. “In the past, hardly anyone ever suspected Hemingway novels of symbolism,” writes a *Time* editor. “Then, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, people saw symbols – the old man stood for man’s dignity, the big fish embodied nature, the sharks symbolized evil (or maybe just the critics)” (“American Storyteller 72). “It’s meaning?,” asks a reviewer, “Critics will find as many meanings as there are critical cults” (“Clean and Straight” 101). “It is all but impossible to read it impressionistically,” Perrin claims, because the novel refuses to hide the fact that its form can be interpreted from even the most average readers (159). College professors and casual magazine subscribers both see that something is going on inside of the story that means something outside of it. The open secret of the hermeneutics of form, according to Perrin,



is the defining feature of modernism in general, and it is one that *The Old Man and the Sea* gives up too easily.

And yet the old man in *The Old Man and the Sea* also seems to searching for, and failing to find, symbols that can make sense of what is happening below the surface of the world he inhabits. Throughout the story he is characterized by his knowledge of the sea and his acclimation to its patterns, but he repeatedly encounters phenomena that he doesn't know how to interpret. He is confused by the general movement of fish around his boat: "[T]hey are working far out and fast. Everything that shows on the surface today travels very fast and to the north-east. Can that be the time of day? Or is it some sign of weather that I do not know?" (40). As the old man fishes – "that which I was born for," he says – he contemplates the same problems of surface and depth that readers of the story also face: how to make sense of what is going on below from the signs that are visible above the water. And the problem seems to be, both for the fisherman and the reader, that it's hard to tell where the surface gives way to something else. Just below his description of "everything that shows on the surface," he makes it clear that "surface" is a tricky thing to define:

The sea was very dark and the light made prisms in the water. The myriad flecks of plankton were annulled now by the high sun and it was only the great deep prisms in the blue water that the old man saw now with his lines going straight down into the water that was a mile deep. (40)

The light is "in" the water, not "on" it; the "great deep prisms" seem to be both inside and on top of the ocean; his fishing lines, which also correspond to the repeated references to the lines on his face, distend from the boat through the surface to "a mile deep." This single

passage, which is not remarkable or particularly different than the rest of the novel, over and over again pushes against the idea that there is a knowable surface that can be separated out from beneath and above.

The surfaces described in the text seem to endlessly feedback into their surroundings, so that the difference between above, on, in, or below becomes less and less familiar. In other sections of the novel, this doesn't seem to be a particular problem because everything is described as exactly like everything else. The old man is repeatedly compared to the sea, to the fish, to the sharks, to an older version of the young boy, to the sky, and, like the lines that both cross his face and travel down into the water, to the tools of his trade. The "Hemingway style" of *The Old Man and the Sea* is a style that he says he "had been working for all [his] life" (Buccoli 121), free of the "awkwardness" of his earlier writings (*Writers at Work* 235). And, at this point in his career, as it spreads out over the cultural landscape – its flatness, its lack of surface and depth, its bleed into the news columns and advertisements, the attitudes and stances of a new generation – it also allegorizes the place of literary modernism as it re-circulates in postwar American magazines. When *Time* asks him if "the Hemingway influence has declined" in recent years, he responds in the "cablese" that made him famous: "Hemingway influence only a certain clarification of the language which is now in the public domain" ("Afternoon" 93). But the content of his telegraphic writing was also *Time's* original mission: to "add an appreciable something to American prose." As we saw with James Agee, *Time*-style also spreads outside of itself into the wider field of print culture. Hemingway's modernism and *Time's* modern newswriting, at first figured as being at cross purposes, come together into a "certain clarification" of the language of American letters – and they come together more literally as the modernist book *The Old Man and the Sea* gets printed in its entirety in *Life* magazine. However, in Hemingway's claim about the reach

of his own style, the referent is unclear: is it the “language” or the “Hemingway influence” that exists in the public domain? Or is that a tautology, like his description of the characters and objects in *The Old Man and the Sea*, which each is simply defined by itself?

Perhaps those aren't the right questions to be asking. Perhaps, instead, we should ask what this conflation of American modernism and big magazines in “the public domain” of a national style can tell us about postmodernism, the artistic movement that is waiting to blossom in a very different type of cultural institution, the university. Frederic Jameson famously describes postmodernism in ways quite similar to how we've been describing the Hemingway of the 1950s: “global, yet American” in its production and circulation, and aesthetically characterized by a form in which “depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces” (12). Keeping Hemingway and Time Inc. in mind could help us to make sense of a work like Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1970), which declares *Time* magazine to be Poet Laureate of the United States and provides Dos Passos-esque capsule biographies of Time Inc., the media corporation, and *Time* and *Life* magazines, as if they were characters in the novel. We could also turn to Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968), his endlessly self-referential diptych on the 1967 March on the Pentagon. Mailer, who perhaps takes the Hemingway model of self-advertisement further than anyone else, begins his foray into literary nonfiction by quoting *Time*'s coverage of his own drunken speech at the Ambassador Theater that began the surreal political theater that ends with a group of protestors attempting to levitate the Pentagon. “Now may we leave *Time* in order to find out what happened,” he begins, incorporating the empty center of *Time*-style into his own account of what really happened (12-13). In the twenty-first century, it would be hard to imagine anyone claiming that any periodical is so well-known and culturally important that it deserves the status as the national representative of letters, as Coover does, or beginning an

experimental nonfiction novel by quoting from a newsmagazine. However in the middle decades of the twentieth century, Coover grew up learning about Hemingway and Eliot in *Time*, and Mailer was just as much a journalist for magazines like *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone* – new hybrids of the big and little magazines – as he was as a novelist. When Coover and Mailer flatten the character of *Time* into their experimental novels, we find yet another generation of American writers interacting with the big magazines.

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*Notes to Introduction*

- <sup>1</sup> Pound directly addresses the cross purposes of aesthetic and economic evaluation in the essay in terms of the international book trade, specifically of American books in France. He laments that since the early 1920s American books are quite often as “good” as French literature, but that they “do not *circulate freely* in Europe because an American book is seldom worth four or five European books. It has cost [sic] four or five times as much. This problem of international communication is a matter of publisher’s economics, not of intellectual standards” (698).
- <sup>2</sup> Scholes and Latham are also the co-directors of the Modernist Journals Project, which devotes its resources to digitizing full and partial runs of magazines published between 1890-1922. They justify this end date by stating that “we are interested in the rise of modernism, which may be considered complete by that date” (“Modernist Journals Project”). I see this project as a challenge to that claim.
- <sup>3</sup> One might characterize this application of close reading to all cultural productions as an upside-down version of the rise of “surface reading” or “distant reading,” a practice in which one reads “for the plot” or “with the grain,” to quote two well-known formulations of the methodology. One reads without addressing the ambiguities of difficult texts, whereas the other reads all cultural texts as deep, rich, and productively ambiguous.
- <sup>4</sup> Szalay’s intervention addresses the impact of New Deal programs on conceptions of artistic production, but more recently he has turned to contemporary corporate funding of the arts. See “The Incorporation Artist.”

*Notes to Chapter 1*

- <sup>1</sup> For the first position, see Linneman, Downs. For the second, see Lee, Woodress. A small minority, most notably M. Catherine Downs, have insisted that some of her journalism is actually good and worthy of treatment in its own right.
- <sup>2</sup> Joan Acocella’s polemic against biographical, psychological, or sexual readings of Cather argues that this line of thought is fundamentally off base, and she takes great offense at the critics who attempt to out the hidden recesses of Cather’s mind, libidinal or otherwise. Mostly, Acocella’s response is to those who crassly take up Cather in a way that she herself would have roundly rejected. Acocella reminds us of Cather’s longstanding misogyny, and how it complicates a feminist or queer recuperation of the author. While Acocella’s work forces one to hedge accounts of Cather’s personal life, it also misses how every reading of Cather brings with it the possibility that she will become someone or something else than what she intended. And, more importantly, that the simultaneous hermeneutic openness of her texts and Cather’s attempt at self-enclosure is doubled in the narrative form of the novels.

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- <sup>3</sup> For Edel, the “paradox of success” for Cather can be found in the mounting popularity of her books as they shrink further and further away from the contemporary moment. Edel argues that the retreat into the past that we find in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* are Cather’s attempt to insulate herself and her writing from mass culture.
- <sup>4</sup> In this regard, one also thinks of Tristan Tzara’s claim in the 1918 Dada Manifesto that “any work of art that can be understood is a work of journalism,” which adds a heuristic difference to the two activities (10).
- <sup>5</sup> Schneirov offers a more detailed account of the battle between the “genteel magazines” and the “cultural entrepreneurs” like McClure who take off in the 1890s.
- <sup>6</sup> This recalls a similar scene in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), in which Jonathan Harker and his fiancée Mina Murray furiously type behind closed doors as a room full of people listen.
- <sup>7</sup> See Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (1992) for a broader discussion of the “body-machine complex” as a guiding methodological precondition of naturalism.

*Notes to Chapter 2*

- <sup>1</sup> White periodicals’ refusal to capitalize Negro was a common complaint in *The Crisis*. See “The Name Negro.”
- <sup>2</sup> For a succinct summary of the positions for and against the periodical boom, see Morrison, 1-8.
- <sup>3</sup> As North points out, McGann almost entirely leaves race out his discussion, despite the fact that Bob Brown and other authors he writes about often compound typographic and racial concerns. Neither does McGann address how the cultural and technological changes surface in African American authors, except for one general sentence about the Harlem Renaissance (“Words” 81).
- <sup>4</sup> Some form of this position about the relationship between technological and formal innovations in print culture, and new methods and forums for documenting (or projecting) the rise of the New Negro, can be found in most studies of the period. See Carroll 89; Castronovo 1444. For an insightful critique of the structural positioning of African Americans outside of print culture, see Dubhey, 1-12.
- <sup>5</sup> See, Gates, “Trope”; Nadell; Baker, Jr.; Goesser; and Smith.
- <sup>6</sup> See especially Foster.
- <sup>7</sup> Du Bois felt strongly enough about this that he would reuse most of this article in his column for the *Chicago Defender* in September 1945.

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- <sup>8</sup> A similar move occurs with the genre magazine boom of the 1920s, where formulaic “pulp fiction” takes its name from the cheap paper stock on which it is printed. In both cases, the respective qualities of physical and literary material are imagined as co-extensive.
- <sup>9</sup> Cheng has recently analyzed representations of and discourses around black skin, particularly of Josephine Baker’s, in the context racialized female celebrity and modernist form.
- <sup>10</sup> The title of Hutchinson’s book about black periodical culture in the 1920s and 1930s, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, alludes to this connection between print and race without extrapolating its implications.
- <sup>11</sup> Sollers discusses the structural likeness of printing stereotypes and cultural stereotypes, but does so without noting that it is not until the early 1920s that the semantic drift from the former to the latter occurs.
- <sup>12</sup> See Moon for a useful summary of the relative reputations and overlapping readerships of these magazines. See Hutchinson and Johnson for more detailed histories of each of these magazines.
- <sup>13</sup> Zurier solely deals with his *The Masses* covers. Morrison uses a Walts pastel from *Masses* for the cover of *Public Face of Modernism*, though he has little to say about Walts’s work in that magazine or in *The Crisis*.
- <sup>14</sup> Fried describes the competing impulses to hide or broadcast the two-dimensionality of the painting canvas as “illusionism” and “literalism,” the first aligned with modernist painting that attempts to transcend its material existence and the second with what he calls the “art of objecthood” that hopes to disassociate itself with art and literalize its relationship to the space outside the field of representation. See “Art and Objecthood,” 118.
- <sup>15</sup> On Fauset’s politics and genre, see Schenk; on feminism see Keyser; on race and sexuality see DuCille. Ammons provides the only major treatment of “The Sleeper Wakes,” in which she argues that the story addresses contemporary anti-immigration policies.
- <sup>16</sup> Chesnutt’s novel was not published until 1998, but it was composed from 1919-1920. Ovington and Chesnutt are the two most obvious precursors because of the historical proximity of their composition to “The Sleeper Wakes” and the institutional affiliation of the authors with *The Crisis* (Ovington as a board member of the N.A.A.C.P., Chesnutt as a judge for the Spingarn medal and, beginning in 1927, namesake of the magazine’s literary prize).

### *Notes to Chapter 3*

- <sup>1</sup> In this volume of nineteen writers recounting their years at *Fortune*, half concur with MacLeish that, if nothing else, writing everyday for a magazine coincided with the most prolific period of their more “individualist” writing.

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- <sup>2</sup> Wilson's otherwise powerful account fully neglects how this "masculinization" of writing affected the careers of the many women authors in the period, a situation that Chapter 1 of this study hopes to at least partially rectify. According to Susan Coultrap-McQuin's *Doing Literary Business* (1990), women faced a similar definition of authorship, one that focused on market orientation and masculine publicity. Also Jennifer Fleissner argues in *Women, Compulsion, Modernity* (2004) that fundamental shifts in the division of labor allow one to read naturalism as fundamentally invested in feminist concerns.
- <sup>3</sup> In this regard, one also thinks of Tristan Tzara's claim in the 1918 Dada Manifesto that "any work of art that can be understood is a work of journalism," which adds a heuristic difference to the two activities.
- <sup>4</sup> This situation lasts long after the period in question, though the terms and positions slightly alter. Rarely does a contemporary writer get worked up over modernism, yet critiques of modernism live on under different auspices: they are generalized, like Jonathan Franzen's argument against "experimental fiction," or address a certain type of experimental fiction, like James Woods' critique of "hysterical realism." No matter the breadth of the argument, though, the argument itself gains cultural import by its location in mass-market periodicals.
- <sup>5</sup> "I wish I knew how to work," MacDonald remembers Agee saying, which puts a slightly different spin on Agee's despondency about writing for *Fortune*.
- <sup>6</sup> Though there may be a disconnect between talent and tasks, Agee was known as one of the most brilliant chroniclers of mass culture while working for Time Inc., especially in his role as *Time's* film critic.
- <sup>7</sup> The 1948 film adaptation makes this even more explicit. A giant clock dominates the lobby of the office building, and near the end of the film he must fight off corporate lackeys while hiding behind gears on the inside of the time-piece.
- <sup>8</sup> Funding highbrow endeavors with popular projects certainly is not unique to Fearing. In fact, during this period it is fairly close to the norm. One might read it as analogous to H.L. Mencken subsidizing *The Smart Set* with the *Black Mask*.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Big Clock* was not Fearing's first detective novel: *Dagger of the Mind* (1942) precedes it by several years, and *Clark Gifford's Body* (1943), while not a detective novel per se, takes up many of the same themes as *The Big Clock*. All of these novels, though, were criticized by Fearing's friends as a fall from his poetry.
- <sup>10</sup> I follow the T.J. Clark-Michael Fried debate, which begins with Clark's critique of Clement Greenberg, when paraphrasing this definition of modernism. Both articles can be found in "The Politics of Interpretation" (special issue) *Critical Inquiry* 9(1982).
- <sup>11</sup> Once again, the 1948 film of *The Big Clock* more explicitly draws attention to Patterson's relationship with the magazine and artistic production. Janoth Enterprises tasks her with painting a portrait of the man who bought *Study in Fundamentals*; because she knows that



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Stroud and that man are the same person, and because Stroud just wrote her paycheck, she produces a Cubist-inspired painting that barely resembles a face, concealing her new boss' identity.

<sup>12</sup> Dwight MacDonald and Robert Fitzgerald, employees at Time Inc. and school friends of Agee (MacDonald from Phillip Exeter Academy, Fitzgerald from Harvard), both vouched for him, helping him secure a position without a manager ever actually meeting him face-to-face. Archibald MacLeish, a long-time co-worker at Time Inc., wrote the forward for *Permit Me Voyage*.

<sup>13</sup> The other major career path was moving to Hollywood and working in the studio system, most famously satirized in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939). The studios presented their own set of problems for young artists; see Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* (1988) and Jerome Christensen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Pictures* (2012).

<sup>14</sup> The Education section, where this article falls, was placed in the July 20 edition where the Books section normally would be located, after Art and Cinema. One might interpret this another subtle nod to the performativity of the trial.

<sup>15</sup> *Time*, March 3, 1923: 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Firebaugh for a more complete list of these port-mantaeus. The other noticeable stylistic tic of Hadden's editing style is the use of compound adjectives to describe individuals. According to John Martin, this is a direct result of Hadden's fascination with Samuel Butler's translation of *The Iliad*. "At all times he had by him a carefully annotated translation of *The Iliad*. In the back cover he had listed hundreds of words, especially verbs and compound adjectives, which had seemed to him fresh and forceful" (Qtd. In Elson 82). This use of Homeric epithets can be seen as another type of portmanteau, as it often combined an adjective with a person and made that attribute stand in for a full description.

<sup>17</sup> See Spiegel for a catalog of the ways that Agee's life and letters have been appropriated. Spiegel's text shows that even the compilation of Agee's affiliations can now be considered a scholarly task. T.V. Reed calls Agee's aesthetic "postmodern realism," which shows that each category also has a combinatorial power that, in theory, would allow Agee arcana to infinitely proliferate, which in some ways fulfills the original goal of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. See Reed, "Unimagined Existence."

#### *Notes to Chapter 4*

<sup>1</sup> Though in print the writer goes unnamed, John C. Farrar penned this article along with most of the early book reviews in *Time*. In fact, Farrar is the only writer for *Time* who receives any accreditation (the initials "J.F." follow the Books column) for his writing – not just in this issue, but in every issue until after World War II. Farrar was a Yale friend of Henry Luce and Britton Hadden, and something of a poet in his own right. His book of poetry, *Forgotten Shrines*, won the Yale Younger Poets Prize of 1919. However, his poetic career peaked early,

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and he is probably most famous for his publishing firms Farrar and Rinehart, and later Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux. He disparages the paired opaqueness of Eliot's poetry and the publishing world in this article; however, he funded many modernist writers during his lifetime, both as a publisher and as a founder of the Breadloaf Writer's Conference.

- <sup>2</sup> In 1939, Burton Rascoe will emend his praise of Eliot and write a relatively well-known takedown in *Newsweek*. See "Shreds and Tatters."
- <sup>3</sup> The other two major Time Inc. publications, *Fortune* and *Life*, also developed unique narrative styles to distinguish themselves from competing magazines – and along with those styles, unique ways of representing American and international culture – though neither have a name as catchy as *Time*-style.
- <sup>4</sup> See Pound's 1930 essay "Small Magazines." He argues that the big innovations in literature had been achieved by 1914, and in a backhanded compliment, "T.S. Eliot added certain complexities" (691).
- <sup>5</sup> *Time* repeatedly uses "modernism" and "modernist" in reference to modern visual art. Here it uses modernism synonymously with Cubism. A 1930 article, "Sterile Modernism," assumes the "multitudes of laymen" are familiar "at least by name with Matisse, Picasso, Zuloaga, Augustus John, Rockwell Kent." Also, *Time* uses modernism to designate religious unorthodoxy; in 1923 the magazine contrasts "Fundamentalists" with "Liberals or Modernists, who believe they are more fundamental than the Fundamentalists." However, it does not refer to contemporary literature as "modernism" until the 1940s.
- <sup>6</sup> Ronald Bush argues that *The Dial* published *The Waste Land* and presented Eliot its award not so much to legitimize difficult poetry, but "to announce the achievement of American mastery" as on par with European literature (194).
- <sup>7</sup> For example, see Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*.
- <sup>8</sup> Though Chinitz positions his work as both an extension of Rainey's historicism and as corrective to his interpretation of said historicism, from a certain point of view, Rainey's and Chinitz's projects seem to differ mainly in their treatment of the ethics of mass appeal. Both attempt to unmask Eliot's desire for notoriety; Chinitz is just more sympathetic to Eliot's ambivalence about mass culture – both as content of his poetry and criticism, and as possible realm in which to circulate his own work.
- <sup>9</sup> Katherine Leick's dissertation chapter, "How Eliot Won," shows how biographical readings were always a part of mass cultural interpretations of his poetry. She argues that the New Criticism's refusal to treat Eliot's biography can be read as a way to distinguish itself from mass cultural treatments, which often looked for biographical or psychological explanations for his poems.
- <sup>10</sup> Eliot intermittently commented on his changing reputation in his writing. A representative example is his 1948 Nobel Prize lecture, in which he gets at his ambivalence about being

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turned “overnight” into a “public figure.” I will address this lecture at greater length later in the chapter; it should suffice to say his stated discomfort should be taken with a grain of salt. By the time he won the Nobel, he had written several plays that were well-received in the popular press and financially successful. The Broadway production of the play he was in the process of writing when he found out about the Nobel, *The Cocktail Party*, would win the 1950 Tony Award for Best Play. At any rate, Eliot’s feelings about his popularity are not the topic of this chapter, at least for now.

<sup>11</sup> This conflation of Eliot’s psychological alienation with his personal and family histories runs rampant in both scholarly and popular biographical treatments. See Delmore Schwartz, “T.S. Eliot as International Hero,” Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot: A Life*, and A.D. Moody, “T.S. Eliot and the American Strain” for scholarly treatments. See Ozick and Matthews for popular treatments.

<sup>12</sup> See especially 140-147 for more on the racialized and gendered language that critiques of modernism often took. Also see Michaels, who provides the best account of how new immigration policies in the 1920s affected ideas about American culture and national identity. The present chapter owes a great deal to Michaels’ argument.

<sup>13</sup> A partial list of other examples from 1923-1935 would include a University of Washington magazine, a Naval Academy newspaper article, Hotchkiss’s student magazine *Index*, a 1934 White Company (manufacturer of trucks and buses) promotional pamphlet which included ‘Truck of the Year,’ a Rochester, NY newspaper in 1929, an Edmonton, Alberta newspaper, and even Luce’s own mother in a 1926 letter. I address the *Harvard Advocate*’s 1931 parody of *Time*, spearheaded and almost entirely written by James Agee, in Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> McLuhan begins *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) by comparing the front page of the *New York Times* to an advertisement for *Time* that appeared in *Life*. He contrasts the *NY Times*’s collage-like aesthetic, which he ties to “the visual technique of Picasso, the literary technique of James Joyce,” with the overabundance of personality in *Time*, which reads like “the breathless outpourings of a private diary” (12).

<sup>15</sup> In terms of periodical history, *Life* was unprecedentedly popular: by the end of its first year in 1937, circulation reached 1.5 million per week – more than triple the first-year circulation of any magazine in American history. In 1942 it was over 4 million, and in 1952 over 5.5 million. A 1938 study concluded that the actual readership of *Life* exceeded 17 million if one counted the “pass-along” readers not represented in the raw sales figures. See Brinkley, 223, 282.

<sup>16</sup> A great deal of recent work addresses the rise and fall of little magazines, and they usually divide the history of the genre into the literary-aesthetic pre-Depression and the academic post-Depression. What they agree on is the fundamental collapse of the little magazine during the 1930s. There are many links between these two phases, as well as links between mass-market magazines and little magazines; Dwight MacDonald, for example, left *Time* in 1936 and eventually edited the newly anti-Stalinist *Partisan Review* as well as *Politics*, which provided a periodical home for New York intellectuals. See Morrison, *Public Face of*

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*Modernism* (2001); Golding, “*The Dial, The Little Review, and the Dialogics of Modernism*” (2005); and Scholes and Wulfmann, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (2010); and Wald, *New York Intellectuals* (1987).

<sup>17</sup> Serge Guilbaut’s *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (1983) provides a much more expansive history of the changing roles of American and European art from the 1930s to the 1950s. See especially pp. 50-65 on how mass media begins defining modernist art as a specifically American enterprise during the 1940s. The “freedom” represented by the Abstract Expressionists is positioned against a European tradition that is equal parts aristocratic and totalitarian.

<sup>18</sup> See *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1951): 38-42. More on the *Atlantic’s* visual depiction of Eliot later in the chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Delmore Schwartz’s “T.S. Eliot as International Hero” is an early entry into this reading of Eliot’s singularity. As the Coda to this dissertation makes clear, Ernest Hemingway will also come to signify a similar worldview in the pages of *Time* and *Life*, especially after *Life* publishes *The Old Man and the Sea* in September 1952 and selections from *A Moveable Feast* in April 1964.

<sup>20</sup> A similar visual conceit can be seen when Ernest Hemingway appears on the cover of *Time* in 1954. The gigantic marlin that literally lays at the center of *Old Man and the Sea* partly obscures the right side of Hemingway’s face, effectively becoming his right jaw and underlining his closed mouth. The central symbol of Hemingway’s novella steps in front of the author’s very recognizable face, obscuring it while at the same time creating it.

<sup>21</sup> Like many of the colorful terms *Time* uses to describe Eliot and his poetry, “kaleidoscopic mirror” is probably lifted from an un-cited source. In an early review, Louis Untermeyer characterizes poem’s deficiencies by calling it “a kaleidoscopic movement in which the bright-coloured pieces fail to atone for the absence of an integrated design.” See “Delusion vs. Dogma.”

<sup>22</sup> Plenty of critics have made the same claim about Eliot’s many masks. What is interesting to me here is the way obscurity associated with Eliot has moved from a predominantly textual one (difficult poem) to a biographical one (difficult person).

#### *Notes to Coda*

<sup>1</sup> Hemingway also became the poster child of midcentury masculinity in the lowbrow men’s magazines and pulps, which presents a different relationship between literary personality and periodical culture than the one I will trace here. See Earle.

<sup>2</sup> See Svennson, who thoroughly studied the recently released documents of the 1954 Nobel decision.

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