CONTESTED CONNECTIONS: NETWORKS AND GENRE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITISH AND IRISH LITERATURE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The term network can refer to any collection of interconnected organisms, groups, objects, or even ideas. This dissertation concentrates on two related kinds of networks: those depicted in literary texts and those made up of literary texts. I argue that portrayals of marginalized populations’ interpersonal networks vary little from genre to genre and can, therefore, expose linkages between supposedly distinct types of writing. My methodology derives from social scientists’ formulations of networks and from genre theories, particularly Paul Kincaid’s family resemblances approach to categorizing literature. Each chapter reevaluates both the broad parameters of various genres and specific twentieth-century British and Irish novels’ affiliations with them. Chapter 1 argues for a wider conception of espionage literature, as well as recognition of Elizabeth Bowen’s _The Heat of the Day_ as a pioneering example of that genre. Chapter 2 reveals previously unacknowledged similarities between Big House literature and propagandistic counter-insurgency prose; these similarities, I assert, justify labeling Bowen’s _The Last September_ and Molly Keane’s _Two Days in Aragon_, which are typically classified as Big House novels, works of counter-insurgency literature. Finally, Chapter 3 takes up the issue of cross-genre connections through a comparison of Pat Barker’s early working-class and subsequent historical fiction. My readings show that Barker’s work from both periods validates conservative political positions, establishing her oeuvre as a network that bridges apparent gaps between genres. Every chapter of this dissertation builds upon Wai Chee Dimock’s contention that all literary genres participate in one vast, complexly linked kinship network. Despite focusing primarily on twentieth-century British and Irish texts, this project models a kinship-based method of literary study by privileging similarities of form, theme, and content over more traditional criteria such as time and place of publication. This dissertation also demonstrates the
deeper understandings that can result from incorporating social scientists’ network theories into literary analysis and thereby indicates that these fields should be combined more often in the future.
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INTRODUCTION: NETWORKS, GENRES, AND NETWORKS OF GENRES

“The history of genres, like the history of media, is above all a reproductive history, which suggests that it is a kinship network as well, exogenous to be sure, updated to be sure, but resting always on some kind of fluid continuum, with tributaries flowing into every individual instance” (1380).
— Wai Chee Dimock, “Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge”

Fiona Barr’s short story “The Wall-Reader” (1979) revolves around Mary, a housewife and mother in Troubles-era Belfast who believes she leads a “self-contained” existence (264), noticed by no one outside her small family unit. To amuse herself during long days alone with her infant daughter, Mary roams the city analyzing political graffiti. One such outing brings her into contact with a British soldier on guard in a public park. A brief initial conversation eventually evolves into a regular “meeting of minds” in which Mary and the soldier discuss “everything” except the political turmoil surrounding them (Barr 266). Nonetheless, this friendship causes Mary to be branded an informer. Knowing that this accusation places the entire family in grave danger, Mary and her husband hurriedly flee to Dublin with their daughter. Whereas reading the slogans painted on walls throughout Belfast fails to change Mary’s sense of the Troubles as “remote” and only “vaguely irritating” (Barr 262), the consequences of her innocent conversations with the soldier force her to acknowledge how deeply the conflict penetrates all aspects of life in the city. Relatedly, this incident reveals Mary’s feeling of disconnection to be absurdly unrealistic: pervasive surveillance ensures that no one in Belfast escapes others’ attention. Mary possesses ties not only to her family, but also to the British government via the soldier and to innumerable nationalist watchers. Put another way, she is enmeshed in multiple interpersonal networks.

In an author’s note at the beginning of the James Bond novel From Russia with Love (1957), Ian Fleming claims to accurately represent numerous aspects of a top-secret Soviet
intelligence agency, including its numerical strength, its highest officials, and even its headquarters in Moscow. A subsequent Bond novel, *You Only Live Twice* (1964), likewise tackles the issue of realism. An obituary published following Bond’s apparent death in the field states that his exploits inspired “a series of popular books … by a personal friend and former colleague” (Fleming, *You Only* 151-152). Despite characterizing such texts as “high-flown and romanticized caricatures,” the obituary asserts, “[i]f the quality of these books, or their degree of veracity, had been any higher, the author would certainly have been prosecuted” for revealing classified government information (Fleming, *You Only* 152). Such statements demonstrate Fleming’s frustrated awareness that readers view his writing as pure invention and therefore fail to take its representations of espionage seriously. By attempting to prove the factual bases of his Bond stories, Fleming seeks to reframe them as hybrids of fiction and non-fiction. His stance suggests that two seemingly disparate genres of literature—spy fiction and real intelligence documents—actually possess significant linkages.

The foregoing paragraphs illustrate this dissertation’s dual concerns: networks in literature and networks of literature. I contend that examining the interpersonal networks featured in a range of twentieth-century British and Irish novels affords new insights into the interconnectedness of the entire literary landscape. This argument grew out of my interest in representations of networks amongst marginalized populations including revolutionaries and working-class women. Originally, I planned to concentrate only on how such networks model collective action, exploring how and why some accomplish their goals, while others fail. Shortly after commencing my research, however, I noticed that otherwise divergent texts often deploy the same narrative and descriptive strategies when characterizing oppressed groups—depictions of these groups, in other words, tend to remain constant across literary genres. Consequently, I
began to understand literature itself as a network in which portrayals of networks link genres that have traditionally been considered separate.

My recognition of familial relationships between genres builds upon research by scholars such as Paul Kincaid and Wai Chee Dimock. Genre-specific studies often devote a great deal of attention to definitions, with critics attempting to precisely delineate what traits texts must—or must not—possess to merit inclusion in a given literary sub-group. Such definitions present problems because, as Kincaid points out, they endeavor to “fix the pattern that applies” to a genre rather than acknowledging that generic conventions exist “in constant flux” (414). To correct this issue, Kincaid proposes applying Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophical concept of “family resemblances” to literary genre studies (413). This approach involves cataloging and then comparing texts’ characteristics; works that demonstrate common features are said to bear a family resemblance to each other. Texts can claim membership in a genre if they resemble “another work that we commonly agree” belongs to that genre, and a “network of resemblances” emerges once connections have been discerned between multiple texts (Kincaid 414). In this way, a “flexible” map of an entire literary genre can be created (Kincaid 414). Using widely accepted examples of a genre as benchmarks for inclusion maintains meaningful boundaries between various literary forms, but Kincaid also recognizes that every text possesses more than one generic affiliation. Even an exemplar of a genre “will share something, be it use of language, characterisation, satirical intent, or whatever, which still links it with” other categories of literature (Kincaid 413). Thus, the family resemblances method acknowledges that genres inevitably overlap.

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1 Although Kincaid’s discussion of family resemblances focuses on science fiction, his method works equally well for other genres. For instance, Ted Underwood uses predictive modeling, a digital humanities technique that operates on principles similar to those of the family resemblances theory, to investigate the cohesiveness and historical longevity of Gothic and detective fiction.
As the epigraph above shows, Dimock similarly emphasizes genres’ kinship. She also explains the disciplinary implications of considering literature a familial network: “literary studies needs to be more fluid in its taxonomies, putting less emphasis on the division of knowledge and more on its kinships, past, present, and future” (1384). Instead of categorizing works by nationality and/or historical period, a kinship-based approach to literary studies would trace iterations of themes and structures throughout space, time, and genre. My project moves in this direction: though I concentrate primarily on twentieth-century British and Irish texts, I consistently connect them with pieces that originated in other eras and places. In doing so, I not only reimagine the modern and contemporary literary canons, but also contextualize them within larger fields of knowledge. Dimock suggests that “the study of genre” might well lead to engagement with “adjacent disciplines such as anthropology, folklore, and performance studies,” which have influenced and been influenced by literature (1384). This dissertation demonstrates that literary studies and other disciplines do, indeed, comprise another complex “kinship network” (Dimock 1384). Putting literature into conversation with network theory reveals that descriptions of similar interpersonal structures and behaviors connect these two fields.

Network theory encompasses an enormous body of research into subjects ranging from businesses and terrorist organizations to academic bibliographies and geography. However, since Duncan J. Watts published an article on the small-world principle, which outlines how few steps connect any two participants in even a vast system, in 1998, his and other physicists’ conceptions of networks have dominated conversations both inside and outside the academy. Considering only the physics perspective is problematic because it disregards social scientists’ much longer tradition of examining networks. Peter J. Carrington and John Scott trace the usage of characteristic network theory terms for visualizing relationships—for example, lines, points, and
connections—to early German sociologists including Georg Simmel (1). During the mid-1930s, psychologist Kurt Lewin and psychiatrist Jacob L. Moreno “investigated the ‘field’ or ‘space’ of social relations and its characteristics as a ‘network,’” and the latter man “invented the ‘sociogram’ as a way of visually representing social networks with points and lines” (Carrington and Scott 1). The interwar period also saw anthropologists using the word “network” to refer to a collection of linked individuals (Carrington and Scott 2). Scholars affiliated with these and other social sciences investigated networks throughout the twentieth century, and such studies supply the foundations of physicists’ work in this area.²

Although social scientists and physicists often deploy disparate vocabularies when discussing networks, common concepts underlie and reveal the compatibility of their approaches. Networks consist of two core components: objects and their relationships to one another. However, network theorists bestow assorted monikers upon these basic building blocks. Network analysis’s roots in graph theory prompt some to adopt that field’s terminology of “points and lines” (Carrington and Scott 4). Others refer to “vertices” and “edges” (Newman 168). Still others prefer “nodes” and “connections or links” (Kahler, “Networked” 3). All, though, recognize that network theory applies to many types of objects related in many different ways. For instance, physicist Mark Newman acknowledges “social networks of acquaintance or other connections between individuals, organizational networks and networks of business relations between companies, neural networks, metabolic networks, [and] food webs,” amongst others (168). Similarly, Miles Kahler, a political scientist, notes, “the nodes can be individuals, groups, organizations, or states (as well as cells or Internet users); the connections or links can consist of personal friendships, trade flows, or valued resources” (“Networked” 3-4). The resemblances

² Some physicists recognize their indebtedness to social scientists’ network research, while others deny it. For more on this issue, see Carrington and Scott (3).
between these statements highlight the fundamental similarities of network theory’s various disciplinary manifestations. Scholars also sometimes apply different names to the same network structure. Compare the following: in a “distributed network … any point can connect to any other without needing to go through any central site or in any fixed order” (Levine 125); “[b]y connecting everyone in the … network, the result is a star, or all-channel network,” which “permits each member to communicate freely with all other persons” (Lunenburg 2). These definitions describe an identical, decentralized pattern of organization, pictured in Figure 1. Thus, the different names assigned to this network structure merely reflect the authors’ influences—physicists and social scientists, respectively.³ Network theory’s foundational principles remain constant across disciplines.

Despite exploding in popularity amongst both academics and the general public during the last twenty years, network theory rarely appears in studies of literature. Networks do not fail to interest literary scholars; on the contrary, several books, including those by Ned Schantz and Aaron Worth, investigate textual depictions of technological and interpersonal networks. These projects, though, evince no awareness of the field of network theory and consequently utilize none of its insights. A variation of this approach ignores research in the sciences and social sciences and instead associates theories of networks only with cultural criticism. Wesley Beal, for example, suggests that “a great proportion of intellectual output over the last thirty or forty years has operated on various networked configurations” such as the Panopticon, the cyborg, and the rhizome (4). Only a few literary critics perform textual analyses based on network theory principles. Franco Moretti occupies a prominent position in this group. Seeking a quantitative

³ Although Fred C. Lunenburg uses the names star and all-channel interchangeably, most other social science-based network analyses include only the latter. See, for example, Chad Whelan (43) and Nancy Katz et al. (319). In deference to this scholarly consensus, I employ the term all-channel network throughout this dissertation.
method for mapping interpersonal networks, Moretti relies solely on “explicit connections” and links characters only “if some words have passed between them” (Distant 214). Others who apply network theory to literature often respond directly to Moretti, either building upon or criticizing his approach. Petar Penda largely approves Moretti’s view of networks but argues that recording conversations’ “expressive tones” would better reveal the complexities of characters’ relationships (110). Caroline Levine and Jesse Rosenthal critique Moretti more substantially. According to Levine, making network ties contingent on exchanged dialogue oversimplifies social experience by ignoring “the enormous variety of connectors that link people,” such as familial relationships and common financial or philanthropic interests (123). The most expansive conception of what constitutes a network tie comes from Rosenthal, who asserts that the population density and mediated communications characteristic of “modern life” forge connections amongst individuals otherwise unknown to one another (291). These differences contrast with a fundamental similarity: Moretti, Penda, Levine, and Rosenthal all derive their understandings of networks from physicists.4

This dissertation differs from existing scholarship by viewing literature through the lens of social science-inflected network theory. Social scientists routinely study collectives similar to those depicted in my primary sources—institutionally disadvantaged, if not criminalized, and consisting of relatively few members. Methods of analysis vary widely, but social scientists often consider networks primarily either as structures or as actors. How networks are organized and how they affect participants’ behavior receive emphasis in the former perspective. The latter, meanwhile, focuses on networks’ potential for successful “collective and collaborative action”

4 Moretti refers to Newman (Distant 223, 226n7), as does Penda (109). Levine utilizes Newman, Albert-László Barabási, and Watts’s coauthored text The Structure and Dynamics of Networks (165n11). Though Rosenthal cites no physicists, he frames his argument as a response to Moretti and Levine; thus, Rosenthal’s claims rely implicitly on the physics-based network theories Moretti and Levine use.
(Kahler, “Networked” 4). Although usually deployed separately, these approaches can be combined to yield fuller understandings of some networks and their consequences (Kahler, “Networked” 7). I find that inspecting both the forms and the successes or failures of the networks in my selected texts affords unique insights into not only these works’ generic, but also their political affiliations.

To showcase both of these categories of insights, each chapter of this dissertation operates on canonical and textual levels. Chapter 1 uses the family resemblances theory to argue for a more expansive understanding of espionage literature. Focusing on representations of competing interpersonal networks, geographic space, and mobility, I show that Elizabeth Bowen’s The Heat of the Day (1948), which critics typically omit from discussions of spy fiction, resembles Joseph Conrad’s groundbreaking espionage novel The Secret Agent (1907) and therefore warrants inclusion in that genre. Moreover, I contend that Bowen sufficiently transforms generic conventions to make The Heat of the Day itself a landmark example of spy fiction. Ultimately, I advocate for a conception of espionage literature that places less emphasis on the intricacies of intelligence work and more on the symbolic connotations of spying.

While Chapter 1 concentrates on a single genre as a network of related texts, the following chapter encompasses multiple literary forms. Chapter 2 examines The Last September (1929), another of Bowen’s novels, and her contemporary Molly Keane’s Two Days in Aragon (1941) alongside participants’ accounts of the Irish War of Independence and imperial propaganda meant to delegitimize colonial insurgent movements. Doing so reveals that The Last September and Two Days in Aragon consistently rely on counter-insurgency tropes when depicting Irish nationalists. Consequently, these novels are less politically subversive and more

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5 For more on these methods and examples of their use, see Kahler (“Networked” 4-7).
regressive than many recent readings claim. Noticing the similarities between *The Last September*, *Two Days in Aragon*, and anti-insurgent writings also holds broader significance: scholars typically do not consider Big House literature—the category to which *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* tend to be assigned—a relation of counter-insurgency prose, but my research exposes a profound kinship between the two genres.

Continuity across genres remains a major concern in my third chapter; however, Chapter 3 adds a unique temporal focus, as it compares works produced by one author, Pat Barker, during different periods of her career. Because dissimilar casts and settings—working-class women in the final decades of the twentieth century and middle- and upper-class men in World War I, respectively—situate Barker’s first three and subsequent novels within different literary genres, commentators have long debated what, if anything, unifies her oeuvre. In contrast with readings that emphasize Barker’s repeated use of themes such as morality and trauma, I argue that conservative political positions underpin her earliest, as well as her more recent, fiction. Barker’s first two novels, *Union Street* (1982) and *Blow Your House Down* (1984), echo conservatism’s denigration of collective action by depicting women’s networks as hopelessly ineffective.

Additionally, *Union Street*, *Blow Your House Down*, and Barker’s 1995 novel *The Ghost Road* all endorse symbolic, spiritual redemption rather than practical reform or revolution. These common features link both Barker’s individual texts and the genres in which they participate.

The chapters of this dissertation diverge in some notable ways. First, the novels I have selected draw upon various prose traditions and take place against a wide range of sociocultural backdrops, so each chapter provides literary and historical contexts for its primary sources. Second, because my chosen texts portray a variety of interpersonal networks, the chapters analyze different organizational structures and methods of operation. All three chapters, though,
work to acquaint literary studies with social scientists’ network theories, and all assume a kinship-based approach to genre. This project shows that network analysis enables innovative interpretations that extend beyond the modernist and contemporary canons to encompass all periods and kinds of literature. As a result, I conclude that literary studies needs a deeper and broader engagement with network theory. Literary scholars should use network theory more often, for more varieties of literature, and should engage with social scientists’ ideas, not just physicists’. My research also prompts the conclusion that literary scholars and network theorists should devote more attention to how their disciplines overlap and might inform one another.
CHAPTER 1


Elizabeth Bowen’s 1936 review of Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel famously declares, “Conrad is in abeyance. We are not clear yet how to rank him; there is an uncertain pause” (“Conrad” 758). Less attention has been paid to Bowen’s speculations about the reasons for Conrad’s ambiguous status, which emphasize differences she perceives between the cultural climate in 1936 and the one existent in his lifetime:

we resist verbal magic now. His novels are, in the grand sense, heroic: now we like our heroics better muffled … His dramatic, ironic sense of fate is out of accord with our fatalism. Most vital of all, perhaps, he seems to be over-concerned with the individual: with conscience, with inner drama, with isolated endeavour. Romantic individualism is at a discount now. (“Conrad” 758)

Bowen’s use of the first-person indicates that she shares contemporary readers’ tastes, and as a result, her own novels, all of which appeared in print after Conrad died, might be expected to exhibit few commonalities with his work. Literary critics tend not to compare Bowen’s writing with Conrad’s, preferring instead to emphasize her affinities with predecessors ranging from Henry James to Shakespeare. Hermione Lee, one of the few scholars who juxtaposes Bowen and Conrad, finds the former suffering in the comparison: Lee asserts that Bowen’s The Heat of the Day “looks like a peculiarly unconvincing or sketchy ‘spy story’, if set against the work of Conrad” (168). This chapter demonstrates that Lee is mistaken because she ignores numerous resemblances between The Heat of the Day and Conrad’s The Secret Agent, which support

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6 Amongst the works that reproduce this quotation are Norman Sherry’s Joseph Conrad: The Critical Heritage (39), Cedric Watts’s A Preface to Conrad (40), and Allan H. Simmons’s Joseph Conrad (223).
7 See Walter Allen (192) and Barbara Bellow Watson (132, 134-137, 143, 148).
classifying Bowen’s novel as espionage literature. Furthermore, I argue that *The Heat of the Day*’s revisions of generic conventions make it just as significant a work of spy fiction as *The Secret Agent*.

While sharply divergent subjects and settings characterize much of Conrad’s and Bowen’s respective outputs, *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* both deal with intelligence work and take place mostly in London. Additionally, the plot of each novel revolves around conflicts between political, professional, and/or personal networks that espouse different ideologies yet frequently claim overlapping memberships and territories. Adolf Verloc of *The Secret Agent* and Stella Rodney of *The Heat of the Day* occupy the intersections of these networks and therefore must juggle not only conflicting belief systems, but also competing loyalties. Despite differently prioritizing their networks, Verloc and Stella similarly strive to establish boundaries between the various groups with which they are affiliated. In each case, the character’s efforts toward network separation fail, and a fatal crisis occurs after representatives of rival factions converge on the same place at the same time. These resemblances coexist with numerous dissimilarities—for instance, the late nineteenth century provides the temporal backdrop of *The Secret Agent*, and most of *The Heat of the Day* takes place in 1942. Bowen’s text also treats the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, particularly the difficulties a person faces when attempting to fully know and comprehend someone else, more explicitly than does Conrad’s. Nonetheless, according to the family resemblances theory, the previously listed similarities reveal that *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* share a generic affiliation. *The Secret Agent*’s recognized status as spy fiction allows it to serve as a touchstone for that genre;

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8 A. Michael Matin asserts that because *The Secret Agent* gives the date of the Verlocs’ wedding in 1879 and specifies the length of their marriage as seven years, the novel’s events “occur in 1886” (270). Bruce Harkness and S.W. Reid disagree, noting that “the action takes place in early spring a full seven years” after the Verlocs’ union and thereby concluding “the ‘official’ time of the novel is 1887” (413). In either case, the novel’s setting in the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century is clear.
consequently, *The Heat of the Day*’s resemblances with *The Secret Agent* support admitting Bowen’s novel to the canon of espionage literature.

At stake in this chapter’s argument for categorizing *The Heat of the Day* as spy literature is the diversification of the genre. Studies of espionage fiction concentrate almost exclusively on male authors, with John Buchan, Graham Greene, and Fleming typically garnering large amounts of space.⁹ Male dominance also occurs at the textual level, as the aforementioned authors’ spy novels depict only protagonists who are men. Reading *The Heat of the Day*, a female-authored novel that centers on a female character, as espionage fiction addresses both of these sites of disparity. My attempt to expand the canon of spy literature builds upon Phyllis Lassner’s recent work, which points out that whereas women writers associated with some popular genres, such as detective stories, now regularly receive scholarly scrutiny, “those who wrote espionage fiction are still neglected” (69). In other words, it is not that women avoid crafting espionage narratives, as Atkins asserts (129), but rather that their narratives are ignored. Lassner’s recovery of three rarely examined women spy novelists—Helen MacInnes, Ann Bridge, and Pamela Frankau—reveals the erroneousness of considering this genre the province of men. Espionage novels by women, Lassner argues, often share male-authored texts’ preoccupation with moral and ethical quandaries but also “trouble and revise the genre’s gendered conventions” by depicting female intelligence workers as politically engaged actors instead of as mere “sidekick[s] or handmaiden[s]” (70). Women’s spy novels thus creatively combine adherence to generic standards with innovation.

Like the works Lassner analyzes, *The Heat of the Day* reuses and repurposes numerous characteristics of the espionage genre—characteristics that *The Secret Agent*, as one of the

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⁹ See, for example, John Atkins, Michael Denning, Jon Thompson, and Wesley Britton.
earliest spy novels, helped to establish. This chapter thus first examines *The Secret Agent* and then turns to how *The Heat of the Day* reworks accepted generic formulas. My readings of these novels focus on three significant yet underexplored elements of spy fiction: inter-network conflicts, geographic space, and mobility. In *The Secret Agent*, Verloc experiences conflicts between his occupational and kinship networks, and when trying to resolve these clashes, he consistently favors the former over the latter. *The Heat of the Day*’s Stella, meanwhile, faces a less clear-cut decision between personal and professional obligations, finding herself caught between connections that all harbor both romantic and political motives and interests. In contrast with Verloc, Stella repeatedly privileges longstanding affective ties over all other concerns. Both *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* are set primarily in London, but Bowen’s characters venture outside of this metropolis more than do Conrad’s. No matter where characters in either text travel, though, they tend to cause and/or experience unfortunate consequences; in this way, both works portray spatial mobility as a destructive force. Comparing *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* reveals how espionage literature evolved during the first half of the twentieth century while also highlighting the unique contributions that establish each novel as a landmark within the genre.

**Espionage Literature: Origins, Development, and Critical Appraisals**

Brief histories of espionage literature and of scholarship on the genre will provide additional context for this chapter’s argument. Spy literature can be seen as an outgrowth or descendant of invasion fiction, which enjoyed massive popularity in Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As its appellation suggests, invasion fiction depicts attempts by foreign powers—typically France, Germany, and/or Russia—to conquer Britain,
playing on contemporary xenophobia and fears of national degeneration. The earliest works in the genre, such as George Chesney’s 1871 publication *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*, do not emphasize spies’ roles in international conflicts, but beginning in the 1890s, espionage “assume[s] major significance in the plot development of … invasion novels” (Stafford 496). For this reason, some critics struggle to demarcate the boundary between invasion and spy fiction. In fact, Matin claims that the two genres display “virtually seamless thematic and formal continuities” (260). Matin’s position receives support from Erskine Childers’s *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), which numerous commentators view as the first spy novel: although *The Riddle of the Sands* highlights the amateur espionage efforts of two young British men, their spying aims to thwart a German naval assault on their homeland. However, other candidates for the first spy novel, including Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901), Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), and *The Secret Agent*, omit the invasion trope in favor of different types of international power struggles and clandestine activities. The publication of these three novels in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century demonstrates that by the Edwardian period, spy literature had developed characteristics distinct from those of invasion fiction.

From these earliest works onward, espionage literature has tended to follow two major trajectories. The first, “the romantic and heroic tradition” (Thompson 86), typically features plots full of adventure and valorizes spies as patriotic defenders of British territories and ideals. *Kim*, which portrays espionage as a “Great Game” played between rival imperial powers (Kipling 127), is often viewed as the progenitor of this tradition (Denning 26; Thompson 86). Subsequent practitioners include E. Phillips Oppenheim, Buchan, and Fleming, whose Bond stories exemplify many of the traits associated with heroic spy fiction. Espionage literature’s other

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10 For more information on invasion fiction’s historical contexts, see Matin (253-254, 267-269, 271-272) and David A.T. Stafford (491-500).
11 See Atkins (23), Denning (11), and John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg (229).
prominent strain displays more ambivalence about Britain and imperialism, as well as about the morality of intelligence workers’ actions. Often associated with realism due to its reliance on plausible plots and attention to minute details, this strand of spy fiction has also been labeled “the critical or ironic tradition” (Thompson 86). *The Secret Agent* provides the origin point of this tradition, which authors such as Somerset Maugham, Eric Ambler, Greene, and John Le Carré carry on (Thompson 86; Denning 26). Bowen, likewise, employs several traits of the critical spy tradition, including “intrigue, betrayal[,] and double agents” (Denning 26), in *The Heat of the Day*.

*The Heat of the Day*’s participation in the critical tradition of espionage literature has gone largely unnoticed by commentators considering the novel’s relationship with the genre. As previously mentioned, scholars of spy literature tend not to discuss Bowen’s work at all. Allan Hepburn, author of the only extended study of espionage literature that covers *The Heat of the Day*, catalogs the novel’s divergences from other works in the genre:

Most spy plots treat love as a pesky distraction that befalls male spies. By contrast, in *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen places love at the core of narrative. Whereas emotions of hate drive many spy thrillers, love is the animating force in *The Heat of the Day*. Women, in classic espionage paradigms, are to blame for erotic entanglements with the wrong men. Instead of choosing whether women will be love objects (duplicitous Vesper, who betrays James Bond in *Casino Royale*), traitors (calculating Madam von Einem in *Greenmantle*), or moles (pliable Charlie in *The Little Drummer Girl*), Bowen demonstrates that equivalent roles are not only irrelevant for Stella, but limit the subtleties of her political position. (139)
The question of whether *The Heat of the Day* qualifies as a spy novel arises more often amongst critics of Bowen’s work; like Hepburn’s, their assessments usually emphasize how *The Heat of the Day* subverts or departs from common espionage literature tropes. Angela G. Dorenkamp claims *The Heat of the Day* “is not a spy story in the generally accepted sense of the term” because it assigns greater import to Robert Kelway’s betrayal of Stella, his romantic partner, than to the treasonous activities that he undertakes as a Nazi spy (20). Megan Faragher sees *The Heat of the Day* as a site of “experimentation with the form of the espionage novel” (62), for instead of following spy fiction’s typical pattern of concealing the traitor’s identity until the conclusion of the story, Bowen unmasks Robert in an early chapter. Such analyses suggest that Bowen’s innovations prevent *The Heat of the Day* from being considered espionage literature. I disagree because, as Kincaid points out, a literary genre is “a restless, dynamic form that might head out in multiple different directions from multiple different origins, and yet still be something that we can talk about sensibly under … one heading” (415). In other words, *The Heat of the Day*’s revisions of generic standards, no less than its correspondences with *The Secret Agent*, validate its claim to the title of spy novel.

The similarities between *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* may be overlooked because the traits the novels share are themselves underexplored. The roles interpersonal networks, geography, and mobility play in these texts—as well as in spy literature more generally—have not received thorough analysis. Critics occasionally note the importance of networks for fictional intelligence agents but go no further. Rishona Zimring, for instance, posits reliance on interpersonal networks as a key difference between espionage and detective literature: “unlike the Holmesian detective, the spy works as part of a network or web. Whereas
the detective … works as an individual, the spy collaborates” (330). This perspective leaves unexamined issues such as what organizational forms these networks take, whom they include, how they operate, and how effective they prove. Additionally, despite the prominent position networking occupies in spy fiction, literary scholars interested in network theory have so far failed to study this genre. Levine’s contention that *Bleak House*’s extreme length uniquely qualifies it to represent “the complexity and power of networked social experience” implies that spy texts, which tend to be significantly shorter than this Charles Dickens novel, hold little promise for network analysis (123). The present chapter complicates Levine’s argument by demonstrating that *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day*—both single-volume novels—successfully portray complicated, contentious, and overlapping networks.13

Like networks, geography has rarely been the subject of sustained discussion amongst scholars interested in espionage literature. Some merely note the importance of “interesting settings” for successful spy narratives (Britton 13). Thompson gets slightly more specific by associating the genre with “exotic” locations (86). Denning provides perhaps the most detailed analysis of spy fiction’s geographic orientation but confines his remarks to Fleming’s Bond tales: these stories, Denning points out, almost never take place in Britain and instead favor “the tourist belt surrounding the industrialized world including the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia” (105). As this brief summary shows, commentators often link espionage fiction with international locales. Indeed, many spy novels, including two of the earliest, *Kim* and *The Riddle of the Sands*, feature settings outside of Britain. London, though,

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12 See also Worth (102).
13 Incidentally, critics identify numerous similarities between *Bleak House*, which Conrad claimed to have read “innumerable times” (*A Personal Record* 199), and *The Secret Agent*. See, for instance, Tanya Agathocleous (19), Wendy Lesser (185), and James Walton (455-461). My research indicates that a heretofore unnoticed resemblance between *Bleak House* and *The Secret Agent* involves their representations of densely linked interpersonal networks.
14 Also see Winks (52).
has also frequently provided the geographic backdrop for works of espionage literature since *The Secret Agent* helped to inaugurate the genre, and critics typically do not consider the significance of this setting. My readings go against this trend, exploring what traits *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* attribute to London, as well as which sections of the city they depict; doing so reveals that both novels increase espionage literature’s geographic range and challenge received notions about the locations they depict.

The movements of Conrad’s and Bowen’s characters around—and occasionally outside of—London also concern this chapter. In recent years, mobility has become a popular topic in studies of modernism and modernity, yet it remains largely absent from discussions of spy literature. As with geography, the most detailed account of espionage texts’ representations of mobility comes from Denning, but again, he considers the subject solely in relation to Fleming’s renderings of Bond (102). Consequently, scholars working outside of the spy genre most heavily influence my approach to mobility. Charlotte Mathieson, in an examination of *Bleak House*, formulates a three-part theory of mobility:

mobility is embedded in social relations, bringing people into social interactions;

mobility connects people at a fundamental level to the space in which they move;

and the term ‘mobility’ encompasses all scales and modes of movement, recognizing that small-scale, everyday acts of mobility are as important as far-reaching travels across the globe. (396)

This method involves considering which characters move, where they go, and whom they encounter either along the way or upon reaching their destinations. Mathieson also addresses the relationship between mobility and networks in Dickens’s novel, arguing that the latter depends

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15 See, for example, Wendy Parkins, Deborah L. Parsons, and Andrew Thacker.
on and springs from the former: “it is mobility which is the force producing new possibilities for social interaction, and bringing about connections between disparate people from diverse locations” (401). Like Mathieson, I view mobility and networks as closely entwined. Both The Secret Agent and The Heat of the Day show networks coming into conflict as a result of members’ movements through the same spaces. If in Bleak House, mobility generates possibilities, it forecloses them in The Secret Agent and The Heat of the Day, forcing characters to go places they would rather not be and confront people and issues they would rather avoid. At the same time, The Heat of the Day distinguishes itself from The Secret Agent and most other spy fiction by foregrounding a woman’s, rather than a man’s, acts of mobility. Along with The Heat of the Day’s groundbreaking depictions of interpersonal networks and geography, its innovative portrayal of mobility establishes it as a crucial text in the development of espionage literature.

The Secret Agent’s “coruscating whirl of circles”

Verloc, the titular secret agent in Conrad’s novel, works for both the London Embassy of an unidentified foreign power and the Metropolitan Police. The former intends Verloc to act as an “‘agent provocateur’” amongst the city’s community of political revolutionaries (55), but he typically confines himself to passing along information gleaned from his radical contacts. Early in the novel, the Embassy’s First Secretary, Vladimir,16 tells Verloc he has not been earning his salary and must be more active to maintain his employment. Specifically, Verloc must carry out a terrorist attack that can be blamed on the revolutionaries and that will frighten Britain into being less tolerant of political dissidents. Vladimir insists that the British populace will only be sufficiently outraged by “an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible.

16 The Russian associations of the name Vladimir, along with the correspondence between his Embassy’s address in Chesham Square and the real Russian Embassy’s location in Chesham Place, lead scholars such as Harkness and Reid (417), Agathocleous (16), and Martin Ray to assume that Russia is the foreign power employing Verloc (206). Matin, however, argues, “the identity of this embassy is thrown into question” by the Germanic name of its former ambassador, Baron Stott-Wartenheim (262).
inexplicable, almost unthinkable” (60). Attacking the concept of astronomy by “blowing up …
the first meridian” at Greenwich Park, he says, will suit this purpose (62). Accordingly, Verloc
recruits his young brother-in-law, Stevie, to set a bomb at the Greenwich Observatory. This
bomb detonates prematurely, killing Stevie but doing no other damage. When Verloc’s wife,
Winnie, learns of Stevie’s death, she fatally stabs Verloc. Fearing being apprehended and hanged
for her crime, Winnie attempts to flee the country with Alexander Ossipon, one of Verloc’s
revolutionary acquaintances, but he soon robs and deserts her. Winnie then commits suicide by
leaping off a ship crossing the English Channel. The Secret Agent’s representations of an
intelligence worker caught between contending networks and obligations, of London’s
geography, and of mobility’s destructive potential subvert existing generic practices and
establish the characteristics of espionage literature’s ironic or critical tradition.

Although the foregoing summary mentions only a handful of characters, The Secret Agent
features a relatively large cast—a fact that attracted comment in contemporaneous
reviews. A reviewer for Country Life, for example, faults Conrad for “bringing in minor and
unessential characters and making far too much of them” (Z 404); this reviewer believes Conrad
unduly emphasizes Winnie Verloc’s mother, the Assistant Commissioner of police, and Home
Secretary Sir Ethelred, amongst others (Z 404-405). Conrad, for his part, asserts that the story
requires the inclusion of all “the personages” in The Secret Agent (“Author’s Note” 35).

Focusing on the interpersonal networks in the novel validates Conrad’s position, for a complex
web of associations, emotional attachments, and chance encounters connects all of the major
characters. Belief in revolutionary ideals links Michaelis, Karl Yundt, Ossipon, the Professor,

17 While Vladimir argues that bombing Greenwich will be a “purely destructive” offense against the
cultural “fetish” of science (60), the Observatory actually holds profound significance for global systems
of governance, meaning that destroying it would have political ramifications. For a discussion of
Greenwich Mean Time’s entanglements with imperialism, see Adam Barrows.

18 For a more appreciative appraisal of The Secret Agent’s cast, see E.V. Lucas (285).
and, to some extent, Stevie, who dreams of a world without cruelty.\footnote{The Secret Agent labels these characters—with the exception of Stevie—anarchists, but scholars disagree about the extent to which their expressed convictions are compatible with the philosophies of anarchism. For a summary of the critical conversation on this issue and an argument in favor of the characters’ anarchism, see David Mulry. For arguments against classifying the characters as anarchists, see William W. Moseley, Jr. (72), and Graham MacPhee (103). The nuances of the characters’ political identities do not matter for the purposes of this chapter.} A network of British government employees, including Chief Inspector Heat, the Assistant Commissioner, and Sir Ethelred, stands in opposition to the revolutionaries, as do the officials of the Embassy, Vladimir and Privy Councillor Wurmt. Verloc’s relations—Winnie, Stevie, and their mother—form another network. Finally, social ties with Michaelis’s unnamed “lady patroness” connect characters such as the Assistant Commissioner and Vladimir (110). Individuals who belong to more than one group—Vladimir, for example—provide points of intersection for The Secret Agent’s various networks. These networks also intersect more literally when members accidentally encounter each other on the streets of London, as happens repeatedly to the Professor and Heat.\footnote{Although the police keep the revolutionaries under almost constant surveillance, Conrad’s narrator specifies that Heat and the Professor have “a chance meeting” in an unfrequented alley on the day of the bombing (96). The Professor’s description of another occasion when he “came suddenly upon Chief Inspector Heat at the corner of Tottenham Court Road” likewise suggests coincidence rather than planning (86).} Links across networks proliferate further around Winnie, who briefly meets both the Assistant Commissioner and Heat and interacts with the revolutionaries when they visit her home. Thus, The Secret Agent uses multiple types of connection to tie all of its characters to one another.

The Secret Agent also portrays a variety of network structures. Because of the numerous links between the novel’s various groups, the entire cast could be considered a large all-channel network. Within this all-encompassing all-channel network, however, the smaller networks—revolutionaries, police, and so on—maintain distinct identities by proclaiming unique objectives and adopting varying organizational principles. While all of the networks show some evidence of
internal hierarchies, observation and enforcement of these rank structures differ. The Embassy network operates via a rigid chain of command, with Verloc at the bottom, Wurmt in the middle, and Vladimir at the top. In theory, a similar hierarchy, running upward from ordinary constables through Heat to the Assistant Commissioner and then finally to Sir Ethelred, characterizes the police force. The police hierarchy, though, can be subverted fairly easily: Heat does so by declining to share information, including his employment of Verloc as an informant, with the Assistant Commissioner and by meeting privately with Sir Ethelred. Such meetings represent the simple omission of a link—the Assistant Commissioner—from the chain and therefore do not drastically modify the network’s structure. At other times, such as when he visits Verloc “in the character of a private citizen” to obtain information about the Greenwich bombing (178), Heat attempts to completely divorce himself from the governmental hierarchy while engaging in detective work. Heat’s behavior reflects his belief that a department “can never be perfectly informed” (101), but it also highlights the disparity between the police network’s organization in theory and in practice.

A similar disconnect between theoretical and actual organization occurs in the circle of revolutionaries. Members of the circle hold official titles—Verloc, for instance, is “[o]ne of the Vice-Presidents” of the Future of the Proletariat (55), and Michaelis, Yundt, and Ossipon all serve as “special delegate[s] of the … Red Committee” (70). Such distinctions indicate that a hierarchical structure underlies the revolutionaries’ societies. Interactions between members of the group, by contrast, lack structure and references to rank. Each revolutionary can communicate with all of the others without requiring an intermediary, as evidenced by Verloc’s clandestine visits to both Michaelis and the Professor while preparing for the Greenwich attack (169, 89). Ossipon, too, meets individually with Michaelis and the Professor (246-252). The
freedom with which the revolutionaries communicate suggests that they act as an all-channel network, rather than a hierarchical one. Like the police, the revolutionaries demonstrate that a network’s official structure does not necessarily reflect how it actually functions, as members routinely reshape it to best suit their own goals and needs.

Verloc’s family introduces additional network types to *The Secret Agent* and further underlines the fluidity of such organizational structures. In the novel’s early chapters, the Verloc household approximates a Y network, which has a structure akin to a simple hierarchy but divides at its lowest level to resemble an inverted letter Y. Figure 2 provides a visualization of this network structure. The two most subordinate members of a Y network communicate only with one superior (Lunenburg 2)—in the case of Verloc’s familial network, Stevie and his mother occupy the lowliest positions and interact with Winnie, who holds a more elevated rank. Winnie, in turn, deals with and defers to Verloc, the household’s highest authority. Verloc’s tendency to use Winnie as a go-between for himself and Stevie, rather than communicating with the younger man directly, \(^{21}\) increases the family’s initial similarity to a Y network. However, this structure fragments once Winnie’s mother leaves the family residence and Verloc starts spending more time with his brother-in-law. At this point, Verloc, Winnie, and Stevie begin to operate as discrete dyads: they interact one-on-one, keeping the contents of their interactions secret from the third member of the household. Finally, these dyads disintegrate as a result of Stevie’s death and Winnie’s reactions to it. By the conclusion of *The Secret Agent*, Verloc’s kinship network has not merely lost its structure, but completely vanished. \(^{22}\) Verloc’s relations, then, illustrate

\(^{21}\) For example, upon discovering that Stevie has been agitated by hearing the revolutionaries talk and has not gone to bed at his appointed time, Verloc makes only one “tentative” effort to talk to the younger man before referring the matter to Winnie (76).

\(^{22}\) Agathocleous suggests that by portraying a family’s “disintegration” (21), *The Secret Agent* challenges the standards of Victorian realist fiction, which include “creating a vision of social stability through the closing image of a happy marriage” (19). Stephanie J. Brown considers Conrad’s portrayal of the Verloc
network forms’ susceptibility to change even more clearly than do the police and the revolutionaries.

Verloc’s participation in all of the aforementioned networks makes him a hub—a “highly linked” node that is “simultaneously part of many large clusters” (Levine 126). Additionally, his placement at the intersections of several networks establishes a recurrent trope of critical espionage literature: the intelligence worker who juggles competing professional and personal duties and loyalties. Verloc finds such juggling easier than do many subsequent fictional agents, including *The Heat of the Day*’s Stella, because he holds the majority of his contacts in low esteem. According to the narrator, “Anarchists or diplomats were all one to [Verloc]. … His scorn was equally distributed over the whole field of his operations” (208). Verloc does not, though, direct scorn at the police. During his journey to the Embassy in Chapter II, he casts “an approving eye” on the “opulence and luxury” he sees and reflects that “the whole social order” enabling such wealth must be preserved (45). Verloc’s approbation of the existing societal hierarchy entails approval of the operations of the police, for as Winnie later informs her brother, officers’ responsibilities involve maintaining the status quo: “Don’t you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn’t take anything away from them who have” (158). While Verloc’s feelings about the Embassy, the revolutionaries, and the police emerge clearly, his attitude toward his kinship network proves more nuanced. Verloc household as less subversive, contending that Winnie’s relations with her husband and Stevie “reinforce women’s political marginalization on grounds of dependency” and thereby support contemporary anti-feminist rhetoric (44). Such readings help to situate *The Secret Agent* in its literary and historical contexts beyond espionage fiction.

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23 Of the networks rendered in *The Secret Agent*, only the social one centering on Michaelis’s benefactor excludes Verloc. Interestingly, the benefactor herself functions as another hub, for through her large acquaintance, she possesses ties to numerous networks: to the Embassy via Vladimir, to the police via the Assistant Commissioner, and to the revolutionaries via Michaelis.

24 Throughout this dissertation, I follow the scholarly convention of treating a text’s narrator as “a strictly textual category … clearly distinguished from the author” (Margolin).
behaves as a “fond husband” to Winnie (201), placing “profound confidence” in her yet keeping her ignorant of his involvement in intelligence work (208). Winnie’s mother and Stevie receive indifferent tolerance from Verloc until he hears Vladimir’s ultimatum—at that point, Verloc begins to consider Winnie’s relatives a burden that he will struggle to support if he loses his income from the Embassy. The mandate to attack Greenwich complicates Verloc’s relationships with all of his networks, forcing him to struggle—for the first time—with their incompatibility and to choose how to prioritize them.

In compelling its protagonist to decide amongst competing occupational and personal responsibilities, *The Secret Agent* creates a narrative pattern that much subsequent critical espionage literature reproduces; however, Verloc differs from most later fictional spies by assigning the least importance to his kinship network and favoring his professional ones. The initial instance of this tendency occurs in the novel’s third chapter, when Winnie expresses concern about how exposure to Verloc’s revolutionary acquaintances affects Stevie. She contends that her brother “hears too much of what is talked about” amongst the political dissidents and “gets into his passions over it” (79), then offers numerous additional remarks detailing his volatile reactions to the revolutionaries’ ideas. The narrator repeatedly interrupts Winnie’s speech to note that Verloc “ma[kes] no comment” (79). Drawing attention to Verloc’s silence in this way emphasizes his failure to heed Winnie’s words and suggests that he cares little for how the revolutionaries’ conversations affect Stevie. During this incident, which occurs shortly after Verloc receives the order to attack Greenwich, the difficulties of his professional position absorb his thoughts. Disregarding Winnie’s anxiety in favor of concentrating on his own work worries indicates that Verloc considers his familial network a low priority, and subsequent developments confirm this.
Further evidence of Verloc’s willingness to compromise his kinship network to appease his professional contacts comes via his decision to involve Stevie in the Greenwich plot. After the attack, Verloc asserts that because Winnie brought him into contact with Stevie, she shares blame for her brother’s role in the bombing and, thereby, for his death: “Strike me dead if I ever would have thought of the lad for that purpose. It was you who kept on shoving him in my way when I was half distracted with the worry of keeping the lot of us out of trouble” (216). Verloc, though, willingly endangers Stevie’s mental and emotional stability, as well as his physical safety, so as to remain in the Embassy’s pay. As mentioned above, Verloc knows of the malleability of Stevie’s feelings. Verloc is aware, too, that Winnie does not want Stevie acquiring much knowledge—she goes so far as to wish that “he had never been to school” (79)—because learning tends to discompose her brother’s mind. Nonetheless, during his interactions with Stevie, Verloc acts as a “peripatetic philosopher,” using “subtle reasonings” to erase the younger man’s trust of the police and ensure his silence in the event of interrogation (198). By disregarding Winnie’s expressed preferences in order to obtain Stevie’s cooperation in the bombing, Verloc chooses to satisfy his Embassy connections instead of his relations. This ranking of networks makes Verloc an anomaly within the critical strain of espionage literature; characters facing similar inter-network conflicts, including The Heat of the Day’s Stella, typically show personal bonds preferential treatment.

The Secret Agent’s depiction of network effectiveness has proven more enduringly influential, and it also represents a significant break from established practice in the espionage genre. While earlier spy novels, such as The Riddle of the Sands, attribute the greatest efficacy to
amateur spies and assert that official networks react to danger too slowly, The Secret Agent characterizes the police network as highly effective. As Moseley notes:

A local constable is present at the first hint of disorder in the London streets. The policeman on watch in Greenwich responds immediately to the explosion that kills Stevie and relays the occurrence to headquarters. Likewise, a constable comes upon the scene of Winnie and her mother who have been accosted by the coachman for not wanting to hire the dilapidated cab and driver. … The constable has watched the cab driver, and he watches for any disruption of the public tranquility, quickly calming it before it gets out of hand. (64)

In addition to this “omnipresence” (Moseley 65), The Secret Agent endows police officers with a level of knowledge nearly amounting to omniscience. Heat brags that the police “know what each of [the revolutionaries] is doing hour by hour” (96), and the Professor makes a similar statement (92). Although Verloc’s ability to keep his preparations for the Greenwich bombing secret belies these claims of total knowledge, the Assistant Commissioner’s investigation of the attack reinstates the police force’s association with effectiveness. This investigation produces several important successes in a single evening: suspecting Verloc’s involvement in the bomb plot, the Assistant Commissioner visits him and elicits a confession implicating Vladimir; the Assistant Commissioner then confronts the diplomat, who feels “almost awed by the miraculous cleverness of the English police” (195), and threatens him into withdrawing from Britain’s high society. Notably, the Assistant Commissioner obtains the permission of his superior, Sir Ethelred, before commencing his inquiries, in which Heat plays no part. Omitting Heat from this successful operation dismisses his insubordinate working style and endorses the Assistant

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25 The preface to The Riddle of the Sands asserts that “the common-sense of the country at large” is “growing, while statesmanship is declining” (Childers vi). In this novel, civilians’ recognition of the threat Germany poses contrasts with officials’ stubborn refusal to behave as if Britain is at risk.
Commissioner’s methods, as well as the efficacy of the police force’s hierarchical network structure.

_The Secret Agent_ further emphasizes the effectiveness of the police by juxtaposing it against other networks’ ineffectiveness. Despite being consistently prioritized by Verloc, the Embassy network proves entirely ineffectual. The Greenwich bombing fails both to affect its target and to provoke public terror, and as noted above, Vladimir’s responsibility for the plot is uncovered almost immediately, imperiling his position in Britain. Verloc’s kinship network and the circle of revolutionaries also fall short of their objectives. Guaranteeing Stevie’s wellbeing serves as the primary goal of Winnie’s marriage with Verloc (207); thus, Stevie’s death signifies the network’s failure, which Verloc’s murder and Winnie’s suicide reinforce. Meanwhile, according to John Attridge, _The Secret Agent_ characterizes Yundt, Ossipon, and Michaelis as “allergic to effective action” and “conspicuously impotent” (133). The revolutionaries transfer these traits to the network they comprise, which undertakes no missions during the novel. Only the bomb-making Professor represents an ongoing menace to the British populace. By leaving the Professor at large at the conclusion of the narrative, _The Secret Agent_ embraces a convention common to both strands of espionage literature: “resist[ing] closure” (Snyder 9).²⁶ The novel’s depiction of the police as an effective network, however, indicates that Britain’s governmental institutions can deal with the threat the Professor poses. Attributing efficacy to official agencies both distinguishes _The Secret Agent_ from previous examples of espionage literature and demonstrates the scope of the novel’s literary legacy: many works belonging to not only the critical but also the heroic tradition of spy fiction, including Le Carré’s _The Spy Who Came in

²⁶ Thompson, too, identifies avoidance of closure as one of spy fiction’s defining features: “The satisfactory resolution of one threat or one conspiracy is never sufficient. There is never any finality: there will always be another threat, another conspiracy, another crisis” (105).
from the Cold (1963), Greene’s The Human Factor (1978), and Fleming’s Bond tales, follow in
Conrad’s footsteps by portraying highly effective official networks.

If The Secret Agent’s representation of interpersonal networks established overlapping
memberships, divided loyalties, and effective government organizations as characteristics of
espionage literature, its setting reoriented the genre’s geography from colonized or disputed
territories to the Empire’s center, London. Most of the novel’s action takes place in a relatively
circumscribed portion of this sprawling city. Verloc routinely travels to continental Europe,
supposedly to replenish his store’s “stock from Paris and Brussels” (163), but the text depicts no
such journeys. The cottage “in the country, somewhere on the London, Chatham, and Dover
[railway] line” (165), where Michaelis temporarily resides receives similar treatment: instead of
directly representing scenes at the cottage, The Secret Agent shows characters describing, in
conversation with one another, past visits there. Other locations closer to or within London but
south of the River Thames, including the “almshouses” for widows of “licensed victuallers”
where Winnie’s mother settles (143), Waterloo Station, and even Greenwich itself, provide the

27 Alec Leamas, the main character of The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, endows the Secret Service
agency to which he belongs with a supernatural amount of power and perseverance, noting that it
“pursue[s] traitors as the eye of God followed Cain across the desert” (Le Carré 60). In The Human
Factor, MI6 initially identifies the wrong employee as a Soviet double agent but ultimately discovers
protagonist Maurice Castle to be the true culprit (Greene 214-215), forcing him to flee to Moscow for his
own safety. The Secret Service then bullies Castle’s wife into abandoning a plan to join him in the USSR
(Greene 244-246). Fleming invariably shows the British Secret Service successfully completing
operations and dispelling threats to the nation.

28 Celebration of amateur agents did not completely disappear from espionage literature following The
Secret Agent’s publication. For instance, in The Thirty-Nine Steps, which appeared eight years after
Conrad’s novel, “ordinary fellow” Richard Hannay earns most of the credit for defeating a German plot
against Britain (Buchan 87). Stories of non-professionals engaging in intelligence work did, though,
become much less frequent as the twentieth century progressed.

29 The one trip abroad Verloc undertakes during the course of the narrative occurs between chapters VIII
and IX—that is, Verloc first mentions the trip toward the end of Chapter VIII (163), and he has completed
it by the beginning of Chapter IX (164).

30 While The Secret Agent never specifies the site of these residences, Robert Hampson associates them
with “the Old Kent Road” (168), the location of the real Licensed Victuallers’ Asylum. The Old Kent
Road runs through the borough of Southwark, south of the Thames.
settings of only brief scenes. The majority of the narrative occurs on the northern side of the Thames—more specifically, in Soho, the site of Verloc’s residence/shop and the Assistant Commissioner’s undercover investigation into the bombing; Belgravia, where Vladimir’s Embassy sits; and Westminster, the home of governmental offices. Only a few miles separate these sections of London. By restricting the geographic scope of the plot in these ways, *The Secret Agent* portrays London as claustrophobic, in spite of its enormous size, and contrasts sharply with earlier spy fiction’s penchant for sprawling international settings.

*The Secret Agent* might be the first espionage novel to take place almost entirely in London, but usage of this setting allows Conrad’s text to participate in—and challenge—larger cultural discourses about the British capital. The Stanford Literary Lab shows that novelistic renderings of London became “significantly more frequent in the course of the [nineteenth] century” (63). The West End, which encompasses the sites most heavily featured in *The Secret Agent*, figures especially prominently in nineteenth-century fiction (Stanford 67). Literary portrayals of the West End tend to replicate its real-world connections with wealthy residents, grand homes, and high quality consumer goods (Stanford 75). Additionally, nineteenth-century novels associate “happiness,” defined as including both romantic and platonic affection, as well as general “social well-being,” with the West End more often than with any other section of London (Stanford 86). Some of these pleasant connotations extend to Soho but there exist alongside more unsavory perceptions, lending the district a uniquely ambiguous reputation.

Joseph McLaughlin notes that Soho had provided “a haven for political radicals” fleeing continental Europe since “the late seventeenth century, when French Huguenots settled there,”

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31 For details about the corpus on which the Stanford Literary Lab researchers base their conclusions, see page 91 of their article.
32 A.D. Mills locates the West End in the borough of Westminster, of which Soho, Belgravia, and Westminster are constituent districts.
and in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, large numbers of anarchist refugees moved into the area (137). This concentration of foreign-born, politically threatening individuals contributed to a popular conception of “Soho as London’s center of vice and pollution” (McLaughlin 137); conversely, the diverse cuisines of Soho’s population made it “an appealing place to dine” (McLaughlin 139). According to McLaughlin, this paradoxical image of Soho as both dangerous and alluring became established during “the first decade of the twentieth century” (139), when The Secret Agent appeared in print, but had its roots in the waning years of the nineteenth century, when the novel takes place. The geographical associations that the Stanford team and McLaughlin reveal provide the historical and cultural contexts against which The Secret Agent’s representation of London should be interpreted.

The version of the British capital presented in The Secret Agent occasionally reflects but more often problematizes contemporary conventions. For instance, though Conrad’s text conforms with the nineteenth-century trend of focusing fairly exclusively on the West End, the details of its portrayal defy established discourses about the area. The narration of Verloc’s trip to the Embassy in Chapter II includes little of the “patrician” vocabulary and “opulence” characteristic of passages set in its wealthy neighborhood (Stanford 75). Instead, some of the same language describes the Embassy’s environs and the dilapidated part of Soho where Verloc lives—both Verloc’s street and the road he takes to reach the Embassy are “narrow” (42, 47). The narrator mentions the Embassy’s “imposing” façade but devotes more attention to the illogicality of addresses in the vicinity (47); this emphasis on “London’s topographical mysteries” and “strayed houses” creates an atmosphere of jumbled confusion at odds with Belgravia’s reputation as a space of elegance and ease (47). The Secret Agent likewise omits the agreeable emotions typically associated with this portion of the city, replacing them with
unpleasant confrontations and sensations: the Embassy officials anger Verloc by insulting his weight, as well as his inactivity as an agent provocateur, and Vladimir’s demand for a bombing causes Verloc anxiety about his finances. All of these details produce a unique and subversive portrait of Belgravia.

_The Secret Agent_’s representation of Soho also complicates widely accepted ideas. The novel reinforces Soho’s association with political radicals by showing revolutionaries meeting in and inhabiting the district but otherwise contradicts contemporaneous beliefs. As noted, Soho’s food scene often received praise; _The Secret Agent_, by contrast, denigrates the culinary options available in the area. Before commencing his investigation of the Greenwich bombing, the Assistant Commissioner eats “fraudulent cookery” at an Italian restaurant in Soho (141). This accusation of fraudulence, which Conrad’s narrator repeats twice, arises from the food’s “denationalised” character (141-142). Despite its purported national identity, the narrator claims that “the Italian restaurant is … a peculiarly British institution” (141). Such slippage into the realm of national characteristics highlights another difference between _The Secret Agent_’s and other texts’ depictions of Soho: for the common lament that foreign residents of Soho refuse to assimilate and thus have stripped the district of its Englishness (McLaughlin 138), Conrad’s novel substitutes the notion that Soho’s inhabitants exhibit no evidence of either their original or their adopted nationalities, leaving them “as denationalized as the dishes” they consume (141-142). _The Secret Agent_ similarly alters other aspects of Soho’s reputation. The window display in Verloc’s shop, which exhibits “photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls” (39), gestures toward the “moral pollution” often linked with the area (McLaughlin 139), but material pollution receives more emphasis. Following his meal, the Assistant Commissioner goes outside, where he meets “an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and
enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night, which is composed of soot and drops of water” (142). Here, unappealing tactile sensations accumulate rapidly, emphasizing the sheer quantity of physical contamination in the atmosphere. This depiction of Soho as a place with unappetizing food, no discernable national identity, and pervasive material dirtiness diverges from established discourses and thereby attests to The Secret Agent’s importance not only to spy fiction, but also to British literature in general: whereas Conrad’s concentration on London claims new terrain for the espionage genre, the details of his portrayal generate new ways of thinking and talking about the capital city.

Finally, The Secret Agent’s representation of London inaugurates critical spy literature’s abiding interest in instability. References to damp or wet surfaces in numerous districts minimize their differences and lend the entire city an atmosphere of threatening unsteadiness. To reach Sir Ethelred’s office from police headquarters, the Assistant Commissioner walks through “a short and narrow street like a wet, muddy trench” (131). The narration of the Assistant Commissioner’s journey between Westminster and Soho, too, highlights the moistness of his surroundings: “His descent into the street was like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off. A murky, gloomy dampness enveloped him. The walls of the houses were wet” (140). In these sentences, as in the above-cited passage set in Soho, abundant moisture implies precariousness—traversing wet environments presents numerous opportunities for slipping, falling, and possibly being injured. Deaglán Ó Donghaile asserts that such descriptions embody one of modernism’s central tenets: “the fluid and levelling atmosphere” of Conrad’s London corresponds with the dissolution of stable identities that figures such as Ford Madox Ford equate with modernity (127). As Thompson argues, “part of Conrad’s legacy to espionage

33 For a detailed analysis of the water imagery in The Secret Agent, see Sue Tyley (32-34).
fiction consists of his deployment of a distinctly modernist ideology” (105); in subsequent spy literature, the emphasis on instability which *The Secret Agent* imports from modernism manifests via agents who switch allegiances, wonder whom they can trust, and question the morality of their actions. Thus, the geography of *The Secret Agent* possesses double significance for espionage literature: it relocates spies’ activities from the liminal spaces of empire to the heart of “the mother country itself” (Thompson 96), and it establishes uncertainty as a crucial theme of the genre via its portrayal of a fluid and disorienting environment.

*The Secret Agent*’s presentation of mobility as a destructive force constitutes another influential intervention in spy literature’s standard practices. Mobility is a near constant motif in Conrad’s novel: Martin Ray points out that the narrative opens and closes with walks through London and, in between, features “characters obsessively tramping the thoroughfares of the ‘enormous town’” (197). Ray enumerates the myriad instances of mobility in *The Secret Agent*, revealing that the text associates nearly all of its characters—from the relatively minor, such as Yundt, to the central, such as Verloc—with frequent movements around the metropolis (200-202). Even bodily limitations do not prevent characters from moving, as Verloc’s mother-in-law, who suffers from “swollen legs” and consequently cannot walk well (41), demonstrates by traveling in hired vehicles. These characters feel compelled to move, Ray concludes, because being in the crowded streets fosters awareness of their own “humanity,” as well as “the fellowship of the community” (203). Ray’s contention that mobility serves a life-affirming function in *The Secret Agent* overlooks how consistently the text couples movement with disaster. The deaths of Stevie, Verloc, and Winnie all result from acts of mobility, and the narrative’s concluding walk, undertaken by the Professor, signifies an open-ended threat to more lives.
Before examining *The Secret Agent*’s representation of mobility more closely, the role immobility plays in the narrative must be considered. Verloc’s strategy for avoiding conflicts between the inimical networks in which he participates hinges on restricting his own and others’ movements. Verloc minimizes his need to venture outside of his residence at 32 Brett Street, Soho, by conducting the affairs of all four of his networks in this space. An early description of Verloc’s home emphasizes its many usages: “The door of the shop was the only means of entrance to the house in which Mr Verloc carried on his business of a seller of shady wares, exercised his vocation of a protector of society, and cultivated his domestic virtues” (40). The gatherings of political dissidents from which Verloc collects intelligence to pass along to the Embassy and the police take place behind the shop in a “parlour” that is also contiguous with the household’s kitchen (40). While the novel does not specify how Verloc transmits information to the Embassy, his claim to have visited there “only twice … in the last eleven years” prior to Vladimir’s summons indicates that intelligence is not communicated in person (57). Verloc likely corresponds with the Embassy in writing, as he does the police. This arrangement relies equally upon the secret agent remaining in his residence and others, including Heat, staying away from it. The folly of Verloc’s dependence on immobility emerges quickly and repeatedly in *The Secret Agent*. For the novel’s characters, movement proves both inevitable and nearly always prone to incite undesirable results.

Movement often brings together representatives of antagonistic networks. Two inter-network confrontations in which mobility plays a major role—the first between the Assistant Commissioner and Vladimir and the second between Heat and Winnie—merit especial consideration. Although both of these incidents provoke significant, widespread consequences,

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34 To the Assistant Commissioner, Heat summarizes his interactions with Verloc thusly: “I drop him a line, unsigned, and he answers me in the same way at my private address” (129).
the text invests them with contrasting connotations. Productive effects follow the Assistant Commissioner and Vladimir’s interaction. The two meet at the home of Michaelis’s patron, but the bulk of their interaction coincides with a walk from her house to the nearby Explorers’ Club, where Vladimir holds an honorary membership. As they move through the streets, the Assistant Commissioner insinuates his knowledge of the Embassy’s involvement in the Greenwich bomb plot, and upon their arrival at the club, he warns Vladimir against entering. Obediently, Vladimir departs, leaving the Assistant Commissioner confident that the foreign dignitary will “not be seen very often [at the Explorers’ Club] in the future” (197). The Assistant Commissioner believes his exertions have not only accomplished his immediate objective of weakening Vladimir’s ties with influential members of British society but also begun making progress toward his longer-term goal, “clearing out … all the foreign political spies, police, and that sort of—of—dogs” from England (195). Mobility enables both of these achievements. The investigation of the bombing, which provides the Assistant Commissioner with the evidence needed to start his campaign against foreign spies, involves a great deal of movement around Westminster and Soho. Confronting Vladimir likewise depends upon motion, as the Assistant Commissioner must travel to the patron’s house and also follow the diplomat when he flees the gathering. In these instances, urban mobility emerges as a constructive force that allows the truth about the Greenwich attack to be discovered and thereby prevents the possible persecution of innocent parties such as Michaelis, whom Heat hopes to blame. Mobility thus proves an indispensable part of effective policing, further validating the Assistant Commissioner’s tactics.

The Assistant Commissioner’s investigation has attracted a great deal of critical commentary. For a reading that equates the Assistant Commissioner’s movement from his office to the streets of Soho with a descent into an urban jungle, see McLaughlin (148-153). For comparisons of the Assistant Commissioner with Walter Benjamin’s concept of the flâneur, see Zimring (330-332) and Pei-Wen Clio Kao (131-132).
The Assistant Commissioner’s mobility also serves a defensive function through its identification and neutralization of whatever threat Vladimir poses to Britain.\(^{36}\)

The Assistant Commissioner’s movements provide a lone exception to *The Secret Agent*’s tendency to endow mobility with harmful agency. Heat’s trip to Verloc’s residence on the day of the Greenwich attack exemplifies the novel’s typical approach. Finding that Verloc has gone out, Heat settles for questioning Winnie. She, who knows nothing of either the bombing or Stevie’s death, demonstrates her customary indifference in the early stages of this conversation. Once Heat mentions being in possession of an overcoat labeled with her address, however, Winnie grows increasingly agitated, as the adjectives included in her speech tags attest: she responds “calmly” at first, then grows “awed” and speaks “fervently” as she realizes the coat in question must be Stevie’s (181). Seeing the damaged state of the label shocks Winnie so much that she can only move “mechanically” before becoming “rigid all over” (182). The intensity of these reactions suggests that Winnie suspects serious harm has befallen her brother even before she learns the exact circumstances of his death by eavesdropping on Verloc and Heat’s discussion of the bombing. Though Winnie alternately engages in automaton-like motion and rigid paralysis throughout her subsequent dealings with Verloc, descriptions of her conduct during the exchange with Heat show it to be the origin point of the “rage and despair” that subsequently lead her to kill Verloc and herself (185). In other words, the tragic events that populate *The Secret Agent*’s final chapters stem not only from a clash between irreconcilable networks but also from Heat’s mobility, which brings Winnie the news of Stevie’s death.

\(^{36}\) Scholars disagree about whether or not Vladimir’s plots actually imperil Britain. Attridge contends that *The Secret Agent* depicts “no effective threat to British national security” (135), and Matin makes a similar claim (277). Conversely, Andrew Glazzard interprets the novel’s portrayal of Vladimir as “a warning” about the dangerous deceptiveness of Russia (100).
Several other incidents throughout *The Secret Agent* likewise portray mobility as prone to engendering or reinforcing suffering and alienation. These episodes do not always involve members of inimical networks, revealing that harmful potentialities extend beyond confrontations between groups to encompass nearly all instances of movement. As McLaughlin observes, “it is a walk … that starts the trouble in the novel” (141). Verloc makes this walk, which takes him “westward” from Soho to the Embassy on “Chesham Square” and which the narrative maps in some detail (44, 47). Like Heat’s visit to Verloc’s residence, this incident attributes adverse consequences to mobility. Most obviously and significantly, the meeting with Vladimir that awaits Verloc at the end of his walk mandates the attack on Greenwich, thereby contributing to Stevie’s demise and all that results from it. This meeting also affects all of Verloc’s subsequent experiences of mobility. In spite of his innate laziness, Verloc enjoys walking to the Embassy, as it gives him an opportunity to think with “satisfaction” on his position within the “social order” (45). Conversely, upon leaving the Embassy, Verloc “retrace[s] the path of his morning’s pilgrimage as if in a dream—an angry dream” (63), noticing nothing about his surroundings. The narrative mirrors Verloc’s experience by almost completely omitting details about his journey back to Soho. Whereas the walk to the Embassy occupies around three pages of text, the return trip garners only a couple of sentences. Verloc’s homeward walk creates a template for his succeeding movements, which likewise receive extremely limited description and involve disagreeable thoughts and sensations.

Although Verloc walks a great deal over the course of *The Secret Agent*, the detailed narration and contentment of his opening trip to the Embassy never recur. The text’s account of how Verloc wanders London under the influence of an “unconquerable restlessness” (161), for example, demonstrates remarkable brevity: “He led a cortege of dismal thoughts along dark
streets, through lighted streets, in and out of two flash bars, as if in a half-hearted attempt to make a night of it, and finally back again to his menaced home” (161). The absence of specific place names in this passage distinguishes it from the description of Verloc’s walk to the Embassy, as does its emotional register. The complacency apparent in Verloc’s first act of mobility has been replaced with darker associations—the word “dismal” indicates the gloominess of Verloc’s mindset, while “cortege” likens his movements to a funeral procession.\(^{37}\)

In this instance, walking increases Verloc’s anguish because he feels compelled to do it though he knows it will accomplish “no earthly good” (161). Later references to Verloc going for walks demonstrate that this compulsion toward movement persists for many days. Typically, the novel mentions that these walks happen without including details such as where Verloc goes or how he feels.\(^{38}\) However, the mere association of so much motion with one as averse to exertion as Verloc is noteworthy. For him, mobility becomes self-perpetuating: one journey necessitates another, so that after walking from his home to the Embassy at the outset of the novel, Verloc can rarely stop moving. The involuntary, compulsive character of his outings casts mobility as a kind of torment. *The Secret Agent* thus connects motion with destruction on multiple levels—on the physical level through Stevie’s death, and on the mental and emotional levels through Verloc’s reluctant, angst-filled wanderings.

*The Secret Agent* continues to link mobility with detrimental outcomes after Winnie murders Verloc. Previously one of the text’s least mobile characters, Winnie moves almost constantly as the narrative draws to a close: from the home she has shared with Verloc into Brett Street, around a nearby courtyard, back to the house, to a train at Waterloo Station, and finally

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\(^{37}\) See the *Oxford Dictionaries* definition: “A solemn procession, especially for a funeral” (“cortège”).

\(^{38}\) For example, further along in the novel, the narrator simply refers to Verloc “going out for a walk” (167). One exception to this tendency to leave Verloc’s routes unstated occurs when he tells Heat about the bombing: Verloc includes a precise account of his position at the time of the explosion—“making for Chesterfield Walk” (183)—as well as where he went upon hearing it.
onto the cross-Channel ship off of which she flings herself into the water.\textsuperscript{39} This conclusion validates Winnie’s original “frightened” reaction to going out of the house into “the street” (224), which she believes will lead to her death. For a brief space, though, the novel holds out the possibility that Winnie will successfully escape to a foreign country with Ossipon, whom she meets shortly after leaving home. Due to \textit{The Secret Agent}’s omniscient style of narration, readers know that Ossipon’s vows to accompany and assist Winnie spring from a self-interested desire to “get hold of what there [is] to get” from her (226), but this access also reveals that he seriously ponders how the two of them can leave England. Even after discovering that Winnie has slain Verloc, Ossipon believes that he has no choice but to flee with her because his actions have already made him her accomplice (240). Ossipon gives no outward indications that he has changed his mind about going with Winnie until the moment when he dramatically “leap[s] out” of the moving train carriage as it departs Waterloo Station (245), nor do his reported thoughts reveal his intentions beforehand. Consequently, readers learn of Ossipon’s betrayal at the same time as does Winnie. This narrative technique prolongs the audience’s expectation that Winnie’s journey will be successful, only to suddenly dash it. Without Ossipon and the money he steals from her, Winnie lacks the knowledge and resources to satisfactorily complete her “flight abroad” (225), which makes her suicide unsurprising. Although Winnie’s experiences temporarily invoke the liberating possibilities of travel, her death strengthens \textit{The Secret Agent}’s established ties between mobility and tragedy.

Ossipon’s behavior following his abandonment of Winnie also contributes to the novel’s unfavorable depiction of mobility. Immediately after exiting the train, Ossipon embarks on a lengthy trek around London. The descriptions of his route initially include specific place names,\textsuperscript{39} On the relationship between Winnie’s mobility and late-nineteenth-century debates over women’s roles, public and private spaces, and consumerism, see Zimring (328-329).
such as “the towers of [Westminster] Abbey,” “[t]he lights of Victoria [Station] …, and Sloane Square” (245), but then become increasingly vague: “He walked through Squares, Places, Ovals, Commons, through monotonous streets with unknown names” (246). The progression in these passages from a great deal of precise geographic detail to practically none resembles the novel’s pattern of description for Verloc’s movements. Like Verloc, Ossipon feels compelled to walk though he derives no benefit from this activity. The compulsive elements of Ossipon’s mobility emerge most clearly in the penultimate paragraph of the novel, which takes place “more than a week” after Winnie’s death and depicts him walking “without looking where he put[s] his feet, feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound” (253). On this occasion, Ossipon behaves in the same manner “[a]s on that night” of deserting Winnie, and the narrator’s comment that the revolutionary’s “inevitable future” involves “marching in the gutter” indicates that this automatic, unconscious style of movement will persist indefinitely (253). Repetition characterizes not only Ossipon’s bodily movements but also his mental processes. Key sections from the newspaper item about Winnie’s death, which Ossipon has memorized, run through his mind continually. He mentally recites the article’s phrases “[a]n impenetrable mystery” and “this act of madness or despair” six and five times, respectively, in the last few pages of The Secret Agent (250-253). These words particularly dominate the revolutionary’s thoughts while he walks, as the following excerpt shows: “‘An impenetrable mystery….’ He walked disregarded…. ‘This act of madness or despair’” (253, emphasis and ellipses in original). This description’s intertwining of Ossipon’s physical and mental compulsions suggests that they have a close, mutually reinforcing relationship. Thus, obsessive thoughts, like careless walking, seem likely to be a permanent part of Ossipon’s life going forward. This fate strengthens The Secret Agent’s
association of movement with unpleasant consequences and emotions, for Ossipon’s restlessness and distress both result from a single act of mobility—his jump out of the train.

Throughout its length, *The Secret Agent* links mobility with suffering and destruction. The most explicit acknowledgement of mobility’s dangerousness, however, occurs in the novel’s final few sentences, which depict the Professor strolling down an unspecified London roadway: “He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable—and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men” (253). In addition to the fanatical beliefs mentioned here, the Professor’s deadliness stems from the bomb he constantly wears beneath his clothes. He keeps the detonator in his hand so that he can activate it even if his arms become immobilized, and he claims that the bomb contains enough explosive power to annihilate a room full of people. The Professor’s unprepossessing appearance and diminutive stature further increase his treacherousness, for they lead others to ignore him, leaving him free to transport himself and his deadly goods wherever he pleases. The narrator’s reference to “pest[s]” serves as a reminder of the devastation small creatures such as insects can cause and attributes the potential to wreak similar havoc to the Professor. Despite these textual signals that the Professor represents a hazard, critics routinely insist on his innocuousness.40 Nathan Waddell argues, “the preceding narrative has so fully discredited [the Professor’s] philosophy, and his ability to implement it through violence, that his ‘threat’ is contained” by the time the novel closes (56). This assertion might seem justified when viewing *The Secret Agent*’s concluding sentences only in relation to the Professor’s previous failure to act upon his radical ideals but becomes more problematic when taking the novel’s portrayal of mobility into account. As the above discussion

40 For a reading that judges the Professor harmless based on his similarities with contemporary beliefs about chronic masturbation, see Brian W. Shaffer (453-457).
shows, *The Secret Agent* consistently invests mobility with the ability to inflict damage. In this context, every instance of mobility holds destructive potential, and the Professor’s beliefs and possession of an explosive device heighten, rather than create, the ominousness of his movement through the streets.\footnote{The efficacy of the police, noted above, mitigates but does not completely destroy the Professor’s dangerousness—his wearable bomb ensures his ability to harm others even while being arrested.}

By highlighting mobility’s dangerousness, *The Secret Agent* departs from previous works in the espionage genre. Although early spy novels such as *Kim* acknowledge the risks associated with their characters’ movements, they nonetheless tend to associate mobility with adventure, excitement, and the successful completion of important missions. *The Secret Agent*’s approach to mobility, like its representations of interpersonal networks and geographic space, reverberates through subsequent works belonging to the critical tradition of spy fiction, including *The Heat of the Day*. Scholars of espionage literature typically recognize neither these traits’ importance to the genre nor *The Heat of the Day*’s membership in it. The following section uses Kincaid’s family resemblances theory to argue that similarities between *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* support the latter’s inclusion in the canon of espionage literature. Like Conrad, Bowen reinvents spy fiction by revising accepted generic formulas. For this reason, *The Heat of the Day* should be considered just as revolutionary a piece of espionage literature as *The Secret Agent*.

**Bowen Reimagines the Spy Novel**

Human relationships—particularly romantic and familial bonds—ground *The Heat of the Day*’s exploration of espionage. In the second chapter, Stella learns that Robert, her lover of two years, might be a Nazi spy. Harrison, the “counterspy” on the case who shares this information with Stella (40), offers to indefinitely postpone apprehending and punishing Robert in exchange for an affair with her. Stella endeavors to discover the truth of Harrison’s accusation and to
decide whether to accept his proposition throughout most of the novel. Eventually, she confronts Robert, and after some initial denials, he admits to colluding with the Nazis. Robert dies a short time later as he attempts to evade capture by British authorities. Into this narrative of Stella, Robert, and Harrison’s triangular relationship Bowen weaves two sub-plots: the first concerns Stella’s son, Roderick, inheriting an Irish estate from a paternal relative, while the second features a young working-class woman named Louie Lewis struggling to adjust to the absence of her soldier husband. Intersections between these plots create linkages across interpersonal networks but do not diminish the animosity amongst them: in *The Heat of the Day*, as in *The Secret Agent*, rival networks exist in perpetual conflict. Additional resemblances between Bowen’s and Conrad’s novels include using London’s West End as the primary setting and emphasizing mobility’s potential to cause harm. Far from simply reproducing *The Secret Agent*’s portrayals of these traits, though, *The Heat of the Day* tailors each of them to suit its own narrative and themes. In doing so, *The Heat of the Day* literally and figuratively claims new territory for espionage literature, making it a pivotal text in the genre.

Exploring the principles of connection in *The Heat of the Day* helps to illuminate how the novel’s depiction of inter-network conflict charts a new course for critical spy literature. *The Heat of the Day* uses a wide range of interpersonal bonds, including affective ties, professional relationships, and chance meetings, to convey the complexity of social experience. Stella attributes an isolating inward focus to her partnership with Robert, commenting, “outside us neither of us when we are together ever seems to look” (210), but through him, she gains connections with the rest of the Kelway family. Similarly, her long-dissolved marriage to Roderick’s late father, Victor, has left Stella with certain bonds to his relatives. Another network centers on involvement in espionage and includes Robert and Harrison, as well as a number of
unseen others. Stella, too, participates in the espionage network by attempting to uncover Robert’s true allegiances, and Francis Morris, a cousin of Victor, possesses a mysterious association with Harrison’s intelligence operations. Although *The Heat of the Day* features fewer cross-group connections than does *The Secret Agent*, Francis reveals entanglements between networks that might at first seem completely disparate. Coincidence and spatial proximity also link otherwise unconnected individuals, as when Louie introduces herself first to Harrison and later to Stella merely because they happen to be in the same location simultaneously. Taken together, the foregoing methods of connection encompass all of *The Heat of the Day*’s characters.

Like *The Secret Agent*, *The Heat of the Day* offers examples of several different network structures. Louie’s unplanned encounters with Harrison and Stella evoke the defining feature of all-channel networks—that each node in the system can connect to each of the others without following a predetermined path. In fact, *The Heat of the Day* suggests that all of wartime London operates as an all-channel network. Evacuations have decreased the city’s population, and Stella more than once notes the interconnectedness of those who remain. When Harrison first claims to know Robert, she expresses no surprise because “[s]o many people do know each other” (28). To Robert, she reveals her frustration at repeatedly meeting Harrison: “London’s got too small—wherever there’s left to go to, Harrison seems to be” (110). The latter comment suggests that the constricted space of the city—a consequence of bomb damage rendering some areas unusable—

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42 Robert admits to being part of “a ring” (304), but none of his contacts appears in the text. While Harrison consistently uses “we” and “us” when discussing his professional activities (35, 38, 262), his colleagues are likewise absent from Bowen’s narrative.

43 Stella also seems professionally linked with espionage: she is “employed, in an organisation better called Y.X.D., in secret, exacting, not unimportant work” that utilizes her knowledge of other languages and cultures (24-25). This job is even more likely to involve espionage if, as Kristine A. Miller contends, Stella “is a character modeled upon Bowen’s own experience” (42), for the author worked with the Ministry of Information, providing intelligence about Ireland, during World War II.
also facilitates increased linkages between residents. In contrast with such details about the large all-channel network that exists amongst Londoners, *The Heat of the Day* offers little information regarding how its smaller networks function. The Kelways’ kinship network receives the most elaboration. Robert’s family observes a strict hierarchy, with his mother at the top. Mrs. Kelway makes not the smallest “concession” to others (283), refusing even to turn her head to look at Robert during a conversation. Robert’s sister Ernestine defers to their mother but exercises power of her own over the young niece and nephew staying at Holme Dene, the family residence, while their parents live abroad. This dynamic resembles a Y network except that Mrs. Kelway often communicates directly with her grandchildren rather than using Ernestine as an intermediary. Regardless of its exact structure, the dominant trait of the Kelways’ network is authoritarianism; the text’s connection of Robert’s decision to commit treason with the tyrannical environment in which he grew up, explored further subsequently, emphasizes the harmful possibilities of such a rigid hierarchy.

Harrison’s professional espionage network adds to the number of organizational schemes included in *The Heat of the Day*. Whereas the Kelways abide by the sort of rank structure commonly associated with intelligence agencies, the professional spies’ network exhibits more flexibility. To Stella, Harrison describes the responsibilities of his occupation thusly:

> Just as things are now, I could tip the scales either way. The thing *could* just turn on the stuff on [Robert] I send up. As to that, if you follow me, I do use my judgement [*sic*]. I *could* use my judgement a bit more. (36, emphases in original)

Harrison’s reference to “send[ing] up” information shows that he reports to at least one superior, but his ability to decide what to report indicates that he enjoys significant autonomy in the field. The narrative’s failure to include any other intelligence agents reinforces the notion that Harrison
mostly works unsupervised. This blend of centralization and independence resembles a wheel network, which consists of a supervisory “core node” and specialized, largely self-regulating “peripheral nodes” (Kenney, “Turning” 84), though *The Heat of the Day* does not provide sufficient information to definitively establish the structure of Harrison’s agency. The novel includes even fewer details about its other small-scale networks, such as Robert’s spy ring, making their organizations and methods of operating impossible to determine. Nonetheless, both the conflicts amongst these groups and Stella’s unwilling entanglement in them emerge clearly.

If *The Heat of the Day*’s depiction of a protagonist caught between contending organizations recalls *The Secret Agent*, Stella demonstrates a more innovative strategy for handling inter-network conflict. Whereas financial concerns lead Verloc to sacrifice his kinship network for his professional duties, Stella prioritizes her emotional reactions above all other concerns, including patriotism and national security. Harrison she mistrusts: upon their first encounter at Francis’s funeral, Stella believes Harrison to be a mental patient, and she later admits that she continues to “wonder whether [he is] quite ordinary in the head” (31). Consequently, she suspects that all of Harrison’s claims about himself and Robert could be mere “bluffing” (43). Such feelings contrast sharply with Stella’s disposition toward Robert. She associates their first meeting in 1940 with “the rising exhilaration of kindred spirits” (104). Two years into their relationship, she loves him passionately and feels confident he reciprocates her affection though she knows “they [do] not tell one another everything” (108). Suspicion of Harrison and intense attachment to Robert profoundly shape Stella’s behavior, prompting her to do whatever she can to guarantee her lover’s freedom and safety.

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44 For a more detailed description of wheel networks, see Chapter 2.
45 Stella swiftly dismisses Harrison’s suggestion that “thinking about the country” will influence her response to his proposition (42).
By attempting to protect Robert from the consequences of his espionage, Stella both demonstrates an inclination toward self-sacrifice and assigns the highest priority to her personal affective network. Stella’s initial disbelief that Robert could be aiding the Nazis falters as the circumstantial evidence against him mounts, and she finally decides to take him “out of danger” by accepting Harrison’s offer (270). With this decision, Stella sets aside her lack of attraction to Harrison in the hope of safeguarding Robert—in other words, she exhibits willingness to take care of Robert at the expense of her own needs and wants. Harrison’s failure to immediately capitalize on Stella’s acquiescence suggests that he has reconsidered his proposition, and when she perceives clues that Robert remains under surveillance the next night, she searches for another way to protect him. Stella’s decision to help Robert flee from the authorities once again prioritizes his safety above all else, including her own wellbeing. Aiding a proven traitor could expose Stella to criminal prosecution and other dangers, but her thoughts—as reported by the narrator—never turn to these possibilities. Such selflessness further distinguishes Bowen’s protagonist from Conrad’s: while preparing for the Greenwich bombing, Verloc views Stevie’s arrest, but not his own, as an acceptable eventuality (198). As discussed above, Verloc’s treatment of Stevie also shows that for the secret agent, professional responsibilities take precedence over personal ones. This approach to inter-network conflicts rarely appears in subsequent critical spy novels: not only Stella but also the main characters of works such as The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and The Human Factor rank personal affective ties above other

46 Though most of Stella’s self-sacrificial behavior relates to Robert, she occasionally exhibits similar tendencies when dealing with Roderick. For instance, she agrees to travel to Ireland to manage affairs at Mount Morris, Roderick’s inherited estate, despite “dread[ing]” the idea of going there because it was the site of her honeymoon with Victor (178).
types of bonds. Thus, in valorizing the personal, *The Heat of the Day* diverges from *The Secret Agent* but anticipates the direction of the larger body of critical spy fiction.

*The Heat of the Day*’s inter-network conflict ends in much the same way as does *The Secret Agent*’s but conveys a different message about the efficacy of various organizational structures. Regardless of their disparate priorities, Verloc and Stella experience similar outcomes: the network to which they show the most loyalty fails, and an antagonistic official network succeeds. None of Stella’s efforts can protect Robert, whose fatal “fall or leap” from her roof severs their connection (327). Conversely, Robert’s death represents a triumph for the British government: “the country was spared a demoralising story; everything now could be, and was, hushed up” (340). Although Harrison, having been transferred abroad, plays no role in the cover-up, the intelligence agency for which he works likely does. Concealing Robert’s traitorousness would be in keeping with the agency’s overall characterization as enormously powerful and effective. Harrison flaunts the “‘inside’ power” he enjoys due to his occupation in numerous ways, such as displaying “prodigality with matches” (140), a commodity most people have difficulty obtaining because of the war, and disregarding injunctions against excessively “travelling around” (188). The agency’s power and efficacy stem in part from its extensive knowledge, about which Harrison repeatedly boasts. On the evening when he first mentions Robert’s possible treason to Stella, Harrison assures her, “Your interest in Robert has, with everything else concerning him, been of some interest elsewhere for quite a time now—yes, I

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47 At the end of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, Leamas and his love interest, Liz Gold, have an opportunity to escape captivity in East Germany by scaling the Berlin Wall. Leamas has almost reached safety when he realizes Liz has fallen behind. In the course of going back to check on her, he is shot dead by East German forces (Le Carré 225). *The Human Factor*’s Castle leaks intelligence to the USSR not for ideological reasons but out of gratitude because Communists helped his wife flee dangerous circumstances in her native country, South Africa (Greene 114-118). When forced to choose between either their intelligence careers or their political beliefs and their loved ones, both Leamas and Castle take the final option.
may say I was pretty well up to date with that particular story before I met you” (41-42). During a later meeting, he reveals that listening in “on the telephone at nights” via a tapped line provides him with current information about Robert and Stella’s conversations (145). Harrison claims that because of this familiarity with the couple’s behavior and routines, he will be able to tell if and when Stella warns Robert about the officials’ investigation of him. Harrison subsequently makes good on this assertion, correctly identifying the occasion when Stella “slip[s] the word” to Robert (260). This incident illustrates how knowledge allows Harrison—and, by extension, the intelligence network he represents—to anticipate and respond to developments in the case. By attributing efficacy only to an official government network, The Heat of the Day resembles The Secret Agent. However, whereas working within the police force’s rank structure enables effectiveness in The Secret Agent, The Heat of the Day emphasizes the destructive potential of such hierarchical networks via its portrayal of the Kelway family and associates success with the more flexible organization of Harrison’s intelligence agency. This difference, along with Verloc and Stella’s contrasting techniques for handling network conflicts, shows that rather than merely mimicking Conrad, Bowen revises established tropes of the espionage genre.

The Heat of the Day’s usage of geographic space also both parallels and departs from The Secret Agent’s. Each novel heavily features the West End of London, but Bowen concentrates on a different and smaller segment of this area. Additionally, in The Heat of the Day, characters more frequently venture outside of the city, traveling to places such as England’s Home Counties and Ireland. Of these settings, London receives the most critical analysis. One line of inquiry concentrates on the unusual stylistic strategies Bowen employs to render the war’s effects on the city and its population,48 while another devotes more attention to how she maps urban space.

48 See, for instance, Céline Magot and Beryl Pong.
Readings in the latter category rarely discuss the specific locales *The Heat of the Day* depicts and instead focus on the types of places it favors. According to Parsons, “The inhabitants of Bowen’s London move between different public spaces; parks, cafés, bars, and most notably the city streets” (190, emphasis in original). Lisa Katherine Avery echoes this assessment of public spaces’ importance in *The Heat of the Day* and further contends that the novel makes scant use of precisely named locations and routes: “*The Heat of the Day* describes a London that cannot be mapped by tourists who want to recreate the walks taken by the characters” (87). Although *The Heat of the Day* declines to minutely plot the geography of the British capital, Avery exaggerates by labeling its characterization “amorphous” (87). When Bowen’s characters are in London, the text reveals their geographic positions fairly specifically, either by naming them outright or by mentioning the names of nearby streets and landmarks.

Nearly all of *The Heat of the Day*’s London action occurs in the portion of the West End known as Marylebone; Bowen’s depiction of this area combines convention with innovation, reiterating well known discourses but also suggesting new ones. As noted, the entire West End has longstanding associations with wealth and luxury, but Roy Porter suggests that Marylebone and neighboring Mayfair demonstrate especial gentility. Whereas other parts of the West End occasionally display “shoddy” architecture and design, Porter contends that “the squares and places of Mayfair and Marylebone,” developed during the eighteenth century, embody “new standards of aristocratic elegance” (102). Aristocrats ceased being the sole occupants of Marylebone in the 1800s, when professionals such as doctors moved in (Porter 110), yet the

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49 On one occasion, for example, Stella and Robert eat dinner “in Soho” (138), and her route home from the restaurant involves walking across “Langham Place” (140). On a different night, Stella goes with Harrison to an eatery “several blocks further east” than Regent Street and south of her own residence (250).

50 Marylebone occupies the spaces directly south and west of Regent’s Park. Although some disagreement exists over the area’s exact boundaries, they are often given as Oxford Street in the south, Edgware Road in the west, and Great Portland Street in the east (“About Marylebone Online”).
neighborhood’s reputation for refinement and fashionableness endured throughout the twentieth century.\footnote{Even in the twenty-first century, Marylebone’s reputation remains substantially the same. For example, a recent London travel guide draws attention to Marylebone’s “genteel Georgian housing” and “elegance” (Leapman 218).} The Heat of the Day’s portrait of Marylebone includes all of the aforementioned traits. Stella’s flat, where a significant portion of the novel takes place,\footnote{Chapters 2, 3, and 15 take place wholly in this flat, and it is heavily featured in an additional four—5, 7, 9, and 12—of the novel’s seventeen chapters.} consists of the uppermost level of a “fairly old house in Weymouth Street,” Marylebone, that is “otherwise in doctors’ and dentists’ occupation” (21). This rented, furnished flat exhibits “irreproachable taste” and décor expressive of the latest “fashion” (22). If the flat implies wealth, the house’s exterior explicitly proclaims it: Louie balks at entering the “expensive length” of Weymouth Street (328). Stella, on the other hand, evinces no unease with the opulence of the area. This disparity likely stems from the women’s differing backgrounds. Louie belongs to the laboring classes, while Stella descends from landowning “gentry” and therefore possesses a pedigree similar to that of the neighborhood’s traditional residents (125). Such details reinforce popular conceptions of Marylebone as a stylish retreat for affluent women and men.

By centering a spy story on Marylebone, The Heat of the Day simultaneously expands the geographic range of espionage literature and challenges traditional understandings of the district. Thompson suggests that Gothic literature and Victorian crime narratives by authors such as Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle include similar sensationalism, so the two genres are distinguished primarily through their favored settings: Gothic tales typically emphasize “remote” and “fantastic” settings, while Dickens, Conan Doyle, and their peers relocate danger to “the sacrosanct realm of the middle-class home” (64). Bowen performs a comparable feat for espionage in The Heat of the Day. The Secret Agent imports spying to London but metaphorically distances this activity from Britons through its concentration on Soho, a district
routinely linked with foreign cultures and ideas. This kind of problematic national identity does not extend to Marylebone—on the contrary, Marylebone provides a prototypical British space due to its long habitation by the nation’s elite. Using the Weymouth Street flat as the setting for the scene in which Harrison informs Stella of Robert’s treachery links spying with the intimate domestic spaces of the upper classes early in the novel, and this association continues throughout the narrative. Stella and Robert’s habit of rendezvousing in Weymouth Street means that Harrison, too, frequents the neighborhood to perform his job of “watching” the other man (35). Inside the residence, Stella adopts the role of “a spy” toward Robert (152), studying him for signs of treachery. Robert’s confession that he has been collaborating with the Nazis “all the time” he has known Stella also happens in the flat (300). Just after Robert flees, Stella hears “the semi-stumble of someone after long standing shifting his position” outside her building (326), which indicates that the couple has been under surveillance. All of these incidents enmesh Stella’s flat and the surrounding area with espionage plots. In so doing, The Heat of the Day diverges from Marylebone’s established reputation for gentility and reimagines it as an arena teeming with political and personal intrigue.

Although much of The Heat of the Day takes place in Marylebone, characters repeatedly journey outside of London, and the novel’s descriptions of these locations once again both conform with and undermine established discourses. Whereas Bowen’s narrator usually includes geographic references sufficient to disclose in which district of London characters are situated, their positions remain far vaguer when they leave the city. For instance, Stella travels to “the Home Counties” to attend Francis’s funeral (75). Naming her destination in this way provides only a very general idea of where Stella goes: the term “Home Counties” refers to “the counties surrounding London” and therefore encompasses a sizable swath of southern England (“home”).
Similarly, the novel gives no more specific location than “a Home County” for Holme Dene (113). Failing to delineate these places implies that beyond London, England’s geography exhibits uniformity. This implication becomes explicit when Stella first sees Holme Dene’s local railway station and spontaneously recalls the station where she boarded a train back to London from Francis’s funeral:

in both cases a high embankment on which the station stood, intersected a sunk concentration of roofs and roads and trees; in which, looking down from the platforms, you saw one kind of pattern of English life at its most incoherent and reassuring. The platforms themselves seemed to bear the mark of breadwinners’ contented evening returns—here no one did anything but keep house. (113-114, emphasis in original)

Despite recognizing the possibility of multiple “pattern[s] of English life,” Stella attributes a single pattern to the Home Counties she experiences. Her understanding of the countryside as a space devoted exclusively to homemaking hearkens back to earlier literary mappings of England. “[E]state poems” published between 1650 and 1850 and Jane Austen’s novels, which employ Home County settings more frequently than any others (Moretti, Atlas 14), portray southern England as a realm of upper-class “country houses” and “parks” isolated from the industrialization and urbanization occurring in other areas of the country, including London (Moretti, Atlas 13). Stella supplies a twentieth-century incarnation of this attitude: the presence of railway stations shows that the Home Counties no longer shun industrialization, but trains also allow these areas to remain primarily residential by transporting laborers to jobs elsewhere.

The reinforcement of traditional associations apparent in Stella’s thoughts about the train depots gives way to subversiveness in The Heat of the Day’s portrait of Holme Dene, which
challenges prevailing assumptions about both the Home Counties and English national identity. Because the Home Counties contain numerous ancient aristocratic estates and favor rural lifestyles, they represent a “much older”—and therefore apparently more authentic—version of England than can be found elsewhere (Moretti, Atlas 13). Works of invasion literature produced around the turn of the twentieth century often show foreign troops passing through the Home Counties (Moretti, Atlas 137), their presence in this celebrated seat of traditional Englishness emphasizing the threat they pose to England’s national character, as well as its territory. The Heat of the Day, in contrast, identifies the Home Counties as the source of England’s danger by depicting them as ideal incubators for spies. Bowen’s narrator describes the Kelways’ home as “a man-eating house” (288), and Robert frames his work for the Nazis as a cure for emasculation, claiming it provides him with “a new heredity” (307). Several critics, too, blame Robert’s experiences at Holme Dene for his treason, but they tend not to explore the wider implications of this notion. The Heat of the Day does not claim uniqueness for Holme Dene; on the contrary, the narrator calls it “one of a monstrous hatch-out over southern England” dating from “the 1900’s [sic]” (288). If the conditions in these other houses resemble those at Holme Dene, other men are liable to respond as Robert has. Thus, the novel suggests that suitable breeding grounds for traitorous double agents exist throughout the Home Counties. In addition to unsettling the Home Counties’ reputation, this portrayal of a menace emanating from within England revises one of espionage literature’s most enduring tropes—foreign countries as the origin points of national security hazards.

The Heat of the Day also uses Holme Dene to critique dominant notions of Englishness. Stella considers Holme Dene’s nationality its most salient feature, musing “if this were not

53 See Victoria Glendinning (188-189), Watson (137-139), and Pong.
England she did not know what it was” (125). Viewing Holme Dene as a symbol for England suggests that the house’s traits can be extended to the country as a whole, and the Kelway residence demonstrates extreme dysfunction. Robert remembers his relatives studiously avoiding unexpected encounters in the house yet constantly watching one another: “everyone knew where everyone else was and, in time, what everyone else was up to” (288). As a young man, he took up photography not out of genuine interest but as a means to the ends of time alone and “a more or less free pass out” of the house (288). Such details reveal how long elements of espionage such as surveillance and deception have reigned at Holme Dene. Spying continues to permeate the residence in the novel’s present. Robert’s mother and sister still vigilantly monitor the behavior of everyone in the home, and Stella mentions having “[s]pied round” during her visit (144), looking for evidence to either refute or support Harrison’s allegation. As it does for Marylebone, *The Heat of the Day* thoroughly entangles Holme Dene with espionage by making it the site of numerous acts of spying. Moreover, because the novel uses Holme Dene to symbolically represent England, the entire country becomes associated with espionage. This constitutes a significant innovation within spy fiction—rather than following the generic convention of depicting Britons who consider spying morally reprehensible and only to be undertaken when necessary to protect national security (Stafford 507), Bowen shows espionage as a constituent element of Englishness. By contradicting common beliefs about where and from whom threats to England arise, *The Heat of the Day* significantly expands the representative possibilities of espionage literature.

While *The Heat of the Day*’s representations of English spaces include subversive elements, its portrait of Ireland diverges the most substantially from spy fiction’s standard practices and from contemporary discourses. The Irish and espionage narratives in the novel
might initially seem unrelated: the latter concentrates on Stella’s relationships with Robert and Harrison, and the former revolves around Roderick’s unexpected inheritance of Mount Morris. Closer examination, however, reveals several connections between Mount Morris and spying. Stella learns during her first full day at the house that Harrison visited there repeatedly when Francis, the former owner, still lived. Aware of Harrison’s job and believing he is “not a man to have come back and back for nothing” (189), Stella concludes that he had involved Francis in some sort of intelligence plot. If Harrison and Francis literally bring espionage to Ireland, Stella does so symbolically by using her time at Mount Morris to thoroughly consider whether Robert could be cooperating with the Nazis. She confronts Robert about this issue on the night she returns to London, suggesting that her ruminations in Ireland have been decisive. As Shannon Wells-Lassagne notes, the couple’s discussion of the allegation against Robert provides the “turning point” of the novel’s spy story because it “precipitat[es] his eventual confession and his death” (“Town and Country” 59, 53). *The Heat of the Day* therefore links its espionage plot with Ireland via the role the country plays in Stella’s decision to speak with Robert about Harrison’s accusations.

*The Heat of the Day*’s depiction of Ireland goes against the grain of both the spy genre and actual wartime attitudes. According to Keith Jeffery and Eunan O’Halpin, “Ireland is characterized in spy fiction chiefly by the small amount of attention that it has received” (93). Consequently, Bowen defies generic standards merely by affording Ireland a prominent position in her story of espionage. Equally importantly, *The Heat of the Day* counters the dominant British perspective on Irish neutrality in the Second World War. Many Britons believed Ireland’s neutrality to be a ruse masking cooperation with Germany. Popular gossip claimed that Irish civilians publicly embraced fascism and aided the Nazi military (Faragher 52). German
intelligence agents, too, could allegedly find “safe haven” amongst the Irish, and World War II spy novels that mention Ireland often reinforce this idea (Jeffery and O’H Halpin 97). The Heat of the Day includes no friendly relations between Ireland and Germany. In fact, Bowen’s novel promotes the opposite view—that the Irish regret their country’s refusal to join the conflict and sympathize with the British cause. Journeys from Ireland to England being restricted, Francis must travel between them on the pretext of visiting his wife, who lives in an English residential care facility; however, his true purpose is “to offer … his services in the war” (74). Pro-Anglo sentiment extends beyond Anglo-Irish individuals such as Francis, in whom it might be expected, to Mount Morris’s Irish caretaker, Donovan. After telling Stella the news of a British victory in Egypt, Donovan comments, “I would give much … to have a hat to bare my head with: the day’s famous” (198). His desire to make this gesture of respect demonstrates satisfaction with the outcome of the battle. Donovan goes on to express a sense of proud ownership over the Anglo-Irish leader of the British forces, saying, “We bred a very fast general. Didn’t I say to you he’d be a fast general? Hasn’t he got them on the run?” (198). By pairing Francis and Donovan’s deep investment in the British war effort with Robert’s fascism, The Heat of the Day reverses standard characterizations of World War II-era Ireland and England. In Bowen’s novel, that is, the treacherousness frequently associated with Ireland arises in England, and the enthusiasm for combatting Nazis routinely attributed to the English occurs more often amongst the Irish. Like its portrayals of Marylebone and the Home Counties, The Heat of the Day’s representation of Ireland not only complicates accepted conceptions but also broadens the geographic scope of espionage literature.

Depictions of mobility provide another area in which The Heat of the Day both reworks generic codes and resembles The Secret Agent. Whereas women account for only a small number
of the movements in Conrad’s text, Stella moves as much as, if not more than, Bowen’s male characters. This disparity reflects societal developments, including “industrialisation, urbanisation[,] and increasing democratisation” (Parkins 2), which occurred in the years between the novels’ publications and which enhanced British women’s access to and opportunities for mobility. The exigencies of the Second World War further loosened restrictions on women’s movements, especially in London—a shift that attracted the attention of numerous women authors. London appears as “a newly female-dominated place” ideal for “the female wanderer or flâneuse” in the wartime work of H.D. and Rose Macaulay, as well as Bowen (Parsons 190).

Bowen’s unique contribution to this widespread emphasis on women’s mobility consists of embedding *The Heat of the Day*’s roving female protagonist in an espionage narrative. In doing so, Bowen not only departs from spy literature’s convention of focusing on male characters but also disrupts the genre’s typical ideological affiliations. Since its inception, spy literature has consistently favored “the politics of the right,” including restrictive gender roles (Denning 148).

Stella’s mobile, relatively independent lifestyle thus infuses the espionage genre with an unusual dose of progressivism.

Though *The Secret Agent* and *The Heat of the Day* depict different relations between gender and mobility, each text foregrounds reluctantly undertaken movements with painful consequences. Stella’s first acts of mobility in *The Heat of the Day* revolve around Francis’s funeral. The narrative recounts only the final minutes of her train ride from London to the service in the Home Counties but details her discomfiture about the trip: Stella dreads “the presenting of some sort of face to her once relations-in-law” (71), who erroneously believe her responsible for the end of her marriage to Victor. She attends the funeral only out of a sense of obligation. In

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54 A high degree of mobility also characterizes Louie and Connie, but because they possess only minimal connections with *The Heat of the Day*’s spy plot, my discussion omits them. For a more detailed consideration of Louie’s and Connie’s mobility, see Parsons (195-199).
contrast with her trip to the countryside, Stella looks forward to the return journey to London. This, though, becomes another uncomfortable ordeal once Harrison insists on sitting with her on the train. Stella feels isolated, claustrophobic, and cowed due to “Harrison’s way of sticking a leg across” the space between their seats like a gate, as well as “his fixing forceful manner to her” (93). The traits that characterize Stella’s movements throughout the novel can already be discerned in these initial instances of mobility. Traveling to the funeral forces her to encounter the former in-laws she would prefer to avoid and exposes her to the humiliation of being publically snubbed by them. Stella’s interactions with Harrison on the London train strengthen the associations between mobility and unpleasant social situations. Additionally, by bringing Stella into contact with Harrison, her trip to the funeral contributes to the adverse effects of their acquaintance, including his attempt to blackmail her into an affair and her uncertainty about Robert’s allegiances.

Stella’s trip to Mount Morris continues to associate mobility with coercion and unpleasant outcomes while also challenging constrictive gender roles. As with Francis’s funeral, Stella feels hesitant to go to Ireland but believes she has a responsibility, for Roderick’s sake, to do so. Stella’s decision to disregard her own inclinations in service of another’s interests recalls the selflessness discussed above, but she simultaneously asserts autonomy by making the journey over Robert’s objections (177-179). This behavior contrasts with the subservience women in spy fiction often exhibit, demonstrating once more how The Heat of the Day modifies generic practices. In other respects, the novel’s treatment of the Irish trip parallels that of the excursion to Francis’s funeral. Again, the narrator describes Stella’s journey to her destination in far less
detail than her return to London. Stella’s final approach to the capital, by train, and her car ride with Robert away from the railway station receive particular emphasis. Both of these acts of mobility generate atmospheres of panicked uncertainty. In the train, blacked-out windows spatially disorient the passengers, who repeatedly ask one another, “Whereabouts would we be now?—how far are we along?” (200). Sound alone provides clues as to the train’s position: “a loud catastrophic roar” accompanies passage through tunnels, and the noise of the train’s motion becomes increasingly “constricted” once it enters London (200). These descriptions’ connotations of disaster and pressure heighten the already considerable tension of the scene. The violence with which the passengers exit the train, “hurling themselves on London” (201), reveals their eagerness to escape this uncomfortable environment. Stella particularly longs for the journey to end because she plans to speak to Robert about Harrison’s allegation upon her arrival in London. The train ride accrues additional ominousness through its connection with the impending crisis in Stella and Robert’s relationship. Thus, mass anxiety and confusion, as well as simultaneous sensory deprivation and overload, characterize this instance of mobility.

Similar attributes distinguish Stella’s next experience of mobility, which occurs in the car Robert has hired to retrieve her from the train station. Robert’s gesture initially pleases Stella, but she becomes distressed when she learns that Ernestine will join them for part of the drive. Once more, mobility entails contact with someone Stella would rather avoid. Her mood shifts again, however, as the ride progresses: noticing Robert’s genuine affection for his sister, Stella “wildly contemplate[s] … a conversation with Ernestine about [him] before it [is] too late” (205-206). The inclusion of the word “wildly” here emphasizes Stella’s lack of control over her mental state and indicates a rising panic reminiscent of the scene on the London train. Whereas

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55 This discrepancy is even more pronounced in the case of the Irish trip, for the narrative completely omits Stella’s progress toward Ireland—one page, she is in London (179), and on the next, she has arrived at Mount Morris (180).
the train’s arrival diffuses its pressurized atmosphere, the tension in the car consistently builds until, after Ernestine departs, Stella abruptly admits someone has told her Robert is “passing information to the enemy” (210). The darkness of the car’s interior prevents Stella from seeing Robert’s reaction to this revelation, and his first verbal responses do not address the charge—instead, he prolongs her uncertainty by wondering aloud that she failed to confront him sooner. If his eventual denial of involvement with the Nazis reassures Stella about his political allegiances, it destabilizes the future of their relationship, as Robert demands, “How do you expect me to know what’s true, now? All I can see now is, how well you hide things” (213). The long-delayed discussion of Robert’s possible espionage, which might have been expected to eliminate ambiguity, therefore merely augments it. Mental and physical symptoms reveal the toll such ongoing indeterminacy takes on Stella: her impression of “hear[ing] a ghostly hoot of a laugh, uttered by herself” indicates dissociation of her mind from her body (214), and she subsequently struggles with a tremor in her hand and a feeling of faintness. Though Stella’s distress over her predicament with Robert seemingly causes these sensations, their occurrence in the midst of a journey means that they hold significance for the novel’s representation of mobility. This episode reinforces preexisting connections between movement and disagreeable developments, anxiety, and confusion and uniquely associates mobility with somatic ailments.

The foregoing examples demonstrate the significant role technologically-assisted mobility plays in *The Heat of the Day*. Walking receives less emphasis, but it, too, tends to be linked with feelings of foreboding and reluctance. For example, after returning to London from

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56 Notably, once Stella and Robert occupy stationary positions at a restaurant table, their interactions become more harmonious, despite some lingering tension over what each said during the car ride.  
57 Contrary to Parsons’s claim that Stella favors “directionless” and “aesthetic, musing wanderings” (197), Bowen only once shows her protagonist aimlessly strolling: following Robert’s death, Stella visits Roderick at his Army base, and mother and son purposelessly walk some distance along an “asphalt field-patch” (332), then turn around and retrace their steps. Stella typically treats walking as she would any other form of transportation, using it to move between particular destinations.
Holme Dene and dining with Robert in Soho, Stella walks back to her Weymouth Street flat. The narrator’s account of this walk bristles with ominous imagery: clouds carry out “a slow, stealthy massing” overhead, “sinister” raindrops occasionally hit Stella, and “troubled lingering” light suffuses the western sky (138). Stella supposes that the uncanny atmosphere has “travelled over” from Nazi-occupied France and imaginatively identifies with civilians trapped in conquered territory (139). This identification intensifies as Stella walks, leaving her feeling “dissolved … into the thousands of beings of oppressed people” in Europe by the time she reaches Weymouth Street (140). Her sense of subjugation could foreshadow another meeting with Harrison, who waits outside her building and whom she has previously compared to “the Gestapo” (33), but the narrative undercuts this interpretation—in fact, Harrison’s presence relieves Stella because she does not wish to arrive home alone. Stella’s upsetting impressions seem to proceed from the act of walking itself. Moving through the unusually dark, quiet streets enhances her awareness of her precarious circumstances and thereby strains her nerves. For Stella, then, traveling on foot proves just as disagreeable as riding in trains or cars. All of these forms of mobility cultivate turbulent perceptions and sensations.

Other acts of pedestrianism also bear upsetting associations. Stella’s connections with reluctant, enforced mobility recur during a dinner date with Harrison. After leaving her flat and walking some distance with him, she stops to ask “where they [are] going in a tone which barely politely veil[s] a disinclination to go anywhere” (247, emphasis in original). Her immobility, though, lasts only momentarily—within a few lines, the pair has resumed walking, indicating that Stella again sets aside her own preference and allows external forces to dictate her movements. Harrison increasingly guides Stella as they walk, so that eventually, he completely controls her motions: “Harrison, having got Stella across Regent Street and several blocks further
east, braked their speed down by a firmer hold on her elbow, cast about for their bearings, then swung her south: she took the corner like an automaton” (250-251). This passage attributes agency only to Harrison, relegating Stella to the status of an object under his direction. Although Stella’s comparison with an automaton implies a lack of affect, she evinces emotions throughout this episode. Harrison observes that Stella seems “rattled” shortly after they set off (248), and she subsequently echoes his assessment (254). Her agitation prompts Stella to be uncharacteristically talkative and open with Harrison as they walk—she even shares the long-held secret that she was the “innocent party” in her divorce from Victor (249). On this occasion, unlike her solitary trek from Soho to Marylebone, merely being mobile does not cause Stella’s distress: learning, just before departing her flat, that Roderick knows the truth about her divorce unsettles her. Nonetheless, the episode’s coupling of emotional turmoil with movement bolsters the adverse connotations with which *The Heat of the Day* has surrounded mobility. Stella’s walk back to her residence after dinner performs a similar function. Louie, whom Stella and Harrison unexpectedly encounter at the restaurant, accompanies the other woman and judges her “a soul astray” (279), presumably based on her steady stream of chatter and excessively brisk walking pace. Stella’s behavior during this walk—particularly her atypical “communicativeness” (278)—resembles her demeanor on the way to the restaurant and again betrays her anxiety. The consistency with which Stella experiences nervousness and other disagreeable emotions when walking or traveling in vehicles depicts mobility as a harmful, disruptive force in her life.

*The Heat of the Day*’s portrayal of movement does not equate to an endorsement of immobility; on the contrary, remaining in one place proves equally problematic. Stella and

58 See the Oxford Dictionaries definition: “Used in comparisons to refer to a person who seems to act in a mechanical or unemotional way” (“automaton”).
59 This representation of both movement and stasis as flawed options for women recalls Bowen’s earlier novel *To the North* (1932), which highlights mobility’s life-threatening potential by concluding with a car
Robert’s tendency to stay in her flat makes them easy targets for surveillance and leaves them open to encirclement by the authorities. Both Stella and Robert realize the vulnerability of their stationary position on the night of his confession: she envisions Harrison “posted … by some multiplication of his personality, all round the house” (311), while Robert worries more generally about “somebody” guarding the front and the back (323). Although the couple never confirms the presence of intelligence agents outside Stella’s building, they behave as if surrounded. Robert decides he has the best chance of avoiding capture if he leaves via the roof, for “there’s one way off it” even if someone stands guard there (325). Robert’s death exemplifies the dangers of both mobility and immobility. On the one hand, acts of mobility—fleeing from the authorities and plummeting from the roof—directly cause his death; on the other hand, his earlier immobility with Stella creates the conditions that provoke him to attempt such a risky escape. Stella, too, suffers as a result of Robert’s death, not only losing her lover, but also being tainted by association with the “scandalous” circumstances of his demise (340), which appear in numerous newspapers. Thus, immobility plays just as detrimental a role in Stella’s life as does mobility—both prompt emotional upheaval and injurious consequences. Her circumstances evoke The Secret Agent’s attribution of treacherousness to remaining stationary, as well as moving. This similarity joins inter-network tension and subversive deployments of geography in demonstrating The Heat of the Day and The Secret Agent’s shared genre. Each novel participates in and significantly transforms the genre of spy fiction.

**Conclusion: A New Map of Espionage Literature**

Erin G. Carlston argues that for British writers of W.H. Auden’s generation, the spy was “a flexible symbol, available for service to such a broad range of political and narrative positions accident but also links settling down to domesticity with the loss of previous interests and an “unadventurous” or unfulfilling life (Parkins 4).
that it could almost be defined as the master trope of the liminal, the oppositional, the secretive” (154). Though “the metaphor of the spy” figures especially prominently in interwar literature (Carlston 154), authors have also used it extensively during other periods: for instance, John Banville’s 1997 novel *The Untouchable* follows Auden’s lead by likening male homosexuality to espionage, and 1940s publications by both Bowen and Greene explore similarities between heterosexual lovers and spies. According to Petra Rau, *The Heat of the Day* and Greene’s *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) suggest that “[l]ove is like spying because it relies on a perceived other whose boundaries it strives [to] dissolve” (48). In spite of the rich symbolism with which these texts invest spies and spying, scholars of espionage literature often attach greater significance to manifest content such as plot and character types. This approach has led to a narrow definition of what constitutes spy literature and the marginalization of works that involve espionage but do not emphasize the technical or bureaucratic details of intelligence operations. For this reason, studies of spy literature typically omit *The Heat of the Day*.

The family resemblances method enables a more inclusive idea of spy literature. As noted, this method stipulates that a text can be considered spy literature as long as it shares features with “another work that we commonly agree” belongs to the genre (Kincaid 414). The similarities between *The Secret Agent*, an acknowledged example of espionage literature, and *The Heat of the Day* that this chapter examines—conflicting networks, provocative geographic discourses, and an emphasis on the dangerous potentials of mobility—support labeling Bowen’s novel spy fiction. *The Heat of the Day*’s differences from *The Secret Agent* also fit within the family resemblances approach, which recognizes that far from remaining static over time, genres continually evolve. Signs of evolution in *The Heat of the Day* include its elevation of personal

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60 Victor Maskell, Banville’s protagonist, claims that his liaisons with other men and his spying for the Soviet Union have “a kind of equilibrium, each a cover for the other” (316).
ties above all other concerns, its reliance on locations usually absent from espionage literature, and its concentration on a mobile female protagonist. These revisions of existing conventions introduce new possibilities for spy literature and therefore situate The Heat of the Day as a crucial text in the genre’s development. Recognizing Bowen’s contributions, as well as those of women writers such as MacInnes and Frankau, constitutes a step toward rectifying the gender imbalance of espionage literature’s established canon, and the family resemblances model shows that the genre need not be redefined to do so.

Using family resemblances to map an individual genre can also reveal connections between ostensibly disparate types of literature. As Kincaid explains:

it is rare for a work, even in the heartland of [a] genre, to be all of one thing or all of another. A novel such as The Caves of Steel by Isaac Asimov, for instance, is clearly and unequivocally science fiction, but it also clearly and deliberately partakes of the detective story. It is a recognisable member of two different genre families. But there is no problem in saying that in respect of characteristics A, B, and C it resembles science fiction, and hence discussing it as a work of science fiction; that in respect of characteristics X, Y, and Z it resembles detective fiction, and hence discussing it as a work of detective fiction. (416)

Partaking of multiple genres does not make a text any less an example of one particular genre; rather, such hybridity illustrates the permeability of generic boundaries. Whereas The Secret Agent exhibits traits of spy and detective literature,61 two categories critics routinely recognize as being related,62 The Heat of the Day forges ties between genres as apparently dissimilar as

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61 For a reading that emphasizes The Secret Agent’s affinity with detective literature, see Walton.
62 Thompson, for instance, considers spy and detective narratives so closely linked that he uses the single term “crime fiction” to encompass both genres (3), while Yumna Siddiqi identifies espionage fiction as a “cousin to the detective story” (19). Hepburn goes to great lengths to differentiate spy and detective
espionage fiction, Big House literature, and portraits of the working classes. Exposing such bonds shows that the entire literary landscape makes up a densely interconnected network. Further evidence of this occurs in the next chapter, which examines resemblances between two seemingly unconnected genres: counter-insurgency prose and Big House novels.

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fiction but nonetheless admits the existence of several commonalities between their plots, including emphases on analysis, pursuit, and revelations of guilt (25-26).
CHAPTER 2
CLANDESTINE NETWORKS OF THE COLONIZED: REPRESENTATIONS OF
THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY

In a 1986 interview, Molly Keane remembered visiting the home of her friend Elizabeth Bowen decades before: “The plan was that we would both write in the morning. For the entire two weeks, I sat and listened to the ceaseless clacking of Elizabeth’s typewriter and couldn’t think of a thing to write about. Not a scribble” (Kierstead 112, emphasis in original). If a comparative valuation of Bowen’s and her own work seems implicit in Keane’s comments, literary critics often explicitly measure the two against each other. Such comparisons stem from the authors’ shared tendency to write about the landed Irish estates known as Big Houses, as well as the Anglo-Irish families who occupied them. Scholars who venture beyond juxtapositions of Bowen and Keane typically only go so far as considering their publications alongside other works centering on Big Houses. One consequence of this isolation of Big House texts is, as Margot Backus points out, that they have “seldom been seriously discussed in relation to the Irish canon” (174). I argue that such limited comparisons also result in skewed perceptions of the politics of Big House novels such as Bowen’s The Last September and Keane’s Two Days in Aragon, which both take place in 1920 and explore how the Anglo-Irish respond to the Irish War of Independence unfolding around them. Recent studies cite Bowen’s and Keane’s exposures of Anglo-Irish wrongdoings as evidence of political subversiveness, but reading The Last September and Two Days in Aragon in relation to works from other genres problematizes this

63 Comparisons of Keane and Bowen often center on arguments that one or the other writer deserves more praise. James M. Cahalan, for instance, favors Bowen, but others, including Ann Owens Weekes and Mary Breen, elevate Keane, suggesting that her satirical style lends her work greater subversiveness.
conclusion, revealing profoundly regressive\textsuperscript{64} tendencies in both novels. In other words, \textit{The Last September} and \textit{Two Days in Aragon} appear subversive by the standards of Big House literature but not by broader literary and cultural standards. Reappraising the politics of these novels provides a better sense of how they fit into the Irish canon, as well as the larger tradition of English-language literature.

This chapter recontextualizes \textit{The Last September} and \textit{Two Days in Aragon} by placing their portrayals of the War of Independence in conversation with Irish Republican Army veterans’ accounts and with works of counter-insurgency prose—the latter a genre that seeks to undermine the legitimacy and justify the repression of insurgent movements. \textit{The Last September} and \textit{Two Days in Aragon} devote markedly different amounts of space to the war in general and to Irish nationalists in particular. In \textit{The Last September}, members of the IRA appear only briefly and tend to remain anonymous and silent, whereas \textit{Two Days in Aragon} offers lengthier scenes in which named Irish nationalists’ looks and personalities are described and their voices are heard. Both portrayals attribute advance planning, organization, and cooperation to the IRA—that is, \textit{The Last September} and \textit{Two Days in Aragon} indicate that the IRA operates as a network, and the details the novels offer about that network’s functioning sometimes parallel information included in IRA veterans’ reports. Ultimately, however, both novels’ depictions of the IRA more strongly resemble characterizations found in counter-insurgency prose. \textit{The Last September} and \textit{Two Days in Aragon} draw in distinct ways on the literary tradition of counter-insurgency:

\begin{itemize}
\item I use this term to mean “returning to or reflecting an earlier or less advanced stage of development” (“regressive, adj.”), in which sense it serves as an antonym for progressive: “Of persons, communities, etc.: developing, changing, progressing; esp. advancing in or gaining some desirable attribute or quality; improving, or able to improve” (“progressive, adj. and n.”). \textit{The Last September} and \textit{Two Days in Aragon} reflect earlier eras by deploying concepts of Irish beastliness and intellectual inferiority that have characterized British accounts since Gerald of Wales published \textit{The History and Topography of Ireland} in the twelfth century. As I discuss, such conceptions have historically played important roles in defenses of Ireland’s colonization and therefore also have political implications.
\end{itemize}
Bowen’s novel associates IRA soldiers with merciless violence and extreme mobility, casting them as an omnipresent threat to the Anglo-Irish and British; Keane’s suggests that the IRA terrorizes the rest of the Irish population and consists of criminals and immature religious fanatics rather than informed patriots. Both texts utilize the counter-insurgency convention of obscuring the violent actions of colonial government forces. In addition to revealing connections between the seemingly disparate genres of Big House novels and counter-insurgency prose, these resemblances suggest that, with regard to their depictions of the IRA, *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* are themselves examples of counter-insurgency literature.

**The Irish War of Independence, Big Houses, and the IRA**

Because both *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* take place in the midst of the Irish War of Independence, some background information about that conflict aids understanding of these novels. The War of Independence, sometimes referred to as the Tan War or the Anglo-Irish War, lasted from 1919 to 1921 and resulted in the partition of Ireland and the creation of the Irish Free State. In Ireland, the executions of participants in the Easter Rising of 1916 had aroused outrage and increased public support for the independence movement, but the primary pro-independence fighting force, the IRA, included a relatively small number of consistently engaged troops: historian Peter Hart estimates that the IRA’s “active and reliable core” consisted of only around 5,000 men (*The I.R.A.* 112). Opponents of the IRA included active and former members of the British military, with the latter comprising the forces known as the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries (Hopkinson 28, 50). Additionally, the Royal Irish Constabulary, a police force, was tasked with fighting the IRA, which the British government considered a criminal, rather than a military, organization (Blake 18). These forces fighting for the British

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65 See Michael Hopkinson for the ideological connotations of each of these terms (xx).
66 Hart distinguishes between the IRA’s strength “on paper,” which at times rose to more than 100,000, and its number of members who actually took part in operations (*The I.R.A.* 112).
greatly outnumbered and were far better equipped than the IRA. To compensate for these
disadvantages, the IRA relied on guerilla warfare tactics. During the early part of the conflict,
IRA soldiers favored ambushes of military or police vehicles traveling alone and assaults on RIC
barracks, but as the British government implemented precautions against these types of attacks,
the IRA had to adopt new strategies. One such strategy was the creation of flying columns—
“compact, mobile, fighting units” prepared to engage opposing forces whenever opportunities
arose (O’C 233). Flying columns proved capable of planning complex attacks, inflicting heavy
casualties on their opposition, and—equally importantly—evading apprehension.

Around the same time as flying columns began operating and likely in response to their
successes, crown forces began regularly carrying out “reprisals,” which often involved burning
the homes and/or businesses of individuals believed to sympathize with the nationalists’ cause.
IRA veterans claim to have burned “unionist houses” as “counter-reprisal[s]” for such
destructions (O’B 250). 67 From the IRA’s perspective, Big Houses made attractive targets for
counter-reprisals for both practical and symbolic reasons. First, because the British Army
sometimes requisitioned these buildings for troop accommodations (Martin 155), ruining the
houses deprived the military of places of refuge and thereby hampered its operations.
Additionally, unionist sentiments were often taken for granted in Big House owners because of
their descent from British individuals who settled in Ireland during the plantation efforts of the
sixteenth century. 68 The connection between the plantations and Big Houses also explains the
symbolic implications of burning the latter: the IRA saw Big Houses as representations of
“British domination” situated on land “robbed” from its “rightful owners” (Barry 8), so
destroying these residences symbolized destroying anchors of British power in Ireland. Despite

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67 See also Ernie O’Malley (133) and Tom Barry (154). According to Barry, the IRA’s policy in West
Cork was to burn “the homes of two British Loyalists” for each “Republican home destroyed” (154).
68 See Barry (8).
these perceived benefits, however, the IRA did not burn all of Ireland’s Big Houses during the War of Independence. In fact, historical research shows that Big Houses were burned in greater numbers during the Civil War that followed the fight for independence (Martin 157). Literary representations of Big Houses in the War of Independence, on the other hand, almost always depict the houses in question being set alight. Such a discrepancy suggests that the relationship between these texts and the historical record is more complex than it might initially appear and consequently warrants closer examination.

As Backus notes, *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* present a “realist surface” (175), and their apparently realistic style and grounding in actual events might give the impression that these novels depict only lightly fictionalized versions of the War of Independence. Indeed, Peter Martin suggests that literature has “created many people’s image of how the aristocracy experienced the revolutionary period” (155). The tendency to conflate literature and history that Martin identifies occurs even amongst literary critics. For instance, Edwina Keown treats *The Last September* as a simple mirror for history, occasionally slipping sentence by sentence back and forth between a discussion of Bowen’s novel and of real incidents in the War of Independence. Neil Corcoran points out that although *The Last September* never specifies the location of its Big House, Danielstown, scholars routinely name its location as County Cork; Corcoran suggests that this is “because the Bowen family home, Bowen’s Court, was in Co. Cork, and Danielstown is too casually identified with its fictional representation”

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69 Literary depictions of the War of Independence so often feature Big Houses going up in flames that Backus designates “‘burning Big House’ texts” as a sort of subgenre within the more widely recognized subgenre of Big House novels (213). Whereas the Big House tradition dates back to the publication of Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* in 1800, burning Big House texts began appearing within a few years of the conclusion of the War of Independence: the first performance of Lennox Robinson’s play *The Big House* occurred in 1926, and *The Last September* was published in 1929. Subsequent decades saw the production of more works in the subgenre—*Two Days in Aragon* appeared in 1941 and J.G. Farrell’s satirical novel *Troubles* in 1970—attesting to the continued association of burning Anglo-Irish dwellings with the Irish fight for independence.
(46). Polly Devlin acknowledges *Two Days in Aragon*’s status as a “fictional account” but nonetheless emphasizes its depiction of the “sad truths” of “Irish history” (xv). Assuming a straightforward relationship between these novels and the historical conditions in which they are set is problematic not only because authors sometimes represent history inaccurately, but also because the details of such inaccuracies can help to reveal the texts’ political and ideological affiliations, which have long been debated.

Recent analyses of *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* cast them as politically subversive—more specifically, as critical of the injustices perpetrated by the colonial systems and practices in pre-independence Ireland. However, these readings rest almost exclusively on the novels’ portrayals of the Anglo-Irish and say little about their representations of Irish individuals, including IRA members.70 While the Anglo-Irish may have been, in Wells-Lassagne’s words, “both colonisers and colonised” by virtue of their hybrid English/Irish identity and complex relationship with Britain (“‘He Believed’” 452), they nonetheless possessed significant legal and economic privileges that set them apart from other colonized groups. An assessment of the stances *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* take regarding Ireland’s colonization should consider how they portray the primary objects of colonial control—the “native” Irish whom punitive government policies had targeted since the time of the plantations—as well as the anti-colonial efforts of the IRA. Backus admits that both *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* feature “two-dimensional” IRA members grounded in “stereotype” but fails to recognize how such portrayals complicate the novels’ politics (210).

Stereotypes about the Irish, including their supposedly innate laziness, childishness, and

70 *The Last September* has received greater scholarly attention overall than has *Two Days in Aragon*, so more examples of this tendency can be seen in the criticism of Bowen’s novel. See Shannon Wells-Lassagne (“‘He Believed’” 454, 459), Corcoran (52, 53, 60), and Kcown on *The Last September* and Backus on *Two Days in Aragon* (202-205). These readings devote minimal space to the IRA and often use IRA soldiers’ appearances in the novels to illustrate points about Anglo-Irish characters.
emotional volatility, were long used to justify British control of Ireland. Through their stereotypical portraits of the IRA, then, *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* perpetuate rather than subvert imperialistic ideas.

Even more important for *The Last September’s* and *Two Days in Aragon’s* politics are their similarities with counter-insurgency prose. Coined by Ranajit Guha in the context of South Asian historiography, the phrase “the prose of counter-insurgency” denotes texts that blame factors such as religious fanaticism, spontaneous instincts, and atavism for colonial uprisings (3, 15), instead of portraying insurgents as “entit[ies] whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion” (2). Justifications of governmental reactions to insurgencies, including indiscriminate violence and suspension of regular legal processes, also frequently appear in texts belonging to this genre (Guha 26). As Stephen Morton demonstrates (36-46), the tactics that characterize literary depictions of South Asian insurgencies also appear in many accounts of Irish nationalists published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During that time period, Britain’s government repeatedly passed emergency legislation suspending the purportedly “normal rule of law” in Ireland in favor of explicitly repressive procedures (Morton 35). Subjecting “a country that was legally part of the United Kingdom” to measures typically identified with “colonial governmentality” challenged the British government’s self-fashioning as a liberal upholder of constitutional rights (Morton 35). To justify the use of emergency measures, politicians and writers of counter-insurgency prose characterized the Irish as inherently different from and inferior to the British. According to this viewpoint, these differences meant that the principles of government that worked in the rest of the United Kingdom could not succeed in Ireland (Morton 36). In addition, the prose of counter-insurgency

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71 For more about the content and strategic deployment of these stereotypes, see Michael de Nie (173-190).
attributes ruthless violence and destruction to Irish nationalists, suggesting that they threaten the social stability of England, as well as Ireland, and that therefore their activities must be stopped by whatever means necessary (Morton 37-39). Counter-insurgency writing’s investment in maintaining the imperial status quo—manifested through vindications of government activities and vilification of rebels—identify it as a politically conservative genre.

Though counter-insurgency literature concerned with Irish nationalists predated the War of Independence, that conflict occasioned an outpouring of new material. For instance, a collection of policing narratives titled *Tales of the R.I.C.* appeared in 1921 after being published serially in the same year. These tales show the IRA tyrannizing the rest of the Irish population and so “serve to disavow the violent methods of counter-insurgency, which emergency regulations … empowered the armed Royal Irish Constabulary to employ” (Morton 45). *Tales of the R.I.C.* exemplifies the blatantly biased perspective scholars tend to associate with counter-insurgency prose, but I argue that *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* participate just as meaningfully in the genre. While these novels acknowledge some of the ways colonialism harms the colonized population\(^2\) and decline to explicitly condone the use of emergency measures, their representations of IRA soldiers strongly resemble depictions of Irish nationalists in counter-insurgency works. Such resemblances demonstrate that critics overestimate the subversiveness of *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* and illustrate the insights that can result from reading Bowen’s and Keane’s writings alongside pieces outside the Big House genre.

\(^2\) *Two Days in Aragon* repeatedly mentions household servants being sexually abused by their Anglo-Irish employers and the resulting offspring being killed (108, 156, 192-193). *The Last September* is less explicit, but Lois claims to understand why Britain’s treatment of Ireland has aroused resentment amongst the Irish population (66).
The Last September and Two Days in Aragon can also be usefully put into conversation with IRA veterans’ accounts of the War of Independence. Frank O’Connor’s personal experiences with the IRA famously informed his fiction, but the majority of veterans who wrote about the conflict did so in non-fiction formats. While numerous literary texts depicting the Anglo-Irish experience of the war appeared within a few years of its conclusion, many of the veterans’ accounts saw publication well over a decade later: Ernie O’Malley’s On Another Man’s Wound and Tom Barry’s Guerilla Days in Ireland were published in 1936 and 1949, respectively, and Irish newspapers serialized short narratives of operations written by former IRA members during the 1930s, ‘40s, and ‘50s. These veteran-authored texts contest the portraits that The Last September and Two Days in Aragon paint of the IRA. For the largely anonymous or undeveloped IRA figures in these novels, veterans’ accounts substitute a wealth of personal details, often naming and stating the hometown of each soldier in a unit. Whereas Bowen and Keane omit details about crown forces’ treatment of the IRA but include specifics about nationalist attacks, IRA authors work to situate their actions in the context of the war’s pattern of reciprocal, often escalating, violence. Additionally, writers such as O’Malley and Barry emphasize the intensity of nationalistic, anti-colonial feeling amongst the IRA; the organizational structure that the group used and worked to perfect throughout the war; and the assistance that it received from civilians, as well as other nationalist associations. On these points, The Last September and Two Days in Aragon differ. The Last September recognizes the IRA’s nationalism and ties to the civilian population but only hints at the group’s organizational structure. Two Days in Aragon directly references hierarchal, yet flexible, organization within

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73 Examples include the Fighting Story series, published in The Kerryman “in the years before the Second World War” (Ó Conchubhair 9), and O’Malley’s Raids and Rallies, which appeared in Dublin’s Sunday Press from September 1955 to June 1956 (Blake 17). Both of these series were also subsequently published in book form—the Fighting Story series in 1947 and Raids and Rallies in 1982.
the IRA but denies that non-members sympathize with its agenda and that nationalistic ideals motivate its members. *Two Days in Aragon* gives a better sense than does *The Last September* of how the IRA functions as a network. Both novels, though, fail to portray the Irish nationalists as politically conscious and engaged agents and thereby diverge greatly from IRA veterans’ descriptions of themselves and their compatriots. Conversely, the IRA soldiers in *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* mirror counter-insurgency texts’ depictions of rebels. This similarity not only provides a previously overlooked linkage between Big House literature and counter-insurgency prose, but also aligns *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* with the regressive politics that undergird the latter genre.

**Theorizing Clandestine Networks**

Scholars of networks long overlooked criminalized organizations, but evidence that al Qaeda, the group responsible for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, was structured as a network generated unprecedented interest in this area. In the years since then, researchers have applied network theory to numerous active and defunct illegal organizations—labeled dark, covert, or clandestine networks to distinguish them from “bright,” overt, legal networks. Such studies reveal that many otherwise heterogeneous covert networks

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74 I do not mean to suggest that scholars have completely ignored organized crime but rather to follow Michael Kenney in noting a traditional disciplinary division between those who study networks and those who study criminals (“Turning” 79).

75 Within a few months of the attacks, Valdis E. Krebs attempted to map the network ties amongst the September 11 hijackers (44-50). For subsequent accounts of al Qaeda’s network structure based on more complete data, see Marc Sageman (137-174) and Kahler (“Collective” 103-124).

76 Organizations investigated in this way include South Africa’s MK, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, and Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Bakker et al. 36-59), as well as Israel’s Jewish Underground (Asal et al. 402-420) and the Provisional IRA (Gill et al. 53-75).

77 As Jörg Raab and H. Brinton Milward observe, the term dark network is “problematic” because it “contains an evaluation of goals that is by its nature normative” (429), attributing immorality to the organization so labeled. Conversely, “covert network” avoids moral judgments and merely indicates that the group’s “activity is contrary to the law that is enacted in the geographic area where the activity takes
exhibit common traits, such as exploiting preexisting social ties and adopting flexible organizational structures. While network theorists usually concentrate on covert networks operational during the second half of the twentieth century, historical accounts indicate that these same features characterized the independence-era IRA and thereby justify applying contemporary analytical methods to its operations.

Research shows that previously established social connections play a crucial role in clandestine networks. According to Raab and Milward:

\[
\text{every illegal activity that needs continuing coordination is based on ties of trust that were often formed long before the illegal activity started. This occurs because recruitment of new members follows the path of established trust relations. (430)}
\]

Raab and Milward base their argument on case studies of al Qaeda, transnational drug traffickers, and West African arms dealers, and analyses of other clandestine networks reach similar conclusions. For instance, most members of the Jewish Underground knew one another prior to the organization’s founding. These relationships “accentuated the sense of trust and facilitated the recruitment patterns of the Underground” (Asal et al. 403); additionally, familial and friendship ties between Underground members heightened their sense of the stakes of their operations against Palestine (Asal et al. 419). Kahler observes that similar factors shaped earlier networks, such as “right-wing nationalist organizations in Europe after World War I,” which included veterans bonded by shared experiences of combat (“Collective” 114). In the independence-era IRA, too, companies often “formed around already existing social networks, in workplaces, neighbourhoods, on sports teams and among friends and family” (Hart, “Introduction” 21). The foregoing examples demonstrate that covert networks often grow out of place” (Raab and Milward 430). The phrase clandestine network is similarly free of moral valuation. For these reasons, I use covert or clandestine network, rather than dark network, throughout this project.
preexisting social connections. These underlying linkages increase a network’s likely effectiveness by boosting trust and cohesion within its nodes, as well as members’ investment in its success.

Organizational flexibility also often characterizes clandestine networks. Kenney’s study of twentieth-century Columbian drug traffickers describes two network structures that illegal organizations commonly utilize.\(^78\) The first of these, the wheel, which Figure 3 visually represents, features “a hub or core node that coordinates the overall network and peripheral nodes that perform specific tasks” (Kenney, “Turning” 84). Core nodes hold the greatest amount of power within wheel networks, including the authority to discipline individuals or groups responsible for mistakes (Kenney, “Turning” 84), but “peripheral nodes are largely independent” and “contain their own … hierarchies” (Kenney, “Turning” 86). Peripheral nodes’ autonomy, along with core nodes’ tendency to “build redundancy into their operations by exploiting the services of multiple peripheral nodes that perform the same task” (Kenney, “Turning” 85), provides wheel networks with the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions—even to completely restructure themselves, if necessary. Kenney describes how drug trafficking networks evolved following the elimination of important core node members in the late 1980s and early ‘90s: “relatively centralized wheel networks responded to increasingly hostile environments by decentralizing their operations, becoming more amorphous—and resilient—than before” (“Turning” 99-100). Wheel networks reorganized into chain networks, in which “autonomous nodes exchange directly with other nodes, sans the mediation and oversight provided by the core” (Kenney, “Turning” 87). See Figure 4 for an illustration of a chain network. The lack of centralization in chains means that the destruction of a single node cannot incapacitate the entire

\(^78\) These network forms seem especially well suited for illegal entities but are not unique to them. On the contrary, covert networks’ structures often closely resemble the organizational models of overt networks, such as corporations (Raab and Milward 420, 423, 431).
network, a quality that makes this structure especially advantageous for organizations under attack by external forces. A shift from wheel to chain organization occurred not only in Columbian drug networks but also in al Qaeda during the US-led “war on terrorism” (Kenney, “Turning” 99), indicating that these network structures remain advantageous across different geographic and temporal contexts.

In firsthand accounts of the War of Independence, the IRA demonstrates behaviors associated with both wheel and chain networks. Officially, the IRA’s organizational structure closely resembled a wheel. General headquarters (GHQ), located in Dublin, corresponded to the core node of the wheel, and fighting units stationed in different sections of the country corresponded to peripheral nodes. As would be expected of the core node, GHQ held authority over other parts of the network. Barry, commander of an active service column in West Cork and therefore a participant in a peripheral node, recounts responding to a summons to GHQ in spite of his reluctance to leave his unit and the extreme peril in which traveling placed him (232). Barry evinces no possibility that such a summons could be refused, revealing his recognition of the authority of GHQ officers. Writing of his time in Dublin, Barry notes the remarkably different lifestyles of GHQ staff and of field units—the former had much greater freedom of movement and less fear of arrest thanks to their cover identities as “business men,” which were complete with “false papers to support their disguise[s]” (236). The more comfortable existences of members of GHQ conform to Kenney’s assertion that the core nodes of wheel networks accrue more benefits than do peripheral nodes (“Turning” 84). The IRA also confirms that peripheral nodes maintain substantial independence. Although GHQ officially possessed the power to issue orders applicable to all of the IRA, such orders were often not followed. Examples of frequently disregarded orders include that assaults not be carried out or suspected
spies executed without GHQ authorization.\textsuperscript{79} These incidents confirm that the independence-era IRA did not function in the rigidly hierarchical fashion characteristic of most armies and highlight its similarities with wheel networks.

The IRA also demonstrated traits of a chain network. As noted, an important distinction between wheel and chain networks is that in the latter, no core exists, and nodes interact directly with one another. While the IRA had a core node, local units sometimes acted as if it did not; their autonomy then went beyond that accorded to the peripheral nodes in a wheel and assumed the characteristics of a chain network. Although IRA writers emphasize fighting units’ need to depend on themselves alone,\textsuperscript{80} units from different locales aided each other with reinforcements when possible. At these times, units communicated directly with each other, not involving GHQ (O’Malley 175). In keeping with his representation of the self-determining nature of flying columns, Barry admits that he and his men “were not respecters of borders” and frequently operated in other brigades’ territories, relying on those units for food, shelter, and protection (179). What is more, Barry describes representatives from several brigades meeting without GHQ’s sanction in April 1921 to discuss importing a large supply of weapons and ammunition. These meetings, Barry says, “were indicative of the lack of control which G.H.Q. exercised or could exercise over the Brigades” (205). He suggests that this incident was anomalous (205), but it remains significant because it demonstrates the IRA’s ability to function as a chain network on a fairly large scale. To an even greater degree than the previously mentioned examples, the arms-importation talks show IRA units taking upon themselves the kind of logistical, “steering” task that would normally be performed by the core node of a wheel network. This evidence suggests

\textsuperscript{79} See O’Malley (62, 199) and Barry (142). Barry’s memoir includes discussions of several other ways in which flying columns acted autonomously (31, 246).

\textsuperscript{80} See O’Malley (212).
that the independence-era IRA was organized as a wheel network in theory but in practice often operated as a chain.

Whereas network scholars have become interested in illegal organizations relatively recently, literary depictions have long recognized the existence of networks among criminalized groups, including colonial insurgents. Representations of the Indian rebellion of 1857 show the insurgents as a network capable of vying with the British telegraph system in geographic extent and speed of communication (Worth 23). Technology often plays little to no role in this Indian network, which transmits information through word of mouth and material objects invested with unspecified symbolic meanings (Worth 24). Such portrayals offer a “dualist conception” that associates natives with “resolutely material” signification—as opposed to the British’s form of disembodied communication—and also reinforces stereotypes of Indian inscrutability and primitiveness (Worth 24). On the other hand, the Indian rebels demonstrate that even without access to advanced equipment, insurgent networks can pose a real threat to the imperial order. This idea receives additional support from IRA veterans’ accounts of the War of Independence, which emphasize the nationalist organization’s limited usage of technology. O’Malley recalls fighting with improvised grenades and bombs (28), and Barry reports that members of the women’s nationalist group Cumann na mBan “carried dispatches long distances” on bicycles (278). IRA soldiers, too, regularly traveled on bicycles or on foot rather than by car or train. All of this suggests that the IRA’s effectiveness owed more to its flexible organizational structure than to any of its war materiel.  

81 The importance of IRA flexibility and adaptability were noted at the time by commentators on both sides of the conflict—see the British Labour Party Commission’s 1921 statement on the situation in Ireland (qtd. in O’Malley 130), Barry (85), and the semi-anonymous IRA veteran O’C (234). Subsequent historians have also listed flexibility amongst the IRA’s strengths—see Marie Coleman (71-72) and Hopkinson (73).
Counter-insurgency literature tends to recognize some of the IRA’s structural traits but claim that other factors bear responsibility for the nationalists’ victories. For example, the story “The Red Cross” in *Tales of the R.I.C.* mentions the existence of both local field officers and an IRA “General Staff” headquartered in Dublin (58). Although the General Staff plans complex attacks and efficiently channels supplies to field units, the story denies that these tactical capabilities play a meaningful role in the IRA’s successes. Instead, IRA victories are attributed to its reliance on surprise attacks—what another narrative in the collection refers to as “cowardly ambushes” (“The Great Round Up” 281). Such representations undermine the value of the IRA’s capacities for advance planning and coordination by contending that they are deployed only to confront crown forces at an unfair disadvantage. As subsequent sections of this chapter discuss further, both *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* also simultaneously recognize and downplay how the IRA functions as a network. Paradoxical renderings of the IRA network, then, constitute an intersection between Big House literature and counter-insurgency prose. In terms of their portrayals of the IRA, *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* can be considered counter-insurgency texts.

**Ghosts, Monkeys, Executioners: The Last September’s IRA**

*The Last September* centers on the occupants of Danielstown—Sir Richard and Lady Myra Naylor, Sir Richard’s niece Lois, Myra’s nephew Laurence, and guests Hugo and Francie Montmorency and Marda Norton—examining their strained relations with one another, as well as how they respond to the war going on around them. The Naylors and their guests and acquaintances attempt to carry on with their accustomed mode of life: they continue to play tennis, pay social visits, and dress for dinner. The war, however, forms a constant undercurrent to all of their activities. The first allusion to the conflict occurs within the first few pages of the
novel, with the Montmorencys being questioned about their drive to Danielstown: “You came quite safe? No trouble? Nobody at the crossroads? Nobody stopped you?” (4). Information about the war’s progress then surfaces repeatedly throughout *The Last September*. Corcoran claims that references to the war “float nebulously through the novel, signifiers deliberately unattached to the enormity of their signifieds” in order to suggest the unutterable horror of the conflict (46). As Corcoran points out and I discuss further below, Bowen’s narrator and characters often revert to vague or euphemistic language when discussing the war, but examples of more precise description exist and should not be overlooked. These descriptions often relate IRA actions, so examining them is crucial to understanding the portrait that *The Last September* creates of the nationalist organization.

Some of the most straightforward passages in Bowen’s syntactically complex novel depict atrocious behavior on the part of the IRA. Sir Richard warns Lois against pursuing a relationship with a British Army officer because other young women have “had their hair cut off by masked men for walking out with the soldiers” (84). The language here is plain, as is the threat that the IRA poses to civilians. Publicly shaming and punishing women aligns IRA members with terroristic practices and distances them from the decorum that British soldiers demonstrate throughout the novel. Lois’s subsequent jokes about the shearing of women’s hair do little to dissipate the ominousness of a practice that indicates the nationalists consider all segments of the population legitimate targets for violence. Precise description also relates IRA violence directed at a more conventional target, a police building:

Five days ago, an R.I.C. barracks at Ballyrum had been attacked and burnt out

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82 For more about *The Last September*’s use of ambiguous language, see Corcoran (39-60) and Matthew Brown (4-21).

83 Lady Naylor describes the British soldiers as “quite pleasant” (30), and they are desired guests at social gatherings (64). Only Daventry behaves with impoliteness, and the fact that he has been “shell-shocked” in the First World War helps to explain, if not excuse, his conduct (212).
after a long defense. Two of the defenders were burnt inside it, the others shot coming out. The wires had been cut, the roads blocked; there had been no one to send for help so there was no help for them. (64)

This passage’s reliance on simple descriptive language avoids sensationalizing the barracks assault, but at the same time, it emphasizes the meticulous cruelty of the operation by repeatedly mentioning the helpless isolation of the defenders and the word “burnt.” This account also makes a clear distinction between the defenders and the attackers of the barracks—the former, due to their “long defense” of the building, come across as brave and stalwart, while the latter appear monstrous for forcing their opponents to choose between being burnt and being shot.

The mercilessness that these attackers display contrasts strongly with accounts of barracks assaults that actually took place during the War of Independence. O’Malley suggests that occupied barracks were set alight to induce the RIC to surrender rather than to incinerate them. Those who surrendered were stripped of weapons and allowed to leave without being harmed (O’Malley 57). O’Malley’s affiliation with the IRA necessarily problematizes his objectivity, but historians such as Hopkinson agree that barracks assaults were primarily viewed as opportunities to capture weapons and ammunition, not to slaughter police officers (28, 119).

Though the attack recounted in The Last September seems ahistorical, it resonates with the prose of counter-insurgency. As Siddiqi discusses, British writing about the 1857 rebellion in India tends to characterize Indians as “degenerate, violent, irrational, and altogether blighted” (89). Nineteenth-century counter-insurgency prose aimed at Irish nationalists relies on similar tropes: for instance, a newspaper article about the Phoenix Park assassinations of 1882 labels the Irish nationalists responsible “worse than savage manslayers” (qtd. in Morton 37). Thus, by portraying
the IRA as bloodthirsty and bestial, *The Last September* adopts a longstanding tradition of counter-insurgency prose.

An association between the IRA and beastliness recurs when Lois and Marda stumble upon a solitary nationalist in an abandoned mill. Asleep when the women arrive, he soon wakens and interrogates them at gunpoint while staring at them “with calculating intentness, like a monkey” (181). Comparing rebels with wild animals is a common counter-insurgency tactic, but this description’s reference to a monkey evokes a more specific cultural context. L. Perry Curtis, Jr., demonstrates that “the dominant Victorian stereotype” of the Irish “looked far more like an ape than a man” (29). In the illustrations of popular publications such as *Punch*, Irish revolutionaries display particularly simian features, their grotesquely subhuman appearances emphasizing the danger they pose to “English civilization” (Curtis 37), as well as their innate inferiority. Like counter-insurgency writings, such images vilify Irish nationalists and excuse imperialism, so in alluding to them, *The Last September* subtly declares its political sympathies. Moreover, according to Curtis, the stereotype of the ape-like Irish “lasted well into the twentieth century, only to die out slowly after the rebellion and intermittent warfare of 1916-21” (29).

Figure 5 reproduces an example dating from 1920. The continued circulation of simianized Irish characters during the independence era suggests that contemporary readers would have understood all that *The Last September*’s likening of an IRA soldier to a monkey implies.

Literary critics often analyze the mill scene but typically offer no comment on either the animalistic depiction of the gunman or its implications. Matthew Brown provides a notable exception to this tendency, acknowledging the “antipathy” present in the description and also pointing out that the narrator utters it, whereas Marda applies more benign terms to the gunman.

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84 Scholars often concentrate on the Gothic elements of the mill scene. See, for example, Backus, Corcoran, Keown, and Wells-Lassagne. For readings that focus on the sexual undertones of the scene, see Vera Kreilkamp and Weekes.
Brown’s reading establishes a distinction between the narrator’s and characters’ words that also applies to the barracks assault—that is, the narrator provides the catalog of IRA atrocities discussed above. The narrator informs readers that the Anglo-Irish and British characters have been speaking of the attack, but the only dialogue about it included in the text is the expression “the horrible thing” (64). Bowen’s characters seem less inclined than her narrator to dwell on the gruesomeness of the battle. Such an omission of detail obviously reflects the Anglo-Irish and British civilians’ desire to remain ignorant of the particulars of the war, but divergences between the language of the characters and the narrator also suggest that their views about the IRA differ. Although characters might reject stereotyped counter-insurgency ways of conceiving of Irish nationalists, these ways of thinking recur at the larger, textual level. Using a straightforward style to relate incidents such as the cutting of women’s hair and the RIC barracks attack causes these events to stand out from the ambiguous wording present in much of the rest of the novel; in this way, The Last September highlights outrages committed by the IRA and follows the counter-insurgency convention of connecting the nationalists with inhuman(e) behavior.

Other references associate the IRA with mysteriousness and incessant movement, traits that also resonate with characterizations in counter-insurgency prose. The Last September creates an air of mystery around IRA personnel by using vague language: aside from Peter Connor, whose family resides close to Danielstown and knows the house’s inhabitants, IRA soldiers remain anonymous and sparsely described. Early in the novel, Lois recounts a story she heard from Michael Keelan, one of the estate’s employees, who claims to have seen men digging for guns buried in the Naylors’ land late one night: “I asked him, ‘What were they like?’ and he said, ‘The way they would be’” (29). Keelan’s statement completely omits detail. Possibly, he assumes that Lois already has ideas about what sort of men would be engaged in such an activity
and therefore does not require a detailed description to envision them. Another potential explanation is that Keelan is being purposely evasive, that for some reason he does not wish to share identifying information about the diggers with his listener. This interpretation raises the possibility that Keelan sympathizes with the nationalists’ cause and consequently attempts to shield them from capture by keeping their identities from Lois, who maintains friendly relations with numerous members of the British Army. Additionally, an acknowledgement of the IRA’s freedom of movement underlies the story of the buried guns. Coming onto Danielstown’s grounds to bury and then to dig up these guns indicates that IRA soldiers can freely roam around the estate, despite its enclosure in seemingly protective gates and banks of trees.

Lois’s first close encounter with a nationalist likewise utilizes vague description and connects the IRA with mobility. As she walks along a path through Danielstown’s grounds one evening after dark, Lois nearly runs into a man traversing an intersecting path. Upon realizing that someone else is nearby, Lois expects to see “a ghost” but instead observes “a trench-coat” approaching (42). The repeated use of indefinite articles here introduces an ambiguous atmosphere. Moreover, the focus on the man’s clothing rather than his body creates a dissociation between his presence and his corporeality like that which supposedly occurs in ghosts, lending some appropriateness to Lois’s earlier expectation. Only one phrase—“some resolute profile powerful as a thought” (42)—describes the man’s physical appearance. The words “resolute” and “powerful” lend this description a certain amount of specificity and ascribe distinguishing traits to the man’s face, but the inclusion of “some,” which denotes indefiniteness, prevents precision. As a result, even though the narrative acknowledges his

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85 Collusion between employees of the Anglo-Irish and the IRA occurs more explicitly in other “burning Big House” texts, notably Robinson’s *The Big House* (186-187).

86 See definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “an undetermined or unspecified” (“some, pron., adj.1, adv., and n.1”).
“fleshliness” (42), the man remains more of a ghost—a mysterious, shadowy presence—than a human being. The suggestion that the soil “swallow[s] him” as he passes out of Lois’s sight reinforces his association with incorporeality (43).\textsuperscript{87} This man is barely more specifically described than the aforementioned diggers, and like them, he freely ranges around Danielstown. His “smooth” and “steady” pace suggests confidence (42); he evinces no hesitancy about walking through someone else’s property. Lois, aware that he is trespassing, briefly considers demanding, “What do you want?” but stays silent (42). She seems to realize that she has no power to stop him from traveling through the estate as he pleases. The nationalists’ ability to appear within the boundaries of Danielstown at any time makes them an ever-present, inescapable threat to the Anglo-Irish lifestyle the house represents.

In the episodes just discussed, the IRA’s violent potential goes unrealized, but nationalist soldiers receive similar descriptions when they commit acts of violence that impact the Naylors’ household. \textit{The Last September} does not directly render the IRA’s killing of Gerald Lesworth, a British officer briefly engaged to Lois. Instead, readers of the novel experience, in indirect discourse, the account that another British soldier gives Lois after the fact. This account consists of only a few sentences:

- a patrol with an officer and an N.C.O. had been ambushed, fired on at a crossroads. The officer—Lesworth—was instantly killed, the N.C.O. shot in the stomach. The enemy made off across country, they did not care for sustained fire, in spite of the hedges. The men did what they could for the sergeant. (296)

\textsuperscript{87} Siân E. White argues that the man’s “absorption by the landscape” depicts nature as complicit with the nationalists (39). Further evidence of such complicity can be seen in the other instances of IRA soldiers’ mysteriously easy cross-country mobility discussed in this chapter. By depicting the colonized landscape abetting the native population and opposing the colonizers, \textit{The Last September} deploys another standard discourse of imperialism (Worth 17).
Strikingly little information about the force that carried out the ambush appears in this narrative, though it includes other apparently extraneous details, such as where Gerald’s companion was wounded. Referring to the IRA attackers only as “the enemy” dehumanizes them in typical military fashion, and the lack of other details about them—for instance, how many carried out the ambush—means that they remain a vague, shadowy group. This telling of Gerald’s death again highlights the IRA’s mobility, as do another military man’s comments: Captain Rolfe responds to an inquiry about what became of the ambushers with, “Oh, got right away” (293). The phrase “got right away” implies that the IRA soldiers had no difficulty escaping and did so quickly, and the matter-of-fact tone of Rolfe’s response suggests that he has grown accustomed to such easy retreats. This reveals how mobility aids the IRA’s war effort: the ease and speed with which IRA members move around the countryside make them more difficult for crown forces to capture.

The Last September’s final scene, which depicts the “execution” of Danielstown (303), possesses many similarities with earlier parts of the novel that include the IRA. After setting fire to Danielstown, those responsible slip away through the darkness in “unlit car[s]” (303), the only evidence of their escape the sound of the automobiles’ engines. The lack of drama in this exit emphasizes not only the ease with which the IRA can move around the countryside, including the Naylors’ property, but also its propensities for elusiveness and stealth. Like ghosts, these IRA men are barely glimpsed before they vanish, and they receive extremely limited description: they are “bland from accomplished duty” (303), a phrase that, through its inclusion of the word “bland,” characterizes these men as unremarkable, without distinguishing features.  

88 See the Oxford Dictionaries definition: “lacking strong features or characteristics and therefore uninteresting” (“bland”).
the IRA soldiers’ individual appearances and identities remain obscure, though their devotion to
their political values comes across clearly.

In *The Last September*, anonymous, vaguely described members who operate under cover
of darkness lend the IRA a menacing air. IRA soldiers’ incessant movement heightens their
ominousness by indicating that they might appear anywhere, even within supposedly private
spaces such as Anglo-Irish families’ lands, at any time. By portraying the IRA in this way, *The
Last September* mirrors counter-insurgency prose. British counter-insurgency texts produced
during the latter part of the nineteenth century represent Irish nationalists as “an ‘invisible’ and
global enemy that can strike the empire at any point” (Morton 40). These texts show Irish
nationalists infiltrating imperial spaces, including London, and invoke the possibility that they
will take their anti-colonial fight to other colonized locations, such as India (Morton 39).
Although these counter-insurgency works depict movement on a much larger scale than does *The
Last September*, the underlying idea—that the nationalists cannot be contained and thus present
an omnipresent yet difficult to detect threat—remains the same in both cases.

Nineteenth-century counter-insurgency texts and *The Last September* both also imply that
Irish nationalism should be taken more seriously. Rather than suggesting that nationalists should
be crushed through the implementation of emergency legislation, as counter-insurgency prose
often does, *The Last September* merely hints that Anglo-Irish individuals such as the Naylors
might have fared differently had they recognized the IRA’s seriousness earlier. Throughout the
novel, Sir Richard, in particular, cultivates ignorance about the war and chides those who view it
as a genuinely grave affair. When Lois proposes ascertaining for certain whether nationalists’
guns have been buried within Danielstown’s grounds, Sir Richard angrily demands why he
“would … want to know” (29). He shows more concern about the plants that might be damaged
by men searching for guns than about the weapons themselves. Sir Richard demonstrates similarly little regard for the IRA’s favored method of fighting, which he calls “this ambushing and skirmishing and hey-fidaddling” (273). His use of the nonsense term “hey-fidaddling” links the IRA’s operations with silliness and dismisses them as such. Only when Danielstown burns does he seem to change his opinion. As the house blazes, the narrator comments, “Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, not saying anything, did not look at each other, for in the light from the sky they saw too distinctly” (303). Although what the Naylors see remains unspecified, context suggests that they finally realize the seriousness of the IRA and recognize that the war can no longer be ignored. Their belated realization contrasts sharply with the novel itself, which continuously reveals the gravity of the War of Independence and the dangerousness of the IRA.

As the foregoing examples illustrate, *The Last September*’s depiction of the IRA often disregards historical accuracy in favor of counter-insurgency conventions. Bowen’s novel also offers some details about IRA operations that parallel veterans’ accounts; however, *The Last September* frames these details so as to reinforce its representation of nationalist fighters as tremendously cruel and destructive. The strongest resemblance between *The Last September* and veteran-authored texts concerns the roles preparation and coordination play in the IRA’s successes. The description of the RIC barracks assault discussed above notes that prior to the engagement, IRA soldiers sever telegraph wires and seal off surrounding roads to prevent the barracks occupants from requesting or receiving assistance (64). These preparations, which provide the IRA with the tactical advantages needed to emerge victorious from the encounter, mirror actions nationalists actually took during the War of Independence. O’Malley recalls successful barracks attacks that involved cutting telegraph wires and creating roadblocks (31, 49), and he provides additional details about how these precautions fit within the context of an
offensive: “Patrols on foot and on bicycles moved in and out between obstructions on the roads and the village; and then, beyond the barricades, cyclists kept in contact with the outposts on either flank and with a central point in [the village where the attack took place]” (49). This passage reveals the fairly large number of IRA soldiers involved in this barracks assault, as well as the high level of organization necessary to coordinate the actions of all these men. By assigning different, specialized tasks to different groups or individuals and using messengers to circulate information amongst the various groups, the IRA forces involved in this attack act as a network. Despite crediting the IRA with preparation and organization, *The Last September* stops short of portraying the nationalists as a network by omitting details such as how responsibility for the various parts of the attack was allocated and how IRA soldiers communicated with one another. Nonetheless, Bowen’s novel and O’Malley’s text both demonstrate that IRA forces carefully prepare for attacks beforehand and that such preparation significantly contributes to the IRA’s overall effectiveness.

The fiery destruction, in the same night, of Danielstown and two neighboring Big Houses likewise resonates with IRA veterans’ reports. Bowen’s narrator compares the glow of the fires to an “extra day” that has “come to abortive birth” and points out that when viewed from a certain perspective, “the country itself” appears to be in flames (303). This apocalyptic imagery foregrounds the notion that the destruction of Anglo-Irish houses symbolizes the termination of Ireland’s existing societal structure, but on a more mundane level, the vast amount of illumination that the narrator describes suggests that all three houses burn simultaneously. One group of IRA soldiers might have been able to accomplish this feat by racing from one location to another, but it seems more likely that a different group assumes responsibility for each house. If so, careful planning would be needed to coordinate the actions of the groups. The narrator
hints at the large scale of the burning operation by twice mentioning that Danielstown’s “executioners” occupy multiple cars (303). Many more people would have to be involved if a separate crew set fire to each of the Big Houses—this, like the RIC barracks assault, reveals that although The Last September’s IRA might favor small skirmishes, it can also effectively accomplish more sizeable missions. The description of the burning houses omits details about how the conflagrations were started, but the arsonists must possess some level of expertise to light fires capable of engulfing such large structures. Veterans’ accounts, too, demonstrate the IRA’s adeptness at burning houses. In Cork, Barry claims, “the I.R.A. never once failed to carry out in full the programme of reprisal” whereby nationalists razed two houses for each one that crown forces destroyed (155). Barry even recalls one incident reminiscent of The Last September’s closing scene, in which the West Cork IRA razed “four large Loyalists’ residences” in a single night (154). The organizational and planning capabilities that Barry details throughout his memoir feature far less prominently in The Last September, but the burning scene contains hints that the IRA functions as a network. To burn three Big Houses in one night, The Last September’s IRA must proceed with systematic efficiency and cooperation between multiple soldiers.

The Last September’s depictions of the RIC barracks attack and the Big House fires contain some commonalities with veterans’ descriptions but ultimately fall back upon counter-insurgency tropes. These scenes reinscribe regressive conceptions even in their evocations of organization and strategizing amongst the IRA. In the case of the barracks assault, The Last September shows the nationalists planning ahead so that they have the opportunity to burn or shoot all of the building’s defenders. Preparation thus becomes merely a means to the end of merciless violence—in other words, the IRA’s capacity for meticulous preparation strengthens,
rather than undermines, its association with savagery. The scene that depicts the burning of the three Big Houses, meanwhile, gives no indication that the destruction of these homes fits within a pattern of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Only nationalists, not crown forces, are represented as instigators of fires. In fact, the house burnings are completely abstracted from their immediate context because they occur months after the events depicted in the rest of the novel—in February as opposed to September. Omitting crown forces’ inciting actions delegitimizes the IRA’s anti-colonial violence, as well as those who enact it, by presenting the nationalists’ destruction of Anglo-Irish homes as unprovoked acts of aggression. These tactics again recall counter-insurgency prose, which typically obscures the oppression and brutality colonized populations experience and concentrates, instead, on their supposed transgressions (Morton 44-45). The descriptions of the barracks assault and the Big Houses’ destruction encapsulate the complexity of both The Last September’s politics and its genre. Although the novel acknowledges that the Irish have good reason to be “irritated” with England’s treatment of them (66), it often fails to break away from characterizations used in counter-insurgency prose to justify Britain’s continuing dominion over Ireland. Thus, in its portrayal of the IRA, The Last September typically behaves more like counter-insurgency literature than either a Big House novel or a veteran-authored text.

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89 At other times, the novel refers only obliquely to the crown forces’ participation in the war. Sir Richard’s comparison of an armored vehicle to a “coffee-pot” glosses over its destructive purpose and potential (30). British soldiers refer to being on duty “up in the mountains” but typically do not specify what they did there (127), and the narrator does not elaborate, leaving whatever violence the crown forces might have committed unspoken. This textual silence contrasts sharply with the details offered about the IRA’s violent actions.

90 Bowen’s narrator states that the nationalists consider burning Danielstown to be a “duty” but offers no explanation of why they feel this way (303).

91 For instance, Morton argues that although certain types of crime arose in response to “the socioeconomic conditions of poverty and dispossession in nineteenth-century Ireland,” counter-insurgency texts such as The Irish Police Officer (1861) neglect to mention any of these mitigating factors and instead portray the Irish as predisposed to violence (44).
The most significant exception to *The Last September*’s reliance on counter-insurgency conventions comes via its depiction of relations between the IRA and the rest of the Irish population. However, because texts rarely participate in only one genre or demonstrate all of the features associated with a given genre (Kincaid 416), this divergence does not prevent *The Last September* from being considered counter-insurgency literature; rather, it further underscores the novel’s complex blending of genres. *The Last September* includes willing collusion between civilians—even Anglo-Irish ones—and members of the IRA. For instance, crown forces find IRA member Peter Connor “at home, in bed” (131). Peter’s relatives show friendliness to the inhabitants of Danielstown, which suggests that under some conditions, civilians who express no revolutionary sentiments will aid the IRA. Presumably, the Connors’ sense of familial loyalty to Peter outweighs all other considerations or allegiances. Before Peter’s apprehension, Lois hears rumors of his presence at home but fails to share this information with her military acquaintances, thereby indirectly aiding the nationalists. Being unable to “conceive of her country emotionally” (42), Lois takes no side in the war.92 Her protection of Peter also stems not from political motives but from personal ties: she thinks pityingly of the distress Peter’s capture will cause his ailing mother.

*The Last September*’s interpretation of the IRA’s relations with civilians corresponds completely with neither counter-insurgency prose nor veteran-authored texts. Counter-insurgency literature tends to minimize the amount of public support revolutionary organizations such as the IRA enjoy. Civilians and even some organization members, these works suggest, only participate in insurgent activities when coerced to do so (Morton 42). Such portrayals “discredit the revolutionaries’ political cause” by painting their claims to represent their people’s

92 Upon encountering the IRA soldier in Danielstown’s grounds, Lois considers uttering the nationalistic phrase “Up Dublin!” but only “to engage his sympathies” (42).
desire for independence as false (Morton 42). Rather than spokespeople for their nation, insurgents thus seem to be criminal aberrations against whom the government can justifiably use extra-legal measures. *The Last September* avoids this radical implication by depicting an IRA that has easy relations with the Irish populace. On the other hand, the novel diverges from veterans’ accounts by separating civilians’ assistance of the IRA from devotion to Irish nationalism. In veteran-authored works, IRA soldiers’ relatives exhibit especially strong nationalism and frequently participate in other, related republican groups, such as Cumann na mBan,93 but all members of the native Irish population are typically credited with nationalistic inclinations. Barry, for instance, labels the War of Independence “a war between the British Army and the Irish people,” whose “determination to be free” prompted them to assist the IRA’s anticolonial efforts (276).94 *The Last September* and veterans’ accounts also represent differing outcomes of collusion between the IRA and civilians: the latter argue that civilian assistance contributed greatly to IRA successes, whereas in the former, such assistance proves less effective because enjoying his family’s hospitality makes Peter an easy target for arrest. Overall, *The Last September*’s portrayal of civilians’ relationship with the IRA occupies a middle ground between those offered by counter-insurgency texts and veterans’ reports. Although this aspect of *The Last September*’s representation of the IRA defies generic categorization, the previously discussed resemblances with counter-insurgency prose support classifying Bowen’s novel as a member of that genre.

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93 Barry recalls staying with a family in which numerous sons belonged to the IRA and numerous daughters to Cumann na mBan (179). This family had a tradition of participation in Irish republican organizations, and Coleman confirms that other IRA-affiliated families had such a tradition, as well, with some tracing involvement “back to the United Irish revolt of 1798” (75).

94 Recently, scholars have begun questioning IRA writers’ claims regarding the universality of public support for their efforts—see Coleman (83-84), Hart (*The I.R.A.* 52), and Hopkinson (xviii)—but that non-combatants, especially in certain parts of the country, rendered valuable assistance to the nationalist fighters remains undisputed.
Relatively few references to the IRA appear in *The Last September*, but as this section shows, these references consistently correspond with characterizations of Irish nationalists in counter-insurgency literature. IRA soldiers move, unchecked, through the countryside, embodying an ever-present threat to the novel’s Anglo-Irish and British characters. The nationalists’ dangerousness manifests in spectacular violence against not only human combatants, but also the anthropomorphized Big Houses. Some aspects of *The Last September*’s depiction of the IRA diverge from counter-insurgency traditions. Nonetheless, sufficient correspondences exist to form a significant regressive undercurrent within Bowen’s novel and to identify it with the genre of counter-insurgency literature. Scholars fail to notice either these regressive elements or their implications for *The Last September*’s generic affiliations, presumably as a consequence of largely ignoring the novel’s remarks about the IRA. *Two Days in Aragon*, on which the following section focuses, relies even more explicitly on counter-insurgency traditions when representing the IRA, yet these borrowings go similarly unremarked.

**Molly Keane’s Mercenary and Martyrs**

An important dissimilarity between *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* is that the latter envisions a joyous future for the Anglo-Irish in Ireland, while the former does not. Bowen’s use of the term “execution” to refer to the burnings of Big Houses on the final page of *The Last September* suggests a definitive ending (303)—not only the houses, but also the Anglo-Irish way of life they represent, have died. *Two Days in Aragon*, on the other hand, asserts that its titular house will be rebuilt and reoccupied by its traditional owners: Keane’s narrator predicts “the house [will] rise again” (255). The burning of Aragon represents a purging of “its evils and

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95 In addition to differing from counter-insurgency tropes in its portrayal of IRA/civilian relations, discussed above, *The Last September* at times troubles the association between nationalists and monstrous violence by showing IRA soldiers avoiding bodily harming civilians: according to Marda, the gunman in the mill only accidentally wounds her (183), and the armed IRA members Laurence encounters do not injure him (277).
its ghosts” (228), a cleansing opportunity for reinvention rather than a death. These dissimilar forecasts for the future reflect and reinforce the two novels’ differing representations of the IRA. Despite *The Last September*’s vague descriptions of IRA soldiers, their competence and effectiveness emerge clearly through the operations they complete, making their eventual victory in the war explicable. *Two Days in Aragon* features IRA members who bungle their duties and demonstrate no particular zealousness for the idea of Irish independence. Any achievements of such a force seem to be products of luck that can be easily reversed and the life of the Big House resumed.

*Two Days in Aragon* affectionately renders but does not completely idealize life in the Anglo-Irish Big House. By revealing that the Foxes, the owners of Aragon, have sexually victimized their servants for generations, Keane’s narrator establishes cruelty as a central part of the house’s history. During the events of the novel, cruelty continues to run rampant at Aragon: the Fox sisters, Sylvia and Grania, bicker constantly; the head servant, Nan O’Neill—the illegitimate daughter of an earlier Fox—wars with the butler and relentlessly torments Pidgie, an elderly aunt of Sylvia and Grania; and Nan’s son, Foley, trifles with Grania’s emotions as the two engage in a secret affair. These are a few of the “evils” that Keane’s narrator claims the burning of Aragon exorcises. The IRA soldiers responsible for Aragon’s destruction—particularly Denny Cussens, the leader of the group—receive more detailed depictions than do the Irish nationalists in *The Last September*, yet in rendering these men, Keane’s novel leans even more heavily on stereotypes and counter-insurgency tropes than does Bowen’s. *Two Days in Aragon* qualifies as a work of counter-insurgency literature by characterizing IRA members as incompetent, mercenary tyrants alienated from the rest of the Irish population.
Only *Two Days in Aragon*’s representations of the IRA’s organizational structure and communication methods depart from counter-insurgency conventions; as with *The Last September*, these departures complicate *Two Days in Aragon*’s generic affiliations but do not negate its status as counter-insurgency literature. Keane’s novel repeatedly alludes to a hierarchy within the IRA and suggests that members take this rank structure seriously. Other IRA soldiers address Denny as “Captain” and follow his orders even when they might prefer not to (85, 239, 243). Denny, in turn, obeys orders from “headquarters,” from whence he is sent to make “things [move] along” by overseeing violent operations (85)—at Aragon, the abduction and execution of the British Captain Michael Purvis. Thus, despite focusing on IRA activities in the vicinity of the Fox home, *Two Days in Aragon* suggests how the larger organization operates, with orders flowing outward across Ireland from a headquarters where objectives are decided and personnel assigned. Operatives such as Denny, though, appear to retain significant autonomy. Upon learning that Nan has prevented the completion of his original assignment by releasing Purvis and another captive British officer, Denny quickly resigns himself to their escape and moves on to the problem of how to deal with her. Just as quickly, Denny decides that rather than granting Nan an “easy” death by shooting her on the spot, he will force her to watch Aragon, which she dearly loves, burn (187). As I discuss subsequently, Denny harbors personal reasons for wanting to make Nan suffer, so his treatment of her shows that individual IRA soldiers sometimes pursue their own agendas even amidst official operations. The empowerment that Denny evidently feels to alter plans as he sees fit and as circumstances change indicates that flexibility has been built into the IRA’s organizational structure. Headquarters dispatches instructions, but those in the field decide how to carry them out. The organizational system that *Two Days in Aragon* attributes to the IRA exemplifies the concept of the wheel network discussed above. As noted,
the central node of a wheel network exercises only limited authority over peripheral nodes, which often independently perform their own functions, and the elasticity of relations within a wheel network helps it to operate effectively. *Two Days in Aragon* demonstrates the connection between flexibility and effectiveness: because Denny, the head of a peripheral node, can decide on the alternative objective of setting fire to Aragon, the IRA does not lose its chance to strike a blow against its enemies when the mission planned at headquarters, the core node, falls apart. Rather than corresponding with representations in other pieces of counter-insurgency literature, this depiction of the IRA’s structure resembles that described in veterans’ tales of the War of Independence.

*Two Days in Aragon* also parallels veteran-authored texts by crediting the IRA with an object-oriented system of communication. O’Malley describes “signallers” using burning “sods of turf” to relay messages during nighttime operations (80). In Keane’s novel, the IRA announces its presence and alerts civilian collaborators that their assistance is required by displaying items such as “the wooden crosspiece of a plough” outside buildings (80). The low-tech signaling method that *Two Days in Aragon* attributes to the IRA also recalls stories of Indians corresponding via symbolic objects during the 1857 rebellion; in this instance, though, Keane’s novel more closely resembles O’Malley’s account than counter-insurgency texts. Whereas representations of the Indians’ communication network often emphasize its threatening mysteriousness (Worth 24), *Two Days in Aragon* provides a straightforward description of “the sign of the Irish Republican [A]rmy” (80). By showing the nationalists using an object-based code that facilitates communication amongst those who know what to look for and how to interpret the objects but remains indecipherable to or perhaps ignored by outsiders, *Two Days in Aragon* associates the IRA with resourcefulness and ingenuity—two traits O’Malley and other
veterans consistently claim for the organization. This similarity, along with the resemblances between Keane’s and veterans’ depictions of the internal structure of the IRA, demonstrates that Two Days in Aragon’s portrayal of the War of Independence has some historical bases. However, deployments of counter-insurgency tactics, including suggesting that the bulk of Ireland’s civilians lack investment in the conflict and depoliticizing and decontextualizing IRA soldiers’ actions, coexist with and overshadow these historical details.

Characterizations typical of counter-insurgency prose sometimes occur in the same passages of Two Days in Aragon as do resemblances with veterans’ reports. For instance, the scene that introduces the object-based code also associates the IRA with coercive, tyrannical methods of securing assistance from unsympathetic civilians. Foley obeys the signal that serves as a summons to IRA soldiers’ presence because he knows himself to be under surveillance: “someone would be on the lookout to report they had seen him go by when the sign was out” and so “he dare[s] not pass by” (80). Foley fears he would “be bullied and beaten up, perhaps shot for refusing” anything the nationalists ask (45), so he cooperates with them despite harboring no personal feelings of ill will toward the British or the Anglo-Irish. In addition to the threat of physical violence, the IRA uses information as leverage against reluctant collaborators, as when Denny informs Foley that the IRA has observed his supposedly secret tryst with Grania and therefore knows he can assist with the capture of the British officers by reporting on their comings and goings at Aragon (86). Later, while in British custody being questioned about the officers’ abduction, Foley thinks that “he would rather stand in a grave degree of danger from the British enemy than in an uncertain disfavour with Ireland’s soldiers” (194). In this formulation, the unpredictable, unscrupulous, and oppressive means the IRA uses to secure civilians’
collusion make it a more fearsome entity than the British Army, which abides by a known code of conduct.

The unwillingness with which Foley assists the IRA establishes a separation between the nationalists and the rest of the Irish population that the novel repeatedly reinforces. Unlike *The Last September*, *Two Days in Aragon* does not entertain the possibility of civilians collaborating with or protecting IRA members with whom they have personal, affective ties. The narrative includes some details about Denny’s early life but mentions no family, and the backgrounds of the other IRA soldiers receive no description. Thus, the nationalist fighters appear isolated, connected with the civilian population only via threats and coercion. Keane shows ordinary people “[keeping] to their houses” when IRA soldiers are operating nearby (218), for the nationalists portend “death and trouble” (182). If civilians are not forced to cooperate with the IRA, they do not. This characterization evokes the “Reign of Terror” that *Tales of the R.I.C.* claims the IRA imposes on civilians, frightening them into behaving against their own inclinations (“The Informer” 6). *Two Days in Aragon* does not follow *Tales of the R.I.C.* in explicitly stating that many Irish secretly harbor unionist sympathies, but both texts undermine the IRA’s claim to be a popularly supported organization. As mentioned, counter-insurgency prose frequently downplays public support for insurgent movements as a means of discrediting them—whereas insurgents such as IRA soldiers claim to be acting on behalf of their fellow citizens, counter-insurgency accounts suggest that they merely intimidate and take advantage of the rest of the populace. Consequently, *Two Days in Aragon*’s representation of antagonism

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The only willing collaborations between a civilian and an IRA soldier occur when Sylvia and Denny cooperate to rescue Pidgie from a locked room inside Aragon as the house burns and Sylvia then helps Denny to escape from the British troops who respond to the fire. This incident stands out not only because of its uniqueness within the text but also because Sylvia sides with the British in the war. Keane’s narrator explains the odd alliance between Denny and Sylvia by pointing out the similarity of their personalities: they are “a tough guy” and “a tough girl” (244). Nonetheless, their alliance lasts only a short time, with Denny beginning to distrust Sylvia as soon as they have safely left the burning house (247).
between the IRA and other Irish individuals attests to both its status as counter-insurgency literature and its reinforcement of that genre’s regressive politics.

Two Days in Aragon’s characterization of Denny combines several standard tactics of counter-insurgency prose: estranged from the Irish people and unconcerned with Ireland’s political autonomy, Denny participates in the war because of selfish and criminal impulses. During his childhood, Denny briefly served as a “pantry boy” at Aragon (221), which indicates that he is Irish, but his connections with the United States receive equal emphasis. Keane’s narrator notes that Denny has been away from Ireland for much of his life: “He had spent years in America, he had never known a lucky day there, and he was tough with a toughness from the underworld of big and cruel towns” (184). Here, Denny’s American experiences explain his unpleasant disposition—the toughness of the American towns in which he spent time has communicated itself to him. An implication that the United States has played a bigger role in shaping Denny’s personality than has Ireland and that, therefore, he is more American than Irish underlies this passage. Nan’s labeling of Denny as a “Yankee rat” reinforces the idea that he is an American (186), regardless of his earlier residence in Ireland. Denny’s manner of speaking also associates him with the United States. The interjection “now see” regularly occurs in his utterances, as in the way he responds when Sylvia orders him to get out of Aragon: “It’s you who’ll do the getting out, now see, and quick mind you, unless you want to burn along with your ancestral bloody home, now see” (237). 97 No other characters in Two Days in Aragon speak this way, setting Denny apart from the rest of the Irish people. He cannot be taken as their representative, though that is what, as an IRA member, he purports to be. Denny’s speech style

97 For other examples of this speech pattern, see pages 86, 91, 183, 185, and 222.
resembles the dialogue of gangsters in Hollywood films, further aligning him with America. By positing a link between the United States and, through Denny, the IRA, Keane’s novel evokes a recurrent trope of twentieth-century fiction: that Irish-Americans provide the driving force behind the agitation against British rule in Ireland. In displacing responsibility onto the United States, this trope minimizes the amount of revolutionary sentiment in Ireland and hearkens back to counter-insurgency prose’s contention that most of the Irish actually have no objection to their country’s status within the United Kingdom.

Two Days in Aragon dissociates Denny not just from the Irish people, but also from Irish nationalism, and this, too, aligns the novel with the counter-insurgency genre. According to Keane’s narrator, Denny, though capable of igniting in others “the burning flame for Ireland” (85), feels no patriotic fervor; instead, the narrator calls Denny a “mercenary soldier” for whom “the Irish war [is] only a business, a dangerous, exciting and highly remunerative business” (184). This description suggests that Denny fights out of both economic self-interest and a temperamental inclination toward recklessness. Additionally, Denny’s actions, even those related to the conduct of the war, often stem from personal motives. As he accompanies Nan to Aragon to make her witness the house burning, Denny reveals why he has treated her with such hostility: Nan terminated his childhood employment at Aragon and then prevented him from obtaining a similar position in another wealthy household. Speaking of himself in the third person, Denny tells Nan he blames her for all of the misfortunes that followed his dismissal from domestic service:

98 Little Caesar (1931) features perhaps the most famous example of this speaking style; the dialogue of Edward G. Robinson’s character, Rico, frequently includes the interjections “see” and “yeah, see.” 99 For instance, in Conan Doyle’s World War I-era story “His Last Bow: An Epilogue of Sherlock Holmes,” a German spy characterizes Irish-Americans as waging war against “the English king” (932). In Troubles, both Anglo-Irish individuals and the newspapers they read blame Irish-Americans for the conflict in Ireland (Farrell 54, 90, 177, 325).
Ah, if he had got in there he might be a bully butler to-day, see, and never troubling Ireland’s cause, but what happened the job? Some party made it her sacred bloody business to warn the lady engaging him, to watch the dining-room cream jug, yes, and count the dried fruit in their boxes, yes, and the candy, coffee and sugar, how are you, so in the wind up he never got the job, only a hungry, weary, knockabout life kept him small and a bad stomach kept him cross, and at eighteen years he was a starving dirty little rat South of the Slot in Chicago, him that might have been bowing behind his buttons in gentry service, a stout, well-grown, harmless fool, only for you, now see. (222)

The feelings Denny evokes in this speech distance him still further from the cause of Irish nationalism. Using “bully,” a descriptor with favorable connotations,100 indicates that he views being a butler as a desirable occupation and one in which he could have excelled. Moreover, the regret evident in Denny’s remark that he could still have been in service if not for Nan’s intervention shows that he does not object to the existing social hierarchy, which privileges the Anglo-Irish—he suggests that he would willingly serve individuals whose unionist sympathies directly oppose the IRA’s mission and beliefs, revealing that his affiliation with the nationalists relies more on circumstance than ideology.

From the moment when Denny discovers Nan outside the cave where the British officers have been kept prisoner, a personal vendetta against her dictates his actions. He wants to destroy Aragon because Nan loves it, to make her suffer as she previously made him suffer, not because the house holds any strategic or symbolic importance in the War of Independence. Denny

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100 See the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition: “Of persons: Worthy, ‘jolly’, admirable” (“bully, adj.1”). It is also worth noting that a subsequent meaning included in this entry—“Capital, first-rate, ‘crack’”—is attributed to the United States; thus, this utterance furthers Denny’s association with America.
continues emphasizing his personal motives for resenting Aragon as he prepares to set it alight. When Sylvia asks the reason for what he does, Denny looks at a decorative china figurine and says, “I had a great admiration for that ornament when I was a little fellow. Mrs. O’Neill got me one day with it in my hand, she took it from me and she beat hell out of me” (238). Although Denny might initially seem to have avoided answering Sylvia’s question by changing the subject, the sequence of events in this passage suggests that he has actually responded, admitting that the treatment he received at Aragon as a child motivates his current actions. He destroys Aragon as a form of revenge upon Nan for the cruelty she previously showed him. Because Denny is the most prominent IRA soldier in *Two Days in Aragon*, depoliticizing him by downplaying his nationalistic sentiments and focusing on his grudge against Nan depoliticizes the entire IRA.

Depoliticizing insurgents’ actions is one of the most commonly used counter-insurgency tactics. According to Siddiqi, “narrative codes that … deny or distort the political impulse of the rebel’s acts” help to manage the anxiety colonizing peoples feel when confronted with insurgent movements (88). Authors of counter-insurgency fiction often recast political rebellions as ordinary crimes or as expressions of religious fanaticism; in so doing, these authors “not only diminish the political import of insurgency but also assert the need for, and rhetorically enact the gathering of, knowledge and the pursuit of order and control” (Siddiqi 88). Portraying insurgents as criminals or zealots minimizes their political consciousness, affirming their need for guidance from the colonizers, as well as the inherent superiority of those colonizers. *Two Days in Aragon* reframes the Irish War of Independence as both a series of criminal acts and an expression of religious fervor. Through Denny, Keane’s novel associates the IRA with criminality. The narrator typically refers to him as Killer Denny, Denny the Killer, or simply the Killer.¹⁰¹

indicating that taking human lives forms as essential a part of his identity as does his name. Using the word “killer,” which has no political denotations, decouples Denny’s actions from the fight for Irish autonomy and equates him with anyone else who, for any reason, ends another’s life. The narrator further underscores the idea that Denny’s actions result from deviance rather than political ideals by labeling him “a really hard and wicked little man” (184). Foley mirrors the narrator’s assessments of Denny, considering the nationalist’s work “mean” and “dirty” and explicitly separating the “murder[s]” he commits from the “war for Ireland” (88). By denying the political significance of the assassinations Denny carries out, the novel suggests that they are straightforward crimes and he is merely a criminal.

The other most common method of depoliticizing colonial uprisings—linking insurgents with religious fanaticism—finds expression through Denny’s IRA subordinates, Matty and Tim. Religious oaths such as “O Lord” and “Jesu” pepper their speech (185), and one of them “gabbl[es] prayers” during the confrontation between Denny and Nan (186). This phrase, with its allusion to incoherence, aligns the soldier with unrestrained, unreasonable piety. The narrator also repeatedly likens Matty and Tim to martyrs, claiming that they “[know] fear and prayer and [are] sustained through ordeal by a terrible martyr’s spirit of patriotism” (184). The wording of this passage contains some ambiguity. The narrator suggests that Matty and Tim’s religiosity—symbolized by prayer—helps them cope with the hardships of war but also conflates their faith and their nationalism, particularly in the phrase “a terrible martyr’s spirit of patriotism.” Because the term “martyr” is most often applied to a person who dies for religious beliefs, connecting it with patriotism indicates that love of country has assumed spiritual

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102 The narrator fails to identify Matty and Tim by name not only in this scene, but also in all but their first appearance in the novel.
103 See the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary: “To talk volubly, inarticulately and incoherently; to chatter, jabber, prattle. Also, to read so fast as to be unintelligible” (“gabble, v.”).
significance for Matty and Tim. Their martyr-like readiness to sacrifice their lives indicates fervent dedication to but not intellectual understanding of the cause for which they fight. This is precisely the kind of “unreflective fanaticism” that counter-insurgency literature tends to portray as the cause of “political uprisings” (Siddiqi 114). Matty and Tim’s religiousness distinguishes them from Denny, but all three embody conventional counter-insurgency methods of emptying colonial struggles of their political contents.

Representing insurgencies as outbursts of criminal or religious feelings denigrates the intelligence of colonized populations by implying that they lack the mental sophistication necessary to conceive of and carry out politically motivated rebellions. Such portrayals negate the insurgent’s “agency as a self-conscious political actor” (Siddiqi 87). In addition to emphasizing Matty and Tim’s religiousness, *Two Days in Aragon* downplays their political agency by representing them as alienated from their soldierly duties. Although the narrator’s initial description of the IRA members looking “tired and sly and fierce as ill-used dogs” associates them with animal-like cunning (85), these traits quickly disappear. Subsequently, Matty and Tim display no fierceness. Instead, they respond to their orders with reluctance and horror. One of them vomits at the thought of killing the captive British officers and then begs to be relieved of responsibility for their executions: “Oh, Jesu, did you hear one give me a winner for Thursday? And I’m to turn round and pump lead through him. God knows I’m a poor shot, I wouldn’t know where I’d hit him” (185). Such a reaction shows that the speaker, despite his previously established faith in the cause of Irish nationalism, is unprepared to take the steps that the IRA’s leadership has decided are necessary to advance that cause—a gulf exists between the IRA soldier’s beliefs and his actions that eliminates his efficacy as a political actor.
Two Days in Aragon also uses infantilization to deny IRA members political consciousness and agency. The IRA soldier’s hysterical statements about shooting the British officers, above, evince immaturity—a characterization that the narrator reinforces by referring to the nationalist as “the boy” (185). The soldier’s reference to his poor shooting skills suggests that he considers himself incompetent and underprepared, and the novel generalizes these traits to his comrades. Nan easily tricks and immobilizes the IRA member guarding the British officers (178), then compares Irish nationalists to “boys in the nursery” (187). Such descriptions replace the novel’s earlier representation of the IRA as a versatile yet structured network with a portrait of the organization as a collection of childishly frightened, bumbling amateurs. During the burning of Aragon, the novel’s narrator continues to infantilize the IRA soldiers, saying they have “the savage desperate look of boys who had committed some outrage beyond their own believing, an outrage that has got beyond them and taken on a strength of its own” (241). Here, the narrator privileges the agency of the fire over that of the IRA members: the flames grow stronger while the juvenile men remain stupefied by shock. Their disbelief divorces them from their own actions, which they cannot seem to comprehend at the most basic level, let alone relate to Ireland’s political situation or the War of Independence. Keane’s representation of infantile IRA soldiers evokes the stereotype of Irish immaturity that long provided justification for Britain’s dominion over Ireland, but it also undercuts their potential as politically aware and engaged agents. By featuring insurgents too childish to understand the political dimensions of their behavior, Two Days in Aragon again conforms with an established convention of counter-insurgency writing.

104 Denny is one of the “boys” to whom this sentence refers, but at no other time does he evince discomfort with or reluctance to commit violence. On the contrary, the narrator notes that Denny’s “bravery and cunning and ruthlessness” make him an effective IRA member and leader (85). These contradictory descriptions are representative of the uneven characterization of the IRA throughout Two Days in Aragon.
Two Days in Aragon’s representation of crown forces also testifies to its membership in the counter-insurgency genre. Like The Last September, Two Days in Aragon includes very little discussion of crown forces’ participation in the War of Independence so that, again, rather than being seen as part of a cycle of reprisals and counter-reprisals, the IRA’s actions are viewed in isolation. Whereas Barry states that the IRA seized members of the crown forces “specifically as hostages … to be executed should the British shoot or hang any I.R.A. captive” (288), Keane’s novel gives no indication that the British officers’ abduction has any such strategic importance. Neither does the narrative suggest that Captain Purvis, the main target of the operation, has done anything to warrant being singled out for execution, though according to veterans, typically only members of the crown forces who showed especial cruelty or antipathy to nationalist fighters became the subjects of assassination plots.105 In fact, Two Days in Aragon completely omits discussion of the Captain’s battle experiences and instead accentuates personal traits, such as his fondness for animals and his burgeoning romance with Sylvia. Purvis’s kindness—he is captured while kneeling and “trying to persuade [his] tired terrier to lap milk” (90)—makes him seem innocuous, in spite of his high military rank, and imputes monstrousness to the IRA leaders who want such a man killed.

Two Days in Aragon dissociates crown forces from the actual conduct of the war to an even greater extent than does The Last September. While Bowen mentions British military patrols occurring in the mountains around Danielstown, Keane depicts crown forces keeping to “the garrison town” when not pursuing leisure activities such as hunting and tennis (85). Keane’s narrator draws attention to the dangers that the men face when returning to their barracks after such excursions: “bridges might be blown to bits … or barricaded roads [give] masked

105 See, for instance, Barry (35) and Lee-Sider (130-133).
adventurers their opportunity” (88). On the one hand, this description ridicules the recklessness of the crown forces, who fail to “conduct themselves as though they [are] at war and in an enemy’s country” (88), but on the other, it positions Irish nationalists as aggressors and British troops as unfortunate victims. The text acknowledges no possibility that crown forces will retaliate for such attacks or mount offensives of their own. *Two Days in Aragon* actually shows British servicemen committing no intentional acts of violence. They come the closest when questioning Foley about his role in the officers’ abduction but even then fail to move beyond threats of varying explicitness: one officer suggests that Foley will “find it healthier to talk” voluntarily (190), and another points out that “justice can be done quickly under martial law” (198). However, the arrival of Mrs. Fox and Grania in the interrogation chamber returns the military men to politeness and shields Foley from harm. If the officers’ threats hint that they harbor the potential to perpetrate torture and summary executions, the speed with which they abandon these threats and allow Foley to flee Ireland reestablishes a separation between the British military and such acts of cruelty.

Crown forces only accidentally inflict harm, and instead of nationalist combatants, they injure Nan and Aragon. Ironically, though Denny and his IRA subordinates repeatedly threaten Nan’s life, a British military vehicle strikes and kills her. That same vehicle wreaks additional destruction at Aragon, “hitting a [gate] post … and cutting across a corner of mown grass, old rich turf, abruptly torn and scarred after its years of repose” (256). Both of these incidents cast the British troops in a unflattering light, especially because they express very little remorse for Nan’s death. On the contrary, a sergeant informs Grania that the Irish nationalists bear the most blame: “Yes, we *was* driving fast, and fast we must drive. Can’t ‘ang about and give the Shinners time to crack us off, can we? Very sorry, Lady, but fair’s fair … and we’re not in any too ‘ealthy
a spot right here this minute” (256, emphasis in original). This statement once more casts the nationalists as the offensive force and the British military as a vulnerable target, giving no indication that the soldiers possess means of protecting themselves. Consequently, although the sergeant’s callousness disrupts the novel’s preexisting link between the British military and politeness, its characterization of the war remains unaltered, with members of the crown forces cast primarily as subjects, not originators, of violence. When British forces inflict injuries, they do so through carelessness rather than malice, and notably, the only person they harm is Nan, whose Anglo-Irish heritage Two Days in Aragon consistently highlights.\footnote{For example, the narrator introduces Nan and her Fox ancestry simultaneously (6), and she is said to have had “consciousness of dead Fox’s [sic] stirring in her blood” upon first arriving at Aragon (110).} In this way, the novel replaces Irish with Anglo-Irish suffering—any harm that British forces cause IRA soldiers or other nationalists remains unrecognized, while the damage to the Anglo-Irish way of life receives emphasis. By minimizing official forces’ use of violence against participants in a colonial uprising, Two Days in Aragon follows a standard practice of counter-insurgency prose. Hence, the text’s representations of both groups of combatants in the War of Independence demonstrate its affiliation with counter-insurgency literature.

**Conclusion: Relocating The Last September and Two Days in Aragon**

Bowen’s preface to the second United States edition of The Last September discusses the atmosphere she aimed to create with the novel: “the ‘then’ (the past) as an element was demanded. The cast of my characters, and their doings, were to reflect the mood of a vanished time. ‘All this,’ I willed the reader to know, ‘is done with and over’” (124). Bowen’s concern for constructing an “authentic” account, a work of “fiction with the texture of history” (Preface 125), contrasts with Keane’s goal of expressing “atonement for her contemporaneous attitude [to the War of Independence], her condemnations and her lack of understanding” by portraying “both
sides” of the conflict in *Two Days in Aragon* (Devlin ix). Despite their differing objectives, Bowen and Keane produced remarkably similar texts. Literary critics regularly cite one commonality—the novels’ shared concentration on Anglo-Irish families and estates—to justify labeling *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* works of Big House literature. In addition, scholars including Backus, Corcoran, and Wells-Lassagne contend that subversive political messages appear in both *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon*. Backus considers these novels “anticolonial critiques” because they expose the destructive dynamics of sexuality and gender underpinning Ireland’s colonial systems (174). Although this interpretation laudably attempts to rectify the generic marginalization that *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon*’s traditional classification as Big House novels involves, it overlooks their problematic depictions of Irish nationalists.

When representing IRA members, Bowen and Keane borrow heavily from the prose of counter-insurgency, a genre that denigrates anticolonial uprisings and defends imperial forms of governance. *The Last September*’s stealthy, beastly, highly mobile Irish nationalists and *Two Days in Aragon*’s depoliticized criminal and incompetent religious zealots all parallel standard representations of rebels in counter-insurgency prose. *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* both acknowledge the IRA’s capacities for delegation and coordination but credit its victories less to these qualities than to ruthless willingness to capitalize on unfair advantages. In this, too, the novels follow a convention of counter-insurgency literature. *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* use more counter-insurgency tactics by describing crown forces’ actions in vague or innocuous terms and by casting them as the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of incredible violence.
*The Last September’s* and *Two Days in Aragon’s* resemblances with counter-insurgency prose affect the novels’ political and generic affiliations. First, these novels cannot be considered subversive or anticolonial, for their criticisms of Ireland’s colonization address only Anglo-Irish experiences. *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* actually stake out regressive political positions by promulgating stereotypical, propagandistic conceptions of the Irish and of insurgents. Second, the texts’ reliance on tropes characteristic of counter-insurgency writing allies them with that genre. In other words, their portrayals of Irish nationalists establish *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* as counter-insurgency literature. This categorization does not supplant but rather exists alongside the texts’ ties to the Big House literary tradition: *The Last September* and *Two Days in Aragon* are both Big House and counter-insurgency novels.

Although critics typically do not recognize Big House and counter-insurgency literature as related genres, this chapter shows significant connections between them. The following chapter operates on a smaller scale, exploring hitherto ignored linkages amongst works by a single author—Pat Barker.
CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL CONTINUITY IN PAT BARKER’S FICTION

Whereas Pat Barker’s first three novels—Union Street, Blow Your House Down, and Liza’s England (originally published in 1986 as The Century’s Daughter)—concentrate on the experiences of women in northern English working-class communities in the 1970s and 1980s, her acclaimed Regeneration trilogy focuses on men during the First World War. Such divergences situate Barker’s earliest novels and the Regeneration trilogy within different genres: working-class or feminist literature and historical fiction, respectively.¹⁰⁷ Numerous critics, though, claim that all of her work grapples with similar themes, including “the nature of evil” (Ross 132), “communities and individuals under stress” (Monteith 1), and “the interplay between past and present as it affects both male and female characters” (Prescott 168). Lawrence Driscoll objects to such readings, asserting that Barker’s treatment of social class creates “a political and aesthetic split in her oeuvre” (30). According to Driscoll, the Regeneration trilogy affirms middle-class over working-class values, symbolically destroying the latter via Billy Prior’s implied battlefield death and replacing the possibility of “revolution” apparent in Barker’s earlier novels with “platitudes” about spiritual rebirth and recovery (32). While I agree with Driscoll’s assessment of the Regeneration trilogy’s politics, I dispute his contention that Barker’s output contains an ideological divide because conservative political tendencies also appear in Union Street and Blow Your House Down. Not only Driscoll but also scholars who argue for unity within Barker’s oeuvre neglect to acknowledge its political continuity. Another unrecognized area of stability involves spirituality: Union Street, Blow Your House Down, and The Ghost Road, the final entry in the Regeneration trilogy, all emphasize spiritual, rather than political,

¹⁰⁷ In a 1992 interview, Barker expressed frustration at being “typecast as a northern, regional, working-class, feminist … novelist” (Nixon 6). The success of the Regeneration trilogy dissociated her from those labels.
transformation and thereby further distance themselves from revolutionary ideals. Overall, then, Barker’s initial works prove no more politically radical than her later ones, and her oeuvre comprises a unified kinship network while also participating in multiple genres.

*Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* discount the prospect of political revolution via portrayals of ineffectual collective action by women’s networks. In *Union Street*, the women residents of the titular road form a network in which members offer one another companionship, emotional support, and practical assistance, such as childcare. *Blow Your House Down*’s network performs these same functions, but because most of the characters in this novel, unlike those in *Union Street*, work as prostitutes, their collective includes additional, specialized operations. The women in *Blow Your House Down* exchange advice for dealing with customers and for separating their personal lives, including their interactions with their children, from their profession; additionally, they debate and implement safety precautions such as working the streets in pairs and recording the license plate numbers of each other’s customers. Although the prostitutes’ network articulates its goals more explicitly than does the network in *Union Street*, both fail to improve members’ lives or shield them from danger.

Departing from many other literary depictions of women’s networks, *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* suggest that the greatest threat to collective action exists internally—amongst the women themselves—rather than externally. Of the friendships amongst women in *Blow Your House Down*, Barker observes:

> there is support, but it is support for the status quo. … Women who are tremendously supportive of a woman who is being battered, giving support on how to deal with it, are not helping her get out of it. There’s a stoicism without

108 The women in *Blow Your House Down* repeatedly debate methods of protecting themselves from the murderer (258, 321-322), in addition to taking the precautions discussed above. The *Union Street* women do not have a similar large-scale unifying goal; instead, they deal with members’ needs as they arise.
Barker’s statements apply equally well to the interactions between women in *Union Street*. In both novels, failure to question the status quo entraps network members in cycles of poverty and abuse. Only those who evince resignation to their situations can rely on other members’ consolation and advice; women who try to institute changes risk alienation. This commitment to existing circumstances prevents the women’s networks not only from achieving objectives such as protecting members from physical and sexual violence, but also from undertaking or even imagining large-scale political movements. Such pessimistic assessments of networks mirror conservative politicians’ stances on collective action. *Union Street* continues to uphold conservative principles by indicating that women operating alone or outside the network can be more effective, whereas *Blow Your House Down* undermines the efficacy of network members’ individual actions, preventing any hope that working-class lives can be bettered. Both novels conclude with scenes of spiritual redemption and healing, but only in *Union Street* do network members undergo these transformations; *Blow Your House Down*’s reservation of spiritual insights for a woman with bourgeois traits privileges higher social classes in much the same way as does Barker’s succeeding work. Examining the depictions of women’s networks and spirituality in *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* thus shows that certain themes recur throughout Barker’s writings but also suggests that critics misjudge the political sympathies of her early material.

**Finding Women’s Networks in British Literature**

By representing women networking with one another, *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* join a fictional tradition that reaches back to some of the earliest British novels. Scholars have identified women’s networks in Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Samuel
Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748). Schantz asserts that although such literary representations often feature “hostility among women” or concentrate on individual female characters, they nevertheless contain sufficient details about interactions between women to confirm the existence of far-reaching female support networks (3). These networks utilize various forms of communication, including face-to-face conversations and letters, but have the common objective of “transmitting sympathy and strategy to women beset by patriarchy” (Schantz 3). In other words, women’s networks help members cope with the disadvantages attendant on their gender, providing them with both supportive friendships and practical advice and aid. Early novels regularly depict women using gossip “to regulate the marriage market” by, for instance, exposing and humiliating unscrupulous male suitors (Schantz 12). Network connections also enable members to behave in less societally condoned ways than arranging advantageous heterosexual marriages. Srividhya Swaminathan demonstrates how Moll Flanders’s female network facilitates and protects her criminal activities, “subverting patriarchal power” by allowing her to gain an atypical degree of financial independence through thievery (199). These eighteenth-century texts show participants in women’s networks gaining significant, lasting benefits from their connections with one another. Indeed, in *Moll Flanders*, women can accomplish their goals “[o]nly within the network,” and those “who work against the female solidarity are thwarted” (Swaminathan 201). Women’s networks, however, are far from impervious: they often face especial threat from men who attempt either to appropriate or to destroy their functions.109

The women’s networks in *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* differ in several notable ways from their literary precursors. As previously mentioned, Barker’s networks experience threat from within rather than without, with network members impedance network

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109 For example, Robert Lovelace, the villain of *Clarissa*, forges a letter from the title character’s female friend advising Clarissa to marry him, thereby “simulating the essential [network] function of screening suitors” (Schantz 34).
operations, and individuals sometimes have greater chances of success when acting on their own than when relying on their comrades. Additionally, whereas earlier novels often relegate female networks to the peripheries of plot and narration in order to focus on opposite-sex interactions, *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* center on connections between women. Critics debate whether the two novels endorse the presence of solidarity and opposition to oppression amongst working-class women. Peter Hitchcock sees evidence of intergenerational “sisterhood” in *Union Street* (97), as does John Kirk (614). Hitchcock and Kirk also agree that the women of *Union Street* resist the various forms of subjugation present in their daily lives. Sarah Brophy and Sarah Falcus offer more complex appraisals, emphasizing Barker’s depictions of not only love and support, but also resentment, jealousy, and violence between women. Such conflicts, both Brophy and Falcus argue, curtail cooperation and solidarity amongst Barker’s women characters. This chapter builds upon the scholarship of Brophy and Falcus. I agree that Barker’s working-class women fail to exhibit effective collective agency; however, rather than sharing Brophy’s and Falcus’s dedication to affective relationships between mothers and daughters, I focus on the larger scale of the women’s networks in which these relationships are embedded, as well as those networks’ activities.

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110 Hitchcock asserts that *Union Street* offers “a lesson in the discourse of resistance” (103), while Kirk elaborates:

> The narrative encodes a heterogeneity of struggle against patriarchy, capital, and the state. Bureaucracy is figured in the inclusive but anonymous ‘they,’ who invariably represent some form of authority: establishment figures like the police or schoolmaster, bosses or violent husbands who must be denied. (613)

111 Although Brophy and Falcus both recognize the complicatedness of interactions between women, the latter sees more room for optimism in Barker’s depictions. Whereas Brophy emphasizes how economic and material considerations persist in alienating the characters from one another (32, 38), Falcus suggests that “fleeting moments of connection” prove the possibility of healthier emotional and spiritual relations between women (258).
By dealing with *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down*, this chapter differs from most analyses of Barker’s early fiction. Numerous readings concentrate on the texts individually. On the other hand, Belinda Webb refers to *Union Street*, *Blow Your House Down*, and *Liza’s England* as the “other Pat Barker trilogy,” and accordingly, critics such as Kirk and Falcus examine all three of these novels together. Brophy, meanwhile, claims:

> Barker transposes so many details from *Union Street* to *Liza’s England* that they are usefully read together as two connected mappings of working-class mothering and community, with the subsequent novel revising and commenting on the first.

Brophy’s perspective overlooks an important difference between *Union Street* and *Liza’s England*: the latter explores the experiences and emotions of one woman, while the former affords access to a variety of developed characters and considers in greater detail how the women of a community interact. In this respect, *Union Street* more closely resembles *Blow Your House Down*, which likewise highlights the viewpoints of multiple women in an unnamed northeastern English city.

Reading *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* together reveals two possible formulations of women’s networks and suggests how Barker’s representations of working-class action—at both the collective and individual levels—shift over time. In *Union Street*, the women’s network proves impotent, but individuals can sometimes achieve their own objectives by resorting to short-lived alliances with outsiders or solitary action. *Blow Your House Down*

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112 See, for instance, Ann Ardis, John Brannigan, Lucy Gallagher, and Kathryn and Philip Dodd.
113 In the years since Webb coined this phrase, Barker has published a third trilogy, consisting of *Life Class* (2007), *Toby’s Room* (2012), and *Noonday* (2015).
114 This distinction can be seen even in the novels’ titles—*Union Street* foregrounds location over any particular character, and *Liza’s England* does the opposite, immediately drawing attention to the text’s protagonist, Liza Jarrett.
portrays connections between members of the prostitutes’ network and non-members as more problematic and undermines the effectiveness of even individual action by network members. Neither novel, though, portends a working-class revolution. Instead of material transformations, each text features instances of spiritual growth and renewal similar to those in the *Regeneration* trilogy. *Blow Your House Down* departs from *Union Street* but foreshadows *The Ghost Road* by restricting spiritual experiences to a woman who, despite belonging to the working classes, displays hallmarks of bourgeois respectability such as a stable, affectionate heterosexual marriage. Thus, *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* demonstrate significant yet heretofore ignored resemblances, including eschewal of revolutionary politics, with Barker’s subsequent publications. These resemblances constitute the ties that join Barker’s entire oeuvre into a kinship network.

**Stagnation Inside and Action Outside the Network in *Union Street***

*Union Street* explores the daily lives of working-class women in northeastern England during the 1970s. The novel consists of seven chapters, each of which revolves around and is named for a woman who lives on or near the titular road. The characters range in age from the pre-pubescent Kelly Brown to the elderly Alice Bell but share experiences such as poverty, exploitation, and physical and/or sexual abuse. Such similarities suggest that women’s lives change little over time: generation after generation marries young, often as a result of unexpected pregnancies, and then suffers spousal violence or, occasionally, abandonment. The women of *Union Street* have few employment opportunities outside their houses, and the available jobs—

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115 The prostitute Blonde Dinah, for whom the penultimate chapter is named, does not actually live on *Union Street*.
116 During the 1960s, national legislation increased the availability of birth control and legalized abortion and “no fault” divorces (Thane 172), but these changes seem to have minimally impacted the life cycle of *Union Street*’s women. In this way, *Union Street* echoes other literary representations of British working-class communities, which tend to represent them as “anthropologically distinct and cut off from the wider world” (Dodd and Dodd 126).
assembling cakes in a local factory, acting as “home help” to sick and aged individuals (171), cleaning, and prostituting—are all physically taxing and poorly paid. Downsizing in steel and other heavy industries has left many men unemployed and with slim prospects for finding more work, so married women enjoy no more financial stability than do single ones. Going hungry, being unable to pay their bills, and losing their homes are real possibilities for the women of Union Street.\textsuperscript{117} To cope with such hardships, the women act as a network, circulating emotional and material forms of support amongst themselves. This network, though, does not enable members to significantly improve their lives; on the contrary, the women’s concern with respectability and criticism of one another encourage endurance rather than change. Members can be most effective when they break away from the network and either forge temporary alliances with non-members or act alone. By thus endorsing individualism over collectivism, Union Street reflects conservative political principles; this, along with the novel’s concluding emphasis on spiritual transformation, demonstrates that Barker’s early works are no more revolutionary than are her later ones.

The women of Union Street form an all-channel network, meaning that each participant can connect to any other without requiring the assistance of an intermediary.\textsuperscript{118} Nonetheless, as in the majority of networks, some members, called hubs, “are more highly linked than others” (Levine 126). Iris King, who appears in all but one of Union Street’s chapters, functions as the network’s main hub. Emotional bonds and acts of service tie Iris to most other members of the network, as the following summary of her relations with her neighbors shows:

\textsuperscript{117} Union Street depicts a former cake factory employee squatting in a condemned house (62). Even Iris King, whose years of employment have enabled her to afford the relative luxury of an indoor toilet (171), fears losing her home on Union Street and being forced to return to the poorer area where she lived as a child.

\textsuperscript{118} Urban areas facilitate the creation of all-channel networks, as discussed in Chapter 1’s analyses of The Secret Agent and The Heat of the Day. Like the characters in those novels, the women of Union Street regularly encounter one another by chance in public areas such as roads and alleyways.
she mothered half the street. Kelly Brown and the Scaife children, Lisa Goddard’s little lads—they all knew and loved their Iris. Oh, my Iris, Kelly used to say when she was little. Oh, my Iris. And she sat with women in labour. Even laid out the dead, though there wasn’t as much call for that now. (179-180)

For children such as the Scaifes, who have an attentive mother, Iris functions as a supplementary maternal presence; for Kelly, whose mother spends minimal time with her, Iris acts as a surrogate parent. Iris’s interactions with Kelly demonstrate a close entwinement between emotional and material care, for at Iris’s house, Kelly receives not only affection but also food (40)—both scarce commodities in her own home. Iris extends similar nurturing attention to women of all ages. While visiting Alice, Iris performs chores, such as maintaining a fire to heat the house, and shares “news” of happenings amongst the street’s residents (216), once more blending practical, physical care with companionship. The narrator’s comment that Alice, who moved to Union Street fairly late in life, “was bonded into” the community “through Iris” reveals the latter woman’s power to bring new members into the network (216). Iris, in other words, possesses not only a large number of linkages, but also a considerable amount of influence in the women’s network.

Once incorporated into the Union Street network, Alice also becomes a hub, serving as a maternal figure for younger women and as a trusted confidant for those closer to her own age. As Levine points out, however, “those who are the sites of the most substantial traffic are not necessarily sources of either agency or authority” (126-127). Alice’s links with her neighbors do not invest her with power. On the contrary, Alice occupies a fairly passive position in the

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119 Iris works as professional “home help” for Alice (216), but the narrative emphasizes the strength of their emotional connection: Alice is “almost a mother” to Iris (217), who visits the older woman “far oftener than she [is] officially supposed to do, even calling in late at night to make sure that all [is] well” (216). This relationship reveals how Iris’s unofficial functions in the network overlap and mix with her paid work.
women’s network because health problems have rendered her reliant on her fellow members for her basic needs. This situation illuminates the network’s ineffectiveness. Following a disagreement, Iris and another neighbor, Gladys, depart Alice’s house without lighting a fire, thereby leaving the residence unheated during a winter’s night. Alice reflects, “Iris … could easily think somebody else had come in to light the fire. That was the trouble. It wasn’t anybody’s job” (221). The network’s failure to explicitly allocate responsibilities to members means that important tasks sometimes go uncompleted, leading to suffering amongst those, such as Alice, who most depend on the collective’s help. Alice’s attempt to make her own fire leads to additional failures of the women’s network. Though she manages to fetch coal from the detached coalhouse, Alice falls while returning to her home and cannot raise herself from the ground. She considers trying to attract the attention of her next-door neighbors but quickly realizes that they are watching television loudly enough to drown out her cries for help. After eventually reentering her house, Alice attempts to summon assistance: she “rattle[s] the poker at the back of the grate, hoping the neighbours might hear. But nobody [comes]” (223). These incidents show that Alice’s high level of connectedness does not equate to either personal benefits from or power over the rest of the network. Rather than controlling the network, Alice relies on it. Her helplessness exposes some of the flaws, such as lack of organization and attention, that contribute to the network’s overall inefficacy and, consequently, to Union Street’s unflattering portrait of collective action.

The importance that the Union Street women’s network places on respectability heightens its ineffectiveness. Because members fear damaging their reputations, they frequently neglect to seek one another’s emotional support in times of trouble—a tendency particularly apparent in their responses to domestic violence. For example, Lisa Goddard refuses to admit
that her husband, Brian, hits her. Instead, she tries to explain a facial wound by saying that she “walked into the coalhouse door,” which Brian neglected to close (117). Iris, who has also suffered violence from her husband, Ted, clearly shows that she does not believe Lisa’s excuse but still avoids speaking explicitly of the abuse: “Sounds a bit like our Ted. He was forever leaving the coalhouse door open when we were first married. Till I fettled him” (117). This coded utterance suggests that spousal violence should be reciprocated, and indeed, Iris goes on to say that she “took the meat chopper” to Ted (117). Neithne Lisa nor Iris acknowledges leaving an abusive husband as a possibility. The women of Union Street expect one another to remain in unhealthy marriages, which “implies that keeping the family unit together is vital to maintaining respectability” (Brophy 33). Based on Lisa and Iris’s refusal to speak openly about their husbands’ violence, preserving a good reputation also requires attempting to keep such abuse secret. The women stoically tolerate domestic violence but do not approve of it; thus, to admit to being abused would be to risk losing status in the network, and members forego one another’s emotional support in the interest of keeping up appearances.

Like domestic violence, extramarital sex and pregnancies carry scandalous connotations despite occurring commonly in Union Street, so concern for their reputations causes network members to avoid confiding in one another about these topics. Upon learning of her sixteen-year-old daughter Brenda’s pregnancy, Iris becomes convinced that the King family’s respectable reputation, which “matter[s] more to her than anything else,” will be “destroy[ed]” (180). Fear and anger prompt Iris not to seek guidance or consolation from her neighbors, many of whom have dealt with similar situations, but to viciously attack Brenda: Iris “hit[s] the girl on the

\[120\] Notably, the account Iris gives of her abuse here, in the chapter that focuses on Lisa, differs from the details included in her own chapter. While Iris’s statements to Lisa suggest that attacking Ted with the meat chopper ended his episodes of violence, the narrator later points out “[i]t didn’t stop him hitting her again” (175). This disparity raises the possibility that Iris bends the truth when talking to Lisa to protect her own reputation as a formidable and respectable woman.
mouth” and “drag[s] [her] around … by her hair” in front of numerous other women (169, 170). Iris evidently views public violence as less shameful than an extramarital baby, and the treatment a single mother experiences in the neighborhood suggests that others share her opinion. Although women employed in the cake factory react with shock and horror when one of their colleagues physically assaults another, they merely ostracize the attacker thereafter. Conversely, “Soppy Lil” (83), a factory worker who has borne two children outside of marriage, receives open bullying and humiliation. When confronting Brenda about her pregnancy, Iris compares her to “Soppy Lil” (169), implying that the teenager has acquired—and deserves—a reputation as bad as the older woman’s. Iris’s response to Brenda’s pregnancy illustrates not only the contempt with which the women of Union Street view unmarried mothers but also the precariousness of respectability amongst them: Iris’s important position in the women’s network does not immunize her against exclusion, and she believes that her daughter’s disreputable pregnancy can undermine all the respect she has accrued through years of service for other members. For this reason, Iris declines to discuss Brenda’s condition with her network connections and cannot benefit from whatever advice or emotional support they might offer.

The foregoing examples indicate the outsize role fear of being the subject of gossip plays in women’s reluctance to utilize the Union Street network’s supportive functions. Gossiping, in its “essential dynamic of forming a bond through talking about others not present” (Schantz 17), does not necessarily entail criticism of those being discussed, but Union Street portrays gossip that consists largely of disparaging comments and speculation. The first instance of gossip

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121 Barker’s narrator comments, “One illegitimate child was accepted easily enough” (84), but the narrative belies this assertion by portraying generations of women, from Iris to the teenager Joanne Wilson, feeling that they must be married once they become pregnant (174, 99).
122 According to Gabriele Taylor, “[d]efinitions of gossip will always be complex and controversial” (34). However, numerous commentators, including Taylor, accept a basic definition of gossip that resembles Schantz’s. See also Aaron Ben-Ze’ev (13), Nicholas Emler (131), and Ofra Nevo et al. (183).
in *Union Street* sets the tone for the rest of the novel, as Doris expresses “outrage” over Mrs. Brown’s romantic relationships and supposed lack of concern for her two daughters’ wellbeing (16). Iris, the recipient of Doris’s gossip, likewise criticizes Mrs. Brown for prioritizing her social life over looking after her children, who are frequently left “on their own” at home or “let roam the streets” (17). During one such night, a stranger rapes Kelly Brown, and the aftermath of this attack underscores gossip’s power within the women’s network. Upon finding out what happened to Kelly, Mrs. Brown longs to express her complicated feelings to another woman but hesitates because she knows what her neighbors think of her and does not want to provide them with additional ammunition to use against her:

> She needed a woman to talk to, but in all this sodding street there wasn’t one of ‘em you could trust. They’d all turned against her, because since Tom [her husband] left there’d been other men in the house. Jealous cows. And how they’d talk! Coo and sympathise, oh, yes. But talk. She could hear them now, “Well, what can you expect, leaving the bairn alone half the bloody night? You know where *she’d* be, don’t you? Out boozing at the Buffs with that Arthur Robson. Eeee!” (38-39)

Mrs. Brown had better relations with her neighbors before her husband abandoned the family, but because her behavior since then has not met communal standards, the other women have snubbed her. Like Iris’s, Mrs. Brown’s predicament emphasizes how easily members can lose status in the Union Street network if linked with conduct deemed improper. These situations also reveal the network’s frequent failure to fulfill its primary functions: providing the women with emotional support and companionship. Members fear that sharing their feelings and difficulties
will elicit judgment, criticism, and possibly shunning, so they often choose not to rely on the network.

The Union Street network’s aforementioned commitment to the status quo also casts collective action as unproductive. Using visual surveillance, gossip, and well publicized mores, the women’s network pressures members into accepting lives nearly indistinguishable from those through which their ancestors suffered. This dynamic emerges most clearly in the chapter devoted to pregnant teenager Joanne. After sleeping at the home of her friend Joss, a little person, Joanne worries over what she was witnessed doing the night before: “She had gone to the Buffs and got drunk and, watched by several people from the street, including two girls who worked at the cake bakery, she had allowed herself to be seen going home with a midget” (69). Joanne assumes that those who observed her will share what they saw with the rest of the neighborhood. In Union Street, discussion so inevitably follows observation that distinguishing between speaking and seeing becomes unnecessary. Accordingly, Joanne’s thoughts skip over how the knowledge of her actions will spread and instead move directly from what onlookers saw to the bawdy jokes she will hear as a result of spending the night at Joss’s. Joanne also considers the communal consensus about Joss, whose caring, non-violent nature makes “everybody” say “[h]e’d be a husband in a million, if only his arms and legs were the normal length” (73). From this perspective, Joss’s size makes him an inappropriate romantic partner, so being tied to him would adversely affect a woman’s esteem in the neighborhood. These collective judgments make Joanne feel that she cannot stay with Joss, though she would like to. Conversely, Joanne has misgivings about marrying the young man responsible for her pregnancy but knows that others will expect them to wed before she gives birth. Joanne ultimately defers to the community’s standards, submitting to a traditional lifestyle of marriage and motherhood to
diminish her chances of being gossiped about or ostracized by the women of her acquaintance. Far from stoking revolutionary behavior, the Union Street women’s network combines surveillance, gossip, and strict rules to encourage resignation to the current state of affairs.123

Because the Union Street network aims to help women respectably endure their existing circumstances, those who wish to reshape their lives must break away—at least temporarily—from their fellow members. Such women either form evanescent allegiances with individuals outside the network or act alone, and Union Street indicates that by doing so, they can accomplish their objectives. The chapter “Iris King” includes an example of effective cooperation that transcends the Union Street network’s boundaries. Iris believes that Brenda, being unprepared to raise and support a child, must have an abortion, but the teenager’s doctor insists that her pregnancy has advanced too far to be terminated. In desperation, Iris contacts Irene, an illicit abortionist. Irene’s residence on what the denizens of Union Street spurn as “the worst street in the town” means that she lacks ties to Iris’s network and will likely not have an opportunity to spread information about the Kings amongst their neighbors (72). Irene’s outsider status thus serves Iris’s desire to conceal Brenda’s pregnancy from the people of Union Street. Equally importantly, Irene proves able to induce Brenda’s labor. The teenager delivers a live male infant, whom Iris allows to die and then secretly buries. Afterward, Iris finds herself “haunt[ed]” by visions of the baby during “moments of silence and solitude” and also when interacting with the son of her other, married daughter (201). Such details lead critical readings of this episode to focus on its detrimental emotional and psychological connotations. Brophy, for example, speculates that the “intolerable juxtaposition” of Iris’s love for one grandchild and abandonment of the other will activate her recurrent depression and possibly render her unfit to

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123 For more on gossip’s entwinement with surveillance and policing, see Giselle Bastin (117-119), as well as Cathy Greenfield and Peter Williams (130-131).
“continue her work of ‘mothering’ the rest of the street” (34). While the violence and trauma associated with Iris’s actions should not be overlooked, neither should her successful interruption of the cycle of young motherhood. This incident is one of only a few times in the novel when a woman attains a goal, adding significance to the fact that Iris’s effectiveness follows collaboration with someone outside the Union Street network. Whereas the network urges members to stoically tolerate unpleasant aspects of their lives, Iris’s experience indicates that non-members demonstrate more willingness for action. Consequently, in this case, Union Street attributes greater efficacy to cooperation across network lines than to intra-network efforts.

At other times, Union Street depicts women attaining their objectives by relying most heavily on only themselves; by portraying individuals as more effectual than collectives, Barker’s novel reinforces a central pillar of contemporary conservatism. Valorization of the individual occupied an especially prominent position in Margaret Thatcher’s rhetoric. As Mary McGlynn points out, Thatcher consistently advocated for a “British state comprise[d] [of] individuals dependent on no one and nothing but an unfettered economy” and presented collective action as little more than “uncontrollable mob activity” (312, 313).124 Union Street critiques collective action on different grounds than did Thatcher, but the novel validates her contention that individuals who “look to themselves first” have the best chances of success (“Interview”). Kelly and Alice both achieve personal goals after severing links with the Union Street women’s network and acting alone. After being raped, Kelly feels uncomfortable around her relatives and neighbors, so she wanders the town by herself, engaging in increasingly taboo behavior. She first sneaks into and vandalizes the home of a well-off family, then subsequently breaks into her school, where she exhibits even greater destructiveness. On the second occasion,

124 Thatcher’s 1987 interview with the magazine Women’s Own, in which she claimed, “There is no such thing [as society]! There are individual men and women,” exemplifies both of these attitudes (“Interview”).
Kelly believes she can only be “bad enough” by defecating in the Headmaster’s office and coating his desk, chair, and belongings with her feces (57). She also carves a series of obscenities into a classroom blackboard, tearing her fingernails “down to the quick” in the process (57). These acts of vandalism stem from clearly articulated goals: Kelly wants to create “disruption[s]” severe enough to prevent others from “pretend[ing] that nothing [has] happened” (56). Her actions in the school, she thinks, satisfy these standards, for they leave persistent, undeniable traces of her presence.

Kelly’s behavior while trespassing can be considered effective not only because it fulfills her stated objectives but also because it produces psychological and emotional benefits. Before both incidents, Kelly experiences a “sensation of pressure, … of blood squeezing through narrowed veins” (51), and her destructive actions temporarily relieve this feeling of constriction. Her most extreme deeds provide the most catharsis: she tries to suppress “groans” after breaking a mirror in the strangers’ home but freely sobs and pants following the defacement of the classroom blackboard (55). The emotions apparent in Kelly’s behavior, including rage and sadness, likely stem from the rape, which suggests that violently acting out helps her to process her feelings about being assaulted. Barker’s narrative supports this idea by connecting Kelly’s rape with both sites where she trespasses. The house sits beside the park where Kelly first encounters “The Man”—her name for the otherwise anonymous rapist—prompting her to wonder if he lives nearby (53), and she finds the “shape” and “weight” of the waste she excretes in the school reminiscent of his penis (57). Based on the similarities Kelly perceives between her feces and the rapist’s genitalia, Gallagher argues that the girl’s activities in the Headmaster’s office represent healing:

by defecating, Kelly distances her own body from that of the rapist so that,
metaphorically, his body is no longer in hers. … Consequently, by abjecting her body of what is other to it (the lingering presence of The Man), she reaffirms its boundaries and, in turn, her sense of self. (49)

Gallagher is mistaken when she says Kelly’s actions in the school “[put] an end to the problematic behavior that she has displayed” (49). Kelly subsequently frequents abandoned, dangerously decrepit houses, and even months later, she seriously considers killing a bird (64). Nonetheless, because Kelly becomes nonviolent and more open to interpersonal interactions after vandalizing her school, the emotional release she undergoes there seems to help her begin recovering from the trauma of being raped. Her unwillingness to express her feelings to others highlights the inadequacies of the Union Street women’s network, the members of which prefer gossiping about Kelly’s experience to helping her deal with it. Conversely, the success of Kelly’s solitary efforts to work through her reactions to the rape associates individual action with efficacy.

Additional examples of individual action being more effective than the network’s efforts occur in “Alice Bell,” the final chapter of Union Street. As discussed above, at the outset of the chapter, infirmity makes Alice reliant on the women’s network for basic needs, such as heat, but her fellow members fail to properly care for her. Alice’s fall triggers a debilitating stroke, as well as a shift in her relationship with her neighbors. The other women feel “uncomfortable” in Alice’s presence because the stroke interferes with her ability to speak (227). Rather than struggle to communicate with them, Alice “[withdraws] into herself,” intending “to search through the wreckage of her mind, to find out what she [has] left worth saving” (227). She embarks on a process of memory retrieval that allows her to make peace with painful incidents from her past. For example, Alice forgives the mother who mistreated her by recognizing that the
older woman also suffered greatly, admitting, “Looking back on it now I can see she had a rotten life” (228). Alice’s reappraisal of her memories holds a therapeutic value similar to that of Kelly’s violence and vandalism. Although Kelly’s exertions are corporeal and Alice’s are mental, both carry out acts of self-help, working alone to come to terms with traumatic experiences. Kelly and Alice have to practice self-help because the Union Street network has, in some degree, rejected them, but both demonstrate the ability to accomplish their objectives without support from others. In each case, Union Street indicates that a woman stands a better chance of being effective if she acts alone than if she depends on her network contacts and, by doing so, validates conservative politicians’ belief in the supremacy of individualism.

While Alice’s reevaluation of the past attributes efficacy to solitary mental endeavors, she also proves capable of achieving physical goals alone. Alice knows that her condition has deteriorated enough to make living by herself impossible but cannot abide the thought of entering a care facility. Initially hopeless about her situation, she eventually feels “something so new and unused that it could only be spirit … struggling to stand up” in her mind and decides that her one remaining option is to “go away” to die (237). At this point, Alice’s relationship with the Union Street women’s network has undergone a complete reversal. Whereas she once enjoyed being connected with her neighbors, Alice now views them only as potential obstacles to her plan: “She did not want to see them. Their sympathy would sap her energy, divert her from what had to be done” (236). This passage makes explicit what Union Street repeatedly implies—a distinction between individuals and collectives that associates the former with action and the latter with stagnation. By locking the front door of her house to prevent her neighbors from

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125 According to the narrator, “Sometimes Iris was there to listen [to Alice’s reminiscences]. Sometimes she was almost sure she was alone” (228). This uncertainty makes determining how often Alice is by herself impossible. However, when Iris is present, she contributes little more than brief questions to the conversation, meaning that the bulk of the effort involved in retrieving and reevaluating her memories falls to Alice alone.
entering, Alice symbolically cuts herself off from the women’s network. She then has no anxiety about outside interference as she pursues her objective by exiting her house’s back door, walking to the local park, sitting on a bench, and waiting to die of exposure to the frigid weather. The narrator’s comments in the final paragraphs of the novel that the time finally comes for Alice “to go” and “that in the end there [are] only the birds” left in the park indicate that she achieves her desired death (241). Like Kelly’s actions while trespassing, the last days of Alice’s life reveal that the women of Union Street are more likely to achieve their goals when they rely on themselves instead of the network. This stance on individualism mirrors the attitudes of Thatcher and other conservative politicians. Contrary to what Driscoll claims, then, Barker’s earliest works are no more politically revolutionary than her later publications.

Union Street’s concluding focus on spiritual, rather than material, transformation increases both its distance from revolutionary ideals and its resemblance with Barker’s more recent novels. As Alice ages, she identifies her essential self with her “spirit” and believes her body has “less and less to do with her” (238). In addition, she feels a spiritual affinity with more and more things outside herself. First, Alice’s ability to distinguish between her own and others’ memories declines, leading her to reflect that “[s]he [has] been so many women in her time” (239). While this comment might be viewed as a mere continuation of Union Street’s established practice of accentuating the commonalities of women’s lives, subsequent paragraphs reveal that Alice’s sense of spiritual connection encompasses not just other women but also the natural world: she momentarily mistakes her hand for a dead leaf because “[t]he membrane that had divided her from the world was permeable now, self and not-self no longer an absolute division” (240). Being simultaneously detached from her physical body and attuned to external phenomena enables Alice to approach a nearby tree “in spirit” and to have “a moment of vision” in which
she witnesses it emitting light and sound (241). These incidents create an optimistic atmosphere. Alice’s thoughts after confusing her hand for the leaf imply linkages between humanity and nature, and her apparent out-of-body experience and vision of the tree evoke the possibility of a spiritual realm separate from the corporeal one. Although none of the women besides Alice have spiritual visions, the previously established similarities between their lives suggest that they might do so at some point. Spiritual transformation, however, does not entail alterations to the material conditions of people’s lives, and Union Street’s conclusion continues to offer scant hope for the latter.

The novel’s failure to bridge the gap between spiritual and material change becomes more apparent through Kelly and Alice’s encounter in the park. On the one hand, their interaction demonstrates that women’s relationships do not have to feature coercive maintenance of the status quo, for Kelly accepts Alice’s decision to die there instead of pressuring her to stoically endure her suffering. On the other hand, Kelly and Alice’s exchange resembles other relations amongst women in Union Street in that it produces few practical benefits. Kelly helps Alice by promising not to inform anyone of her whereabouts, but the older woman can offer no equivalent aid. Any improvements in Kelly’s life that follow this incident will have to originate within her because none of her external circumstances have changed: she still lacks an effective support system, and her house remains gravely dilapidated. Kelly’s decision to return home after leaving the park signifies the continuation of Union Street’s entrenched way of life, including the

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126 Kelly is in the park at the same time as Alice, and the narrator uses the same phrase—“fierce, ecstatic trilling”—to describe what both women hear (65, 241); however, whereas Alice perceives the sound to be coming from the tree itself, Kelly attributes it to birds.

127 Brannigan claims that the “spiritual or symbolic” elements of the conclusion do not “transcend the bleak depiction of dereliction presented throughout the novel” but instead “signal the possibility of an imaginative transformation of the structures that produce these material conditions” (12). He does not, though, explain how such transformations might take place or how Alice’s spiritual insights, attained while dying, might be transmitted to Union Street’s living residents. These issues make Brannigan’s argument unconvincing.
network’s determination to uphold established conventions. The women’s efforts will likely be
easier in Alice’s absence—an unashamed proponent of “Socialism” (220), she provided the
community’s lone connection with progressive political ideals. However, these grim prospects
recede into the background in *Union Street*’s closing pages as the narrative increasingly
emphasizes spiritual imagery. In other words, rather than evincing the revolutionary potential
Driscoll associates with Barker’s earliest works (32), *Union Street* diverts attention to spiritual
transformation, which it presents as an achievable and desirable goal for members of the
women’s network. *Blow Your House Down* and *The Ghost Road* confine such transformation to
different segments of the population, but as the next section shows, their conclusions share
*Union Street*’s concentration on spirituality.

Though literary critics posit numerous similarities between *Union Street* and Barker’s
later publications, some significant resemblances remain unacknowledged. First, *Union Street*
aligns no more closely with radical politics than do Barker’s other works. *Union Street* eschews
progressivism by portraying individual action as more effective than the collective actions of the
working-class women’s network. In fact, the novel associates its women’s network with
stagnation rather than action, emphasizing members’ resignation to the status quo, which
includes endemic abuse and exploitation. Individuals such as Iris, Kelly, and Alice demonstrate
greater willingness to challenge existing circumstances, and when they operate outside the
network, they tend to accomplish their objectives. These successes validate a cornerstone of
contemporary conservative ideology—individualism’s superiority to collectivism. Not only
*Union Street*’s avoidance of revolutionary politics, but also the turn of its last chapter to spiritual
experiences resembles Barker’s more recent novels. Whereas *Union Street* confers spiritual

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128 Gladys supports the conservative party (220). The other women voice no political affiliations but, as
this section demonstrates, cling to longstanding beliefs and traditions.
insights on Alice, a woman solidly affiliated with the working classes, *Blow Your House Down* and subsequent works restrict such insights to individuals linked with higher social classes. Nonetheless, this interest in spiritual growth, as opposed to societal change, provides another genre-crossing connection in the kinship network that is Barker’s oeuvre.

**The “line of chickens waiting to be killed” in *Blow Your House Down***

If, as Brophy suggests, *Liza’s England* revis[es] and comment[s] on” *Union Street*’s representation of maternity amongst the working classes (24), then *Blow Your House Down* reimagines the earlier novel’s depiction of female prostitution. Although the penultimate chapter of *Union Street* takes its name from the prostitute Blonde Dinah, the narrative omits her perspective and instead adopts the viewpoint of a male customer. *Blow Your House Down*, by contrast, offers access to the thoughts and feelings of several women who work as prostitutes. Additionally, while *Union Street* depicts Blonde Dinah as isolated from other women, the prostitutes of *Blow Your House Down* form a densely connected network that performs both social and professional functions. A final noteworthy difference between the two texts’ portrayals of prostitution is *Blow Your House Down*’s greater emphasis on the dangers associated with sex work: characters routinely experience physical, as well as sexual, assault, and the plot of the novel revolves around their efforts to avoid becoming victims of the Ripper, a male serial killer who targets female prostitutes.\footnote{129 *Blow Your House Down*’s killer is a fictionalized version of the so-called “Yorkshire Ripper,” Peter Sutcliffe, who murdered more than a dozen women, mostly prostitutes, from 1975 to 1981 (Childs 177).} The Ripper has slain two network members, Irene and Carol, prior to the events related in the novel, and in the course of the narrative, he stabs another, Kath, to death. These crimes demonstrate the futility of the prostitutes’ coordinated efforts to protect themselves and one another from violence. *Blow Your House Down* also associates individual action with failure through Carol’s professional and romantic partner, Jean, whose
efforts to profile, locate, and execute the Ripper prove dissatisfactory. In these ways, *Blow Your House Down* reverses *Union Street*’s position concerning individuals’ ability to act effectively and eliminates the chance that its prostitute characters can even minimally or momentarily improve their circumstances.

*Blow Your House Down* consists of four parts, each of which provides a different perspective on prostitution and on violent crime. Part One centers on a sex worker named Brenda, interspersing her present experiences with memories of her past, particularly of how she became involved in soliciting following her husband’s desertion of her and their two young daughters. Part One concludes with Kath’s murder, and Part Two concentrates on the prostitute network’s grief and terror upon learning first of her death, then of Carol’s.\textsuperscript{130} Part Three, unlike the rest of the novel, utilizes first-person narration, with Jean relating her efforts to “get inside [the Ripper’s] mind” as a means of catching him (343). Part Four involves a shift in focus from members of the prostitutes’ network to Maggie Walker, a woman who survives a brutal physical assault. During her recovery from the attack, Maggie undergoes a spiritual transformation unlike anything else in this novel but similar to incidents in both *Union Street* and *The Ghost Road*. By limiting spiritual experience to Maggie, *Blow Your House Down* shows preferential treatment to middle-class lifestyles and ideals. This favoritism furnishes additional evidence that rejection of revolutionary politics links Barker’s work across time and literary genres.

An overview of the prostitute network’s structure and operations illustrates why its inefficacy adversely affects all aspects of members’ lives. *Blow Your House Down*’s prostitutes, like the women of *Union Street*, make up an all-channel network in which any member can, and often does, connect with any other. The prostitutes’ network, though, performs more functions

\textsuperscript{130} The Ripper kills Carol before the novel opens, but her body remains undiscovered until the end of Part Two (336).
and tolerates a wider range of behaviors than does the Union Street organization. Members of the prostitutes’ network routinely visit one another’s homes and exchange information about their personal lives, including their relationships with their children and significant others. Supportive functions comparable to those depicted in *Union Street*, such as women babysitting one another’s children without asking for monetary compensation in return, also appear in *Blow Your House Down*. Such interactions highlight the social side of the network because while engaging in them, the women avoid discussing work matters. In particular, “[t]he murders” are “never mentioned at home” despite being “talked about endlessly” in public locations (328), which demonstrates the women’s desire to keep the dangers of their employment separate from their personal lives. However, purely social occasions occur rarely in *Blow Your House Down*: most often, the women’s socialization intersects with their occupation, as when they gather for drinks before going on duty and share personal news, as well as work issues. The network also has some purely professional functions, including setting standards for transactions with customers. Due to the multiple principles of connection operating amongst the prostitutes, their network’s ineffectiveness harms not only their personal, but also their professional lives.

Some activities, such as gossiping, serve both occupational and social purposes for the prostitutes’ network. Like *Union Street*, *Blow Your House Down* challenges gossip’s longstanding association with frivolity by emphasizing its serious content and consequences, but the two novels differ in one significant respect: whereas for *Union Street*’s network, gossip primarily performs a disciplinary function by publicizing and encouraging conformity with behavioral standards, it serves purposes related to safety in *Blow Your House Down*. Gossiping about customers’ predilections helps members of the prostitutes’ network recognize dangerous

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131 These standards include charging comparable fees and insisting that customers wear condoms (372, 287, 300).
132 For a concise overview of how both authors and critics tend to discredit gossip, see Schantz (10-18).
conduct. After Audrey confesses that one of her regular clients enjoys “drawing attention” to their sexual activities, her partner Brenda advises her to “[s]teer clear” because such behavior will likely result in arrests and fines (276). This discussion foregrounds the danger that being apprehended by the police would present to Audrey’s financial security, but at many other times, the prostitutes’ gossip revolves around preserving their physical safety as long as the Ripper remains on the loose. Lacking definitive information about the Ripper’s identity, the women speculate wildly about what type of man should be avoided, as Jean points out: “one minute he’s a taxi driver, the next minute he’s a cop. For all we know he’s a bloody vicar” (322). Members of the prostitutes’ network also share and debate the merits of various safety recommendations they have heard, which range from only doing business with regular customers to never performing oral sex (257, 258). These discussions of the murders, along with the above interchange between Audrey and Brenda, illustrate gossip’s crucial role advising network members how to stay safe while working.

Although most often used to transmit job-related intelligence, gossip also contributes to the network’s social functions by allowing members to express their concern for one another. Network members frequently gossip about Elaine, whose boyfriend, Dave, abuses her and pressures her to continue soliciting even while pregnant and sickly. Discussions about Elaine encompass her overall state of health, as well as how having a child will affect her opportunities to escape prostitution and/or Dave. Brenda, Audrey, and the others ridicule Elaine’s fondness for Dave, which persists though he “treats her like muck” (253), but even their criticism betrays concern—by expressing disapproval of Dave’s abuse and wishing Elaine would “toughen up” enough to leave him (257), the prostitutes demonstrate their conviction that she deserves better treatment and imply anxiety about the threat his violence poses to her wellbeing. Similarly,
Audrey calls Elaine a “daft bitch” almost immediately after expressing misgivings about how she will afford her apartment if she breaks up with Dave and thus becomes solely responsible for paying the rent (373). The mixture of affection and chastisement in the women’s comments about Elaine reveals that they consider her a friend, not merely a work colleague. Gossiping about Elaine allows the other prostitutes to air their opinions about her decisions but does not mean, as it might have in Union Street, that they consider expelling her from the network; instead, members’ conversations about Elaine confirm their emotional investment in and commitment to supporting her. The prostitutes’ treatment of Elaine involves tolerance of conduct they consider aberrant and thereby distinguishes their network from the Union Street group, which zealously enforces strict behavioral standards. As upcoming paragraphs show, however, flexibility proves just as problematic as rigidity for Barker’s networks of working-class women.

In Blow Your House Down, the prostitutes’ estrangement from the rest of the community heightens the stakes of their network’s functionality. Despite blurring the boundary between sex workers and other women, Blow Your House Down indicates that those currently employed as prostitutes can depend on solidarity and camaraderie only from one another. Women acquaintances “[cross] the street to avoid speaking to” known sex workers and give them “long, lingering stare[s]” indicative of contempt (292, 294). Men, meanwhile, seem to view prostitutes as unproblematic targets for violence. In addition to clients, random male passersby menace prostitutes’ safety: one of Brenda’s memories from her early days of prostitution involves a man approaching her “smiling pleasantly” but then “punch[ing] her in the face” and fleeing (292). Other non-network members neither actively harm nor lend prostitutes assistance in times of

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133 By including two characters—Annie and Beattie—who prostituted when young but moved to less taboo professions as they aged, Blow Your House Down attributes permeability to the division separating prostitutes from women in other lines of work. As Falcus points out, the fact that “Brenda is asked for sexual services before she turns to prostitution to make a living” further obscures the “distinction between prostitutes and non-prostitutes” (252).
distress. Brenda recalls that when Kath, who continued working during a pregnancy, went into labor in a customer’s car, he “just tipped her out onto the pavement and drove off” (296); Brenda, conversely, ensured that Kath reached the hospital. Subsequently, the novel provides additional evidence that network members can rely on one another but on no one else—not even authorities—for support and protection: Jean describes several prostitutes going to the aid of a colleague who has been “badly beaten up” by a customer, while nearby police officers refuse to “interfere” (345). The absence of police assistance leaves the prostitutes’ network responsible not only for tending to whatever injuries members incur, but also for preventing injuries from happening in the first place.

Protecting themselves and one another is one of the prostitutes’ primary yet least often attained objectives; this failure contributes significantly to their network’s overall ineffectiveness. Though the women excel at finding imperfections in proposed safety measures,¹³⁴ their nightly routine incorporates several precautions. Firstly, network members patrol their territory in pairs and strive to take turns going with clients so that each woman can confirm her partner returns unharmed from every transaction. Partners also write down the license plate numbers of each other’s customers. As Jean notes, recording plate numbers serves two purposes: “One, you scare the bloke, because he’s [sic] knows your mate’s got his number so he’s less likely to try his little tricks. Two, if he does, the number means you can trace the car” (344-345). Such strategies further highlight how greatly members of the prostitutes’ network depend on one another. Notably, however, these tactics do not prevent customers from engaging in violence—they merely increase the likelihood of pinpointing when and with whom a

¹³⁴ For instance, Jean reports that Carol questioned the wisdom of only serving familiar customers by pointing out that the Ripper must be “somebody’s regular” (257). Maureen, another network member, characterizes all the advice she hears as a “[l]oad of rubbish” unlikely to make a difference during a struggle with a knife-wielding killer (258).
prostitute disappeared in the event that she goes missing. Thus, even when members rigidly adhere to the network’s accepted protocols, their safety cannot be guaranteed.

The women frequently fail to follow the aforementioned safety measures, further eroding their usefulness. Partners evince willingness to leave with clients alternately and to document license plate numbers but struggle to follow through with these precautions. Brenda suggests that a prostitute cannot “very well tell [her regular customers] to go away and come back later,” so partners often cannot “wait for [each] other’s return” (264). More mundane reasons lead to customers’ license plate numbers going unrecorded. For instance, Elaine struggles to take down plate numbers because she “is as blind as a bat” and is often distracted from the task (345). Laxness with these procedures never leads to catastrophe, but neglecting to take the basic precaution of working with a partner does: both Carol and Kath fall victim to the Ripper when out on their own.\(^{135}\) This failure to capitalize on network connections provokes comparisons with the characters of *Union Street*. Women in the two novels, though, decline to draw upon network resources for vastly different reasons. As I demonstrate above, Lisa, Iris, and Mrs. Brown of *Union Street* do not utilize their network’s support system for fear of being the subjects of malicious gossip and losing prestige in the neighborhood. In contrast, *Blow Your House Down*’s Carol typically exercises network linkages by working with Jean and only goes out by herself on the night she dies because the two have been arguing. Kath’s ever-worsening alcoholism makes her too unreliable to be anyone’s partner, so she habitually works solitarily.\(^{136}\) In spite of the

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\(^{135}\) *Blow Your House Down* includes fewer details about the circumstances surrounding Irene’s death. However, because she demonstrates habits hurtful to business, such as exposing her breasts to potential customers free of charge to “[s]how ‘em what they’re getting” (319), she makes an unattractive partner for other prostitutes and likely works alone.

\(^{136}\) Kath’s isolation weakens but does not destroy her connections with the prostitutes’ network: both Brenda and Jean include Kath in the members’ ritual of buying drinks for one another, and after her murder, network members offer to contribute money to “put a verse in the paper” in her honor (320). Like
danger these women incur by soliciting alone, other network members neither remonstrate with
them nor intervene. If *Union Street*’s women’s network attempts to exert too much control over
members, then the prostitute network in *Blow Your House Down* suffers from the opposite
problem—that is, the latter network insufficiently regulates members’ behavior, rendering them
more vulnerable to harm.

Being unable to keep members safe during their working hours makes the prostitutes’
network an ineffective professional organization, and the women also fail to function as an
efficacious support system. As in *Union Street*, the network helps members to carry on in their
existing circumstances but not to improve their lives. *Blow Your House Down*’s prostitutes
actively discourage each other from altering their circumstances. Upon learning that Brenda
plans to break up with her lover, Audrey urges reconsideration, contending that the other woman
will “miss him” after he is gone (252). The prostitutes show similarly little support for colleagues
wishing to leave the profession. When Elaine voices her determination to permanently abandon
soliciting before her child progresses out of infancy, Brenda reacts with incredulous dismissal:

> It’s not that easy getting out. I used to think it was, I used to think you could just
move away and that’d be it. Finish. But it’s not like that. I mean you’ll hear
women going on, ‘Oh, I don’t know where to turn.’ ‘I don’t know where the
money’s coming from.’ And you’re listening to them, but it’s like they’re on
another planet. Because you know where to turn, you know where it’s coming
from. And if you’re ever really hard up, you’ll go back to it, because you know
it’s there. Oh, mebbe [sic] you’ll just do one or two, but you’ll do them. And
you’ll think nothing of it. (327, emphasis in original)

the women’s conduct toward Elaine, their interactions with Kath demonstrate flexibility and tolerance,
which distinguish their network from the one *Union Street* portrays.
Brenda’s response deserves to be quoted at length because it reveals the force of her conviction that a woman can never truly leave prostitution behind once she has engaged in it. Brenda views soliciting as a safety net into which a supposedly former prostitute will automatically fall if her economic situation becomes dire enough. Not even being acquainted with Annie and Beattie, who have both given up prostitution and found other employment, convinces Brenda that this can be done. Faced with Elaine’s repeated insistence that she will leave the business, Brenda feels startled and can think of nothing to say other than, “Well, I hope you make it” (328). While this expression of hope for Elaine’s success could be considered a form of encouragement, Brenda’s statement offers no advice or assistance—the strength of her belief that prostitutes cannot forsake the business prevents her from forming any ideas that might help Elaine. Such interactions reveal the limits of the prostitute network’s supportiveness, which extends only to members resigned to continuing their accustomed lifestyle and fails those who seek to make changes. By portraying the network’s professional and social functions as ineffectual, Blow Your House Down completely undermines working-class collectivism’s potential to provoke societal change. This appraisal of collective action reflects conservative political principles, again demonstrating that Barker’s body of work harbors no ideological divide—neither her earliest nor her more recent novels advance a revolutionary agenda, and this commonality constitutes an important tie in her fiction’s kinship network.

Blow Your House Down’s representation of individual action departs from the conservative perspective without venturing into revolutionary territory. Instead, the novel generates an atmosphere of hopelessness. McGlynn argues that the sense of “futility” apparent in many depictions of 1980s Britain, including Blow Your House Down, signifies a reaction to “the

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137 See the Oxford Dictionaries definition of “encourage”: “Give support, confidence, or hope to (someone).”
resounding defeat of the working-class community by Thatcherite policies” (318). This pessimism links *Blow Your House Down* not only with contemporary texts by other writers, but also with Barker’s subsequent novels, which depict consistently diminishing prospects for the working classes. *Blow Your House Down* attributes as much unreliability and inefficacy to network members’ individual endeavors as to their collective undertakings, highlighting the pitfalls of solitary action through Jean’s self-appointed mission to stop the Ripper. Jean’s plight somewhat resembles that of *Union Street*’s Kelly. Like her, Jean suffers a profound trauma and thereafter disconnects from network contacts: following the discovery of Carol’s body, Jean feels “very cut off from” the other prostitutes because they “don’t know what to say to [her], and [she doesn’t] know what to say to them” (346). The prostitutes’ network lacks the resources to help Jean cope with the loss of her partner, and she only finds purpose in “hating” the Ripper (347). In this, too, Jean recalls Kelly, who experiences an overwhelming sense of rage after being raped. However, whereas Kelly’s anger leads her to self-harm, Jean directs all of her violent energy outward to the Ripper. She works as much as possible, only patrolling territory likely to be attractive to the killer, and eventually murders a customer she believes to be the Ripper. Jean’s efforts prove less successful than Kelly’s, exemplifying *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down*’s differing characterizations of individual action.

*Blow Your House Down* implies that Jean has accomplished her objective of killing the Ripper before reversing course and throwing her judgment—and, by extension, the effectiveness of individual action—into question. Because the novel includes the Ripper’s perspective on Kath’s murder and the events leading up to it, readers know that he habitually consumes “little purple, violet-scented sweets” (303). This apparently trivial detail becomes crucial in the absence of other clues about the Ripper’s identity. Consequently, when Jean reveals that the man she
suspects of the murders eats “little purple sweets” that make “his breath [smell] of violets” (366-367), readers can reasonably believe she has identified the right person. Jean at first expresses certainty that the man she stabs to death is the Ripper, but this feeling proves short-lived. By sharing her doubts with readers, Jean likewise erodes our confidence in her earlier assessment. Jean finds no knife in the man’s possession; this diminishes the likelihood of his being the Ripper because, as Jean admits, stabbing is “the one thing he has to do” to his victims (380, emphasis in original). Even the violet scent receives skeptical reevaluation. Anticipating that the man’s scented breath will be interpreted as proof of his guilt, Jean addresses her audience directly: “His breath smelled of violets. Yes, it did, and I killed him for it. Does that seem reasonable to you?” (380). Jean’s query exposes the absurdity of viewing breath odor as conclusive evidence and prompts readers to reconsider her judgment, as well as our own. Jean’s confession that she “can’t even be sure of the smell” completes her dismantlement of the case against her victim (381). Without the violet scent, dubious evidence though it might be, neither Jean nor the novel’s audience has any substantiation of her suspicions about the dead man. Part Three concludes with Jean wondering whether she has committed an act of vengeance or of cold-blooded murder, and Part Four does not definitively resolve this issue. The possibility that the Ripper remains alive at the end of the novel prevents Jean’s mission from being considered a success and therefore disassociates individual action from effectiveness. In Blow Your House Down, unlike in Union Street, a lone woman has no greater chances of acting

138 Jean, of course, lacks readers’ access to the Ripper’s perspective. She merely knows that Carol “didn’t like” a repeat customer who favored violet-scented candies (366). Carol’s unease with this man prompts Jean to believe that he is most likely the Ripper.

139 For more on how Blow Your House Down affects its readers, see Dale M. Bauer (393-394) and Ardis.

140 The police believe Maggie’s attacker to be “the same one that killed the prostitutes” (404), which suggests that Jean did not murder the Ripper. However, the police’s belief never receives confirmation because Part Four devotes minimal attention to the hunt for Maggie’s assailant and instead focuses on her personal recovery.
effectually than does an entire network. Whereas insufficient safety precautions, oversight, and emotional supportiveness hamper the efficacy of the prostitutes’ network, faulty perceptions and hasty judgments represent the chief impediments to successful individual efforts. By presenting collective and individual actions as equally ineffective, Blow Your House Down eliminates the possibility that the network members’ lives will improve and foreshadows The Ghost Road’s symbolic destruction of the working classes.

The dismal outlook Blow Your House Down offers members of the prostitutes’ network worsens in Part Four, as the novel turns its attention to Maggie, a woman who differs from them in several significant ways. Although Maggie’s employment in the local chicken factory situates her within the working classes, other aspects of her life conform enough with bourgeois ideals for her to serve as “an identificatory model” for “a middle-class audience” (Bauer 394). Firstly, Maggie meets middle-class expectations regarding romantic and familial relationships: she and her husband, Bill, maintain an affectionate bond after many years of apparently monogamous marriage, and their adult daughter exhibits fond devotion to them while also caring for a family of her own. Additionally, Maggie enjoys greater financial stability than do the working-class women depicted in the rest of Blow Your House Down. In spite of poor economic conditions, Bill has a job that allows him to take time off during Maggie’s recovery. She ultimately decides not to return to work, suggesting that Bill receives enough income to support them both. Finally, prior to her attack, Maggie holds “middle-class notions about violence,” including “that it happens only to women who provoke men, women who work on the streets” (Bauer 394). Maggie’s assault, which occurs without warning as she walks home from a social gathering with coworkers, unsettles her ideas about violence. She also reconsiders the nature of “evil” once she

141 Early in the novel, Brenda thinks that “anybody with a job should count themselves lucky” (270).
realizes that her neighbors relish speculating salaciously about what the assailant did to her (401). Reflecting that she cannot “put evil into a single, recognizable shape,” Maggie feels as if “[t]he abyss [is] at her feet, and she [can] do nothing except stare into it” (402). These revised conceptions of violence and evil bring Maggie’s worldview into closer alignment with that of the prostitutes, whose profession has taught them that all people are capable of brutality. This similarity, however, does not collapse the divide between Maggie and the prostitutes. On the contrary, _Blow Your House Down_ widens the distinction by reserving recovery and transformation for Maggie alone. Excluding the sex workers from spiritual growth simultaneously compounds the hopeless stagnation of their lives and rewards the middle-class traits Maggie represents. A similar pattern occurs in _The Ghost Road_, establishing class-based favoritism as a recurring theme in Barker’s work of all periods and genres.

Part Four of _Blow Your House Down_ employs a wealth of spiritual imagery to illustrate Maggie’s post-attack recovery. Taking long walks helps Maggie regain physical strength but also eases her mental suffering by exposing her to several transformative sights. The first of these is a crucifix depicting Jesus dead, with “green mouth,” “lolling head,” and “flaring ribs” (406). Though typically not religious, Maggie responds powerfully to this representation: she believes that the tortured, deceased Jesus “claim[s] her as his own” (406), in contrast with portrayals of the resurrected Christ, which leave her unmoved. The affinity Maggie feels with this gruesome portrayal of death emphasizes the depth of her depression, as well as how alienated she has become from her formerly robust social support system. A subsequent encounter with death both reveals and furthers the progress of her recovery. In a rural area, Maggie unexpectedly comes

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142 This reference to the “abyss” alludes to a point Nietzsche makes in _Beyond Good and Evil_: “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss the abyss also looks into you.” Barker uses this quotation as the epigraph for _Blow Your House Down_ (246).
across a fox with “the still-twitching body of a rabbit clamped in his jaws” (410). The scene fills Maggie not with “disgust” for the fox or “pity” for the rabbit but with “respect for this life … lived apart from man” (410). Equally significantly, this experience prompts a temporary cessation of the visions of blood and violence that have haunted her since the attack. Maggie’s differing reactions to the crucifix and to the animals demonstrate that she no longer identifies with dead creatures. If she has not yet completely turned away from the abyss, she has at least begun to retreat from it, and spiritually meaningful sights have contributed to this process.

The conclusion of Maggie’s narrative continues to link healing with spiritual experiences. A transformative vision of the city where she resides sets off a chain reaction of renewal and redemption in Maggie’s life. Traipsing across the countryside during a downpour, she witnesses “rays of light, or rather great shafts of golden light, falling onto the city, which look[s] … like an island raised up out of the sea, for there [are] still inlets of rain and mist in the surrounding fields” (414). Through its use of imagery often associated with religious or spiritual experiences, such as ascent into golden light, this passage takes on revelatory connotations. For the first time, Maggie conceives of the city as a place of beauty, rather than as just “back streets, boarded-up houses, [and] the smell of blood in a factory yard” (414). Reimagining the city frees Maggie to reimagine her life, which she does by deciding not to go back to work at the chicken factory. Maggie also feels newly hopeful that her relationship with Bill, which deteriorates in the

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143 For additional analysis of how this vision changes Maggie’s understanding of the city, see David James (62-65).

144 The short amount of time that passes between the two events suggests that they are connected. Maggie’s efforts to recall the exact moment of her decision also associate it with the sight of the city: She’d seen the city raised up like an island out of the sea, awash with rain and light. A moment only. Then the long trek back through the mud. But at some stage on that journey home, without consciously thinking about the chicken factory at all, she’d taken the decision: she would not go back. (414)
aftermath of the attack, can be repaired. At home, Maggie signals her readiness to reconnect by allowing Bill to remove her rain-soaked apparel and dry her skin. Bill takes especial care with Maggie’s feet, “which he cradle[s], one by one, in his lap” (415). This notably “Christ-like gesture” evokes Maggie’s previous experience in the church (Childs 180). There, she feels no rapport with a depiction of the living Jesus, but Bill’s actions move her to “[reach] out for his hand and [hold] it fast” (415). This scene implicitly compares Bill with Christ, so Maggie’s movements represent not only hope for their relationship but also a more general affirmation of life over death. Maggie’s final rejection of the abyss stems in large part from the spiritual transformation she undergoes during her solitary walks.

Because Maggie’s transformative recovery process has no parallel in the text, it symbolizes the triumph of the middle-class standards she embodies. Blow Your House Down does more than deny members of the prostitutes’ network healing and rejuvenation comparable to what Maggie experiences: the novel refuses the prostitutes any form of narrative closure by all but excluding them from Part Four. This abandonment of the working-class prostitutes in order to focus on Maggie resembles the narrative pattern of The Ghost Road. The third part of Barker’s Regeneration trilogy features dual protagonists—Billy Prior, a military officer of working-class origins, and W.H.R. Rivers, a bourgeois psychiatrist who treats wounded veterans. In the final chapter of The Ghost Road, Prior suffers a gunshot wound during battle and falls in an area thick with poisonous gas, seemingly assuring his death. Rather than making Prior’s death explicit, however, the narrative cuts away to Rivers, working in a hospital in London. The novel’s last scene describes a vision Rivers has of Njiru, a holy man he met years earlier in the

145 In the wake of her assault, Maggie feels anxious whenever she cannot see Bill, and learning that the police at one point suspected him of attacking her intensifies these worries. For a discussion of how Maggie’s feelings about Bill relate to her shifting opinions about violence, see Bauer (394).
146 Brenda appears briefly twice in Part Four: she comes to Maggie’s aid just after the attack (390), and the two women later unexpectedly meet in the supermarket (399-400).
South Seas. Njiru performs an exorcism, commanding destructive spirits to “[g]o down and depart” (276, emphasis in original). At the symbolic level, Rivers’s vision provides a “comforting and reassuring cleansing” of the ghosts of war casualties, many of whom belong to “the working class” (Driscoll 37). This scene’s exorcism of the working classes also exists at the formal level, for no working-class individuals appear in it. Ending with Rivers makes him seem more important and deserving of attention than Prior, and Blow Your House Down creates similar implications through its concentration, in Part Four, on Maggie instead of members of the prostitutes’ network. In this way, both novels privilege the middle over the working classes, showing that texts from all phases of Barker’s career possess similar political tendencies: her fiction, regardless of its generic affiliations, consistently aligns better with conservative than with revolutionary ideals.

Part Four’s elimination of political consciousness deals a final setback to Blow Your House Down’s revolutionary potential. Unlike the women of Union Street, members of the prostitutes’ network in Blow Your House Down demonstrate awareness of how institutional practices disadvantage them. Brenda learns the difficulty of obtaining financial assistance from Social Security soon after her husband walks out on her: she must submit to a minute inspection of her home and an interrogation about her marital status before being considered for assistance. This experience leaves Brenda “shaking” with fury over “the hypocrisy of it all” (275). Jean, too, realizes even before she becomes a prostitute that powerful organizations claiming to offer “help” and “reform” actually intend to “destroy” individuals like her through drudgery and humiliation (361). Once these women begin soliciting, they find themselves targeted by numerous unfair laws—they can face criminal charges for carrying pepper spray or other “offensive weapon[s]” that could be used for self-protection (324), and a residence where two
women live together legally qualifies as “a brothel” (358). Recognizing such inequities, though, differs from believing they can be rectified, and the prostitutes neither express such a belief nor engage in any political activism. This, in itself, undermines Driscoll’s assertion that Barker’s earliest works signal a “possible” revolution (32). However, the strongest evidence for Blow Your House Down’s absence of subversiveness occurs in its final section. Because Maggie evinces no awareness of institutionalized oppression, this issue fades away in Part Four. Instead, as the above discussion shows, the narrative focuses on Maggie’s emotional recovery from the trauma of her assault. The final result of Maggie’s transformation—the rekindling of her relationship with Bill—represents not a challenge to but a resumption of the status quo.

Conclusion: Politics, Barker’s Oeuvre, and Genre

Dodd and Dodd claim that later twentieth-century texts such as Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1958) and Letter to Brezhnev (1985) “[cancel] hope that working-class life as a whole can change, from the inside, for the better. Only exceptional individuals can struggle, and usually fail, to escape” (122). Although the Dodds do not attribute this perspective to Barker’s writing, certain aspects of it receive support in her first two novels. Union Street and Blow Your House Down associate the working classes with minimal capacity for change. In both texts, working-class women participate in interpersonal networks that help them withstand difficulties but withdraw support if they attempt to alter their circumstances. Consequently, women in these novels often pursue goals alone or seek assistance from outside the network. Union Street and Blow Your House Down diverge over such actions’ chances of success: while the former depicts several individuals accomplishing personal objectives, the latter characterizes network members’ solitary actions as unreliable and ineffective. Neither novel, though, offers much evidence that

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147 The Dodds analyze only Union Street, which they liken to “extreme versions of nineteenth-century naturalism … which exposed in appalling detail the dirt, the squalor[,] and the nauseous bodily functions of the deprived and the depraved” (124).
the material conditions of working class life can be improved. In this way, *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* resemble contemporaneous fictional renderings of the British working classes.

With the exception of McGlynn, critics tend not to compare Barker’s early novels with other pieces of working-class literature and thus not to notice their similarities. Instead, scholars typically view *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* in the context of Barker’s later publications, striving to establish linkages between these seemingly disparate works. Ross, Monteith, Prescott, and others propose numerous recurrent themes in Barker’s oeuvre, but this chapter reveals overlooked sources of continuity relating to politics and spirituality. Validation of conservative political positions appears in Barker’s first two novels, as well as in more recent productions such as *The Ghost Road*. *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down*’s pessimistic depictions of working-class existence reflect conservative conceptions: the novels’ ineffective working-class networks support conservative vilifications of collective action, and the successful solitary endeavors in *Union Street* lend credence to Thatcherite celebrations of individualism. *The Ghost Road*’s symbolic termination of the working classes therefore represents a more extreme iteration of, not a departure from, the politics apparent in Barker’s early novels.

Barker’s portraits of spirituality reinforce her works’ political affiliations. Rather than positing practical reform or revolution as solutions to the societal ills they expose, *Union Street*, *Blow Your House Down*, and *The Ghost Road* emphasize spiritual redemption. The spiritual experiences with which all three novels conclude reverse their earlier concentrations on bleak topics such as poverty, rape, murder, and warfare in order to impart comfort and hope for the future to those who have them. Exactly who does have them provides a noteworthy difference in the texts’ representations of spiritual insights: in *Union Street*, it is Alice, a working-class
woman; in *Blow Your House Down*, it is Maggie, who occupies a liminal position between the working and middle classes; and in *The Ghost Road*, it is the decidedly middle-class Rivers. Whereas Barker’s first novel suggests that the working classes can at least look forward to transformative revelations after a lifetime of material deprivation, subsequent works eliminate this possibility, reserving access to spiritual sights and experiences for individuals with more and more elevated class positions. Barker’s fiction offers increasingly grim outlooks for working-class individuals, but the privileging of bourgeois values apparent in her later writings has roots in some of her earliest published material. As a result, Barker’s work should not be heralded as politically radical.

The commonalities between Barker’s novels have implications for both her body of work and the genres in which it takes part. *Union Street, Blow Your House Down*, and the *Regeneration* trilogy’s shared political stances provide the family resemblances that justify considering Barker’s œuvre a kinship network. This network includes nodes in working-class and historical fiction, thereby highlighting linkages amongst these categories of literature. Recognizing supposedly disparate genres’ relationships with one another recalls the quotation with which this dissertation opens: Dimock’s conception of literature as an infinitely branching yet ultimately unified stream (1380). Her perspective receives support in each chapter of this project. Chapter 1 shows that espionage literature encompasses a wider range of texts than critics typically admit, Chapter 2 traces intersections between Big House novels and counter-insurgency prose, and the current chapter reveals the continuities undergirding Barker’s representations of various populations and settings. My arguments derive not only from a kinship-based approach to literature, but also from social scientists’ network theories. Representations of marginalized groups’ networks often change little from genre to genre and therefore illustrate the density of
connections amongst all parts of the literary field. In addition, the presence of the same organizational structures—the wheel, the Y, the all-channel, et cetera—in literature and network theory indicates these fields’ compatibility. Finally, then, this project shows that both literature and academic disciplines comprise networks that merit further study.
CHAPTER 4

FIGURES

Figure 1: An all-channel network, with lettered circles representing network participants and double-headed arrows representing mutual communication.

Figure 2: Verloc’s household as a Y network.
Figure 3: Kenney’s visualization of a drug-trafficking wheel network, with unidirectional arrows indicating “relations based on vertical accountability” and two-headed arrows showing “horizontal accountability” (From Pablo 30)
Figure 4: A drug-trafficking chain network (Kenney, *From Pablo* 32)
Figure 5: An IRA member with noticeably simian facial features (Lloyd)
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