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# The Writer's Chronicle



**PRINTERS,  
BOOKLEGGERS,  
AND 'SPICY' BOOKS**  
JAMES JOYCE IN THE  
BOOK INDUSTRY

**MESS AND  
MAYHEM**  
THE PLURAL HISTORIES OF  
COLLABORATIVE WRITING

**TRUTHTELLING AND MORE**  
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*The Quick  
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An Energy Crisis in Poetry

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# Printers, Bookleggers, and 'Spicy' Books

James Joyce in the Book Industry

*by Patrick Coleman*



1.

It is revealing to look at the physical production of a book—the manual writing of it, yes, but also the laborious process of working with publishers, editors, typesetters, and printers, each with agendas and reputations to burnish. The fantasies of a writer producing her work in an ecstatic vacuum, that myth of pure and complete and undiluted artistic vision, are persistent and alluring. They linger against our better judgment, even if we know they are false.

These fantasies also mirror what is the case the majority of the time: that we have no editor twiddling his red pencil in anticipation, no typesetters fingering their lead pieces of type, no booksellers perfecting their two-sentence handselling pitches. For most of us writing is being alone with oneself and only ever will be, so it is only natural to romanticize the solitary genius of writers we admire. We don't want our artists to be just like us, bound by finances and chance and poor networking skills. I am uncomfortable with the thought of my favorite books being the product of anything other than careful perception and artistic conviction. If they are not? Tarnished. Less hallowed. Too overrun with dailyness. But spending time following the very material journey a book takes from its first penciled notes to the final printed edition in a reader's hands can give us a more textured sense of how literary art is made.

James Joyce is that kind of pedestaled writer for me. When we look into the production and publication of two of his most well-known books—*Dubliners* and *Ulysses*—we can see that not only was Joyce mired in all of that dirtying daily business, his writing process was influenced by and took advantage of the frustrations and limitations along the way. He was not the aloof

artist we might imagine. His craft was developed with and against the machinery of the bookselling business of his age. For a writer whose fame came about, in part, by acknowledging the width and breadth of what passes through a mind during a given day, seeing the dailyness in Joyce's process as an artist is simply a part of doing him justice.

for *The Irish Homestead*, something “simple, rural?, livemaking?, pathos?” Russell pitched it as “easily earned money if you can write fluently and don't mind playing to the common understanding and liking for once in a way.”<sup>2</sup> Up until this point, Joyce had focused his literary energies exclusively on poems (some of which would eventually be published in *Chamber Music* or attributed to

Joyce is not known for his poems or the short epiphanies, so it's perhaps surprising that the first compositions his reputation would rest on began with what amounts to an assignment, done for cash.

2.

Stacey Herbert, in an essay on Joyce's composition history from James McCourt's *James Joyce in Context*, sketches out a general pattern of production for the author: composing, soliciting recommendations from colleagues (often more established ones), placing the piece in a magazine or journal, revising it for publication in a small press edition, and then finally releasing a complete trade edition.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the stories collected in *Dubliners*, this pattern of production stretches out over the course of more than ten years.

Considering that *Dubliners* is, surely, if not the most famous then the most read of Joyce's books, it is striking to discover that it began from a solicitation for something to print in a newspaper. George Russell (Æ) knew Joyce's poetry and asked if he could write a few pleasant stories

Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Ulysses*) and on little epiphanies, which were short sketches very formally distinct from his stories. Joyce is not known for his poems or the short epiphanies, so it is perhaps surprising that the first compositions his reputation would rest on began with what amounts to an assignment, done for cash.

The stories he wrote for *The Irish Homestead* were “The Sisters,” “Eveline,” and “After the Race.”<sup>3</sup> In many ways, these are the tamest of the pieces that would end up collected in *Dubliners*. That is not to say they pander, or stand outside Joyce's deeply held artistic vision, but it is easy to see how their composition might have been influenced by the knowledge of a newspaper and particularly Irish audience. We do not get “An Encounter,” with its suggestion of sexuality. We don't get the more explicitly political piece “Ivy Day in



the Committee Room.” I would even say that “Eveline” and “After the Race,” for all their craftsmanship, are as close as Joyce gets to melodrama and that this narrative strategy was possibly adopted because of Russell’s instruction and the need to engage a reader differently than he might if he were being published in a literary magazine. The pieces not composed for *The Irish Homestead* venture more, but it is these three, induced

the publisher hired who were afraid of treading into obscenity. As Herbert describes it, “Richards’ printers—themselves liable for prosecution under British law for setting illicit or libelous material—objected, marking unacceptable passages (some of which Joyce altered) and a variety of words, most notably ‘bloody.’”<sup>5</sup> Richards wanted to excise “Two Gallants” from the collection completely, presumably due to its portrayal of a

declined to comment.<sup>8</sup> When Maunsel abandoned the project (his cheap Irish printers, afraid for the same reasons as their English counterparts, refused to release copies of the book and destroyed the plates), Joyce was given “a nearly complete set of proofs of the edition—a set Maunsel had used as a working copy.”<sup>9</sup> At each stage of this process, Joyce made some requested changes, refused others, and made adjustments of his own. How different were the Maunsel proof versions from the ones Joyce had first sent Richards three years earlier? As the letters between Joyce and Richards—and then, later, the open letter titled “A Curious History”—attest, Joyce’s own sense of the organization and content of his stories was in a state of development and refinement that was provoked by his need to defend himself and his project.

This protracted battle to get his work published forced two things onto Joyce’s process: constant return and revision and the need to be articulate about the choices he was making in order to defend himself against some proposed changes.

Joyce’s repeated returns to the stories were not goaded purely by his own desire; they were driven by the demands and failures of his potential publishers and their printers. But this instigated a lifelong process of intense and ongoing revision, one that worked to draw out and clarify submerged formal unities. This accretion of writing and thinking allowed the four-part structure of *Dubliners*—youth, adolescence, maturity, public life—to emerge, as well as recurring themes of paralysis, isolation, and sentimentality. They make the 1914 version of “The Sisters” a stronger story than the 1904 version and a better introduction to the concerns and techniques of the book. The more recent writing of “Grace” had sent him back to “The Sisters” to make fresh changes.<sup>10</sup>

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by the promise of a small paycheck and something of a readership, that began Joyce’s engagement with the short story that would lead him, in 1914, to write one of the unequivocal masterpieces of the form, “The Dead.”

1904–1914. That en-dash elides quite a lot. The first story was written in 1904, and Joyce was in an agreement with a London publisher to print *Dubliners* by February of 1906.<sup>4</sup> The composition of this early version of the book took roughly two years, and it ended with the story “Grace.” (“The Dead” would not be composed for another seven years.) From the moment Grant Richards, the London publisher, expressed doubts about his ability to print the book as it stood, Joyce began an eight-year process of re-engagement with his stories.

The primary problem was not with the publisher; it was with the printers

man who takes advantage of women sexually in order to con them out of money.<sup>6</sup> It would be fascinating to see the altered proofs here, to know what Joyce changed and what he did not. What we do know is that eventually Joyce withdrew the manuscript and began submitting it elsewhere.

It was rejected by Elkin Mathews, the publisher who brought Ezra Pound out in England, and then placed with Maunsel and Company of Dublin—only to be dropped for reasons similar to Richards’s. Maunsel was a conservative Irish nationalist and was especially afraid of libel, which was more restrictive in that time and place. His fear centered on Joyce’s portrayal of “living persons and existing establishments” as well as a reference to King Edward VII.<sup>7</sup> Joyce went as far as writing a letter to King George V to ask his opinion on the matter; the king’s secretary



Most dramatically, the story “The Dead” would have been omitted and quite possibly never written. (It is likely that the final story was born out of recursive meditations on the strengths and weaknesses of the other stories in the collection, as well as the growing acuteness of the then-exiled Joyce’s homesickness.) The work would have been a lesser work without the fears and legal objections of those printers and the negotiations of the publisher, in effect, caught between two principled artists unwilling to compromise. Without all the lowly business-end considerations, who knows how the art would have differed?

3.

The protracted publication history of *Dubliners* also forced Joyce to be his own most intelligent critic. Joyce’s open letter, “A Curious History,” published a full three years before

*Dubliners*, as well as various letters to publishers, friends, and critics, show Joyce mounting an intellectual defense of what his stories portray, up to his most dramatic statement that, “I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.”<sup>11</sup> Joyce was so successful at setting the terms of the debate surrounding his work that critics have not been able to see it, *not* through Joyce’s own lens.<sup>12</sup> This other aspect of Joyce’s work prepared his readership for the stories. It portrayed Joyce as a maligned artist, a victim of censorship, a seeker of moral truth—and also hinted at potentially scandalous or titillating content. This would be a formula to which Joyce would return.

Harriet Shaw Weaver published “A Curious History” in her literary magazine the *Egoist* just prior to



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beginning its serial run of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* on January 15, 1914.<sup>13</sup> This was savvy on the part of Shaw Weaver. The open letter created the figure of the artist as a hero against Victorian repression, and *Portrait* offered a sustained look at how that artist came to be. From this early point on, one of the biggest draws to Joyce’s work was Joyce himself—and he

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was a careful orchestrator of this. (Jonathan Lethem, also an excellent critic and self-critic, argues in *The Ecstasy of Influence* that notoriety as a route to literary fame is a postwar development,<sup>14</sup> which would make Joyce ahead of his time—a pre-post-war writer.) His battle with censorship

American edition was published from English sheets. The title page was adorned simply with a small ivy-leaf device—a fitting homage to “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” with its allusion to the king whose printed name had prevented the book’s earlier publication.

early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Paris is a who’s-who of writers, private presses, and intrigue. She had many, many talents. As a publisher, however, she was monomaniacal: the only book she brought out was *Ulysses*, and she tended to Joyce’s literary affairs for years afterward. She was a star-struck admirer of Joyce, but she was also looking out for the interest of her bookstore and lending library. She “clearly saw potential in linking Shakespeare & Company’s future to [Joyce’s] growing fame and reputation; Joyce was motivated by the lack of options and by promised royalties.”<sup>17</sup> She contracted with printer Maurice Darantieri of Dijon to print the book in quarto crown, one thousand copies: “one hundred on Dutch paper and signed at 350 francs; one hundred and fifty on vergé-d’Arches, at 250 francs; and the remaining seven hundred and fifty on ordinary paper, at 150 francs.”<sup>18</sup> (Joyce asked her to print only ten or twelve.) She sold the book via subscriptions that went out ahead of printing, and she worked tirelessly to get any writer of renown—and any prominent critics—a copy when it was printed. Books printed via subscription were the pre-internet crowdsourcing and, like the popular books-only publisher Unbound or more general websites such as Kickstarter, was an effective means of drumming up cash and interest before the book was in print. In fact, the subscription fees were crucial to covering those very printing expenses. (Boutique online booksellers, like Emily Books, are using a subscription method to create a steady reading community for books not found on the big octagons in your local Barnes & Noble.)

Darantieri began typesetting the book in June of 1921. The first edition was not complete until January 30, 1922. The main cause of the delay was the sheer number of significant changes Joyce made on proof pages; the book expanded by as much as

Joyce learned a valuable lesson from his experience with *Dubliners*: it was better to be a figure of controversy, considered by some a pariah for his art, than to be thought of hardly at all.

excited readers into reading *Portrait* and also gave a helpful push to encourage them into its prose style, which was getting more distinctive, more attuned to the psyches of its characters, en route to *Ulysses*. Joyce wanted his readers to feel as if there was something valuable to be gained by spending time with his fictions. It may have been a purely moral or artistic conviction on his part, but as we will see with *Ulysses*, it was also an invaluable strategy for publishing success.

These two writings—“A Curious Incident” and the serialization of *Portrait*—would generate more excitement than he otherwise would have found for his collection of fifteen short stories about everyday people in Dublin, which was coming out later that year from the press of Grant Richards, who had first rejected it (making *Dubliners* into Joyce’s *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*<sup>15</sup>). Richards had the book printed in Edinburgh, and the first

4.

With *Ulysses*, Joyce began serially publishing it between 1918 and 1920. The plan was for simultaneous publication in the *Egoist* (England) and in the *Little Review* (USA). Due to the potential punishment of printers for licentious material in England, the *Egoist* was only able to bring out a few sections of the book. The *Little Review* made it to the twenty-third installment of *Ulysses* before the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice brought them to court under obscenity charges. The case, which the *Little Review* lost, bankrupted them and made a trade edition look like a financial and legal landmine. No one Shaw Weaver approached would touch Joyce’s book.<sup>16</sup>

Then in stepped Sylvia Beach, of the Shakespeare & Company bookstore in Paris. Beach is an interesting figure in her own right, and her memoir of



one-third during this seven-month period. This was an intensification of the revision process Joyce inaugurated with the proof pages of *Dubliners*. In this, he was taking advantage of the flexibility of writing in and around a typeset page. It is clear to see how this worked to his advantage in *Ulysses*: the way a detail in Chapter 17 was hinted or glanced at in Chapter 2, the small correspondences that deepen the portrait of Dublin on this one day. All of this was made easier for him by having a typeset proof to improve and improvise upon, and he took every advantage of it. Of course, this was maddening for Darantiere. Remember: he was setting the type on these pages by hand. Something as simple as adding a paragraph on page five could mean resetting the type on every subsequent page in the chapter. But by some miracle, Darantiere saw the book all the way into print.

5.

Once *Ulysses* was in print, it had to reach readers. Both England and the United States were confiscating—and sometimes burning—copies of the book. Much of the censorship scandal had focused around, in particular, the sexual elements of the book, most notably the scene between Bloom and Gerty McDowell on the beach. Beach has many great anecdotes of how they worked around the legal impediments—including one featuring a friend of Hemingway's who carried hundreds of copies of the book across the border on the Canada–America ferry, one at a time, down the front of his pants.<sup>19</sup>

But the trouble was good for business. “Its reputation as a banned book helped the sales,” Beach writes, before noting the strange bedfellows it was forced to keep: “It was saddening to see such a work listed in catalogues of erotica alongside *Fanny Hill*, *The Perfumed Garden*, and that everlasting *Casanova*, not to speak of

plain pornography like *Raped on the Rail*[way]. An Irish priest, purchasing *Ulysses*, asked me, ‘Any other spicy books?’”<sup>20</sup>

In much of the public imagination, *Ulysses* was a “spicy book.” Since it could not be listed in catalogues along with more “reputable” works of literature, it was sold alongside erotica. It was not until 1934 that an official American edition came out. That means, for fourteen years, a significant part of the *Ulysses* mystique was that it dealt with sex so powerfully that it had been banned.

That this would incite interest goes without saying.

That mystique was driving sales back in the 1920s, though. The problem was that these were more often than not sales of pirated editions—printed outside of copyright by enterprising knock-off printers who siphoned profits away from Joyce and Beach. The most prominent of those pirates was Samuel Roth. American copyright law said that the book must be set up and printed in the United States to hold copyright. This was impossible

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for a banned book, so Roth was able to pirate *Ulysses* with impunity. Beach heard how the books made their way to the public: "A visitor from the Middle West, a fellow bookseller, told me how 'bookleggers' supplied shops with their wares. A truck stopped at the door. The driver, always a different one, asked how many copies of *Ulysses*—or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—were wanted. The bookseller could have ten or more at \$5—to be sold for \$10. The driver dumped the books and was gone."<sup>21</sup> Needless to say, \$5 was significantly less than the authentic Shakespeare & Company edition. (Interestingly enough, D.H. Lawrence had approached Beach to have *Lady Chatterley's Lover* printed to fight pirated editions. She turned him down.) Beach and Joyce organized a written protest of the piracies, signed by many major writers from all over Europe—many of them also frustrated victims of piracy. But the protest was in support of Joyce's book, and so once again he wrangled controversy—both the censorship trouble and now running amok with pirates and bookleggers—into more attention for his literary productions.

What Joyce and Beach did not seem to consider were the potential boons of the pirated editions. For one, Beach's U.S. distribution model was a single book at a time and depended on a man wearing very large pants. Samuel Roth, on the other hand, had an extensive and somewhat shadowy network across the United States. For a book whose legal troubles had titillated the reading public, the allure of underground or pirated editions may have only increased its desirability. Roth widened Joyce's readership in America by increasing access to the text. Of course, Joyce did not see any money from these sales—at least not until the Random House edition of *Ulysses* became a bestseller, which one could argue was only possible thanks to the promotional work done by Roth and his pirated

edition. In her book *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars*, Catherine Turner writes that Roth "sold *Ulysses* as a work of genius that offered readers sophisticated culture, giving artistic respectability to his slightly illicit publication, *Two World's Monthly*. Joyce and Beach, in turn, used Roth's piracy to solidify Joyce's reputation as a beleaguered man of genius searching for fair compensation in a country hostile to artistic values."<sup>22</sup> The two forces—the legitimate publisher and author against the illegitimate publisher—strengthened and increased the public valuation of the work itself. Both had created a certain reader, one for whom "smuggling, owning, and reading *Ulysses* became a powerful way for [them] to align themselves with new cultural forces that opposed conservatism, and to flout Prohibition in the service of classic literature."<sup>23</sup> This kind of piracy makes an interesting parallel to the file sharing controversies of the last fourteen years—putting Joyce and Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich into a bizarre proximity.

When Joyce worked to make sure *Ulysses* was reviewed just about everywhere—and he did work at that—he hardly cared whether or not the reviews were positive. This took some confidence in the strength of the work itself, but it also shows that Joyce learned a valuable lesson from his experience with *Dubliners*: it was better to be a figure of controversy, considered by some a pariah for his art, than to be thought of hardly at all. "Whatever the reviewer's response, they made sure that the review contained the address of Shakespeare & Co. and, if possible, a famous name in the byline. Their strategy was to make sure important people talked about *Ulysses*, no matter what they said."<sup>24</sup> A mixed review by a man named Huddleston led to 450 orders of the book from Beach. Joyce and Beach had orchestrated

a publicity campaign that piqued people's curiosity.

This controversy and illicit aura of dangerous, "spicy" truth accumulated around *Ulysses* for twelve years before Random House fought and won its case against the obscenity charge and brought out its legitimate edition. Turner gives credit to the American publishing industry having been marketing difficult books to a wide readership for years, in effect creating the audience for challenging literature *Ulysses* needed, in addition to the pirate editions and its fame as a banned book.<sup>25</sup> Before *Ulysses* was even legally for sale in the United States, it was appearing on college course syllabi, and eight books on Joyce and his fiction were in print.<sup>26</sup>

Those were signs of interest among the literati, but the attention generated by the scandal spread beyond a small elite. Bennett Cerf, the president of Random House, knew this and launched a publicity campaign to tap into that wider market. His savvy method for doing this was to commission an ad entitled "How to Enjoy James Joyce's Great Novel *Ulysses*."<sup>27</sup> The ad provided a friendly, nonintimidating key or entry point into the book. It portrayed the novel as a puzzle, and puzzles were all the rage in the '20s and '30s. It opened up the Odysseus structure, providing the public with a way of linking this strange new form to more familiar stories. It did this without diminishing—in fact, while playing up—the book's status as formerly banned, dangerous, young, and hip. The ad garnered 25,000 responses in three weeks.<sup>28</sup> This landed the book on the bestseller list where Cerf could promote it like any other bestseller—to his and Joyce's benefit.

We are left, then, with an odd picture of how inexorably Joyce's literary success is tied to the mechanical, economic, and legal limitations of his day—all those lowly, dirty material constraints.



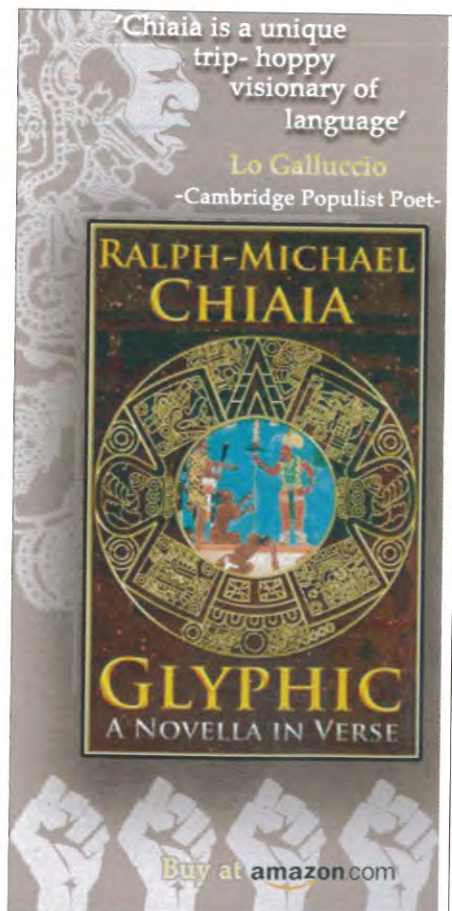
This other aspect of Joyce's work... portrayed [him] as a maligned artist, a victim of censorship, a seeker of moral truth—and also hinted at potentially scandalous or titillating content.

For writers struggling to make art in today's attenuated literary world, it can be a comfort to see how Joyce worked with and against the people and institutions between him and his audience, often to the benefit of the work itself. He did not retreat from the places where books find readers—the publishers and printers, booksellers and bookleggers,

reviewers and critics. Even in those places, there was room for creativity.

AWP

**Patrick Coleman** earned a BA from the University of California, Irvine, and an MFA from Indiana University. His writing has appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, the Black Warrior Review, The Morning News, the Utne Reader, and is forthcoming in Hobart. He is Project Manager, Special Exhibitions and Publications, at the San Diego Museum of Art.



## Notes

1. John McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 3.
2. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), p. 163.
3. McCourt, Ed., *James Joyce in Context*, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
5. McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context*, p. 5.
6. A. Nicholas Fargnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie, *James Joyce A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Writings* (Oxford UP, 1996), p. 46.
7. McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context*, pp. 5-6.
8. Fargnoli and Gillespie, *James Joyce A to Z*, pp. 46-7.
9. McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context*, p. 6.
10. Thomas Jackson Rice, "Paradigm Lost: 'Grace' and the Arrangement of Dubliners," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 32:3 (1995 Summer): p. 406.
11. McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context*, p. 6.
12. This is the main argument mounted by Thomas Jackson Rice in his essay, "Paradigm Lost: 'Grace' and the Arrangement of Dubliners."
13. McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context*, p. 7.
14. Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), p. 26.
15. *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, for those who missed it, was the Wilco album rejected by Reprise Records and then sold to Nonesuch Records, both subsidiaries of Warner Music Group.
16. McCourt, ed., *James Joyce in Context*, pp. 8-9.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
18. Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1991), p. 48.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
22. Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2003), p. 174.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 193.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 210.