

Strategies in *Ulysses*: Reading and Re-reading the Novel

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ABSTRACT

Taking Leo Bersani's proposal for a "ruseful naiveite" in reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*, this study considers how a theoretical "naive reader" would read and re-read *Ulysses*. Such a reader would journey through a first stage of identifying the core story of the novel, which requires resolving narrative complications, and also a second stage of constructing the life stories of the main characters, which requires integrating the huge amount of information not needed to tell the core story. *Ulysses* is a good example of a novel that demands to be re-read, and as such this study turns to the early novel theorists György Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin to consider how the reading experience of *Ulysses* compares with the theory of the novel. Within this structure, and from today's perspective, *Ulysses* can be seen to be relatively coherent in that the naive reader can eventually gain mastery over the preponderance of the text. However, *Ulysses* certainly changed our concept of reading and re-reading a novel.

KEYWORDS

James Joyce, *Ulysses*, naive reader, Leo Bersani, re-reading, narrative Novel theory, Mikhail Bakhtin, Georgy Lukacs

In a chapter entitled "Against *Ulysses*" in *The Culture of Redemption*, Leo Bersani proposes from the very first line to set particular parameters around a certain reading of *Ulysses*. "Let us approach *Ulysses* as naively as possible, while admitting that this decision can be little more than a ruse. The ruseful naiveite I have in mind will consist in our pretending not to have any extratextual information about the novel."¹ Bersani specifies that this is a choice of a reading strategy: we could not call it naiveite if we did not know how important extratextual information can be to the novel. Such an approach to a novel like *Ulysses* is not only fruitful, but at some point arguably necessary in order to clear away the dense fog of extratextual criticism on this novel.

Bersani sets a strong assumption as a basis for a reading of *Ulysses*, and proceeds from there. Among other insights, Bersani proclaims that "*Ulysses* is a text to be deciphered but not read. [...] The exegetical work to be done is enormous, but it has already been done by the author and we simply have to catch up with him." Through making the reader into an "exegetical machine", "*Ulysses* promises a critical utopia."² Bersani's chapter does not end on that note, and discusses in more detail why this reading strategy is enacted, to the point where he claims that even though the reader is to be a "machine", "to stop working on *Ulysses* is like a fall from grace."³

I would like to dwell on Bersani's preliminary conclusion, that *Ulysses* is a text to be "deciphered but not read". In fact, I would like to briefly investigate what that really means for the naive reader. I claim that the naive reader is likely to experience the text in roughly two stages: figuring out the basic story events of the one day of story time, and then using the rest of the information provided in the novel to piece together the life stories of the main characters, which obviously extends well beyond the story

1 Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 178.

2 Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, 175.

3 Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, 178.

time. *Ulysses* is a good example of a text that demands to be re-read, and in fact what we usually refer to when we talk about “reading” *Ulysses* is re-reading. Many books make this demand but rarely do we recognize that reading strategy in criticism. Also, I will consider the type of reading strategy that *Ulysses* demands in light of basic concepts of the theory of the novel from György Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin in order to consider what *Ulysses*’ reading strategy means for its place in the history of the novel.

The reader can interpret a reliable plot in *Ulysses*,⁴ an event-based summary of the one-day story, which I also call the “core story”. This may seem a simple task, but for the naive reader, constructing this summary requires significant study. For any part of the text of *Ulysses* the main problem is that the reader needs to determine the identity of the narrator in order to then interpret the events that are happening. Determining the changes in narration in a sense requires reading the whole novel because the narrators are multiple and they frequently change, and some narrator identities seem to exist in disparate parts of the text. This is essentially a hermeneutical reading that builds an understanding of the text step by step, but that also somehow relies on a prior knowledge of the whole novel. As Fritz Senn puts it, “what inevitably emerges is a multiple amalgamation [...]. In order to follow up all ramifications one would have to unravel the whole novel.”⁵

Stephen, Bloom, and Molly serve as narrators through interior monologue, and there are also several more objective narrators, both authorial and first-person. The narrator may remain the same for as long as a chapter, but often it changes within a chapter. When the narrator is clear, little stands in the way of a reliable interpretation of the events of the core story for that chapter, especially since the events are by and large rather simple. Through this process, it quickly becomes clear that a large amount of the text of the book has nothing to do with the events in the one-day story time. The reader realizes that parts of the text seem to follow some set of rules but other parts do not, a “dislocation” in Fritz Senn’s terminology. A dislocation for Senn is a characteristic of *Ulysses* in particular, where there is a sense on the reader’s part that “there is always some latent continuity, but tracks are switched all the time.”⁶

It would be useful to outline the identification of the narrator and then the story-time events for each chapter in the novel, but to not belabor the point, I would like to briefly comment on a few chapters to illustrate the kind of reading *Ulysses* makes us engage in, as naive readers.

Joyce employs reliable authorial narrators in *Ulysses*, but only as one option among many. Part II, which contains the bulk of the book, begins with “Calypso”. “Calypso” employs mostly Bloom’s interior monologue with the minority presence of an authorial narrator similar to how “Proteus” has Stephen’s interior monologue with some authorial narration. However, the effect is quite different because Bloom’s interior monologue, while still attempting to reflect the interior psychology of a character, is much more amenable to interpreting story events than is Stephen’s younger, more troubled, artistic interior. “Calypso” shows Bloom enact what seems to be his morning ritual: serving his wife, Molly, breakfast, going to the bathroom, and buying and cooking breakfast for himself.

This type of narration—mostly Bloom’s interior monologue with some authorial narration—is a staple for *Ulysses*. The same Bloom-centered narration is used for the

4 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922. New York: Vintage Books, 1986). Further citations of *Ulysses* will only be for direct quotations.

5 Fritz Senn, *Joyce’s Dislocations: Essays on Reading as Translation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 205.

6 Fritz Senn, *Joyce’s Dislocations*, 206.

fifth chapter "Lotus Eaters", the sixth chapter "Hades", the eighth "Lestrygonians", the eleventh "Sirens", and at least half of the thirteenth chapter "Nausicaa".

"Aeolus" is the seventh chapter of the book, right after "Calypso", and contains the most striking narrative change in the book in a linear reading. The first six chapters all have similar narrative strategies. More or less, up to this point, the narrator has been in the background. With "Aeolus", the narrator is suddenly foregrounded in a formally obvious way. The interruption of the narrative by newspaper-type headlines, and the fact that the text in between appears much in the same mode as some of the previous chapters, indicates not only that a conscious narrator is indeed presenting the story to us in this chapter, but has been doing so in the past six chapters as well. Joyce chooses as his narrative device in this chapter the newspaper, a popular medium that the vast majority of readers will be familiar with, so this innovation is not as jarring as others later in the novel. Quickly the reader is able to identify the interruptions as headlines, and can proceed to consider why in this chapter the narrative is interrupted in this way. The naive reader is able to read past the headlines to continue reading the novel, if needed.

Some of the headlines merely repeat information that is clear from the rest of the text already, such as "EXIT BLOOM" or "CLEVER, VERY" or "RETURN OF BLOOM". These have little function other than to highlight that the chapter is being written by inserting headlines in the text. Some of the headlines can literally be "read past", in the sense that the text before and after continue the same thought and the relation of the headline to the story-time events seems indirect if present at all. Examples of these include "A STREET CORTÈGE" or "SHINDY IN WELLKNOWN RESTAURANT".

One example of a chapter that perhaps transcends a reasonable expectation of reader competence is "Oxen of the Sun". Again in this chapter there is an extreme change in narrative strategy that the naive reader most likely will not be able to interpret. The changes in narrative mode that happen throughout the chapter, mimicking different eras of English-language usage and indeed specific voices during those times, are not marked as anything like vignettes, and it would take an extraordinary amount of knowledge and insight for the naive reader to make even basic sense of the structure of the narrative in this chapter.

"Oxen of the Sun" is deep into the novel, however, so perhaps the naive reader has been prepared to deal with such an impossible challenge. But perhaps the only way to deal with this challenge for this reader is to read past the entire chapter, and hope to make sense of it upon re-reading. As mentioned above, this reading past strategy is not unique to this chapter, although it is certainly more prominent here. Plus, it is qualitatively different to have to read past a whole chapter than to read past something that looks like inserted newspaper headlines. If a reader provisionally ignores "Oxen of the Sun", there has to be an anxiety on the part of the reader as to what was missed. Indeed, it is in this chapter that the two main characters in the novel meet for the first time, so skipping this chapter can cause problems understanding the story going forward. It is an extreme chapter in the novel, and no other chapter risks disrupting the communal meaning-making of the text like this one does.

Taking "Oxen of the Sun" as an exception, each chapter in *Ulysses* requires of the naive reader an interpretation of the narrative strategy that then leads to a rather easy identification of the core story events in that chapter.

In reading the core story, the naive reader does have to pick out certain pieces of information from the narrative to make into a coherent basic story, knowing that there is a large amount of material left in the book that has not been included. Again, this is the classic hermeneutical problem of having made only partial sense of the text, and yet

requiring a concept of the unknown whole text to create that sense. But the story of the novel can also be understood to reach beyond the one-day story time of the novel, and indeed no reader of *Ulysses* would think that the basic one-day events constitute the complete plot of the novel. For naive, but persistent, readers, this leads to another stage of the re-reading of the novel: reading the life stories of the main characters of the book, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. I will call this the “larger story”. Bersani writes that readers are “required to complete the portraits of Bloom and Stephen, an activity that includes but is very little threatened by the perception of their absorption into a variety of alien styles and nonrepresentational techniques.”⁷ These styles and techniques are resolved in the smaller puzzle described above. After this is completed, the portraits of the main characters can be constructed. Again, this is clearly a process of re-reading, and not only in the sense of reading once again or reading from page 1 linearly through the book multiple times. Rather the path the reader makes through the novel is entirely that reader’s own creation. It is not only re-reading, but creating an understanding. The reader is within the hermeneutical circle, and the question is where that back-and-forth approach takes the reader.

Joyce tells the story of these characters’ lives, but he locates pieces of these life stories in various locations throughout the novel, not in a conventional chronological order or by any other consistent ordering mechanism. These pieces need to be not only collected and collated, but also interpreted. Some pieces conflict with each other, and we need to consider other events and the reliability and competency of the narrator in constructing the life stories. It seems that the larger story offers the reader space to participate in making meaning in the text. However, I will show that the larger story, even though it may offer this opportunity, ultimately denies the opportunity for the naive reader to participate in a lasting, deeper way. Of course many readers make meaning from *Ulysses* seemingly endlessly, for example by directly considering historical or cultural connections, but that is outside the considerations of this study. Still, *Ulysses* does involve the reader more than any other novel up to that point, even the naive reader.

The best example of the reading process to construct the larger story in *Ulysses* is Bloom. Readers can produce a reliable story of Bloom’s whole life from the extra material in the novel. However, while the core story is told along a linear chronology, the pieces of the story of Bloom’s life follow no logical arrangement in the text. The reader must continually pick up clues from the text and compare them to other clues, little by little building Bloom’s past. This process relies on triangulating repeated references to the same events or facts to construct a more reliable story. A further complication is that most of the information about Bloom’s life is given in the form of memories of characters narrated through interior monologue. This introduces a large possibility for error. Indeed, in real life, reconstructing past events from memory is a difficult task, even with (maybe especially with) multiple people’s memories. Considering the possibility for error that exists in narrating such facts in this way, in the end there is a relatively small amount of uncertainty about exact events in Bloom’s life before the core story.

Ulysses works to communicate a coherent story about Bloom’s life, but it also tries to show the natural uncertainty that comes with reconstructing past events. Again in this way it creates a kind of paradox, satisfying two contradictory impulses at once. The construction of Bloom’s life has been done elsewhere, perhaps most notably in John Henry Raleigh’s *The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom*.⁸ Subsequent criticism has revealed

7 Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, 158.

8 John Henry Raleigh, *The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom: Ulysses as Narrative* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

the many errors that this book makes, and the correct solutions are still debated. Some questions still remain, but through re-reading we learn about where Bloom and Molly were born and about when they came to Dublin, as well as about Bloom's ancestry. We also learn of Bloom's life before he met Molly, and about their life together before the core story. Here I will not review the reading and re-reading that is required to re-construct this story, again in the interest of brevity. Such a review would only be a review of the scholarship that already exists, perhaps starting with Raleigh's book and the corrections that it spawned. However, to give a flavor of how the naive reader would do this work by him or herself, below I provide a couple examples of the insights that this puzzling process produces.

In general, though, the important point is that even this larger story comes to the same kind of author-reader accord that the core story does. This accord is of course on the author's terms. While the core story already requires an in-depth reading process, the larger puzzle is even more involved, but this by itself does not mean that the novel hands the making of meaning over to the reader. The amount of work the novel requires does not by itself mean that the novel is not ultimately author-centered.

Ulysses sets up rules for its own reading, and the question becomes whether, in the end, the novel itself plays by its own rules and thereby lets the reader come to a sense of understanding of the novel that the author intended. The process of reading and re-reading to a large extent makes it feel like *Ulysses* does not play by the rules, but in the end, it does. Fritz Senn would say that *Ulysses* is a dislocutionary text overall, and considering a real-world reader, he is certainly correct. The real reader's lack of naivete allows the reader to make more out of the more indirect parts of the storytelling in *Ulysses*. The question is where the boundary between stable and unstable meaning is for a text like *Ulysses*, which Senn's concept of dislocation helps us think through. But the reader I am proposing is not realistic. For the naive reader proposed in this study, the reader stays on the stable side of meaning-making, not being allowed to read meaning into the larger story like a real reader would. A naive reader will not find endless indeterminacy of meaning in *Ulysses*. Rather, the naive reader will find an end to the game Joyce constructs. Therefore the naive reader will not find this a dislocutionary novel.

The point of the larger story is to imbue the events in the story time with larger significance. While the life stories are not unquestionable, they are relatively complete. This is obviously a subjective assessment to a certain necessary extent. One can cite many details that are still debated in the study of *Ulysses* and even make an argument that these details have basic importance to the story. In making this assessment, though, I would like to take the perspective of the naive reader, not the perspective of the advanced state of Joycean scholarship we have today. The amount of indeterminacy the naive reader sees while reading *Ulysses* is huge. An overwhelming majority of this indeterminacy has been resolved by scholarship over the past several decades. Scholars must realize that in terms of narrative and reading strategies, we are now dealing with details of details of details in making new claims about *Ulysses*. This work is important, but we also should not forget from where we came. Given the number of questions that can be answered through a detailed reading process, overwhelmingly the novel plays by its own rules. Most importantly, of course, the two puzzles in this book fulfill their narrative purpose: to bring life to the simple story of June 16, 1904.

There are numerous examples of parts of the larger story that need to be constructed by the reader with material from the novel. Here I will review a few as examples. When the naive reader works to understand the core story of the novel, it is clear that Bloom and Molly have a daughter named Milly. However, the fact that Molly gave birth to a boy who died at eleven days old is just as much a fact of the story, but it is hidden in the text, and must be unearthed by a process of parallax reading.

The first stage of this parallax reading has to do with triangulating repeated references to Rudy in the text, just to establish that such a son existed. Working linearly through the text, in "Calypso", Bloom first indicates evidence of Rudy: "She knew from the first poor little Rudy wouldn't live. ... He would be eleven now if he had lived".⁹ In subsequent chapters, Bloom refers to Rudy several times, indicating more that the lost son continues to affect Bloom and confirming that indeed this is a son who died in infancy. This comes to a head in "Circe", when Bloom visualizes Rudy as a grown boy of 11 years old, in his Eton suit. "Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand."¹⁰ Rudy becomes a character, albeit a silent one, this chapter closing on Bloom's vision of his deceased son. In terms of the story, little additional practical information related to Rudy is provided in these chapters, however. The exact time and location of Rudy's birth and death are difficult to construct, but it seems that he was born and died when Bloom and Molly lived in Holles street.

The fact that Bloom and Molly had a son who died in infancy, and the related possibility that this tragedy has something to do with the sexual problems that Bloom and Molly suffer still to the day of the story, are significant life events for the major characters of the story. Moreover, this fact deeply informs Bloom's approach to Stephen in the core story. Through collecting pieces of information like this, the reader creates a coherent life story for all of the characters, and those life stories then can inform a re-reading of the core story, producing different interpretations and effects, but still relying only on information provided within the novel itself. That is, this whole process has still been completed by the reader who was naive upon taking up the book.

Ulysses is a web of associations; so many facts from the characters' pasts illuminate events in the story time. Another example is the relationship between Bloom and Molly, and specifically their faithfulness to each other. In constructing the larger story, we learn that Bloom is aware that Molly is having an affair with Blazes Boylan. This does not appear particularly to upset Bloom; perhaps it is not news to him. However, we learn in the last chapter in the book that Molly does not dislike Bloom; she considers him better than most husbands. In "Calypso", where we meet Bloom and Molly, Bloom spends a good part of his morning serving Molly breakfast in bed. Through interior monologue, we see Bloom's awareness of what Molly likes, and his effort to please her. These actions are not accompanied by bad thoughts about Molly in the interior monologue: apparently, Bloom still loves Molly, or at least likes her. Their relationship is friendly, but not passionate. At the same time, in the core story we see Bloom spend part of this supposedly typical day continuing a pen pal romance. As far as we know, this romance is only through the mails, but even that is a significant aspect of Bloom's approach to his marriage with Molly.

With the core story, we have no clear indication that Molly is unfaithful to Bloom, while we see Bloom using a second identity to exchange love letters with another woman. After constructing the larger story, the reader knows that Molly deals with her unsatisfying marriage through sexual affairs. Now Bloom's postal romance appears quaint, pathetic maybe, in any case very different than it does with only the core story. With the larger story we learn more about Bloom's marriage as well as Molly's affairs. Our view of Bloom changes from a man who is cheating on his wife to a man who deals with his wife's infidelities in a relatively harmless way.

9 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 54.

10 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 497.

In “Nausicaa”, Bloom watches girls on the beach, and possibly masturbates. Again, with the core story, Bloom appears as a sleazy voyeur (in fact this fits in well with his postal romance), but with the larger story it appears that Bloom takes his pleasure indirectly, through observation and imagination, rather than through actual sex, as his wife does. The larger story turns Bloom into a more sympathetic character, which must cause the reader to consider the events in the core story in a different light.

These two stories are not progressive, but rather recursive or dialogic. The core story is necessary to complete the larger story, but we construct the life stories to better understand what happens during that one day of the core story. Not only is this a hermeneutic reading in the sense that the reader negotiates meaning with the text through a repetitive process that produces real and useful results, but also in that the reader constructs a kind of history of the story that the reader already understands. It is like the core story has its own cultural context within the novel itself. This understanding is also an appreciation of the characters’ reality, and the importance of a normal day in the life of each character. With the larger story solved, the novel becomes simple again, but elegantly and wonderfully simple. After the reading and re-reading process, *Ulysses* becomes like an epic novel. The reader imbues the events of the novel with such importance largely because the reader knows the characters so well. *Ulysses*, however, does not require us to plod along with the characters’ lives in a linear fashion like most epic novels. Rather than follow the characters’ lives as they are given, we learn about the characters through actively reading. In this way the reading of *Ulysses* requires reader input, but the effort of the reader to interpret the stories does not change the ultimate outcome. As Bersani writes, the outcome is given beforehand, even if the (naive) reader does not know this as she or he is reading the novel. The effect of the successful implementation of this structure is what makes *Ulysses* a masterpiece. Joyce’s formal innovations are for an ultimately human purpose.

By encouraging, really forcing, the reader to re-read the novel to understand its story, Joyce not only includes the reader more integrally into the meaning-making of the text, but makes the reading experience more personal and individual to the reader. The reader must make decisions about how to re-read (and indeed *if* to re-read), and the subsequent success or failure of the making of meaning is clearly dependent on those individual decisions. Very often with texts like *Ulysses*, we talk about “reading” in a way that assumes re-reading. Even a statement like “In *Ulysses* the story takes place over one day and night.” assumes that the reader has not just read, but re-read.

At the same time, a disturbing amount of scholarly work on narrative, the novel, and reading assumes a linear reading process, that reading starts with page one and ends with the last page, and that conclusions such as the story time of *Ulysses* are obvious on a first linear reading. The linear reading process is often an implicit assumption, even though we violate this assumption all the time in reading literature. Disregarding re-reading in theorizing about narrative and reading is simply not realistic for many pieces of literature, at the very least literature after *Ulysses*.

The naive reader, hard at work on the larger story, will certainly find inconsistencies and remaining questions about details. But the naive reader will also find a satisfying amount of coherence and reliable information. On the one hand, I am sympathetic to the view that Joyce left questions unanswered to perpetuate the reading process and to make statements about the impossibility to accurately re-construct histories. On the other hand, the naive reader will consider these questions as the exceptions that prove the rule. Obviously the reader who considers extra-textual material will always find new questions to ask about *Ulysses*. We can ask if this is the case for the naive reader,

and if not, whether this says anything about the place of *Ulysses* in the development of the novel as a genre. From our current perspective we have the luxury of commenting both on what *Ulysses* achieved in its own historical situation and how it compares with later novels.

The answer to the first question is “no”. The naive reader will come to a place of relative satisfaction, a coherent understanding of both the events during the day in the story time and the life stories of the main characters. To look more closely at the second question, we should look briefly at what so-called “novel theory” has to say about what the novel can and should do.

The first thing that early theorists of the novel established is not only that the novel should be seen as a genre unto itself, but that it in fact is a genre that does not fit within the traditional set of literary genres. I would argue that the two main figures to consider in the creation of twentieth-century theory of the novel are György Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin. According to Lukács and Bakhtin, the novel is a special genre in the sense that it is the newest genre, and is the only written genre, historically. As the newest genre, it indicates the future of literature. Along with this, the novel as a genre is still in the process of “becoming”, it does not yet have a hardened definition. Further in this becoming it is not a continuation of ancient literature, but rather has a completely different orientation, towards experience rather than memory.

This already makes the novel special, but especially Bakhtin indicates a deeper uniqueness for the novel. In fact, the novel is not in a process of becoming because it is “not yet” defined. Rather, the novel will never be defined in this way. In being focused on experience, the novel must be more closely linked to contemporary reality and the present, and this is linked to the kind of stories the novel can tell. Stories that deal with contemporary reality, which is and always will be changing, require a form that is never settled. A form that is constantly innovated with is the “only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality.”¹¹

Lukács has a similar view of the possibility of truly defining the genre of the novel, although he poses the problems in more philosophical terms. In his introduction to Lukács’ in his anthology, Michael McKeon usefully summarizes Lukács approach thus:

Novelistic form, we may paraphrase, created to resolve the problem of dissonance that occasions all formal creation, instead takes on the irresolvability of dissonance as its basic premise. ... It’s crucial to recognize how Lukács works against structuralism’s devolutionary nostalgia even as he evokes it. The novel neither lacks form nor possesses it in a weakened or censored state. Rather, the novel has a problematic attitude toward its form, which it expresses by self-consciously replicating form as content.¹²

The traditional concept of a genre is that it has a consistent form, which typically lends itself to certain thematic concepts. In general the form stays the same and the content is communicated through the form. In Lukács, this separation of form and content in the novel is impossible, and requires that the form be changeable as much or more than the content. Lukács further discusses these issues in terms of abstraction, and the system of meaning that a novel sets up:

11 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (1975. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 39.

12 Michael McKeon, ed, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 180.

In a novel, totality can be systematized only in abstract terms, which is why any system that could be established in the novel ... had to be one of abstract concepts and therefore not directly suitable for aesthetic form-giving. Such abstract systematization is, it is true, the ultimate basis of the entire structure, but in the created reality of the novel all that becomes visible is the distance separating the systematization from concrete life.¹³

This indicates that the only thing, in the end, a novel can really communicate is the unspeakable but obvious distance between the abstract system of lived reality that the novel represents and "concrete life" as the reader perceives it. The form or structure of the novel comes from this situation; it is the "ultimate basis" of the novel. This requires the novel, and the novelist, taking the risk of losing the very concepts of meaning and structure. Only then does the novel succeed.¹⁴

Both Bakhtin and Lukács conclude that traditional criticism, the criticism that they have seen up to their time, completely fails with the novel. Criticism can discuss the novel, but does so in a way that ignores the true character of the novel as a genre, so that the conclusions such criticism produces are largely irrelevant. The criticism lives in a different world than the novel does. This stance follows from Lukács and Bakhtin's characterization of the novel as a genre. Lukács dismisses criticism that treats the novel like the other genres: "That is why, from the artistic viewpoint, the novel is the most hazardous genre, and why it has been described as only half an art by many who equate having a problematic with being problematic."¹⁵ This is the core of the mismatch in criticism.

Bakhtin has a suggestion for what kind of structure or theory such a criticism might follow, although it is, perhaps expectedly, a rather loose formulation. He suggests that if we adhere to the ancient field of rhetoric, we will have guidance for how to address the novel: "However, there is another solution to our dilemma that does take basic concepts into account: one need only consider oft-neglected rhetoric, which for centuries has included artistic prose in its purview."¹⁶ The tendency to dismiss the novel as an un-literary form is revealing, Bakhtin writes, in that it demonstrates the difficulty that scholars have with the novel. But this is one thing that seems to have changed since Bakhtin's time: the novel is firmly ensconced in the literary world, and to make an argument today for its exclusion would be much more difficult than it was early in the twentieth century.

In advocating rhetoric as a possible critical solution to the problematic of the novel, Bakhtin discusses rhetoric in terms of linguistics, especially since early in the twentieth century a new wave of structuralist linguistics was seen as the answer to many of the current problems in literary study.

Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics [i.e., such as they have come down to us] have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular "own" language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual.¹⁷

Bakhtin famously proposes an alternative to this construction, which has as its centerpiece the "utterance". The utterance should be the focus, since it turns attention

13 György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, (1920, Trans. Anna Bostock, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 70.

14 Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 72.

15 Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 73.

16 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 267.

17 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 269, emphasis in original.

away from the linguistic structure itself (the "language" used) and toward the function of that language or languages. It also directs attention away from subjective individuals.¹⁸

This is the basis of Bakhtin's proposed approach to the novel, to see it as an utterance rather than an example of a unitary language, a creation of an ideal individual author, or any other such static concepts of creation. Bakhtin specifies the constitutive feature of rhetoric: "All rhetorical forms, monologic in their compositional structure, are oriented toward the listener and his answer. This orientation toward the listener is usually considered the basic constitutive feature of rhetorical discourse."¹⁹

This feature has not been ignored by linguists and philosophers of language, but rather they have not been able to consider a more fluid and influential role for the listener. Linguists have taken the listener into consideration, but only through the speaker.²⁰ This is undoubtedly a step forward from seeing the speaker as an independent creator, unconcerned about her or his listener. But it is also patently short-sighted, for of course the listener plays a role in making meaning through the communication, in the utterance.

I would go farther than Bakhtin does, for he indicates the listener only as someone who might "answer and react" to the speaker. More importantly, arguably, is the necessity of the unique thinking listener to cooperate in making meaning through the utterance, in cooperation with the speaker and many other factors. The listener does not just "answer and react" and thereby again funnel his or her influence through the speaker; the speaker has a direct influence (and has to have a direct influence) on the meaning of the utterance.

Again contrasting the novel with the other genres, Bakhtin shows how the other genres do not lend themselves to study according to rhetoric.

In genres that are poetic in the narrow sense, the natural dialogization of the word is not put to artistic use, the word is sufficient unto itself and does not presume alien utterances beyond its own boundaries. Poetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse.²¹

As noted above, the novel studied as rhetoric will progress at least a couple steps beyond such a "narrow" and false construction of literature. This is because the other genres seek to use "a language of the gods" rather than a language that is "close to a conception of languages as historically concrete and living things." These living things are of course in a constant state of flux, conflict, and creativity, and "prose art [the novel] finds discourse in this state and subjects it to the dynamic unity of its own style."²² The novel is again at least two steps away from the other genres. Not only does it seek to represent in its content a continually changing contemporary reality, but it does so through a variable form. This is contrasted with representing a static conception of reality in a standard and inflexible form.

The kind of discourse that exists in the novel, that exists in the utterance that is the novel, is very complicated but also reflects the kind of communication people engage in every day. We can talk about ourselves and others; we are influenced by those we are speaking with; we can talk on different levels at one time; we can even talk about what we talk about:

18 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 272.

19 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 280.

20 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 280.

21 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 285.

22 Bakhtin, "Discourse," 331.

Thanks to the ability of a language to represent another language while still retaining the capacity to sound simultaneously both outside it and within it, to talk about it and at the same time to talk in and with it—and thanks to the ability of the language being represented simultaneously to serve as an object of representation while continuing to be able to speak to itself—thanks to all this, the creation of specific novelistic images of languages becomes possible.²³

In our daily lives, we find no reason why we cannot tell someone what someone else said, express our own position, and at the same time talk about the conversation itself. In some ways it is striking that it has been so difficult for literature to come to terms with such banal human activities, and moreover that criticism has had such difficulty dealing with such realities. Bakhtin suggests that if we treat the novel more freely as a rhetorically-inspired literature, we should be able to construct more useful considerations of the novel.

Now I would like to come to a conclusion by returning to my unanswered question in light of this thinking on the novel. If *Ulysses* just asks its readers to be “exegetical machines”,²⁴ and if the process of reading is really just deciphering, does *Ulysses* contribute to the novel as a literary form in the ways that Bakhtin and Lukács describe?

If we take into consideration literary history and the place of *Ulysses* in the history of the novel (no matter what history we construct), I believe the answer must be “yes”. This is not a surprise: the weight of decades of scholarship on the novel pushes us toward this answer. However, I find it interesting to consider just how innovative *Ulysses* was when it was published to inform our (hermeneutical) reading of the novel today, since now we can read novels that push the boundaries even further. It is clear that *Ulysses* was historically crucial both for the novel and for literature in English in general. The re-reading process that it forced careful readers to engage in was little less than revolutionary.

With *Ulysses*, Joyce pushed literature a step further by viewing the reader as a living, thinking human being, who could participate in the meaning-making of a novel. Arguably Joyce could only do this with the novel genre. While different histories of the novel and earlier examples of the novel form can be cited in this context, I find it safe to say that especially through its continuing cultural impact, *Ulysses* was the first novel to respect its reader in this way. Put another way, *Ulysses* taught us to be different readers, it taught us to re-read. The concept of “re-reading” that I have repeated often in this paper is really Bakhtin’s active listener in the situation of an utterance. *Ulysses* highlights the Bakhtinian rhetoric implicit in the novel genre; that is one way to recognize the contribution this novel makes and its importance to literature.

I have tried to show above that through considering the rather simple construct of the naive reader, *Ulysses* might appear to be a more “normal” novel than we usually think of it as being. We have plenty of examples of novels that follow after *Ulysses* that do not allow even the naive reader the pleasure of agreeing with the text that a certain coherent story has been told and understood. It is actually with this simple construct that *Ulysses* is most able to be seen as not innovative from our perspective. It seems that *Ulysses* could not (yet) innovate in this most simple way, the basic structure and resolution of a story in the text. The innovations in involving extra-textual material are beyond question.

This character is not unique to *Ulysses*, for there certainly are examples of later novels that innovate with story to a larger extent, but still through a re-reading process

23 Bakhtin, “Discourse,” 358.

24 Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, 175.

satisfy the story needs of the reader to a great degree. Particularly here I think of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*,²⁵ which seems to have no story at all, but through re-reading, a chronological series of events over a nine-month period involving one main protagonist emerges as the basic backbone of the novel. Examples like this perhaps suggest that without such a story as the basis of the novel, even if that story is coded and hidden for different effects, we cannot truly conceptualize of the text as a novel. Perhaps in the end the novel does indeed need a rather staid concept of story. If this is the case, then *Ulysses* can be seen as much less dated than one might otherwise think.

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²⁵ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973).