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GENRE AND ...

Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2



Ekbatana

Ed. Sune Auken,
Palle Schantz Lauridsen, &
Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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Genre and ...
Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2

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READING GENRE

GENRE AND THE NOVELISTIC

Gorm Larsen

THERE ARE GENRES that can be characterized and defined with relative precision. These genres, which may be called “closed genres,” exhibit no notable development, or consist of constancies that are more or less immutable; examples include the sonnet, the tragedy, and the epic. It must be acknowledged, however, that the genres that fit this description are a peripheral group—and indeed a group that, on inspection, turns out to be anything but univocal (cf., e.g., Fowler, 1982, p. 57). By contrast, the dominant group of literary genres consists of genres that are indeterminate or difficult to define. The latter genres are open and alive, changing and in motion; their characteristic traits are, time and again, up for negotiation and discussion.

If the novel can be said to belong to any group of genres, it is to the latter group. It is quite difficult to find a set of defining characteristics that captures the novel fully; in this sense, it is almost tempting to call the novel an anti-genre, a type with no unambiguous hallmarks other than certain loose external relations, such as being long fictional prose narratives written in *lingua romana*, i.e., in the vernacular; and even in that context, it is difficult to operate with fixed boundaries. For example, there are short stories that are over a hundred pages long, and perhaps there are also novels of no more than half that length (assuming, of course, that we do not take length to be the decisive criterion for qualifying as a novel).

It may seem paradoxical that we lack a clear-cut definition of the novel *qua* genre, as the reading public rarely has trouble identifying novels as belonging to the genre, and most literate people know which texts are re-

ferred to by the designation “novel.” In this respect, the novel is no different from most other literary genres: the poem, the short story, the novella, etc. And that reflects, in turn, the fact that it is through the filter of institutionalization that genres communicate with their communities. In the words of Tzvetan Todorov, “it is because genres exist as an institution that they function as ‘horizons of expectation’ for readers and as ‘models of writing’ for authors” (1978/1990, p. 18). More accurately, the fact that genres are institutionally based, and the fact that genres function as frameworks of expectations and models for readers and writers, are two sides of the same coin.

This effective (pragmatico-)functional framework serves only to make the novel’s lack of formal definition all the more conspicuous. This indicates that the essential problem faced by the theory of the novel mirrors some of the problems faced by ordinary genre theory. The fact that genres are well-established and immediately functional on a pragmatic level gives some justification to genre theory; but the latter soon falters when it comes to defining individual genres, particularly where “open” literary genres are concerned. In the case of novel theory, the difficulty can be specified as pertaining to two questions:

- (i) Which formative features constitute hallmarks of the novel?
- (ii) How can the novel be demarcated as separate from related genres, such as the short story or the story? Similarly, how can the novel be described in terms of such wide-ranging stylistic trends or movements as realism or modernism?

Just as it is hardly possible to provide a formal, declarative description of the novel, it is no doubt equally difficult to account for, or to determine, the differences between such closely related genres as the novel and the short story. We must therefore approach the question of the novel from a

different angle. What we have just seen is that the genre of the novel has a communicative function, or rather that it functions as a communicative strategy—for the sender, as a strategy for shaping the text; for the receiver, as a strategy for interpreting it—signaled *inter alia* by means of paratextual codes. The novel is not a classificatory genre; it is a way of communicating.

To say this is to liberate the concept “novel” from a closed understanding, which is always implicit when the concept of genre is in play. In the present case, the genre “novel” undertakes to abandon the notion that a fixed definition of the novel can be found at all, and instead accept an open and mobile concept. My suggestion would be to fashion, as a basis for understanding the concept of the novel, a *mode-specific, non-discrete parametric theory*. This includes an attempt to establish a conceptual framework that would make it possible to distinguish between the novelistic and the non-novelistic, and between the more and the less novelistic. “Novelistic” is the key term here: it refers to those features that are significant to the novel as such, but which are not necessarily present in every novel. In this context, “novel” is an umbrella term for the heterogeneous group of texts that have novelistic properties as their most significant characteristics.

I will here approach the novelistic by a three-step procedure. First, I will offer an overview of trends in novel research—both historically and currently. Second, I will introduce the concepts of *family resemblance* and *genericity* in genre contexts, and so provide a theoretical foundation for my analysis of the novelistic. This will culminate in discussion of the framework for a mode-oriented approach to the novel genre, including a conceptual understanding of what “the novelistic” refers to.

The third step involves clarifying and filling in the category of the novelistic, in collaboration and interaction with established theories of the novel. My focus will be on the novel’s ideology, the dialogic, and realism; and here Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the novel will prove central, inas-

much as his theories identify a set of key factors for the novel that can in fact best be characterized as novelistic. With this as background, it will finally be possible to develop a survey of novelistic parameters. Put in brief, and as stated above, my goal is to offer a portrait of established novel theory that can serve as a backdrop for a mode-determined and rhetorical understanding of the genre.

THREE LINES OF NOVEL RESEARCH

In the wake of the difficulties faced by every attempt to date to identify the novel's defining characteristics, the focus of novel theory has changed. Many have wished to conclude that the novel *qua* genre category is an umbrella term that cannot be specified more precisely, except by dividing it into subgenres: "The novel is not a traditional literary genre, like tragedy or comedy, but a general, varied, categorically distinctive form like poetry and drama [...]. There is no one kind of matter [novels] contain, or effect they produce" (Bradbury, 1973, p. 278-279). This is related to the fact that the novel is a complex genre and has no simple generic origin story. As Alastair Fowler points out, the novel is rooted in a range of early genre forms, both fictional and non-fictional, such as "epic, romance, picaresque, biography, history, journal, letter, exemplary tale, novella, to name only the most obvious. These filiations have persisted in the developed novel, giving rise in some instances to distinct subgenres" (Fowler, 1982, p. 120).

A natural consequence of these relations is that the question of the novel as genre has come to be embedded in a framework defined by literary and intellectual history: What is manifested by the novel *qua* idea? What kind of ideology or ethics does it express?—These questions frame the novel as a special cultural discourse, one that indicates a diagnosis of its age, and is often regarded as the mirror-image of a special period in intellectual history. Put another way, the novel is often taken to be a manifestation of an idea or ideology, which in turn is viewed as a unique reflection of the epoch in which the novel first blossomed. From this point of

view, the novel is bound to a specific period; and that is tied to the question of when the novel was actually “born.”

The historical line in novel research, and the genre-theoretic problems arising from the isolated and positive generation of concepts and rules, have more or less repressed the fact that there does exist a formal line in describing the novel. One reason for this repression is that the concept “novel,” as a category, is absent as a rule from works that fit this formal line—apart from such exceptions as E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) and Franz Stanzel’s *Narrative Situations in the Novel* (1955/1971); and those works are not primarily about the novel in any case, but about specific formal characteristics that belong to *narrative* texts, both novels and others. Hence these texts do not offer theories of the novel in the strict, traditional sense. If narratology, as the theory of the narrative, does relate to the novel nonetheless, it is because the novel’s discursive features are in fact conceptualized in it. In other words, if we must abandon precise and formal definitions of the novel, then a broader description of the novel’s traits may serve as the best alternative—and for that purpose narratology is central.

The same holds for Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the novel. In recent decades, Bakhtin has been accorded an increasingly central role in literary studies and, specifically, in the study of the novel. Bakhtin’s work offers a refreshing perspective on the novel. It is comparable to narratology, though Bakhtin abjures categorical structuralism, and presents more general derivations of concepts besides. Bakhtin’s attraction is that his theories grasp the novel’s general, ideal form, and analyze it conceptually in terms of ideology or ideas, inasmuch as he describes the novel on the basis of various conceptual angles that are anchored at the micro-level.

We can thus see three possible directions for novel research: 1) a historical line that more or less epitomizes the study of the novel—and which can be subdivided into a classical (Lukács (1920/1971), Watt (1957/2000), etc.) and a modern (Moretti (1994/1996), Doody (1996), Pavel (2006) etc.)

line; 2) a formal orientation rooted in Russian formalism (including Shklovsky (1921/1965), and which has evolved into narratology, via Booth (1961/1991) and Genette (e.g., 1979/1992); 3) a Bakhtinian line, which relates to the ideological-formal line (on an overall macro level) with a certain historical perspective. Behind these three trends lies the early Romantic theory of the novel, particularly as it developed in the thought of Schlegel (1798-1800/1974), who, with his peculiar ironic thinking and ideology of fragments (i.e., that the novel should avoid being an organized totality), sketched an account of the novel that is both intellectual-historical and formal, an understanding that, in many respects, points forward toward Bakhtin.

The point is that it makes no sense, in literary- or genre-theoretical contexts, either to speak of the novel as an intellectual-historical product, or to understand the novel as a specifically formative phenomenon. Hence while there is in fact one tradition in novel research that is occupied with the novel's history and origins, and another that focuses on the formal determination of the genre using such categories as style, *syuzhet* and *fabula*, narrator, and plot, these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive.

Instead, I will start by linking the novel's formal aspects to its historical and ideological ones. That is, I will integrate the novel's textual characteristics within a more intellectual-historical framework, meaning that the *textual* determination of the novel will be necessarily become looser; but at the same time I will, as mentioned, suggest a modulation of the concept "novel," a shifting of focus toward the question of what is more novel-like—more novelistic—and what is less. I will, in sum, argue for operating with a series of parameters and aspects that are highly significant to, but not absolutely necessary for, understanding the novel, and so may be present to a greater or lesser degree.

Such an attempt to connect these trends, motivated by a desire to think in both literary-historical *and* formal categories, is a trend that is hardly foreign to modern genre theory, in the tradition that stretches from

Northrop Frye's (1957) and Alistair Fowler's (1982) major works to John Frow's (2006) introductory overview. In this group, Bakhtin is central, inasmuch as he unites the major genre-historical trends with compositional forms and ideological relations. Bakhtin's investigation is not directed toward a prose genre of some defined length or other external characteristics, but toward fictional forms that are shaped in diverse ways. As such, Bakhtin's work prepares the ground for a clarification of the novel's formal genre aspects. What Bakhtin's genre theories offer is, in short, not a process of genre classification whereby the novel could be defined in contrast to the short story, but instead a theory of various ideological forms.

The terms "novelistic" and "novelness" draw on Bakhtin's theories of the novel and their reception.¹ These concepts have emerged in the wake of the explosion in Bakhtin research during the 1990s and at the start of the new millennium—and with a special Danish touch: see, for example, *The Novelness of Bakhtin*, edited by Bruhn and Lundquist (2001). As Michael Holquist had already written, in his introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*—which includes, among other things, "The Discourse in the Novel":

‘Novel’ is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system. ... What is more conventionally thought of as the novel is simply the most complex and distilled expression of this impulse. ... Even the drama (Ibsen and the other Naturalists), the long poem (Childe Harold or Don Juan) or the lyric (as in Heine) become masks for the novel during the nineteenth century. As formerly distinct literary genres and

¹ The concepts of novelness and the novelistic are not widely known, nor are they standardly defined apart from the contexts to which I here refer. They can be distinguished insofar as novelness indicates a novel's essence, while the novelistic designates pronounced or significant features of the novel that admit modulation. While I will here focus on the latter term and meaning, this terminological distinction is not relevant for my inquiry.

subjected to the novel's intensifying antigeneric power, their systematic purity is infected and they become 'novelized' (Holquist, 1981, p. xxxi-xxxii).

In what follows, however, I will not simply draw on Bakhtin's theories of the novel and proceed from there. This is because of my wish to demonstrate (and my readiness to recognize) that the theory of the novel and the ideology of form belong together, i.e., that the novelistic points toward a particular genericity. I also seek a broader perspective, aiming to integrate essential literary-historical and novel- and genre-theoretical aspects of Bakhtin's theories within the perspective of the novelistic. For this reason, it is the latter perspective that largely structures the analysis to come. The generic concept of *mode*, in particular, will be the first concept to be examined and investigated in what follows.

THE NOVELISTIC: FAMILY RESEMBLANCE, MODE & GENERICITY

Much modern genre theory is genre-critical. That is to say, it is skeptical of the notion that firm classificatory categories exist, and suspicious of the idea that the properties of individual genres are essential. As an alternative to an essentialist understanding of genre—unless one is completely averse to genre, as was, for example, Benedetto Croce in his 1902 book *Estetica* (1902/1955)—we can, with Gunhild Agger (2005, p. 82), speak of a *relational position*, whereby genres are determined by the interaction among text, sender, and receiver in a particular historical context. This is a definition that emphasizes the unstable and processual aspect of genre, its development; and it is in the group of moderate critics who employ this definition that we can best find the groundwork for a rethought genre understanding: a less dogmatic, more mode-oriented account of genre.

Here Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance may be an appropriate place to start, as it marks a dissent from a logic of structural es-

sences. Wittgenstein's concept is grounded in the fact that different types of games—board games, card games, ball games—can fruitfully be compared to one another; he concludes that the similarity among all the games can best be described by saying that they constitute a family, inasmuch as they exhibit a complicated network of similarities that overlap and intersect (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009, §§66-67).

Within genre theory, this line of thought has been drawn upon by Alastair Fowler, among others. Fowler regards textual representatives of a genre as constituting "a family whose septs and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all" (Fowler, 1982, p. 41). Fowler remarks that, by using family resemblance theory as a starting point, he can fulfill his own craving to set aside genre theory's insistent focus on sorting texts into classes according to a series of shared essential characteristics. Whereas a class has defined boundaries, family resemblance is based on a complex network of traits. Not all the members of a family will necessarily possess all of the same characteristics; there may very well be family members who do not have significant similarities with other members. Nevertheless, despite his emphasis on family resemblance theory, Fowler does point (with a nod to Maurice Mandelbaum) to several dangers. Family resemblance theory can potentially wipe out all consciousness of tradition; it can distract attention from genres' function; and it can offer no satisfying explanation of genres' genericity. For this reason, family resemblance theory must be modified so that it can evaluate generic similarities within a pragmatic framework. For Fowler, this yields an attempt to localize "codes" and "generic symbols": "Certain constituents appear to have a special value in communicating genre. As we have seen, almost any feature can function as part of a generic repertoire. But some are so immediately indicative, particularly during the early approach, that they seem at have to do with recognition specifically" (Fowler, 1982, p. 106). The problem here, however, is that Fowler is primarily operating with three main types of

signals: generic allusions, titles, and opening sequences. For this reason, as is evident from the passage just cited, Fowler is occupied with what we may call “first-time readers,” and with how readers acquire the relevant genre competence. This means that the genre’s communicative function is grasped as an immediate relation (which is already not unproblematic), and the genre is defined in terms of this relation. Accordingly, the signals Fowler is operating with are too coarse; they are not subject to reinterpretation, and invite no further analytical determinations.

On the other hand, family resemblance theory does also play into Fowler’s concept of *novel variants with modal transformations*. Novel variants can either be understood as complex genres, as subgenres—the war novel, the political novel, the *Bildungsroman*, etc., i.e., thematically determined types of novel—or as “kinds,” i.e., genres that are more generally historical or fixed, such as the epistolary novel, the meta-fictional novel, or magical realism. Whereas a given text will be determined *qua* subgenre by thematic and/or formal categories, a text will be understood *qua* “kind” in terms of broad and general features that are involved in modal transformations; examples include the lyrical novel, the tragic story, the dramatic poem, the Gothic thriller, etc.

This modal relation, so central to modern genre theory and so essential in the present context, is derived by Fowler from Gérard Genette’s *The Architext* (1979/1992). Here Genette demonstrates that what Goethe called the “three genuine natural forms”—epic, lyric, and drama—are not to be understood as three main and essential forms of genre, but rather, as Goethe himself remarked, as three poetic modes. That is, the three natural forms present three modes of discourse, three ways to use language: epic as “pure narrative,” lyric as “a burst of rapture,” and drama as “lifelike representation” (Genette, 1979/1992, p. 62-63). In traditional genre theory, on the other hand, a projection has taken place, so that these three modes are simply identified with epic, lyric, and drama. But this awards the modes a position that was neither intended nor justified. They are indeed

linguistic categories rather than literary ones (as opposed to comedy and the novel). Genette calls the modes “archigenres,” because of the reach and status they have been granted; but he does not wish to deny them a natural, trans-historical, and indeed mental flavor. On the other hand, Genette is critical of the notion that “a final generic position, and it alone, can be defined in terms that exclude all historicity. For at whatever level of generality one places oneself, the phenomenon of genre inextricably merges the phenomena—among others—of nature and of culture” (Genette, 1979/1992, p. 68-69).

In discussing modes, Genette prefers to speak of *the* epic, *the* lyric, and *the* dramatic rather than epic, lyric and drama. This formulation leaves room for further modes, as it suggests that modes cannot be reduced to three, and that these particular three hold no primacy of rank; the elegiac, the fantastic, and indeed the novelistic, etc., also qualify as modal categories. Meanwhile, opposed to the modes are genres, which Goethe called poetic species [*Dichtarten*]: categories that are primarily determined thematically, like the chivalric romance, the ode, or comedy, and which must be understood historically, but which also relate to the issue of modes of discourse, and possibly to other modes as well.

The fact that texts cannot be understood immanently, but must be regarded in light of their various relations (and types of relations) to other texts, is what Genette calls transtextuality. Genette subdivides transtextuality into five aspects. One of these is architextuality, which relates to discourse types and genres; Genette’s goal with this concept is to use it to capture “that relationship of inclusion that links each text to the various types of discourse it belongs to. Here we have the genres, with their determinations that we’ve already glimpsed: thematic, modal, formal, and other (?)” (Genette, 1979/1992, p. 82). The two parallel divisions that Genette introduces into the genre relationship—first, his distinction between historical classes and trans-historical archigenres (modes of discourse), and second, his definition of architextuality—are the tools he uses to combat the

problematic fact that classical, romantic, and post-romantic genre theory has conflated modes of discourse with genre forms; but this must be complemented by the fact that thematic relations and other formal aspects can also be transtextual. And this, in turn, should be understood as a reaffirmation of the fact that the historical and the ahistorical are inextricably intertwined.

In an extension of Genette's conceptual work, Jean-Marie Schaeffer has pointed out—with an eye to twentieth-century literature—that established genre categories are still live, active forces in modern literature; but what is significant is the intense activity with which texts reshape genres and transform them. Transformations, Schaeffer claims, are always taking place. Schaeffer draws a conceptual distinction between genre and genericity, where the first is a purely classificatory unit—such that a text *qua* genre is one that copies a specific genre model—whereas the second is a dynamic function: “The genre belongs to the reading's categorial region, it structures a certain reading type, whereas genericity is a productive factor in constituting textuality” (Schaeffer, 1983/2009, p. 137). More specifically, Schaeffer understands genericity as the mode by which the individual text transforms or modifies its genre. Genericity surmounts the text as an autonomous and closed system: it locates it within a transtextuality. The text becomes overlaid with textual dynamics, meaning that the genre evolves, continuously but slowly. Only a flimsy skeleton of formal features remains stable, primarily modes of discourse—which, on Schaeffer's view, do not say very much about the text itself.

This understanding of genre and genericity fits in harmoniously with Bakhtin's concept of genre. After all, Bakhtin insists on using the concept of genre at the very same time as he himself draws attention to the continual development of genre, and to the fact every text has a memory of the genre(s) to which it has a dialogic relation:

A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre. ... A genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 106).

Every text, *qua* genre, has within it a trace of the source of its genre, even though this trace might not be visible immediately. This can be explained by the model that Bruhn and Lundquist (2001, p. 41) sketch to illustrate Bakhtin's dynamic understanding of genre. If we describe each specific generic trait with the lowercase letters *a, b, c*, etc., and each phase, stage or group within a genre with the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc., then a line of development within a genre can be illustrated as follows:

- 1: *a-b-c-d*
- 2: *b-c-d-e*
- 3: *c-d-e-f*
- 4: *d-e-f-g*
- 5: *e-f-g-h*

Here genre variant 1 has no traits in common with genre variant 5—yet it is obvious that they are closely related. After all, the features of variant 5 that are also found in variants 2, 3, and 4 are associated with the features that are all found in variant 1. In this sense, variant 5 contains a trace—a memory—of variant 1, even that trace is beyond the horizon of immediate perception. Bruhn and Lundquist's model is designed to illustrate a genre's development, but can also be used to illustrate any genre variation whatsoever: in principle, all five variants can exist concurrently. This apparently formal outline, however, should not give reason to believe that it merely amounts to structural thinking within formal, closed systems. On the contrary: it must be emphasized, for one thing, that this outline represents a

modification—indeed, a dynamization—of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance theory; and for another, that this is an understanding of genre as an open generic unit best characterized by its space of possibilities. The novel is neither a finite nor inexhaustible category. It is thus significant that Bakhtin does not merely present a single theory about the novel, but instead offers multiple, separable theories with different and competing perspectives.

By “space of possibilities” I mean that the novelistic is no exemplificatory unit. It is likely impossible to find a novel that contains or represents every novelistic trait. The novelistic is an *idea* about the novel genre that no novel lives up to fully. The novelistic can be understood as an epistemological field that cannot be captured by conventions and standards, and which is never given a final shape or meaning. It includes dynamic and textual conditions which, though non-absolute, compose a genericity. One of the central passages in Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel”, one of his major works on the novel, reads as follows:

The dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel (Bakhtin, 1934-35/1981, p. 275).

This passage ties together two phenomena: the dialogic word and the novel. While there is no question of a one-to-one correspondence between them, but the novel *is* the form of expression that best epitomizes a dialogic genre. The dialogic is thus an essential dimension of the novelistic.

With regard to modal determination, the field of literary genres can be described in terms of a number of modes—the discursive modes epic, lyric, and dramatic, and formal modes such as poetic and novelistic. Or as Bruhn and Lunquist formulate the matter, referring to modes as “poles”:

“Every pole marks the extreme but unreachable point of a given generic potential. And therefore, every literary text, a poem or a dramatic play (in traditional genre-terms), can be novelistic, i.e. take part in novelness” (Bruhn & Lundquist, 2001, p. 42).

Just as the field of literary genres is made up of a number of general modes, so too individual genres can be characterized in terms of a series of clarifying aspects and parameters. These parameters are not merely discursive features and patterns, but also ideological conditions that are interwoven with the discursive patterns. For example, the novelistic can largely be described by means of the dialogic. The remainder of this essay will be occupied with an investigation of the novelistic mode, on the basis of established novel theory, with Bakhtin’s theories as its impetus and focal point. The novelistic will first be delimited as an idea, and then related to specific characteristics. The method in what follows, therefore, is to start with the conceptual and historical, and move from there toward the textual.

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NOVEL, THE MODERN ERA, & PLURALISM

As mentioned previously, one of most essential dimensions of the theory of the novel is the examination of the novel both in its epochal context, and as the vehicle for special ideological content. The novel belongs essentially to the modern world; both Ian Watt (1957/2000) and Georg Lukács (1920/1971) link its breakthrough *qua* genre to the emergence of bourgeois-capitalist society. The novel is linked to (the notion of) the empowerment of the individual, including the liberation and alienation of individuals, through trade, from the economic, social, and geographical ties that had bound them in earlier ages. It was of course not everyone who enjoyed this new space of possibilities, but only the privileged and better-off. What was new, however, was that this privileged group was not simply an exclusive social class, but extended to an emerging bourgeoisie that took the form of a complex and wide-ranging social class of cultural consumers, with a demand for interpretation and reflection on the existential-social

aspects of existence. Watt can therefore regard “The reading public and the rise of the novel”—the title of one of the chapters of his classic book on the theory of the novel—as two sides of the same coin. Hegel had already proclaimed, correspondingly, that the novel was the epic of the bourgeois age.²

In this context, the contrast between the novel and the epic is key—as was particularly emphasized by Lukács and Bakhtin. For Bakhtin (1941/1981), the epic is characterized by the fact that its reality is detached from the contemporary age, the age in which both author and audience are living. The past of the epic’s reality is not arbitrary, but is the national “absolute past.” Hence the epic does not have personal experience as its basis, but the nation’s tradition and lore. This is in contrast to the novel, which requires no temporal discrepancy between past and present, and so is bound neither to the character of the hero (as in the epic) nor to a reservoir of national source-material. The novel, instead, is fueled by its contemporary age. It is not without reason, after all, that “novel” (as well as “novella,” which also serves on the Continent as the word for “short story”), derives from *novum*, the new.

The epic is understood as “an oral and poetic genre dealing with public and usually remarkable deeds of historical or legendary persons engaged in a collective rather than an individual enterprise” (Watts, 1957/2000, p. 240). By contrast, the characters of a novel are free from such constraints; they are not bound to a tragic fate, nor shrouded in some special decree. A novel’s character is not tied to the social order through a relation of determination. Everything that is taken for granted in the epic—everything from gender relations to social hierarchies—is reflected on in the novel. In particular, it is the individual’s creation, formation, and edu-

² Hegel, 1835/1986, p. 392: *Ganz anders verhält es sich dagegen mit dem Roman, der modernen bürgerlichen Epopöe*. See also Hegel, 1835/1975, p. 1092: “But it is quite different with the *novel*, the modern *bourgeois* epic.”

cation; love; and the establishment of a common morality throughout the interpersonal field that are the novel's subject-matters. Much as the epic has the nation and hero as its focal points, so too the novel has the *I* and the individual as its core—specifically the free individual, the individual who is regarded as being left to his own devices.

As Lukács remarks about the form of the novel at the beginning of the second part of his *The Theory of the Novel* (1920/1971b, the fact of God's disappearance, the world's abandonment by God, reveals itself in the novel's "incommensurability of soul and work, of interiority and adventure"; the novel articulates the absence of "a transcendental 'place' allotted to human endeavor" (p. 97).³ In Lukács' well-known words, the novel is associated with a transcendental homelessness.—In Bakhtin, this consciousness of novelistic crisis is transformed and redefined. This novel also manifests homelessness, but does not express a loss that should be mourned, or that can be healed. On the contrary: this loss is encouraging and productive. The novel articulates a questing endeavor, inasmuch as it is part of the linguistic-human condition that language inaugurates a split, a separation, and an absence.

According to both Lukács and Bakhtin, homelessness is the novel's unavoidable predicament. For Lukács, homelessness is linked to an individual whose inward life and outer actions, with respect to the contingent modern world, do not fit together; here homelessness manifests itself in the novel's inability to produce a coherent and totalizing representation, and reflects what Lukács calls the problem of non-representability. For Bakhtin, non-representability is precisely the great strength of the novel, inasmuch it forces the uniform language of absolutism to be discarded in favor of "Galilean linguistic consciousness" grounded in diversity and decentral-

³ "Die Verlassenheit der Welt von Gott zeigt sich in der Unangemessenheit von Seele und Werk, von Innerlichkeit und Abenteuer; in dem Fehlen des transzendentalen Zugeordnetseins für die menschlichen Bestrebungen." (Lukács, 1920/1971a, p. 83).

ization of words and views. Verbal homelessness, in the thought of Bakhtin, is thus associated with a release from a one-way and absolute ideology and form.

While it is traditionally Nietzsche who, with *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1892), is held liable for the death of God, it must be pointed out that the novel itself represents, in its form and function, its pluralism and relativism, an eradication of the Truth. As a genre, the novel does not present solutions and answers, but rather asks questions. In its format *qua* genre, the novel shelters an understanding of the world as multivocal and ambiguous. Or as was expressed by Milan Kundera, who though he was inspired by Lukács, ended up holding a view that is closer to Bakhtin's:

Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire. They can cope with the novel only by translating its language of relativity and ambiguity into their own apo-dictic and dogmatic discourse (Kundera, 1986/1988, p. 7).

One consequence of this is the tendency to define literature according to univocal categories: either Kafka's innocent Joseph K. (1914-1915/2000) is being judged by an unjust court, or K. is in fact guilty, and the court's actions express a higher justice. For Kundera, this attests to an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of existence and recognize that the chief judge is missing: "This inability makes the novel's wisdom (the wisdom of uncertainty) hard to accept and understand".

Kundera's comment is rooted in the fact that the novel itself mirrors and reflects this very inability: the novel investigates man's constant craving for meaning and truth, which stands in opposition to the relativity of the human condition. Elsewhere in *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera invokes a Jewish proverb: "Man thinks, God laughs." God laughs because man's

attempt to seek truth by means of thought is never fulfilled; human reflection only distances ourselves from ourselves and from one another. The art of the novel, in this metaphor, is an echo of God's laughter, and expresses what can be regarded as the novel *epistém*: the novel is the place where no one stands in possession of the truth, whether about him- or herself, others, or the world; at the same time, it is also the place where thinking happens, even though the truth about both the world and the *I* remains absent (p. 75).

BAKHTIN AND THE DIALOGIC

With this ideological framing of the novel in place, a more specific account of its verbal homelessness, relativity, and continual process of reflection can be provided by linking the novel to Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic. What makes this possible is that the dialogic encapsulates the novel's ideology, signals non-hierarchical interaction among various entities in a number of areas, and points to the novelistic. This account is developed most fundamentally in *Discourse in the Novel* (1934-35/1981), which attends both to the general constitution of language and to the novel's relation to it.

Bakhtin's analysis is concerned partly with the level of specific linguistic styles, and partly with an overarching, macrolinguistic level. The latter level should be understood as the connective tissue that binds together all those who belong to a linguistic community, and at the same time is individualized: that is, it mediates between the individual and the social. Bakhtin is interested only in living language—in the utterance and the discourse, rather than in the sentence and the proposition—because the dead language of grammar, formalism, and structuralism obscures the language's actual functions and dynamics.

Living language has two characteristics: its formative principle is dialogue, and it is multilayered. The first dimension, that language is dialogic, is a way of saying that dialogue is the picture of language. This point has

several overlapping dimensions. To begin with, it refers to the fact that every utterance is directed at someone, and that the recipient's response has already been incorporated, in one way or another, into the utterance. What is more, the utterance relates to a relation, an object, that is associated with other foreign words. The notion of the foreign word is an essential aspect of the dialogic:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thought, point of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (Bakhtin, 1934-35/1981, p. 276).

When the object-directed word breaks through a swarm of foreign words in this way, it sets the stage for at least the following three relations: (1) there may be something polemical or double-voiced about the word, as in satire, pastiche, or irony; (2) the word may play on entirely different connotations that have no immediate connection to the object, via syntax, semantics, or composition; and finally, (3) its dialogue with foreign words may relate to additional intertextual meanings—where intertextuality is, as is well-known, Julia Kristeva's (1969/1980) translation and interpretation of Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic. Every living language is dialogic, but the aesthetic-literary language is dialogic to a special extent. Among liter-

ary forms, the novel is the one that accentuates the dialogic most strongly—which is a vital point in the present modal context.

The second dimension of language—that it is multilayered—implies that its dialogic, heterogeneous forms can be traced to different levels and registers. In the English translation of Bakhtin, the term *heteroglossia* is used as a collective term to cover living language's formal-thematic complexity in three registers (as is made explicit in the Danish translation from Russian, where the term *heteroglossia* does not occur; cf. Bakhtin, 2003). Living language is never a single unit; on the contrary, social and historical life form the backdrop for a variety of verbal worlds. To call living language multilayered is to say that its intentional possibilities are realized in certain directions: "filled with specific content, they are made concrete, particular, and are permeated with concrete value judgments; they knit together with specific objects and with the belief system of certain genres of expression and point of view peculiar to particular professions" (p. 289). The concrete layering of language is related to the genres' "specific organisms." The three registers, or levels, can be specified as follows:

First, there is the socially *multilinguistic* character of language. Language itself is shrouded behind different discourses, such as legal, religious, and academic discourses, the "lects" of families and friendships, or social-historical language uses such as sociolects, dialects, or the use of special jargons or period styles. Every language in use contains many "languages," i.e., is multilinguistic.

Second, the *diversity of language* is carried over to the level of national languages, where it becomes possible for different national, regional, or epochal languages to meet each other. Bakhtin refers to this level as "language diversity." It can occur, for example, when a text mixes French and English, or when archaic and modern languages are blended.

Third, each individual articulates his or her own *multivocality*—diversity of voices—by means of his or her utterances. This means that one individual's utterance may contain the words and voices of other individu-

als as well. This occurs, for example, when a character's discourse contains a mix of the author's and narrator's words, or those of another character. It is at this level, in other words, that language's inner dialogic nature becomes most visible.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963/1984)—which is a revision of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929, not published in English)—Bakhtin's goal is more specific. Here he is concerned with the relation between the "hero" and the "author," as he calls it, meaning that between the character and the narrator (though at times the term "author" refers specifically to a text's implicit author). In Dostoevsky, it is only possible to a limited extent to localize an omniscient narrator—or, putting the matter in more Bakhtinian terms, to find a exclusive overflow of vision from the author toward the character. On the contrary, their relationship is regarded as equal. The author enjoys no classic authorial omniscience, no privileged position of vision or knowledge. For his part, the hero also suffers from a somewhat wobbly consciousness: he is just as knowledgeable about himself as the author is about him. In Bakhtin's words:

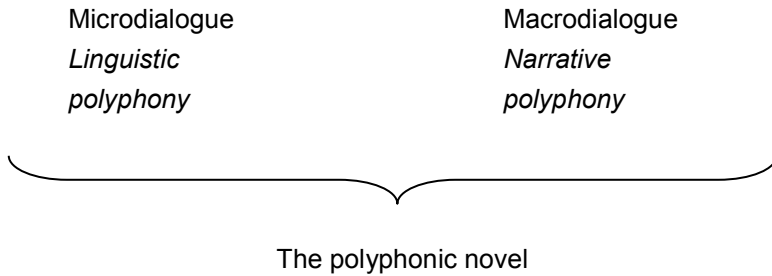
All the stable and objective qualities of a hero—his social position, the degree to which he is sociologically or characterologically typical, his habitus, his spiritual profile and even his very physical appearance—that is, everything that usually serves an author in creating a fixed and stable image of the hero, 'who he is,' becomes in Dostoevsky the object of the hero's own introspection, the subject of his self-consciousness; and the subject of the author's visualization and representation turns out to be in fact a *function* of this self-consciousness (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 48).

The relation of equivalence that Bakhtin here sketches is crucial to his account of the dialogic and polyphonic novel. The dialogic element functions on two different levels, macro and micro; and the preceding consid-

erations about the relation between author and hero pertain to the macro level. They are more wide-ranging than may appear at first, as they pertain to the entire literary composition of Dostoevsky's works and to the idea that is associated with it. The upshot, after all, is that no authoritative voice is established that serves as a final judge. On the contrary, the work's various statements—the voice of the narrator, and the voice of the character—stand and speak to one another in an equal dialogue. Bakhtin does not conceal the fact that Dostoevsky represents an ideal, or that the dialogic form of his works make it impossible to localize their evaluative system either in the author, in the character, or even in an eventual narrator. This makes it evident that the novel can shape its own ideological composition in three different ways: a) the ideological point of view can be bound to a single level or entity in the text—such as the author; b) the text can represent numerous evaluative viewpoints, but orders them in some kind of hierarchy; or, finally, c) the various views can, as sketched above, constitute a non-totalizing manifold—“polyphony” in Bakhtin's terms, or as I would like to call it: narrative polyphony.

Alongside this general compositional dialogue, there can also be—as mentioned earlier—a more localized micro-dialogue in play. This is a textual and linguistic dialogicity, here called linguistic polyphony, which can be characterized by means of the concept of double-voiced words. These are words and expressions that have not just one single, univocal referential content, but carry an additional meaning within them in the form of a foreign voice, whether it be through stylization, parody, a hidden internal polemic, or other devices. The prototypical form of double-vocality occurs when one character uses another character's expressions in his or her own thoughts or speech, so that an (undecidable) game of ownership arises between the two voices.

When these two types of dialogue and polyphony are present at the same time, we have what Bakhtin calls the polyphonic novel:



In the introduction to his book on Dostoevsky, Bakhtin had already formulated this issue schematically:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. ... In his works a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type (1963/1984, p. 6-7).

In both *Discourse of the Novel* and *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, as mentioned previously, Bakhtin wishes to characterize the novel, or more accurately (as I would like to point out) the novelistic, as a strongly dialogic discourse as opposed a monologic one. It is important to emphasize that dialogue and monologue are modes, so that even a novel can be monologic, i.e., be a novel that is not especially novelistic. Indeed, Bakhtin held that this was true of many of Tolstoy's works, for example, because the various characters do not interact with one another, and because they are incorporated

into the author's perspective. By contrast, the chief hallmarks of the novelistic are a non-hierarchical relation between author and character, together with a hybrid construction featuring both social multilinguism and a more individualized multivocality. This is not to say that the novel has an independent language, but that it is influenced by developments in the social language. In this sense, the novel is "unclean," a hybrid—as opposed to closed and defined genres—and can incorporate all possible genres within itself.⁴ The novel mixes the high and the low, and stands in maximal contact with its contemporary age. For this reason, the novel is never fully developed, but is always in process, and so *incarnates* the dialogic, including the dialogic aspects of thinking and being human. The novelistic articulates this ideology—along with an attempt to escape from the tentacles of myth.

NOVEL REALISM AND CHARACTER INDIVIDUALISM

In Ian Watt's tally of the characteristics typical of novels, he identifies the realistic representation of reality as the most significant and decisive new aspect of eighteenth-century novels. In saying this, Watt does not automatically distinguish himself from contemporary theorists. That occurs only when he insists on adding nuance: "The novel's realism," he writes, "does not reside in the kind of life it presents"—that is, *which* world is represented—"but in the way it presents it" (Watt, 1957/2000, p. 11).

⁴ As Derrida (1980, p. 204) quite logically points out, it is only possible to speak of genres, to mix them—or not to have to mix them—on the basis of some notion of the purity of genres' identity. Now, when I speak here of genre hybrids and mixing genres, this is indeed based on the notion that other genres are more well-defined than the hybrid genre "novel"; but this does not mean that these genres—such as the apologia, the sermon, the memoir, the travelogue, the wonder book, etc.—are not also complex, only that they are complex to a less pronounced degree than is the novel. They are, in principle, not novelistic.

The latter is what was new and groundbreaking in Richardson's and Defoe's novels, and what Fielding would later establish as a norm: namely, formal realism, which revolves around the centrality granted to characters in the new genre. This refers, first of all, to the plot's concentration on a single crucial intrigue, so that action and character are linked to two sides of one affair. Secondly, the mode of presentation yields psychologized depth portraits—in the case of Richardson, expressed through letters—full of accumulated details and extended character sketches. In the new, realistic novels, characters emerge as nuanced and individualized, and not just as immutable types. Richardson even argues that realism in characterization and plot are preconditions for the work's edification of the reader to function (See Hultén, 2007, p. 182).

Following Watt, such theorists of the novel as Margaret Anne Doody (1996) have pointed out that Richardson is not as original as Watt makes him out to be: Richardson's realism has roots in English and French chivalric romances. Similarly, while the individualism of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719/2000) may have been significant enough, it can probably be interpreted as a mirroring of the economic individualism that was flourishing in the first half of the 1700s. But whereas Watt sees Defoe's work as merely expressing a threshold event, rather than embodying the novel's core field—the study of the interpersonal order—later theorists have bracketed this issue, criticizing Watt for failing to understand the metareferential play in *Robinson Crusoe*. As is well known, the book was released with a paratext that presents the story as though it were true. This game, which was arguably very important for the book's extensive popularity, transforms the book's extraordinarily detailed form of presentation. The book takes its discursive norms from such non-literary representations as travelogues, “spiritual autobiographies,” wonder books,⁵ and handbooks of survival on

⁵ This is Hunter's (1990) term for a textual genre that existed in Defoe's day, and which consisted of accounts of quite fantastic events that are described as true, and are recount-

desert islands. This reflects the fact that, in this context, realism should not be taken as a literary norm; on the contrary, the wealth of details can be the manifestation of the impression of a true story (put radically, that *Robinson Crusoe* should not be read as fiction at all, but as a reliable report (See Andersen Nexø, 2007, p. 163)).

The mix of genres sketched here is one between factual and fictional genre formats. Put in Bakhtin's terms, this novel is nurtured by the non-literary genres of its day; it is here that the novel, in its unfinishable and continual course of development, acquires new material, new perspectives, and new forms of understanding. As Bakhtin researcher Anker Gemzøe points out, one motivation for the various forms of documentary fiction is an attempt to overcome the chasm between privacy and literature *qua* public phenomenon: "To make the private public has always been the goal and *raison d'être* of prose and, in a wider sense, realism" (Gemzøe, 2010, p. 1).

The psychological individualism, wealth of details, and documentary fiction in *Robinson Crusoe* are also tied to a displacement of an idealistic figure type—the brave hero, the romantic Platonist, the libertine, etc.—to the ordinary, everyday character, one who does not necessarily have anything valiant in him. The next step is the introduction of a complex registry of representations with the thinking, meditating character as its object, as Dorrit Cohn (1978/1983) has analyzed. Quoted (inner) monologue can not only be interspersed with free indirect speech—a narrated monologue, as Cohn calls it—but also psychonarration. The last of these has been used, in the classic omniscient presentation, to provide a brief introduction to a character's motives and situation. It is also a means to gain insight into a character's nonverbal mental life.

ed in a detailed style designed to emphasize the narrative's trustworthiness as a report of an experienced event.

The novel has a special relationship with realism: it is its form of expression *par excellence*. It is linked to the character representation and multivocality that derive from it, much as realism in novels is closely associated with the inclusion and parody of multiple everyday genres.

CONCLUSION: THE NOVEL'S MODES

The novel has a long history and prehistory; but it is not only on account of its development that it is such a spacious genre. Even in a modern perspective, it cannot be grasped as a defined entity. For this reason, on several occasions in the twentieth century the novel was described along two lines: one minimalistic, stressing the writing and the poetic, and the other imaginative, dominated by plot and lively epic narration.⁶ Precisely because of the monstrous size of the novel genre, it may be useful to characterize the novel by means of various different aspects and parameters, i.e., to modulate the novel so that certain forms of representation are understood to be more typical of novels, more novelistic, than others. For this reason, it is the novelistic parameters that take central stage in this characterization.

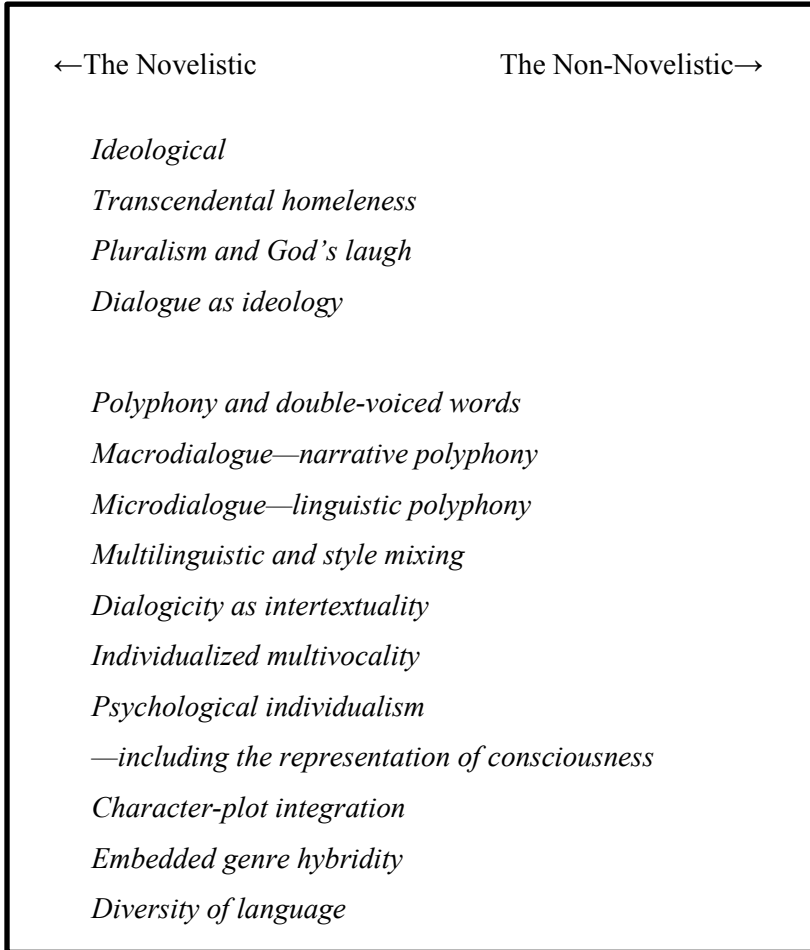
The background for this is, in part, Wittgenstein's family resemblance theory and Genette's demonstration of the significance of modal relations to the understanding of genre, and in part Bakhtin's theories of the novel, conveyed by means of a narratological approach. Bakhtin's understanding of the novel has had a vital influence on recent novel theory and literary genre theory. In the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, for example, Howard Mancing remarks, with regard to the way in which Bakhtin's theory of the novel theory has been understood and applied in modern novel theory, that there exists no special form, technique, theme, or approach that determines what makes a text into a novel; on the contrary, "the distinguishing characteristics of the novel [are] its heteroglossia (mul-

⁶ E.g. the Norwegian author Jan Kjørstad (1999) has outlined such two lines: Woolf, Beckett, Handke, Bernhard contra Grass, Calvino, Marquez, Carter and Carey.

tiple voices) and its dialogism (multiple consciousnesses)” (Mancing, 2005, p. 399). This interpretation implies that these particular characteristics of the novel are not formal. But what are the dialogic and the multilingualistic as features, if they not formal? The dialogic does indeed represent an ideological perspective—but more than that: it signals “democratic” interaction among the novel’s textual entities, styles, integrated genres, citations, etc.; and it sets the characters free as independent individuals, even in relation to moral dogmas. The dialogic forms a space of possibilities without fixed truths, and shapes a verbal homelessness; the novelistic has no temporal commitments or transcendental orders that must be defended, and there is no totalizing representation. But the point is also that, on many levels, the dialogic inscribes itself into the textual.

The non-discrete aspects and parameters are as follows: micro-dialogue, or linguistic polyphony; macrodialogue, or narrative polyphony between author and character; style mixing, and other kinds of linguistic diversity; the dialogic as intertextuality; polyphony that specially incorporates the modes of representing consciousness that are unique to fiction, including the narrated monologue, psychonarration, and above all discourse that is contained within conscious thinking—potentially including, in this context, stream-of-consciousness narration. To this there must be added the genre-multiple: the fact that the novel contains other genres within its overarching form, without thereby being committed to a realistic or conventional form of presentation, but rather has mixture and the hybrid as its point of convergence—including the mixture of literary and non-literary genres.

**The Novel Between the Novelistic and the Non-Novelistic:
Novelistic Aspects and Parameters**



The difficulty of finding a formula for the novel lies partly in the fact that the novelistic and the dialogic can manifest themselves in a series of different ways, and partly in the fact that novelistic aspects and parameters

cannot have the status of genre requirements. There is therefore no one relationship by which the significantly novelistic can be uniquely characterized. Yet the more each individual parameter is expanded, and the more interacting parameters there are in play, the more novelistic a text will be.

One could in principle conceive of a text that is traditionally categorized as a novel, but which lacks novelistic parameters; but no such text is actually to be found. There are, however, novels in which a whole set of novelistic aspects are lacking: e.g., a novel that lacks polyphonic form, and is simply monologic. Conversely, there may be short texts that have the novelistic as their defining features—even though the novelistic, with its hybrid character, naturally encourages longer texts. For each text, this method requires careful weighing and determination of how present or absent the novelistic mode is. If the dialogic and heteroglossic are richly represented in a prose text, then it is highly novelistic, and so the genre at issue will naturally be the novel; otherwise, the novelistic element may be weak, and other genre identifications may be more appropriate. In this same way, we may speak of a short story or poem being “novelized,” meaning that its text has come to be strongly characterized by novelistic features.⁷

Ultimately, however, this is not a matter of classification, but of presenting the novelistic as a set of analytical parameters that can function as a descriptive space for novelistic texts and the novelistic element within texts. Novels are not just novels: they are texts in which the novelistic is articulated in various ways.

⁷ In the Danish context, Peter Stein Larsen (2009) has argued that in approximately the year 2000, two types of polyphony could be localized in Danish poetry, both of which can be classified as prosification—or in the terms of the present article, novelization—and which can be contrasted with traditional lyric poetry on the one hand, and avant-garde-ized lyric poetry on the other.

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