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The Puzzle Novel

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Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci vypracoval samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

Richard Stock datum

I declare that this Ph.D. dissertation is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Richard Stock date

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on the claim that the study of the novel has not capitalized on the designation of the novel's unique properties by thinkers early in the twentieth century. My specific determination of the puzzle novel is in a sense merely one example of the kind of study that I see as necessary to further our understanding of both the novel and narrative. I see the effort of narratology in the twentieth century as a necessary project, but ultimately a failure at its own goals. Theory of the novel, meanwhile, seemed better poised to produce useful criticism in the 1930s, but since then has not had the influence on scholarship that it should have had. To deal with this lack, various philosophical works are discussed and used in the dissertation, especially those from Gilles Deleuze and Maurice Blanchot.

Three novels are studied in detail as puzzle novels, and although the novels are chosen purposefully, they do not constitute a complete set: *Ulysses* (1922) by James Joyce, which I call the first puzzle novel in the terms of this study; Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), the premier postmodern novel, and also an extreme puzzle novel; and *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) by Richard Powers, a puzzle novel that shows the true possibilities of the novel form. This study does not seek to make absolute conclusions about the novels it focuses on or the genre it supposedly defines. Rather, the motivation of this study is to attempt to point a way towards the kind of criticism that respects the special qualities of the novel form.

Abstrakt

Tato disertační práce vychází z tvrzení, že studie románu nevyužila pojmenování jedinečných charakteristik románu ze strany myslitelů počátkem dvacátého století. Mým konkrétním úkolem u sestavovaného románu je v jistém smyslu pouhé určení příkladu

typu studie, jenž považuji za nezbytný pro další porozumění jak románu, tak příběhu. Snahu naratologie ve dvacátém století chápu jako nutný projekt, který však svých cílů nakonec nedosáhl. Teorie románu se mezitím ve třicátých letech dvacátého století jevila být v lepší pozici pro dosažení užitečné kritiky, ale od té doby nezaznamenala žádný svůj vliv na oblast bádání, jenž mít měla. Disertační práce proto pojednává o různých filozofických pracích, zejména od autorů Gillese Deleuzeho a Maurice Blanchota.

Jako sestavované romány jsou v práci podrobně rozebírány tři romány a přestože byly vybrány záměrně, nepředstavují žádný ucelený celek: dílo *Ulysses* (1922) od Jamese Joyce, které nazývám prvním sestavovaným románem ve smyslu této studie; *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) od Thomasa Pynchona, přední postmoderní román a rovněž příklad extrémního sestavovaného románu; a *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) od Richarda Powerse, sestavovaný román ukazující opravdové možnosti románové formy. Účelem této studie není dospět k absolutním závěrům románů, na které se zaměřuje nebo žánru, jenž pravděpodobně definuje. Motivací studie je spíše pokus o ukázání cesty ke druhu kritiky, jež respektuje speciální kvality románové formy.

Abbreviations

Culture
Bersani, Leo. *The Culture of Redemption*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Disaster
Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*. 1980. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Discourse
Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. 1972. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

"Discourse"
Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*. 1975. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259–422.

"Epic"
Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. "Epic and Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*. 1975. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 3–40.

GR
Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: Penguin Books, 1973.

Kafka
Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. 1975. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Lines
Mattessich, Stefan. 2002. *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Durham: Duke University Press.

PD
Powers, Richard. *Prisoner's Dilemma*. New York: Collier Books, 1988.

Plot
Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

"Prehistory"
Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" in *The Dialogic Imagination*. 1975. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 41–83.

Proust

Deleuze, Gilles. *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*. 1964. Trans. Mark Howard. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Step

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Step Not Beyond*. 1973. Trans. Lycette Nelson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Time

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 1*. 1983. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Theory

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

Thousand

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1980. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: The Athlone Press, 1987.

Ulysses

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. 1922. New York: Vintage Books, 1986.

Introduction

The concept of a piece of literature that requires re-reading and re-constructing meaning is not new. In fact, perhaps it is the basis of literary study: texts we deem "literary" deserve this careful attention, and "reading" them is not a simple process. Thinking of such processes under the metaphor of a "puzzle" also does not seem outlandish. In this study I complicate these understandings, but in a way that deepens common assumptions rather than disputes them.

I base this study on the claim that the study of the novel, in the context of theory and criticism on both the novel and narrative, has not capitalized on the designation of the novel's unique properties by thinkers early in the twentieth century. My specific determination of the puzzle novel is in a sense merely one example of the kind of study that I see as necessary to further our understanding of both the novel and narrative.

However, my puzzle novel is a carefully chosen example, since it has the potential to inform us not only about the novel and narrative, but the emergence and passing of the postmodern era, and indeed perhaps the passing of periodization itself. As I construct it, the puzzle novel is a twentieth century phenomenon.

The first two chapters of this dissertation provide the ground-work relating to theory of the novel and narrative to support the claims mentioned above. I see the effort of narratology as a necessary project, but ultimately a failure at its own goals. Theory of the novel, meanwhile, seemed better poised to produce useful criticism in the 1930s, but since then has not had the influence on scholarship that it should have had. In the third chapter I detail my conception of the puzzle novel, indicating that it is one conception among many possible within a broad framework.

The other three chapters focus on three selected novels, and although the novels are chosen purposefully, they do not constitute a complete set. The fourth chapter focuses on *Ulysses* (1922) by James Joyce, which I call the first puzzle novel in the terms of this study, even though it does not quite fit my definition of a puzzle novel. Obviously there were novels before *Ulysses* that could be called puzzle novels using a broader definition of the term. The fifth chapter discusses Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) as the premier postmodern novel, and also an extreme puzzle novel. *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) by Richard Powers is the focus of the last chapter, a puzzle novel that shows the true possibilities of the novel form. It seems that no novels that qualify as puzzle novels in my conception have been published since 2000, so it seems that this sub-genre has risen and fallen within the twentieth century.

This study does not seek to make absolute conclusions about the novels it focuses on or the genre it supposedly defines. Rather, the motivation of this study is to attempt to point a way towards the kind of criticism that respects the special qualities of the novel form. The problem is that the novel form as established early in the twentieth century seems poorly served by traditional modes of scholarship based on categorization, thematic analysis, and absolute conclusions. My greatest hope for this study is that it does not serve as the final word on these theories and novels, but rather encourages others to proliferate the meanings and possibilities that this field offers by engaging with these texts in new ways.

1. The successes and failure of narratology

The twentieth century has seen a rather astonishing development of scholarly study related to stories and to storytelling. The best catch-all term we have for this field is "narrative", as in "narrative theory" or "the study of narrative", although as we will see such categories get problematized very quickly. Even names of sub-categories, such as "narratology", although often used without qualification, refer to widely varying definitions of any one term.

In this chapter, I will review the main figures and texts in the study of narrative, mostly confined to the twentieth century. Only briefly do I review the origins of the modern scholarly field to give a historical background and a sense of progression, devoting more attention to recent criticism related to narrative, namely those from Peter Brooks and Paul Ricoeur. This all serves as a detailed background for the subsequent chapter, which focuses more specifically on works on the theory of the novel, which is more important for this study. But theory of the novel has to be considered in the context of narrative theory, both because of the obvious overlap of the two and because the two fields arose more or less simultaneously, even though from the very beginning the two fields come to very different conclusions about stories and use different methodologies to investigate storytelling.

1.1 Origins of narratology: Propp, Todorov, Greimas, Barthes

In a sense, it all started with Vladimir Propp. His effort to empirically determine a consistent structure in traditional fairy tales was motivated by the general, probably basically human, need to make sense of a text, or in his case, a number of texts. The effort

is to determine the structure to make it easier to understand future, as yet unknown, texts as well as all current stories. This effort to organize, interpret, and critically examine material from a story in the "correct" way survives in any study of narrative and stories, including this one. However, the concept of that "correct" way and the understanding of the ultimate goal or end game of such efforts vary widely. The present study has very different purposes and expectations than analysts like Propp and later narratologists had.

In *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928),[1] Propp bracketed "questions of origin and derivation and reference" to determine the common structure in around one hundred tales. "Propp claims that the essential morphological components are function and sequence" (Brooks, *Plot* 14–15). More specifically than this, Propp ends up making some rather bold claims, such as, "All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure."[2] While such claims are bold, if understood within the parameters of his own study, they are not implausible. For these one hundred or so fairy tales, it may very well be the case that in terms of the "functions" and the sequence within them, and given that they all come from one cultural source, they do have one basic structure. As Peter Brooks notes, Propp's study was from the start "horizontal", looking for similarities across examples (*Plot* 16). Such a study often aspires to more general application, however.

When this type of study was taken up by French structuralists in the following decades, creating what is conventionally referred to as "narratology", the motivation for analysis was the same, but the method was vertical rather than horizontal (*Plot* 16). That is, narratologists looked for a system that could be explained and applied to texts that hadn't been considered yet, a universal system rather than a system applied to a certain body of texts. A. J. Greimas worked directly with Propp's basic ideas, reformulating them in terms of linguistic grammar. Greimas was primarily interested in semiotics, the main

[1] Propp, Vladimir. *The Morphology of the Folktale*. 1928. Ed. Louis A. Wegner. 2nd ed. Trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977.
[2] Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, 23.

figure in that field along with Roland Barthes, who also studied narrative. But Greimas looks more strictly for a grammar of narrative, "the semiolinguistic nature of the categories used in setting up [narratological] models."[3] In any instance of narrative, and such instances abound, Greimas claims one can find a "*fundamental semantics and grammar*."[4] In fact, in parts of his *On Meaning* (1976), he seems to say that narrative is a subcategory of semiotics: "narrative forms are no more than particular organizations of the semiotic form of the content for which the theory of narration attempts to account."[5] This is somewhat in opposition to most study of narrative, since it is a recurring theme that narrative is not just another field of study, but a foundational way that humans make sense of their world, and therefore in some way a meta-field that can apply to any other human endeavor.

Other writers worked to make narratology into a field of its own, rather than linking it to the also-burgeoning semiotics or some other field. Tzvetan Todorov pushed the method more in a vertical direction by taking as a premise that there is a "universal grammar" of narrative. Along with Greimas, Todorov helped bring these ideas to the French intellectual world, which was a more fertile ground for international acceptance of such ideas than Russia (Propp) or Bulgaria (Todorov). As Brooks notes, "Todorov best represents the linguistic model, applied to narrative analysis, in its most developed form" (*Plot* 17). Here Brooks means that Todorov most boldly used the template of prescriptive linguistic grammar to analyze narrative, taking the clause as "the basic unit of narrative", "agents are proper nouns", actions are verbs, states of being are adjectives, etc (*Plot* 17).

From today's perspective, this method is doomed to be a dead-end in at least two possible ways. One, if all narrative really does fit into a universal grammar, then all that is

[3] Greimas, Algirdas Julien. *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*. Trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976, 63.
[4] Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, 65.
[5] *On Meaning*, 114.

left to do is to show how each individual text adheres to this universal scheme. The grammar metaphor would be the be-all and end-all of narrative study, and therefore justification for the end of the study of narrative. Most narrative scholars would agree that this is a sub-optimal outcome. Two, if we find exceptions to the universal grammar rule, these exceptions will surely proliferate, and soon it will become questionable what use a template is if it does not explain all cases. It is possible that the effort to create a universal system of narrative was put forth not to really make a universal system, but to see how far we could go towards such an ideal goal. In fact, many narratologists, from Todorov to Genette to Brooks, make this claim. However, the apparent motivation of their study contradicts such weak disclaimers; their motivation is to create the ideal system. They are clearly not satisfied with a system that has exceptions. This is the rather obvious reason why a thinker such as Roland Barthes proceeds from efforts such as Todorov's to emphasize the horizontal within the vertical.

Barthes did this most usefully in *S/Z* (1970).[6] "What may be most significant about *S/Z* is its break away from the somewhat rigid notion of structure to the more fluid and dynamic notion of structuration" (*Plot* 18). This leads to an understanding of the reader as participating in the making of meaning in the text, rather than only a receiver of meaning. Elsewhere Barthes famously and controversially proclaimed the "death of the author", which provided a kind of sound-bite version of this concept. "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."[7] In "The Death of the Author" Barthes asserts that the reader is now the center of the textual experience rather than the author. Therefore "the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile."[8] The individual reader creates meaning from the text, and each reading by each reader is a unique event of creating meaning.

[6] Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. 1970. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: The Noonday Press, 1993.
[7] Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Image Music Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1977, 148.
[8] Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 147.

Barthes' strategy in *S/Z* is to push Todorov's method to the extreme. He sets up a rather complicated structure of codes and uses them to analyze one short story in exhaustive detail, producing an analysis that is much longer than the original story. In the process, he exemplifies how a reader's understanding of a story is unique as well as how impossible it is for a reader to ever get to an end point in understanding/creating the meaning of a story. In a sense Barthes takes Propp's empirical method, but applies it to one text, exhaustively. This is the vertical within the horizontal, or at least an example of a contribution to such a possible thread of research. Presumably, if *S/Z* produced useful results, a collection of such studies of various stories could hope to come to the universal conclusions that narratologists were after. But beyond this, possibly the most important message of *S/Z* is that if a book like this still can not come to a "receiver of meaning" understanding of even a short story, then it is probably impossible to come to such an understanding at all.

The extremity to which Barthes takes Todorov's method makes explicit the working assumption that one reader can stand in for all readers and one story can stand in for all stories. Barthes' reading of "Sarrasine" in *S/Z* is exemplary, and in its form it aspires to be an absolute reading. The system of codes that Barthes creates are not created in a world where only "Sarrasine" exists. Rather Barthes is implicitly comparing "Sarrasine" to other stories to determine the function and sequence of the story. *S/Z* is an example, and a masterful and interesting one, but ultimately the service it performs for narrative theory is to show that one more possible avenue of narratology—exhaustive analysis of individual texts—does not produce fruit any more than more general attempts at a "universal grammar of narrative".

1.2 Narratology comes of age: Genette

Along with Todorov and Barthes, Gerard Genette completes the trio of the main figures in narratology, which was essentially developed and driven by French intellectuals, or intellectuals working in France. Genette is best known for *Narrative Discourse* (1980), which is still arguably the source most referred to in narratology. In fact, its influence is so pervasive that many of the terms Genette pioneers in this work are now used in common circulation, and are no longer referenced back to their source. Terms like "focalization" (*Discourse* 189) and the plethora of terms using "diegetic" (*Discourse*, 128)[9] as a root are used as Genette defined them, without recognizing that source. It is striking that this happened within the span of two decades.

Todorov seems to be the one who was first to propose narratology as a system of investigation of narrative that held promise, and at the same time made bold claims for what that promise was. Works like Barthes' *S/Z* seem to want to find a way to follow narratology's premises to their logical consequences, perhaps in the hope that it will lead to something else. However, Barthes also has work in the "universal grammar of narrative" vein, such as his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative".[10] Genette made his mark by setting his sights somewhat lower than the Barthes of *S/Z*, and by providing a more user-friendly narratology (as well as by including in his work an exhaustive study of Proust's novel). The foreword to the English translation of *Narrative Discourse* actually claims that Genette's task was to apply a narrative to narratology. "The structures and codes which Barthes and Todorov studied must be taken up and organized by a narrative; this activity is Genette's subject."[11]

Genette simply creates a system of codes and terms for each code by which we can efficiently discuss narrative. Because of this, his work is more than anything a toolbox, but

[9] That is, words like "extradiegetic", "intradiegetic", "metadiegetic", etc.
[10] Barthes, Roland and Lionel Duisit. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 237–272.
[11] Culler, Jonathan. "Foreword" in Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. 1972. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980. 7–13, 8.

one that we are indebted to even in studies (such as mine) that do not share the narratological assumptions that Genette uses. Overall his motivation is to create a system that can describe any narrative, but some of the assumptions he makes to identify narratives remain questionable, and ultimately give his study no basis to be considered as anything more than a toolbox. In some places he gives us almost-new terms that we now use conventionally, such as "analepsis" and "prolepsis" (*Discourse* 40). In other places he seeks to redefine the words we currently use (or change the term for an aspect of narrative), for example "narration" and "story". One of the most striking effects of Genette's study is how it implicitly exposes the complete lack of a common vocabulary and the connected set of common concepts to discuss narrative. Even after Genette, we still struggle with this problem. Often our debates about narrative are little more than opposing salvos on what certain terms should mean, rather than more substantive discussions of how narrative works or can work. One cannot just use the most basic terms like "plot" or "story" and assume the reader agrees with one's meaning. One cannot analyze the plot of a story without defining what one means by plot (although this is often done). Genette has done much to resolve this situation, but still we do not agree on our terms, much less agree on the analyses that use them.

One good example is Genette's discussion of how we should define and discuss the "duration" of a narrative in temporal terms. Genette acknowledges that this is not a simple matter:

> Comparing the "duration" of a narrative to that of the story it tells is a trickier operation, for the simple reason that no one can measure the duration of a narrative. What we spontaneously call such can be nothing more, as we have already said, than the time needed for reading; but it is

> too obvious that reading time varies according to particular circumstances. (*Discourse* 86)

Indeed, it is rather obvious and important that the comparison between how much time a story encompasses and how long it takes to read the narration of that story can be a crucial aspect of an analysis of narrative. And Genette is correct to point out that we simply lack a standard by which to agree on what is a "longer" or "shorter" duration of narrations of a particular story. So, Genette takes recourse to a general definition, thus: "the speed of a narrative will be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)" (*Discourse* 87–88). This is perhaps practically reasonable given the inherent difficulties, but it still does not give us any guidance as to how to discuss duration, or to define what duration really is. Further it does not really set a standard for comparison, since "lines" or "pages" are obviously not standard units of measurement. It really just nods to the difficulty of establishing codes and names for codes, but then goes ahead and establishes and names them anyway, without resolving or really even dealing with the difficulty. In doing this Genette has to make implicit, unsupported assumptions about narrative.

Other useful concepts that Genette establishes include the basic idea that a narrator always exists on a level above the story, for example (*Discourse* 228). Again, nothing specific can be said about exactly how many, or what kind of levels, there are in a story (or how they change or are indeterminate), but this basic idea is important to discuss narrative efficiently. Focalization is another concept that Genette essentially invents (*Discourse* 189), one that makes intuitive sense and that is useful in discussing narrative. However, he simply denies that, even though the concept of focalization makes sense,

there will be things we want to call narratives and stories that complicate focalization, that do not play by the rules.

All of the terms that Genette establishes, and by extension his very system of terms, falls prey to this basic shortcoming. In order to create the system, Genette is forced to make strong assumptions about the character of narrative. He must hold narrative stable in one particular definition in order to reason out why the terms he sets are workable and integrated into a coherent whole. He must assume for example that, generally, stories are told by the reader "seeing through" a particular character and/or narrator, and therefore the concept of focalization is reliable. This is why Genette's study is a success in being a toolbox, a generalization of narrative that provides us with some useful common terms. But the definition of narrative Genette uses, as any stable definition, can be questioned, and examples of narrative that defy the system can easily be found. Really, *Narrative Discourse* ends up being an interesting study of Genette's own unstated assumptions in the context of a recognition of and a disregard for problems of definition. Probably Genette's assumptions are largely reasonable, and therefore his study has resonated with many readers. But as a universal description of narrative, it fails for that same reason. Often this quality of Genette's study has led analysts of narrative to debate what the terms should really refer to, or what they really mean. This debate assumes that the stable definition and a stable set of terms is indeed possible and desirable. Genette supports this bias, even though the recent history of the study of narrative provides all kinds of examples that argue against having this absolute goal.

Genette's study, published in 1972, is still heavily referenced in current study of narrative. *Narrative*, probably the pre-eminent journal in the academic study of narrative, over twenty-one issues from January 2003 to October 2009, had only four issues that did not contain one or more articles referencing Genette. Quite often whole academic articles

and conference presentations hinge on an argument about the definition or application of just one of Genette's terms. His terms and system are still debated, although other large-scale attempts at creating an alternative or better system have not been published; I address some of the more recent book-length studies of narrative later in this chapter. Even Genette's own attempt at improving his own system, his *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1983),[12] discussed below, to my mind falls rather flat.

The "Afterword" to the earlier *Narrative Discourse* at first seems to predict the follow-up volume. After 250-plus pages of system-making, the afterword begins rather astonishingly thus: to "conclude without useless recapitulations, here are some words of self-criticism, or if one likes, of excuse" (*Discourse* 263). He positions his study as "scientific" in that scientific study assumes that it gets some things right and some things wrong, but that it is all in the general interest of progress, and opposes this to a literary study, which hopes to get everything right at once.

> Therefore I think, and hope, that all this technology—prolepses, analepses, the iterative, focalizations, paralipses, the metadiegetic, etc.—surely barbaric to the lovers of belles lettres, tomorrow will seem positively rustic, and will go to join other packaging, the detritus of Poetics; let us only hope that it will not be abandoned without having had some transitory usefulness. (*Discourse* 263–264)

The hope, as Genette states it here, has of course been fulfilled. But the rest of this volume, and even more so the later *Narrative Discourse Revisited* belies a much larger hope. His contrasting of scientific versus humanistic modes of research is striking, for one could easily make the opposite argument. Science is often understood to be after the Truth, and the things it "gets wrong" are simply failures to be corrected on the progressive path

[12] Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. 1983. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

toward true knowledge. That is, getting something wrong is not expected or planned for, but is seen as simply human limitation, to be overcome. On the other hand humanistic research can be seen as studying particular cultural artifacts to come to particular and local understandings of human behavior, creativity, and possibility. Inevitably in its specificity, humanistic research would get certain things "wrong", although this is expected and allowed. It is this understanding of scientific research that seems more suited to Genette's manifested goals.

Despite Genette's claim in the rather interesting "Afterword" to *Narrative Discourse* that the system is meant to be used and modified, the primary motivation of *Narrative Discourse Revisited* is to correct erroneous criticism. This is telling of the whole project of narratology. While in its more reasonable guises it claims that it sets up systems as attempts at complete description, knowing that such a goal cannot be achieved, really this is just a nod to the burgeoning postmodern readership of these texts, or a necessary superficial admission in the face of a plethora of exceptions. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited* Genette shows that works of narratology really do in the end want to provide an absolute, complete description of narrative, and are frustrated when others claim that their works do not reach this goal. This is not particularly unique in twentieth-century scholarship, the double-talk of working toward an absolute goal and realizing that goal cannot be reached. The true reconciliation of this paradox is rare if not non-existent in scholarship, and by coincidence it is very much what the puzzle novel tries to accomplish.

1.3 After narratology but still narratological 1: Brooks

While there have not been any systematic attempts at a theory of narrative since Genette, there have been book-length studies of narrative with different goals. However, to my

mind, these studies are still in the narratological tradition in the sense that ultimately they look to find universal descriptions of narrative.

Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984) is one of the more recent book-length studies devoted to narrative (even though it is by now a quarter-century old). As his title makes clear, Brooks purposefully focuses on the relatively controversial topic of plot. Plot has been variously defined through history, and often misunderstood. Of course, what is a misunderstanding, or an understanding, depends on one's definition of plot, and different definitions abound.

Brooks' turn to plot seems to be in reaction to the obvious and predictable failure of structuralists to describe narrative in a reliable way. Those studying narrative from the mid-1980s onward have an uneasy relationship with structuralist efforts at narrativity. Almost universally they claim that narratologists performed a necessary and important task in attempting to create a universal grammar or structure of narrative. But they also almost universally state that the project has failed. Brooks is in this group, and he turns his attention away from the "impossibly speculative task to say what narrative itself is" toward thinking about "the kinds of ordering it uses and creates, about the figures of design it makes" (*Plot* 4). The best way to do this, Brooks claims, is to renew attention to plot. This is certainly a valid effort, to fill in the gap left by narratologists' failure, and the choice of plot at first glance seems fruitful and innovative. I will end up claiming that Brooks' work on plot is in effect squarely in the narratologist tradition that he claims has failed at its own goal, but the fact that Brooks makes this claim shows the progression in the evaluation of the work of narratologists up to Genette.

Brooks' choice to focus on plot is not a benign one. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983),[13] publishing almost simultaneously as

[13] Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Routledge, 1983.

Brooks, all but ignores plot, even though it is a book that reviews narrative theory and criticism. The only mention Rimmon-Kennan makes of plot in the text is in reference to Forster's distinction of story and plot, and this is only to argue that Forster's crucial difference between story and plot—causality—is useless since the reader interprets causality whether it is directly given in the text or not.[14] In a footnote, Rimmon-Kenan more directly states: "Note that there is no distinction here between the text and the story or plot abstracted from it" and that if anything plot is merely "one type of story (the type which emphasizes causality) rather than a narrative form opposed to the story."[15] That is, for Rimmon-Kenan, in studying narrative, plot as a concept or a term can be ignored. Rimmon-Kenan's reduction of plot to a footnote criticism of Forster's 1927 text[16] obviously disregards the attention that has been paid to plot as a factor of narrative throughout the history of narrative criticism and theory. Plot has been defined in ways other than Forster's, although Forster's definition still holds considerable sway in the field. Still, Rimmon-Kenan sees no use in the concept of plot even in reviewing the literature on narrative, even while Brooks bases a whole book on plot. This is not to say that Brooks is dealing with a dead concept—quite the opposite, I would rather criticize Rimmon-Kenan for dismissing the concept rather than engaging with it—but rather that the focus on plot is not necessarily conventional.

Brooks' choice to focus on plot seems valid, even though to accept it we must make a value judgment, just as to accept Rimmon-Kenan's ignorance of plot we must value story as a better concept. As always it is also possible that different writers are writing about the same things using different words, making the disagreement or debate merely about labeling. Brooks claims that plot is actually the basis for narrative, the necessary component to call anything a story: "Plot is … a constant of all written and oral

[14] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 17.
[15] *Narrative Fiction*, 135.
[16] Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1927.

narrative, in that a narrative without at least a minimal plot would be incomprehensible. Plot is the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements … of a narrative" (*Plot* 5). In other words, without plot, the text is not a narrative, and plot has to do with connecting different parts of that narrative and expressing an intention.

Brooks' choice of "intention" here is intriguing, and given his subtitle, it is a purposeful choice. Nowhere in the book does he specify what the origin of this intention is, although in literary criticism the assumption is that a critic talking about intention is referring to a now-problematic conception of a purposeful real-world, living, breathing author intending to convey a certain meaning. Brooks never argues for this conception, but he never argues against it either, making it difficult to interpret what he really means by intention. This is one indication that in this study Brooks relies implicitly on conceptions of narrative that have come under serious contention in the past several decades. In the end, "intention" seems to add little to the other descriptor he uses in the passage quoted above, "interconnectedness", for the connections between all the factors of a narrative can be thought of in an intentional way, and perhaps must be thought of in this way to have a plot that drives a story in the way that Brooks wants plot to operate. That is, the importance of the connections have to be interpreted whether we have a concept of a "real world" author intending certain connections or not. It seems more fruitful, and more faithful to the spirit of Brooks' study, to forget about intention, and to think about the connections that a particular narrative sets up, encourages, and allows among its various parts, and thereby interpret a plot from the narrative.

But Brooks takes pains to emphasize that his motivation is not structuralist. He is not trying to identify a universal use of plot in different works. Rather, he is interested in defining and understanding plot as a motivation for narrative through various examples.

"Plot as it interests me is not a matter of typology or of fixed structures, but rather a structuring operation peculiar to those messages that are developed through temporal succession, the instrumental logic of a specific mode of human understanding" (*Plot* 10). The effort here is not to get to a "deep structure" in the structuralist sense of a general formal structure of narrative that repeats in many different and various works and forms an organic basis of our concept of narrative. Rather, Brooks is more literally looking deeper into the "structure" of narrative, looking for what motivates and generates whatever formal structure of narrative gets produced. He calls plot the "logic and dynamic of narrative" (*Plot* 10). showing that while we can perhaps study plot and discuss it as a concept, we cannot identify a stable structure of plot. Therefore, Brooks' purpose is more philosophical, in defining and discussing a concept that can then be used by others in their thinking about narrative and narratives. This seems entirely appropriate to the state of interdisciplinary scholarship that had arisen by late in the twentieth century and remains with us today.

In the quotations above, we already see one important defining aspect of plot and narrative that Brooks includes, and that is "temporal succession" and this being linked to a certain kind of "human understanding". In the end this is a rather large assumption in this book, which others who have worked on the problem of humans' relationship with time might not be happy with. Brooks broadly assumes a chronological structure, interpreting a second event in a story differently than the first event in naturally seeing a progression and causality in the time elapsed. Brooks sees this as the human need to plot, that we look for meaning in events ordered in a temporal sequence. Brooks' study, as a more philosophical approach to narrative if not a philosophical tract, has to ignore much philosophical work of the twentieth century to maintain such a simple conception of time. Below I review Paul Ricoeur's major work on time and narrative, which is an example of a study of narrative

that pays much closer attention to the problems and possibilities that the conundrum of time presents to writers and to readers.

Because of the foregoing, Brooks more directly goes against Rimmon-Kenan in asserting that the study of plot includes the study of story, rather than vice versa. He addresses the rather worn distinction between story and plot—perhaps began, but by no means ended, by Forster—referring mostly to the Russian Formalists' version: *fabula* versus *sjužet*. Focusing on plot makes this distinction meaningless, since "to speak of plot is to consider both story elements and their ordering" (*Plot* 13).

The problematic approach to time and human understanding also causes a problematic approach to ends and to beginnings. Brooks asserts that narrative depends on a stable understanding of beginnings and ends: "The authority of narrative derives from its capacity to speak of origins in relation to endpoints" (*Plot* 276). His example here is Freud's narration of the Wolf-Man case, where in a subsequent narration, Freud expresses doubt as to the true nature of the basis of the Wolf-Man case:

> And yet: when Freud has uncovered—or more accurately, reconstructed—this primal scene, which would appear to be crucial to his narrative of the Wolf Man's case, he proceeds to erase it. … We have at this crucial moment of the case history an apparent evacuation of the problem of origins, substituting for a founding event a phantasy or fiction on which is conferred all the authority and force of prime mover, and the evocation of a possible infinite regress in the unconscious of the race. (*Plot* 276)

Brooks' choice of Freud, rather than a piece of fiction, is of course for an effect. Freud should be recounting a true story of objective reality, and even in this effort he ends up "reconstructing" origins. So even "explanatory histories" have a problem grounding their stories:

> A narrative account that allows the inception of its story to be either event or fiction—that in turn opens up the potential for another story, anonymous and prehistoric—perilously destabilizes belief in explanatory histories as exhaustive accounts whose authority derives from the force of closure, from the capacity to say: here is where it began, here is what it became. (*Plot* 276)

So this means that such a "history" is similar to a "modernist novel", which one would expect to try to problematize such issues. But like the novel, by existing and being read, a "history" stands as a testament to our human need for narrative:

> Like the modernist novel, the case history of the Wolf Man shows up the limits of storytelling while nonetheless insisting that the story must get told. … But if plot has become an object of suspicion, it remains no less necessary: telling the self's story remains our indispensable thread in the labyrinth of temporality. (*Plot* 284–285)

Most of Brooks' analysis here is useful, up until the point where he claims that such problems insists "that the story must get told". In Brooks' own terms, this could be re-stated to mean that despite such problems, we still need plotting, we still need to tell stories. Brooks is not alone in this logical flaw. He shows a story that does not play by its own rules, and therefore in a certain sense threatens to destroy itself. Yet the story is read by many people, who take meaning from the story, so even though it is flawed, we still need narrative. The logic here is that as humans we have a drive to seek out origins and endpoints. Narrative promises such origins and endpoints, and this is why we are attracted to narrative. But in the final analysis (and with no surprise in today's world), narrative does not really provide origins or endpoints. But we keep on searching for narrative. So our need for origins and endpoints must be so great, and our options to get at them so few

(in fact barren except for narrative), that even when narrative explicitly says one thing and does another (says it provides origins then destroys those origins), we still need narrative.

Could it be that we need narrative, plotting, and stories, because we do not really need origins or endpoints? There is plenty of empirical evidence that humans are indeed attracted to narrative, to such an extent that we could call it a need. That point can not be debated. But what drives that need, if it is not a need for origins and endpoints? Brooks tries to imply, instead of argue, that the only answer to this question is: nothing. Could it be that we need narrative for another reason, a reason that is not so blatantly violated by Freud's account of the Wolf-Man or any number of modernist and postmodernist novels? Could it be that we need narrative for the process of reading and understanding a story itself, rather than what that reading and understanding will then (in another kind of temporal succession) bring us?

But Brooks is enough in contact (directly or indirectly) with philosophy of the last two hundred years to see that a focus on time is also a focus on ends, and the most obvious end of all, death. So he specifies his definition of plot not just as having to do with time, or a human conception of a progression of time and causality, but the following: "It is my simple conviction, then, that narrative has something to do with time-boundedness, and that plot is the internal logic of the discourse of mortality" (*Plot* 22). This conclusion is not unique to Brooks; indeed he quotes Walter Benjamin to support his point, and other literary critics such as Frank Kermode have made much of narrative's relation to death. In Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967),[17] he not only links narrative to death, but to a particular need to understand the apocalypse, in a sense the ultimate death. One of Kermode's most interesting insights is that this drive through narrative to understand death causes each current period to be seen by the humans living in that time as a "transition"

[17] Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.

period. That is, it is not an end, it is not a beginning, but rather coming from a beginning and going towards an end.

To come to his conclusion, Brooks has to twist Roland Barthes' idea of *le passion du sens* (in both the sense of a passion for meaning and a passion of meaning) into a passion for an end, and the ultimate end of death. Brooks defines Barthes' *le passion du sens* as "the active quest of the reader for those shaping ends that, terminating the dynamic process of reading, promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle" (*Plot* 19). He does claim that he "extrapolates" from Barthes; the question is to what degree, and if the extrapolation is justified. Here Brooks slides without explanation or justification from "meaning" to "end", which to my mind needs more support. It is not clear to me why a passion for meaning cannot be a passion for engaging in a process, a passion for gaining tentative knowledge, a passion for learning how to live rather than what happens when we die. Similarly, it is not clear to me in Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* why we do not perpetually see ourselves as in a transition period—in a middle period, in process between unknowable beginnings and endings—because that is where we want to be, that is where we are most comfortable. And we are most comfortable there because we cannot be anywhere else. Without this understanding of narrative as the necessary in-between, Brooks' yearning in narrative for an impossible approximation of death and Kermode's perpetual transition periods are negative and hopeless places to be.

Much of *Reading for the Plot* is plagued by this useful but also problematic reference to temporal progression and necessary ends. Another broad assumption of the book is that each narrative has a neat beginning, middle, and end. Brooks writes of a "desire [that] is always there at the start of a narrative" (*Plot* 38). and even more he refers to the "end" of a narrative. "If at the end of a narrative we can suspend time in a moment when past and present hold together in a metaphor … that moment does not abolish the

movement, the slidings, the mistakes, and partial recognitions of the middle" (*Plot* 92). In reference to Roquentin (and implicitly Kermode), he concludes that "the sense of a beginning, then, must in some important way be determined by the sense of an ending" (*Plot* 94) because there can be no end without a beginning and vice versa.

> Essentially, the beginning is desire, the end is death, and the middle is "obscure: We need to think further about the deathlike ending, its relation to origin, and to initiatory desire, and about how the interrelation of the two may determine and shape the middle—the "dilatory space" of postponement and error—and the kinds of vacillation between illumination and blindness that we find there. If in the beginning stands desire, and this shows itself ultimately to be desire for the end, between beginning and end stands a middle that we feel to be necessary but whose processes, of transformation and working-through, remain obscure. (*Plot* 96)

There are two problems here to my mind. First, where are the beginning and end? Second, why do we need to define and resolve these to discuss the middle?

It seems to me that what Brooks has to say about the middle is the most interesting part of his beginning-middle-end structural assumption. Indeed, the middle is "obscure", but it is also the only component of this triad that we can compare to lived life, that coincides with our lived temporal frame. In this book, Brooks assumes the model of a novel as a narrative, which in many ways is not unfounded. At least, the novel can stand as a good example of a narrative. But the assumption Brooks seems to have is that the moment you read the first word of the novel is the beginning, and the moment you read the last word is the end. Indeed, in the conclusion to the book, in the midst of a useful questioning of ends—"Ends, it seems, have become difficult to achieve" (*Plot* 313)—

Brooks uses the book as the only end (and therefore beginning) we can count on: "Yet they take place: … we have no more pages to read" (*Plot* 314).

It is rather easy to criticize this in practical terms, even assuming Brooks' model of the novel as narrative. What about when I first hear about a novel, or when I hear someone mention the title and author? Have I begun then, or not yet? What about when I hear someone summarize the book, or when I read a summary or review? Have I begun? If I then go to read the book itself, is my reading of the first word, when I already know the broad outline of the book, really the beginning? What if the book is by an author who I know, whose works I have read before? Is my beginning the same as a reader who does not know the author? Does the beginning include the title or not? What if I really am completely ignorant about the novel before I read the first word (an almost impossibly rare occurrence): does not my conception of the book as a novel form certain expectations that problematize this "beginning" of my reading?

Similar questions can be asked about the "deathlike ending". When I finish the last word, but then turn back and re-read a chapter, what is the ending? What if the book encourages me to think further about the content, where is the end? What if, in fact, the book requires me to re-read and think further to make meaning from the book? Then where does *le passion du sens* require a search for a deathlike ending? If the book encourages me to remember, to think again, to re-read, to construct my own meanings from the components the book provides, how is this deathlike? How does this serve the supposedly basic human purpose of dealing with death, other than perhaps avoiding it? Even more typically, what if I finish the book, then months later engage in a discussion with someone about the book whereby I modify my evaluation or experience of the story. Am I past the end, or is this the end?

Admittedly, these questions could be erased by claiming that it is the concept of beginning and ending that is important, so that any one assignation of beginning or ending would suffice. But Brooks does not have this conception, with his "we have no more pages to read" (*Plot* 314), and he is rather typical in this assumption of a linear first-page-to-last-page process of "reading" a narrative (or novel, as his prime example of narrative).

Such difficulties push Brooks and others to conclude not just that narrative is about death—and that we have an overwhelming need for narrative because it is about death—but also that narrative can only be about itself, or that a narrative can only be about narrative or about that particular narrative. This can be driven by the impossibility to replicate either birth or death, or the impossibility for reliable communication between individuals, either of which leave a void at the center of the narrative project: "The [Barthes] passage quoted shows us how narration can become fully dialogic, centerless, a transaction across what may be a referential void—filled perhaps only with phantasies from the past—yet a transaction that creates, calls into being, a necessary hermeneutic fiction" (*Plot* 304). So if the narrative is not about the people it involves, not about the characters or events that it deals with, then it must be about itself:

> A further, more radical implication might be that the implied occurrences or events of the story (in the sense of *fabula*) are merely a by-product of the needs of plot, indeed of plotting, of the rhetoric of the *sjužet*: that one need no longer worry about the "double logic" of narrative since event is merely a necessary illusion that enables the interpretive narrative discourse to go further, as in the mind of some Borgesian demiurge. This in turn might imply that the ultimate subject of any narrative is its narrating, that narrative inevitably reveals itself to be a Moebius strip where we unwittingly end up on the plane from which we began. Origin and

> endpoint—and, perforce, genealogy and history—are merely as-if postulations ultimately subjected to the arbitrary whims of the agency of narration, and of its model in readership. Narrative plots may be no more—but of course also no less—than a variety of syntax which allows the verbal game—the dialogue, really—to go on. (*Plot* 305)

In this model, it seems that narrative is either about the most serious issues in our lives (How are we born? How do we die?) or the most trivial (What are the formal aspects of this story?). I think this turn to "narrative is about narrative" is overly simplistic. Anything can be "about" itself. The division between form and content is another dichotomy that has been thoroughly destroyed by recent criticism, even if we still use the concept as a rule of thumb. A communication has to be about its own method of communication, at least in part. Further, the more complicated and structured a communication is, the easier it will be to see it as "about itself". By now, this is simply a factor of narrative that we have to take for granted, and include it among the aspects of narrative that we can study and think about. It is not useless to study how a narrative is about itself; on the contrary, such study can yield fruitful insights into the function of the narrative.

But this does not mean that narrative is only about itself, that it is not about other things or does not have other effects. It also does not mean that "about itself" is the primary defining aspect of narrative. In the narratives that are usually studied, where we perceive that there is some social significance to the narrative in its social situation, the narrative is usually both "about itself" and "about" other things. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) was certainly groundbreaking in its time because it required a critical reader to think seriously about how the narrative itself operated. But through and around this, *Ulysses* also addresses other issues arguably more deeply than narratives that are more

conventional, and therefore more transparent in form. The world of criticism of texts like *Ulysses* testifies to the fact that these narratives are not only about themselves. Narratives such as this accentuate the process of reading and making meaning, rather than the need to identify origins and endpoints. The conclusion that "narrative is about narrative" can be seductive, in that we could pretend that narrative has no other effects, and it operates in its own hermetic world. Or we could pretend that narrative is such a basic category in human existence that to study narrative as only "about itself" is actually to study everything else at the same time. The "narrative is about narrative" conclusion is correct, but it must be considered alongside other equally valid, and sometimes conflicting, conclusions about narrative, and it is this messy middle ground that is more important to narrative than birth or death.

I propose that in the time since Brooks' study, we have begun to forget about death. Positioning narrative as beginning with desire for knowledge about death and ending with something approximating death makes narrative merely a coping mechanism. By now we have to know that no matter how well we tell stories, how well we try to understand and cope with death, that we can have no hope to mitigate the surprise at what death will bring. It seems to me that culturally we have found it necessary to forget about death, and let it be an outside, an unknown, and turn to making meaning to inform the lives we live rather than to explore death.

Narrative, and in my study novels in particular, have been following this track over the past one hundred years or so and particularly in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Philosophy of the time reflects these ideas earlier than novels do. In the next chapter, I try to outline some of the connections between twentieth century philosophy and this understanding of narrative in order to provide a more contextualized justification for the approach to novels I take in this study.

Brooks had a noble aim in *Reading for the Plot*: to bring us to a narratology that has lived and learned from the structuralist attempt and failure. His focus on plot as a narrative concept through which to think about narratives, rather than a template by which to analyze narratives, is most useful in its general motivation, to be such a "thinking through" concept, and less useful in delineating a particular understanding of "plot." If he would have produced this particular understanding, it would have been akin to the universalizing efforts of the structuralists, anyway. However, several of the defining aspects of plot, even as a "thinking through" concept, remain problematic and refer to a rather traditional understanding of concepts such as temporality, beginnings, and endings. This is the case even though in some places Brooks makes statements that seem free of this dependence, because more often in his description of his ideas he falls back on these traditional conceptions.

Above I advocate that we are now more comfortable with a looser dependence on certain beginnings and endings, and that while we do retain some concept of beginning and ending, by now our dependence on such concepts is so tenuous that it is not really worth thinking about the "middle" in terms of the "end". I would like to propose that this is analogous to a looser conception of temporality than Brooks and others rely on in discussing narrative, or perhaps a more philosophical consideration of temporality. It is a well-known facet of narrative that it depends on some conception of the passage of time, that events can be ordered in a linear fashion. But it is also a well-known facet of narrative that the manner an event is narrated can drastically affect the experience of time in the story. Genette himself struggled with this reality, even though in his narratological project he tried to label it away. Simply put, a moment can be narrated over one hundred pages, and one hundred years can be narrated in one sentence. This is not a new insight, but it is crucially important to today's study of narrative. Knowing that such a wide variety of

representations of time can occur in narrative, our concept of "temporality" in the story, the dependence on the concept that events can be ordered in a linear fashion, is greatly lessened. And this is only taking the passage of time in the conventional sense. It is not that we have given up on the concept of temporality, but rather its inherent flexibility has by now been demonstrated, and concerning ourselves with linear time order is not very fruitful in reading anymore.

Given issues such as these—that we now make meaning through the process of reading, not because of a certain end goal to the reading, that we are less concerned with the beginning (desire) and end (death) of the reading experience, and that we do not rely so strongly on chronological orderings of narratives—we need to extend Brooks' effort to work with concepts that will help us think through this sometimes frightening and indeterminate, but not chaotic, middle ground of narrative that we live with today. I will assert later in this study that what I call the "puzzle novel" has tried to do exactly this, and this study tries to contribute to that needed extension.

1.4 After narratology but still narratological 2: Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur's monumental three volume work, *Time and Narrative* (1983–1985)[18] is roughly contemporary to Brooks' *Reading for the Plot*, and serves as an interesting

[18] Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 1*. 1983. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 2*. 1984. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

comparison. Ricoeur putatively bases his study on plot as well. In the "Preface" to the study, Ricoeur writes "With narrative, the semantic innovation lies in the invention of another work of synthesis—a plot. By means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action" (*Time* ix).[19] Ricoeur sees plot as a kind of apparatus that gathers various pieces of information and organizes them in terms of time. He continues to juxtapose metaphor to plot, saying that metaphor is somehow more pertinent to values, plot relates in a similar way to action and time. "And whereas metaphorical redescription reigns in the field of sensory, emotional, aesthetic, and axiological values, which make the world a habitable world, the mimetic function of plots takes place by preference in the field of action and of its temporal values. It is this latter feature that I dwell on in this work" (*Time* xi).

However, Ricoeur largely leaves his discussion of plot itself in the preface, and turns his attention more directly to issues of action and time in narrative in the main text. So plot serves as a motivational and structural topic, but not the focus of the study, as it is with Brooks. Ricoeur takes what I would call a more European approach to the topic than Brooks does, and is also much more deeply informed by classical and contemporary philosophy in his approach to narrative. His concern throughout these three volumes is to consider in an exhaustive and detailed way how time and narrative are inter-defined and how they interact in human experience.

Parts of Ricoeur's work yield useful insights, and his attention to detail and description is very much appreciated in a topic of this kind of complexity. Time is a notoriously difficult topic to write about, being such a concrete part of our everyday lives while at the same time being a completely mystifying philosophical problem. Ricoeur's

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Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 3*. 1985. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

[19]Unless otherwise noted, all citations are to *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, and the abbreviation "*Time*" also refers only to volume 1.

study suffers somewhat from this tension, but it does go a long way towards making a bridge from the everyday experience of time to useful applications (to narrative and to thinking about narrative, of course) of a philosophical consideration of the problems that time evoke.

Ricoeur bases his study on what seems to be a circular logic:

> One presupposition commands all the others, namely, that what is ultimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of human experience. The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. (*Time* 3)
>
> To put it another way, *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence*. (*Time* 52, emphasis in original)

In yet another way, assuming a human perspective and experience, narrative is time and time is narrative. Ricoeur early on recognizes that this is circular:

> This thesis is undeniably circular. But such is the case, after all, in every hermeneutical assertion. … I shall strive to demonstrate that the circle of narrativity and temporality is not a vicious but a healthy circle, whose two halves mutually reinforce one another. (*Time* 3)

During the study, it seems that the way this circle is not viscous or useless is that both narrative and time are processes, processes that are always already on-going, and processes that are not necessarily linear. Neither time nor narrative has to "start" or "end" in a certain time or place. A thesis such as Ricoeur's can only be "circular" if one compares such a structure to a linear, clock-time temporal view of theory and the world.

But Ricoeur wants to put time and narrative in a continual cooperation, not having to privilege one above the other, not having to argue that one must come before the other, not having to make any absolute distinctions on either one in terms of the other. Because of this, we cannot absolutely refer to "beginnings" or "endings", either in terms of time or narrative. Readers also are always already implicit in the process of reading, so it is not as if readers choose a time and place to "jump into" the on-going process of time and narrative. Readers, as humans, are already involved in the process, and will only perhaps work differently within that milieu than before, rather than "beginning" to read at a certain time.

This perspective is of course theoretically more tenable than the kind of assumptions Brooks makes about the beginnings and endings of narratives and narrative works.[20] However, it risks the other edge of the sword: how can we then define time and narrative in a useful way, and what standards do we use to judge connections between events and thoughts as more or less interesting and useful? In short, how is this not just a uselessly relativistic theory?

To start to answer these questions, it is necessary to review how Ricoeur gets from his presentation of his circular thesis to his conclusion that being circular is not so bad after all. The main structure of the reading experience that he sets up in the first volume and refers to throughout all three is a three part structure of "mimesis$_1$", mimesis$_2$", and "mimesis$_3$".

This three-part structure is developed under a particular understanding not only of time and temporality, but the struggle against a simple reference to the everyday experience of linear time in thinking about narrative.

[20] See the previous section, which considers Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* in detail.

> If it is true that the major tendency of modern theory of narrative—in historiography and the philosophy of history as well as in narratology—is to "de-chronologize" narrative, the struggle against the linear representation of time does not necessarily have as its sole outcome the turning of narrative into "logic," but rather may deepen its temporality. Chronology—or chronography—does not have just one contrary, the a-chronology of laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself. (*Time* 30)

In this way, speaking about "temporality" is actually a way of discussing time without referring to a linear representation of chronological time. His ideas on $mimesis_1$, $mimesis_2$, and $mimesis_3$ refer in a way to a conventional understanding of writing-reading-understanding in a chronological way, but Ricoeur also tries to make it temporal. To this end he does not discuss stages or sequence, or even of mediation among the three, but rather "traversing" from $mimesis_1$ to $mimesis_3$, and referring to "one side" of a text and the "other side" of a text.

Knowing this, I think it is most useful to describe Ricoeur's structure of reading in a standard chronological way, so that we can then get beyond that description. Of course Ricoeur resists such description, but at the same time his structure implicitly refers to such a chronology. This, by the way, is a strategy that will be repeated below in discussing the puzzle novel. In the end it is a necessary strategy, to use conventional structures of communication, but keep them at a critical distance, and see where they can be transcended. In fact, we use conventional structures not only to transcend, but also to avoid discounting *a priori* the results that such structures can bring. Disregarding conventional structures is only a closed-minded thinking of another kind than assuming conventional structures are organically correct. So, to misrepresent in a way: $mimesis_1$

refers to "before" reading. This is the competency a reader has to share with the narrative text in order for communication to occur. It is a "preunderstanding" (*Time* 64) on which the narrative is built. Mimesis$_2$ is the reading experience itself, from the "beginning" to the "end" of the text (using the assumptions that Brooks uses). Here it seems the text is dominant, and the reader is trying to follow along. Mimesis$_3$ is the stage "after" reading, when the reader thinks about the text, making meaning of it in the reader's particular way. Now the reader is dominant, the text only a suggestion for a certain field of meaning that the reader now determines. Although this description does not yet accurately represent Ricoeur's theory, already we can see that this set-up goes beyond a study such as Brooks'. As I detail in the previous section, with his focus on "plot", Brooks sees the beginning and ending of the narrative experience as inherent in the assumed beginning and ending of the text of the story. Brooks does not get beyond mimesis$_2$ (either in the direction of mimesis$_1$ or mimesis$_3$) and in fact assumes that nothing else exists in the reading process. Ricoeur starts to open up the understanding of reading and narrative already in this conventional translation of his basic idea.

Given this overly-simplified, linear description of Ricoeur's structure of reading, now let us go back and consider each mimesis more in line with Ricoeur's meaning. Ricoeur asserts that the creative act cannot happen in a vacuum. There must be some sort of environment in which it can be produced. "There is a pre-existing basis to the creative act, and some sort of convention that is required for the creative act to be communicated" (*Time* 30). This seems somewhat less relativistic than the more general circular thesis, insisting that some common ground must pre-exist for communication to take place. However, those conditions do not need to be defined in an absolute way:

> Whatever the innovative force of poetic composition within the field of our temporal experience may be, the composition of the plot is grounded in a

> pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character. These features are described rather than deduced. But in this sense nothing requires their listing to be a closed one. (*Time* 54)

This state, if these conditions are satisfied, is the process of $mimesis_1$.

> We can see the richness in the meaning of $mimesis_1$. To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this preunderstanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics. … Yet despite the break it institutes, literature would be incomprehensible if it did not give a configuration to what was already a figure in human action. (*Time* 64)

This is an important point in the rather diffuse world that the reading of a narrative text seems to embody. For literature, or any narrative, to cause a "break" of any kind, it must also adhere to some kind of standard. At the very least, this standard must be shared by a particular reader, or the break, and the narrative as a whole, will fall outside the boundaries of understandability (will not have a preunderstanding and therefore will not have an understanding), and will be lost. One cannot have a break without an understanding to break from. No work of narrative literature can completely violate the rules of common ground, or it will be ignored, overlooked, disregarded, not read.

Perhaps the most important distinction between the false linear representation of the three-part structure given above and Ricoeur's real purpose is the role of $mimesis_2$. Normally, the "reading" of the text would be considered the most important part of the process, the one that makes the other two parts possible. For Ricoeur, however, $mimesis_2$

is probably the least important part, although designating a value such as "importance" on these ideas would not be acceptable, either.

> Mimesis$_2$ has an intermediary position because it has a mediating function. This mediating function derives from the dynamic character of the configurating operation that has led us to prefer the term emplotment to that of plot and ordering to that of system. In fact all the concepts related to this level designate operations. (*Time* 65)

Mimesis$_2$ merely mediates, rather than creating. It takes the reader from mimesis$_1$ to mimesis$_3$, traversing the text. Even more, the very quality of experience we have during mimesis$_2$ shows clearly why this process is not best represented in terms of linear time.

> To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the "conclusion" of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an "end point," which, in turn, furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole. … It is this "followability" of a story that constitutes the poetic solution to the paradox of distention and intention. The fact that the story can be followed converts the paradox into a living dialectic. (*Time* 66–67)

That is, the very "followability" of a story, which is usually considered a necessary part of a linear experience of reading, shows that the reading process is not linear. Usually we might think of reading from the beginning of a text, and enduring the middle of a text because we expect a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the text. Without the concept of the satisfactory conclusion, we would not be pulled through the middle of the text, and it is this pull that creates the linear reading process. But Ricoeur makes a rather simple

observation, that if the middle of the reading process, and perhaps even the beginning, depends on the end, then the process is already recursive and non-linear. The "end" is already in the "beginning" and "middle". Brooks, of course, also refers to a similar all-in-one character of these false distinctions among times or places in a narrative text.

Mimesis$_3$ is where we more fully realize that a linear concept of time is not appropriate for describing this structure of reading a narrative. In fact, it is not that the end is in the beginning, but rather that time itself changes direction.

> Finally, the repetition of a story, governed as a whole by its way of ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past toward the future, following the well-known metaphor of the "arrow of time." It is as though recollection inverted the so-called "natural" order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. (*Time* 67)

This leads to the connection between the three-fold consideration of mimesis and the circular thesis that drives the project as a whole.

> Whether we consider the semantic structure of action, its resources for symbolization, or its temporal character, the end point seems to lead back to the starting point or, worse, the end point seems anticipated in the starting point. If such were the case, the hermeneutical circle of mimesis and temporality would resolve into the vicious circle of mimesis alone. That the analysis is circular is indisputable. But that the circle is a vicious one can be refuted. In this regard, I would rather speak of an endless spiral

> that would carry the mediation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes. (*Time* 71)

In the reading process, it is true that all we can hope to do is travel around the "hermeneutical circle of mimesis and temporality". But it is these different "altitudes" that make the circle not a viscous one, but instead a beneficial one. This brings us back to our original questions, though. How are these different "altitudes" sufficient to release us as humans from a dead circle of mimesis? How is this not just another relativistic theory, suggesting that any narrative is as good as any other, and any reading is as good as any other?

Actually, Ricoeur does not have a whole lot to say about such questions. If anything, he puts his faith in the reader her or himself.

> On the one hand, the received paradigms structure readers' expectations and aid them in recognizing the formal rule, the genre, or the type exemplified by the narrated story. They furnish guidelines for the encounter between a text and its readers. In short, they govern the story's capacity to be followed. On the other hand, it is the act of reading that accompanies the narrative's configuration and actualizes its capacity to be followed. To follow a story is to actualize it by reading it. (*Time* 76)

While this is not a groundbreaking insight, it is important to remember to maintain the opportunities available to the reader in such a concept of reading. Reading is no longer just understanding a text, subordinating oneself to the text and its author, but rather the reader is a primary maker of meaning in the narrative process.

More specifically, Ricoeur does make some rather incomplete comments on modern narratives, and seems somewhat frightened for the future.

> Finally, it is the reader who completes the work inasmuch as the written work is a sketch for reading. Indeed, it consists of holes, lacunae, zones of indetermination, which, as in Joyce's *Ulysses*, challenge the reader's capacity to configure what the author seems to take malign delight in defiguring. In such an extreme case, it is the reader, almost abandoned by the work, who carries the burden of emplotment. (*Time* 77)

First of all, by the publication of *Time and Narrative*, there are many other more challenging texts than *Ulysses* that Ricoeur could refer to as texts that are an "extreme" case of "abandoning" the reader, such as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), which I address below, published ten years earlier. In fact, my conclusion will be that in the terms of this study, *Ulysses* is not such an indeterminate, reader-driven text as comments like Ricoeur's imply. But in volume 2, Ricoeur betrays a downright gloomy view on where narrative, storytelling, and the novel are going. He starts by being optimistic:

> What seems unsurpassable in the last analysis is the reader's expectation that some form of consonance will finally prevail. … The reader's work of composition cannot be made completely impossible. This interplay of the expectation of deception and the work of bringing about order is not practical unless the conditions for its success are incorporated into the tacit or express contract the author makes with the reader. … A leap beyond every paradigmatic expectation is impossible. … It is not conceivable that the narrative should have moved beyond all configuration.[21]

Strangely, then, three pages later, Ricoeur claims that moving beyond all configuration may be what storytellers are now trying to do, and implies that it is possible after all.

[21] Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 2*. 1984. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 25.

> Having said this, one may always refuse the possibility of coherent discourse. … Applied to the sphere of narrative, this refusal signifies the death of every narrative paradigm, the death of narrative. … Perhaps, indeed, we are the witnesses—and the artisans—of a certain death, that of the art of telling stories, from which proceeds the art of narrating in all its forms. Perhaps the novel too is in the process of dying as a form of narration.[22]

Ricoeur does not provide an exhaustive discussion of this idea, which is quite uncharacteristic in these three volumes, so it is difficult to know how to interpret such a foreboding "perhaps" statement. It does seem that Ricoeur may be repeating a rather time-honored tradition of seeing the novel as being anti-narrative, and taking the human need for storytelling and narrative and either extinguishing it or transforming it into something unrecognizeable. Given these statements, his note on *Ulysses* above seems much more negative. Perhaps in studies such as Ricoeur's the motivation is to show how—even in traditional narratives whose meaning is settled and does not seem to ask the reader to be actively involved in meaning-making—the reader is indeed incorporated in a strange temporality and participation in creating the story. This can be opposed to studies, like this one, that are motivated more by narratives that seem to highlight and to capitalize on these realities, rather than try to hide them.

But what is most striking in Ricoeur's later comment is that it seems to rely on an absolute understanding of what readers require to create meaning with a work of narrative. Basically, there has to not only be an expectation that a singular, coherent meaning can be found and would be shared by the author and the reader, but that such a meaning will certainly be created by the reader. This is what Ricoeur must mean above when he refers

[22] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, volume 2*, 28.

to "coherent discourse" or the composition the reader creates not being "impossible". It seems to disregard the possibility that the process of reading itself, like time, like narrative, is an unending process, and that at some point during that process, the reader gains the consonance, the coherence, the meaning, the understanding that the reader wants and needs, without feeling that there is a cooperative end to the process of reading. It seems to me that this does not necessarily go against the exact theories that Ricoeur details in this work, but it certainly goes against the general motivation and spirit of the work. In describing how we read, Ricoeur seeks to break down boundaries while showing that we need to use at least an understanding of those boundaries to operate. But in the end, ostensibly he wants a more stable body of narrative literature to perform these reading activities on. This is not only what the novel is not, but it is not what narrative is, in Ricoeur's own description.

In this chapter I have sought to provide a useful background for the rest of the study, highlighting several concepts that will be referred to and used in the chapters below. This chapter on narrative segues into the next chapter on novel theory because of the close relationship of these two fields. Narrative seems to be the more established field, and an argument can be made that novel theory is simply a sub-field of narrative theory. However, I find good reason to consider the two separately, both in a general sense and for the purposes of this study.

2. The failures and success of novel theory

In his comments on the possible futures of narrative, Paul Ricoeur implicitly refers to novels as our best examples of narrative production (*Time*).[23] This is not a unique conflation: many refer exclusively to novels when discussing narrative and use only examples of the novel to construct theories of narrative (without recognizing this restriction). This leaves many questions open but often not asked, including what a theory of the novel itself might be. The supremacy of the novel actually makes it more difficult to create a theory of the novel. One must assume that the novel is just the best example of narrative, and our work on narrative (reviewed in the previous chapter) applies in a straightforward way to the novel. However, there are a few significant works that seriously question the novel's placement within the traditional scheme of genres, and the theory of narrative does not distinguish among genres. These works see the genre of the novel as a special case in narrative theory, for it seems to play by different rules. But that could mean either that it is not narrative in some sense or that it will transform narrative along with its inherent reflexivity and revisionism. Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*[24] does not explicitly focus on the novel genre, but the development of the novel to date fits nicely within the theories that Ricoeur details, so it is difficult to see clearly how the novel will so drastically change narrative as such. Further, Ricoeur's case for the need for "configuring" a piece of literature certainly applies to the novel.

[23] See the previous chapter.

[24] Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 1*. 1983. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 2*. 1984. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, volume 3*. 1985. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

What all this might express, though, is the same type of apprehensiveness towards Ricoeur's theory that my original questions about Ricoeur's project[25] raise: a fear that since such a structure of reading seems to describe the process very well, and at the same time it leaves room for such an extreme bending of standards and agreements, that the very nature of narrative may be changed.

In this chapter I will review the theory of the novel, being more selective in my review than I was in the last chapter on narrative. It seems to me this is of necessity rather than by choice, since the foundational texts were written relatively early in the twentieth century, and the field has simply not progressed from those foundations. I essentially focus on Mikhail Bakhtin and György Lukács as the main theoreticians of the novel. In this way I focus on texts from early in the twentieth century, contrasting with my focus on later criticism and theory in the previous chapter. The basic reason for this is that it is important to show where narratology has and has not gone later in the century, and to show that since Bakhtin and Lukács no significant progress on the theory of the novel has taken place. Because of this I find it useful to look to other fields for inspiration, particularly twentieth-century philosophy. In a sense I want to create a more secure foundation for my study by showing that "novelistic" theorizing is not confined to Bakhtin and Lukács, even if explicit "theories of the novel" are more or less confined to these thinkers. While influential monographs on the theory of the novel have not been forthcoming, thinking that can inform the study of the novel has, and I take philosophy as one example of this.

In addition, in the next chapter I detail my conception of the puzzle novel, and this conception depends on the novel as a particular genre, and not the novel as an example of narrative in a more general sense. Therefore a thorough consideration of (and perhaps in some ways a construction of) novel theory is in order prior to the next chapter.

[25] Raised in the previous chapter.

My review of narrative theory in the previous chapter indicates that while works such as Brooks' (*Plot*) and Ricouer's (*Time*) have appeared, they have not been able to progress the field of narrative theory much past the principles of narratology, which are roundly dismissed. This means that narratology is both negated and not replaced, a curious state in scholarly research. If in fact we have reached a dead end, or at least a dry spot, in our study of narrative in the last twenty years or so, the question obviously is why. One answer may be the continuing dominance of the novel as a narrative genre. But it is not the case that theorizing of the novel has replaced theorizing of narrative. Rather, it seems to me that the field has put itself in the paradoxical position of holding up the novel as the standard of narrative, while the novel really operates in a realm beyond what narrative criticism has been able to deal with so far. It seems that the novel has stymied critical work on narrative, providing it with an apparently perfect example, but in reality producing a vicious circle of rather useless criticism, and no theorizing.

Indeed, many anthologies that propose to study narrative focus on the novel, seemingly not realizing that there is a difference between the novel and narrative as critical categories, that one would conventionally be seen as an example of the other. In the introduction to his anthology, Michael McKeon writes that "in common academic usage there's a tendency to conflate 'the novel' not only with 'fiction' but also with 'narrative.'"[26] Most students would expect to be reading novels, not reading poetry or listening to oral narratives, for example, in a course called "Postmodern Fiction". He also names several anthologies of the theory of the novel "which include, without discriminating between, both essays on the novel genre, and essays on the narrative mode."[27] This means that we both take novel to mean narrative and narrative to mean novel. When the concrete examples given are novels, then other forms of narratives

[26] McKeon, Michael, ed. *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, xiii.
[27] McKeon, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, xiii.

disappear. At the same time, this runs the risk of making a theory of the novel more difficult to form, if such a theory—as opposed to a theory of "narrative" that refers only to novels—is desirable.

The appearance of two major anthologies of novel criticism since 2000 (McKeon, 2000 and Hale, 2005[28]) should indicate a vibrant and progressive field of novel criticism and theory over the twentieth century. I will not go into a detailed study of these anthologies here, but one of them (Hale) includes narrative sources in the way that McKeon bemoans, and both of them actually display the aridity of novel criticism since 1930 or so. All of the criticism that appears after that time falls into the "categorization" type of criticism that Bakhtin thoroughly explains and lambasts as absolutely inappropriate for the study of the novel (Bakhtin will be discussed presently). Hale's anthology, after three chapters reviewing narrative criticism more or less in way similar to what I provide in the previous chapter, has chapters devoted to the following topics: psychoanalytic approaches, Marxist approaches, the novel as social discourse, gender, sexuality, and the novel, and post-colonialism and the novel. She ends with a unique chapter on "Novel Readers".[29] One wonders where the race chapter is, where the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender chapter is, etc. The implicit message is that the novel has been studied along the same categories as the rest of literature in the second half of the twentieth century, and here is a representation of that categorization. However, none of these categories aspires to defining the novel in the way that Bakhtin and Lukács did in the 1920s and 1930s. McKeon also spends the second half of his anthology progressing through similar categories (such as "Photography, Film, and the Novel", "Subjectivity,

[28] Hale, Dorothy J., ed. *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900–2000.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
[29] Hale, *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900–2000*.

Character, Development"[30]). The first half of his anthology presumably does not focus on narrative theory, but rather more directly on novel theory, with a series of chapters related to either "the novel as displacement" or "grand theory". The former chapters detail how the novel has worked against traditional genre expectations, and the latter include both Bakhtin and Lukács, but the other inclusions do not add much to their theories. The "displacement" chapters, as well, simply illustrate the conclusions that Bakhtin so clearly explicates to us in his work.

While there is a certain history of novel theorizing (McKeon's anthology is subtitled *A Historical Approach*), it is not a history of progressively more useful and updated theories of the novel. I will try to show below the rather simple conclusion that Lukács and Bakhtin still provide the avant garde in the theory of the novel, and criticism of the novel has still not come to terms with the truths that they exposed.

2.1 Foundations of novel theory: Lukács and Bakhtin

In this chapter, while sometimes referring to the history of the novel, I am not concerned to discuss a specific history, or to make an argument about the history of the novel. This is one strain of criticism of the novel that does exist in the research, but it usually takes the form of trying to fit the novel into some kind of literary and/or cultural progression, and either denigrating it as a debased form or glorifying it as the supreme form. Either way, such histories seek to fit the novel into the system of genres, which I have already indicated is a purpose that should be questioned when it comes to the novel.

[30] McKeon, Michael, ed. *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, xiii.

Still, for thinkers like Bakhtin who certainly do not want to tell a history of the novel in this way, the novel does have a special place in literary study. Generally, it is rather well-known how the modern novel began as an un-literary form, and at some point between then and now gained scholarly institutional acceptance as a valid critical object (if still also being seen as a "low" genre, potentially). In "Epic and the Novel", Bakhtin claims that the institutional supremacy of the novel has a strong effect on the other genres: "In an era when the novel reigns supreme, almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized'" ("Epic" 5).[31] This is not simply a top-down effect of the novel being seen as the standard, and other genres naturally gravitating towards the kinds of things that the novel does. Rather, the novel pulls the other genres towards the future of literature: "In many respects the novel has anticipated, and continues to anticipate, the future development of literature as a whole" ("Epic" 7). In this way "novelization" is not a subsuming or co-opting of other genres, but rather a "liberation":

> the novelization of other genres does not imply their subjection to an alien generic canon; on the contrary, novelization implies their liberation from all that serves as a brake on their unique development, from all that would change them along with the novel into some sort of stylization of forms that have outlived themselves. ("Epic" 39)

As the vanguard of modern literature, then, studying the novel is of primary importance. The novel "draws [other genres] ineluctably into its orbit precisely because this orbit coincides with the basic direction of the development of literature as a whole. In this lies the exceptional importance of the novel, as an object of study for the theory as well as the history of literature" ("Epic" 7). While my study does not make specific claims for the novel in terms like this, Bakhtin certainly adds support to the general project of

[31] The page citations are from the versions of these essays that appear in *The Dialogic Imagination*.

investigating the novel form. In fact, Bakhtin specifies this to show that not only study of the novel is vital, but study of the true newness or innovation of the novel is important, and has not yet hardly begun. Bakhtin, of course, was writing this in the 1930s, but as Michael Holquist states in his Introduction to the English translation of *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981):

> The novel is utterly different from such genres because it presumes a completely other relationship to language. But, according to Bakhtin, this has not yet been perceived by its students who—if they are not utterly lost in the morass of gossipy 'character analysis,' ethical high-mindedness and watered-down psychology that frequently passes as novel criticism—continue to view the novel through the optic of a traditional stylistic that has proved so successful with other text types, but is quite inappropriate to novels. … The situation he decried in the thirties is no better in the seventies.[32]

I would assert that the situation still has not changed in the new millennium, as my brief review of the recent anthologies by McKeon and Hale starts to indicate.

The rise of the theory of the novel also seems to have a different, and somewhat contradictory, motivation. György Lukács, one of the first theorists of the novel, strongly argues for the novel as a unique genre, qualitatively different than other genres. In *Theory of the Novel* (1920), he writes: "Thus, the novel, in contrast to other genres whose existence resides within the finished form, appears as something in process of becoming" (*Theory* 72–73). Lukács argues that all the other literary genres assume a pre-existing form that has to be respected, although innovation within this form can be quite significant. The

[32] Holquist, Michael. "Introduction." In Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. *The Dialogic Imagination*. 1975. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, xxx.

novel is the first recognized genre that is allowed to change, continually to "become", not to just "be" as a genre. Lukács here dismisses what he calls the "entertainment novel", which takes the novel as a genre like the others, and also 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" (*Theory* 73).

Bakhtin has a similarly scathing estimation of novel scholarship, but he couches his criticism in terms of the novel as a particular genre. In fact, Bakhtin's consideration of the novel as a genre is really a testing of the basic concept of the literary genre itself. He bases this on some rather surprising, but at the same time blatantly obvious, facts about the novel, such as that it is the newest genre in the pantheon of literary genres. In "Epic and the Novel", he writes that

> the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted. The forces that define it as a genre are at work before our very eyes: the birth and development of the novel as a genre takes place in the full light of the historical day. The generic skeleton of the novel is still far from having hardened, and we cannot foresee all its plastic possibilities. ("Epic" 3)

Even more specifically, "Of all the major genres only the novel is younger than writing and the book" ("Epic" 3). This is of course still the case today: all the other literary genres are not only more established and institutionalized than the novel, but there is a historically and culturally qualitative difference between the novel and the other genres in that it is through and through a written genre.

As the title of this essay indicates, Bakhtin chooses, like Lukács, to situate the novel in terms of perhaps its closest counterpart in the traditional scheme of literary genres, the epic. Some have seen the novel as merely a continuation of the epic: the epic

written down. Both Bakhtin and Lukács take great pains to successfully dispel this gross simplification. Bakhtin observes that in the epic and in ancient literature more generally, "it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative impulse. … The novel, by contrast, is determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future)" ("Epic" 15). This is a basic difference in the relationships among the work, the author, and the reader that must be taken into account in criticism.

So far, 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: "This specific 'impulse to continue; (what will happen next?) and the 'impulse to end' (how will it end?) are characteristic only for the novel and are possible only in a zone where there is proximity and contact; in a zone of distanced images they are impossible" ("Epic" 32). 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" ("Epic" 39).

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, 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.[33]

As the quotation from Lukács above shows, this "problematic" is not meant to be seen as a problem looking for a final solution, but rather a healthy progressive approach to the concept of genre. More specifically, Lukács himself writes that this problem distinguishes the novel from other genres:

> The dissonance special to the novel, the refusal of the immanence of being to enter into empirical life, produces a problem of form whose formal nature is much less obvious than in other kinds of art, and which, because it looks like a problem of content, needs to be approached by both ethical and aesthetic arguments, even more than do problems which are obviously purely formal. (*Theory* 71)

Obviously the traditional concept of a genre is that it has a consistent form, which typically lends itself to certain thematic concepts. But in general the form stays the same and the content communicated through the form changes, or can change. In Lukács, this separation of form and content in the novel is impossible, and requires that the form be

[33] McKeon, Michael, ed. *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 180.

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:

> 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. (*Theory* 70)

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 it 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:

> [T]he structure remains abstract: the abstract basis of the novel assumes form as a result of the abstraction seeing through itself; the immanence of meaning required by the form is attained precisely when the author goes all the way, ruthlessly, toward exposing its absence. (*Theory* 72)

One common debate in novel criticism is when the novel began. This seems an important question for the novel, more so than for other genres, precisely because we have a conception of the novel being the only modern genre. The others are ancient, and the investigation of their origin disappears down the annals of human history and pre-history. The novel, in contrast, should have an origin, and that origin should play a decisive role in determining the definition of the novel as a genre.

Bakhtin in particular argues that the whole concept of genre is flawed, at least in terms of the novel, and suggests a focus on stylistics, or the stylistics of genre. His main reason for this is that the focus on genre ends up being a focus on historical periods, which is only marginally helpful in thinking about literature. He states, "Novelistic discourse has a lengthy prehistory, going back centuries, even thousands of years" ("Prehistory" 50). Important to Bakhtin is that the novel (or more properly "novelistic discourse") is not only a modern phenomenon. In complicating the idea of genre (and, eventually, of style as well), Bakhtin claims that the novel is more of a force, or a quality, that can be traced back to literary production in ancient times. Bakhtin does recognize the radical difference between the modern novel and ancient literature (his argument about the epic shows this), but he also refutes the position that the novel "began" with Cervantes, Rabelais, or any other one novelist in modern times. He sees novelistic discourse as existing before modern times and laying the groundwork for the modern novel to ascend to the dominant literary position it maintains today.

The main preparation work that novelistic discourse performed in ancient times was the inclusion of laughter in "parodic-travestying literature".

> Parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique on the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct work, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and more importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre. ("Prehistory" 55, emphasis in original)

This laughter comes from what are seen as low or common forms, often associated with celebrations or special events, and are allowed a space in the culture because of this de-valuation. But really they responded to the literary needs of the people, and made it possible for the modern novel to arise.

> These parodic-travestying forms prepared the ground for the novel in one very important, in fact decisive, respect. They liberated the object from the power of language in which it had become entangled as if in a net. … A distance arose between language and reality that was to prove an indispensable condition for authentically realistic forms of discourse. ("Prehistory" 60)

The novel, of course, is the primary form of authentically realistic discourse in the modern era. Bakhtin concludes this point in a summarizing mode:

> Here, at the conclusion, we wish only to emphasize that the novelistic word arose and developed not as the result of a narrowly literary struggle among tendencies, styles, abstract world views—but rather in a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages. It is connected with the major shifts and crises in the fates of various European languages, and of the speech life of peoples. The prehistory of the novelistic word is not to be contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles. ("Prehistory" 83)

With this notion, the question of where the novel "began" is irrelevant, or at least in the terms that it is usually asked. The search for the "first novel" is misguided, for the cultural movements that the novel was born out of go back centuries. Bakhtin sees the parodic-travestying forms breaking through barriers in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, so the appearance of the novels by Cervantes and Rabelais in this time are not surprising. We may call them the "first," but the import of that distinction is lessened. It is not an origin, but rather a step in a long "struggle." This character of the novel is also important to considering it as a genre or style because while we want to recognize the uniqueness of the

novel as a written genre, we also do not want to pretend that it emerges on the modern scene completely new.

But the clearest test of the novel as a genre is how it holds up when considered in traditional modes of criticism, which are based on traditional genres. Both Bakhtin and Lukács conclude that traditional criticism, the criticism that they have seen up to their time, completely fails with the novel. Criticism as we are used to it 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 comes to are largely irrelevant. The criticism lives in a different world than the novel does.

Obviously, this stance follows from Lukács and Bakhtin's characterization of the novel as a genre, which I have reviewed above. Lukács statement about the novel being taken as "problematic" rather than "having a problematic" is essentially the core of the issue. He also discusses it in his foundational terms of forms being created because of a dissonance in life, and the way the novel chooses to address this dissonance.

> Art always says "And yet!" to life. The creation of forms is the most profound confirmation of the existence of a dissonance. But in all the other genres—even, for reasons we can now understand, in the epic—this affirmation of a dissonance precedes the act of form-giving, whereas in the novel it is the form itself. That is why the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the creative process of the novel is different from what it is in other kinds of literature. (*Theory* 72)

Instead of trying to counteract dissonance, the novel takes dissonance as the basis of its structure. In a sense, the novel "gives in" to the prevailing contemporary reality, rather than trying to explain it away.

In Bakhtin, this basic idea is directed at a critique of scholarly criticism itself. In general, he claims that the special case of the novel (described above) "explains the extraordinary difficulty inherent in formulating a theory of the novel" ("Epic" 4). On the one hand, criticism is faced with a difficult task when confronted with the modern novel; it seems to be a paradigm shift rather than a smooth progression. On the other hand, what do we have criticism for if it is not to help us deal with such radical shifts in cultural production? If we are to keep our concept of a system of genres making up our literature, then with the novel "genre theory must submit to a radical re-structuring" ("Epic" 8), and the type of reconstruction and the theory that would result seem difficult to imagine.

Above I quoted Holquist's introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, published in 1981, where he asserts that Bakhtin's complaint that criticism has not yet properly dealt with the novel is still as valid in the 1970s as it was in the 1930s. [34] I assert that in the next set of 40 years, to the present time, the same state of affairs exists. Criticism has still not heeded Lukács and Bakhtin's call for a completely different kind of criticism on the novel.

The main point that Bakhtin makes about scholarly criticism is that with the other genres, they expect a criticism of categorization and evaluation, since their forms are set and each work presents itself to the critical eye as (yet another) example of an established and agreed-upon form. Such categorization does not work with the novel, whose form is never set: The utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel. In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear ("Epic" 8). This tradition of being able to work "confidently and precisely" perhaps understandably has made the critic assume that this is the mode to apply to any and all literature, and the failure of

[34] Holquist, Michael. "Introduction." In Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. *The Dialogic Imagination*. 1975. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

criticism with the novel is simply ignored, or explained away. Criticism on the novel produces few results, but that does not seem to bother critics very much.

> In the vast majority of cases, work on the novel is reduced to mere cataloging, a description of all variants on the novel—albeit as comprehensive as possible. But the results of these descriptions never succeed in giving us as much as a hint of comprehensive formula for the novel as a genre. ("Epic" 8)

In a sense the critical mode has been empirical, rather than theoretical. The novel obviously deals with a wide variety and a large number of issues that can be addressed by criticism. The understanding has been that the community of critics, working together over a long time horizon, will effectively categorize and evaluate all these issues piece by piece, eventually coming up with a theory of the novel that fits like standard theories should. Usually we understand a theory as a collection of logical claims that help us accurately describe any particular case within the parameters of the theory. This method, though, again assumes that the novel is static, that it does not change, and each novel that comes out is only another example of a set form, and it is that form—albeit complicated—that needs to be defined by the scholarly community. But since the form changes as well with each novel, how can this method work? In fact, it cannot: "The traditional scholar bypasses the basic distinctive feature of the novel as a genre; he substitutes for it another object of study and instead of novelistic style he actually analyses something completely different" ("Discourse" 263).

Bakhtin does not let the argument go at this rather reasonable and important conclusion. Perhaps, then, we can admit that the novel is a difficult genre, but know that our current critical modes are the best tools we have, and at least come to locally-important conclusions. This, however, is not the case. In "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin writes:

> All these types of analysis are inadequate to the style not only of the novelistic whole but even of that element isolated as fundamental for a given novel—inasmuch as that element, removed from its interaction with others, changes its stylistic meaning and ceases to be that which it in fact had been in the novel. The current state of questions posed by a stylistics of the novel reveals, fully and clearly, that all the categories and methods of traditional stylistics remain incapable of dealing effectively with the artistic uniqueness of discourse in the novel, or with the specific life that discourse leads in the novel. ("Discourse" 266)

It seems that the novel confronts criticism with an impossible task. Basically, we either have to consider the whole novel at once, or not consider it at all. Taking any one facet of a novel into consideration without paying attention to the rest of the novel performs a violence on the novel that makes any conclusions about that focus inaccurate. The alternative seems to be an *S/Z*-like study of any novel that the critic wants to consider. *S/Z* is novel-sized itself, and it is on one short story, so an analogous study of any novel would be in several volumes, presumably. Plus, as I indicate in the previous chapter, *S/Z* itself is criticized for not going far enough, or not coming to applicable theoretical conclusions through its empirical method.

Bakhtin discusses a few other problems of criticism that I will mention here, but not review in detail. In many ways he suggests that the novel should be considered a style rather than a genre, and that a stylistic analysis of not only the novel but of literature in general is preferred. However, criticism's obsession with genre, and especially with genre as linked to eras of history, prevents us from addressing the novel stylistically, and leaves us only with a thematic study of the novel. This is an example of picking one facet of a novel (a "theme") and studying only that facet in isolation from the rest of the novel.

Bakhtin also goes into great detail on the novel as a multi-languaged genre, in contrast to the monologic character of the other genres. The novel always presents a system of images of languages, which again indicates a changing, rather than a static, form. This is another aspect of the novel that traditional criticism cannot deal with, since it assumes that each genre, and certainly each piece of literature, speaks with only one voice. Bakhtin also indicates another special quality of the novel that comes from its more direct connection with contemporary reality and lived life, and that is its ability to include humor, and its ability to, in a sense, laugh at itself in continually remaking its own form. Lastly, Bakhtin enumerates three characteristics of the novel, and discusses these at length in two essays, "Epic and the Novel" and "Discourse in the Novel". Many of the ideas within these characteristics have been addressed above without describing them as part of this taxonomy. The characteristics are the multi-languaged nature of the novel, the change in "temporal coordinates" the novel necessitates, and the focus on the present and contemporary reality.

> Eventually, Bakhtin makes it clear what the critical world faces with the novel.
>
> Thus stylistics and the philosophy of discourse indeed confront a dilemma: either to acknowledge the novel (and consequently all artistic prose tending in that direction) an unartistic or quasi-artistic genre, or to radically reconsider that conception for poetic discourse in which traditional stylistics is grounded and which determines all its categories. This dilemma, however, is by no means universally recognized. Most scholars are not inclined to undertake a radical revision of the fundamental philosophical conception of poetic discourse. ("Discourse" 267)

It is not just that there is a problem that has not been solved yet, but rather the recognition of that problem is not even widespread. Again, I assert that this condition still exists in

criticism today. The world of literature scholarship is in denial of the novel, or willfully ignorant of the useful problems it poses. My study, of course, hopes to more faithfully construct, or suggest, a criticism of the novel that is in line with what Bakhtin and Lukács suggest should be done with the novel. To do this, however, one has to have not only a criticism of scholarly work on the novel, but a concept of how to do it better.

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" ("Discourse" 267).

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. It indicates the dilemma referred to above. In one sense dismissing the novel as not literary at all is the easier of the two options of the dilemma. 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. These arguments have disappeared, but the other side of the dilemma has been ignored.

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. Such disciplines actually know only two poles in the life of language, between which are located all the linguistic and stylistic phenomena they know: on the one hand, the system of a *unitary language*, and on the other the *individual* speaking in this language. ("Discourse" 269, emphasis in original)

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 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.

> Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. And this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of the utterance to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of a unitary language. It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language. ("Discourse" 272)

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 sums up his position thus:

> The problem of stylistics for the novel inevitably leads to the necessity of engaging a series of fundamental questions concerning the philosophy of discourse, questions connected with those aspects in the life of discourse that have had no light cast on them by linguistic and stylistic thought—that is, we must deal with the life and behavior of discourse in a contradictory and multi-languaged world. ("Discourse" 275)

In this study I will not make as grand claims as Bakhtin does here, but it is striking that Bakhtin is positioning the study of the novel as important not only because the novel is important, not only because the novel is the future of literature and not only because the study of the novel is essentially the study of all literature, but even more generally, because study of the novel can fix the errors people have made in studying language itself, and produce a better consideration of the function of language than linguistics has produced.

To get back to Bakhtin's more specific views on the use of rhetoric, he 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" ("Discourse" 280).

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.

> But even where this has been the case, linguists have by and large gotten no further than the compositional forms by which the listener is taken into

> account; they have not sought influence springing from more profound meaning and style. They have taken into consideration only those aspects of style determined by demands for comprehensibility and clarity—that is, precisely those aspects that are deprived of any internal dialogism, that take the listener for a person who passively understands but not for one who actively answers and reacts. ("Discourse" 280)

In other words, linguists have taken the listener into consideration, but only through the speaker. 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 in this passage, 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. ("Discourse" 285)

As noted in the previous paragraph, 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" ("Discourse" 331). 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" ("Discourse" 331). 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. This is not only a stylistic difference, but almost a moral or ethical difference, for this kind of content and form makes the novel the most "human" of the genres:

> From this follows the decisive and distinctive importance of the novel as a genre: the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language. The fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the *speaking person and his discourse*. ("Discourse" 332, emphasis in original)

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:

> 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. ("Discourse" 358)

In our daily lives, we find no reason why we can not 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.

2.2 Narratology to novel theory

At some point during the twentieth century, the novel became indisputably accepted as a literary genre. It would be hard to imagine today a university literature department that ignored the novel. Even more than this, the novel arguably has become the dominant genre, both in terms of the sophistication and quantity of scholarship as well as the cultural impact of the novel, even when restricted to so-called "literary" novels. The rise of cultural studies and similar other fields that were closely connected to English studies in the U.S. and other English-speaking regions undoubtedly helped secure the novel's place in literary study, and probably expanded it.

Even though—considering Lukács' and Bakhtin's negative criticism of novel scholarship—criticism on the novel has probably been misguided, all the same it has been prevalent and voluminous. Similarly, there continues to be a large amount of work done on narrative, boosted more recently by the inclusion of serious academic study of stories created through and distributed by electronic media, film, and comic books. But none of this research has produced a significant theoretical progression in the field. Criticism on both the novel and narrative (and sometimes both at the same time) continues, but neither field seems to be proposing useful new paradigms through which to view their subject. The difference, it seems to me, is that a useful possible direction has been given for novel theory, while narrative's best idea so far has been thoroughly tested and unfortunately rejected. But in many ways the advent of narratology and the foundational texts of novel theory are contemporaneous. At some point, perhaps in our current period, a different attitude toward scholarship on the novel can and should arise, following from the basic reality of the novel as described by Lukács and Bakhtin. This should not give rise to a new "school" or theory, but rather a new practice of scholarship on the novel and perhaps on other genres.

As I describe above,[35] narratology sets a positivist goal: find the absolute, universal explanation. The main structure chosen for this was to find a "grammar" of narrative. The history of the attempt to reach this goal, to find the explanation, shows not only that the attempt failed, but that narratologists set an impossible goal.

Novel theory sets an impossible goal, too, but in a different way. Novel theory sets a goal to find the outside. Below I will delve into a variety of twentieth-century (French) philosophy to help us understand what this means. Novel theory sets this goal by describing the novel and showing how traditional criticism is directed at a different goal

[35] See the previous chapter.

than the novel itself directs itself at. Traditional criticism directs itself at a positivist goal, whereas the novel directs itself at a relativist goal. Therefore criticism is talking on a different plane than the novel. But because of novel theory has this quality, we cannot know in a large sense when we have found the correct kind of criticism. There will not be one idea, one structure, one method, one theory, to be the correct way of studying novels. There will and should be a continual array of attempts at dealing with the novel.

In some way, this exists, and in some way, the categorization of studies of the novel into feminist, racial, stylistic, etc. categories is just a superficial organization of such an array of attempts. But probably the most important thing that is missing from these studies and the body of criticism is humility, a recognition of the partialness of any one study. Scholarship still presents itself as coming to conclusions that should be believed, rather than explorations that should be inspirational. This pride can take greater or lesser forms. In a lesser form, it is simply in the structural claims of a study, that the main method and results should be presented as a contribution rather than an end. In a greater form, it informs the basis of the study, driving one to see a misguided selection of aspects of a novel or novels as definitive.

In this study I will take Bakhtin's ideas on following the principles of rhetoric described above as inspiration to create a more appropriate criticism of the novel, along with the philosophical discussion provided below. I caution that I am not a philosopher, and I am not attempting to make a bold statement about philosophy in the following section. Rather I am doing exactly what Deleuze wrote in many places, namely that what one should do with philosophy is create concepts.[36] The review below is given for a specific purpose, not as a general statement, and as such undoubtedly some readers will

[36] He does this most obviously in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* 1991. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

find errors and omissions in it. Perhaps through selection and brief review I am committing the same kind of bastardization of philosophy that Bakhtin claims critics commit on the novel when they pick and choose themes to discuss. My best justification is that most of the philosophers I draw from below in one way or another indicate that their philosophy should not be taken as a coherent whole, a "theory" in the classic sense, but rather a set of ideas to consider and implement. This is one implementation; undoubtedly, there could be others.

2.3 A perspective on novel theory: philosophy

Much philosophy written in the second half of the twentieth century has concerned itself with describing a lack, an absence, an outside, an unspeakable, and/or an unaccessable (I will use the term "the outside"). This comes from the general postmodern condition of a profound doubting of any possibility of reaching (or at least the possibility of knowing one has reached) a definitive Truth, Reality, Being, Experience, etc.

Examples of this philosophy abound, and almost all philosophy or theory written in this time may be read in this context. The most popular and traditional figure to focus on in this kind of thinking is death, and the philosophy of death as an absent presence and force has a long tradition and history. The theorizing of death continues through the second half of the twentieth century, although because of the changed socio-cultural context, philosophers find other figures illuminating as well.

I would like to claim that the most fruitful thinking of this type comes from Maurice Blanchot, and that in his last two major works, *The Step Not Beyond* (1973) and *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980), he brings the issue of the outside to the point where we can start thinking about what philosophy and theory might look like after the issue of the

outside has become more conventional. He does this essentially by providing the best figure to discuss the outside (the "disaster") that philosophy produced in this period and progressing beyond description to detail what we do with this outside, how we communicate about it, how we "write" the disaster. In this next step is a potential foundation for a philosophy that does not rely on a positivistic concept of Truth or God, and also does not rely on a haphazard theorizing of the absence of Truth or God.

I would like to briefly review some of the twentieth-century philosophers who have in one way or another tried to explain or to deal with the outside to provide a context for my discussion of Blanchot's achievement. This review is selective, and must fail to do justice to the works and thinkers to which it refers.

In *The Birth to Presence* (1993), Jean-Luc Nancy[37] claims that like death, birth is also a figure that we cannot quite define and rely on. In fact, it is rather conspicuous that Nancy focuses on the supposed opposite of the figure of death in his work (birth), explicitly pointing to the need to think about the outside in new ways. He writes, "*Western thought believed itself capable of constructing upon death its dialectical paradigm of pure presence and absence. Death is the absolute signified, the sealing off of sense. It is the name*, but 'to be born' is the verb."[38] Nancy links birth to death, but draws an undeniable distinction: death is "the name" (or in linguistic terms, the noun) "but 'to be born' is the verb". Death is the end of experience, and in that the ultimate finality. It is the constructing of a foundation in order to name, in order to be definite in the face of something real but unknown. Birth, however, is just as important, just as definite, but since we have better access to the "after" of birth as opposed to that of death, and because we tend to think in terms of chronological causation, we can more fruitfully think of birth as something being or getting done, a verb, an action with consequences. At the same time, birth, as a concept,

[37] Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Brian Holmes and others. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
[38] Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, 2, emphasis in original.

has a similar problem of being a foundation constructed in order to create boundaries. What is the moment of birth?

Throughout his oeuvre, Emmanuel Levinas returns to the Other as a basic concept in his philosophy, and the Other is another example of the outside. "The other, absolutely other, is the Other. The Other is not a particular case, a species of otherness, but the original exception to order."[39] Especially in *Totality and Infinity* (1961),[40] Levinas asserts that the Other takes priority over the same, subjectivity, or the self. Further, through his concept of the "face-to-face" relation, one must confront the Other, or at least try to, and engage in a dialogue through language. Under a philosophy that positivistically assumes a Truth or Good, such a dialogue would imply a path to a oneness or connection with the Other, an achievement of a specific goal. However, Levinas asserts that such a connection or absolute relationship is impossible, which paradoxically makes the need to engage in the face-to-face relation all the more important and necessary. Levinas' figure of the outside, the Other, again is a figure that we both cannot and do not want to avoid, but that also seems to be completely absent at the same time.

Georges Bataille has many figures that one could discuss in terms of the outside, even God. His most influential work, the *Summa Atheologica*, includes three rather disparate parts, *Inner Experience* (1943), *Guilty* (1944), and *On Neitzsche* (1945).[41] Bataille's *Summa* is obviously set against Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas' work is based on an argument (or arguments) for the existence of God, and Bataille, in a much less methodological fashion, tries to show that God is an outside, an unknowable.

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[39] Levinas, Emmanuel. "Ideology and Idealism" in Hand, Sean, ed. *The Levinas Reader*. 1989. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 245.
[40] Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
[41] Bataille, Georges. *Inner Experience*. 1954. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
Bataille, Georges. *Guilty*. 1961. Trans. Bruce Boone. Venice: The Lapis Press, 1988.
Bataille, Georges. *On Neitzsche*. 1945. Trans. Bruce Boone. London: The Athlone Press, 1992.

But a better example of the outside in the *Summa Atheologica* is "non-knowledge". Bataille argues against "project", which he sees as a purposeful program to get something done. In Bataille's view, maintaining a "project" has the opposite effect: less and less gets done, less and less knowledge is created. So while we might think of a project to create or obtain knowledge, Bataille insists that true knowledge is actually "non-knowledge", or everything other than what we typically think of knowledge. Non-knowledge is only obtainable by refusing to have a project. In a fashion typical of his writing, knowledge and non-knowledge have a kind of impossible relation. If I obtain non-knowledge, then "*I see* what knowledge was hiding up to that point, but if I see, *I know*. Indeed, I know, but non-knowledge again lays bare what I have known. If nonsense is sense, the sense which is nonsense is lost, becomes nonsense once again (without possible end)."[42] This kind of experience is repeated in Bataille's thought: when one achieves something and has something therefore revealed, only to have that revelation immediately withdrawn. If one obtains non-knowledge, then the knowledge that this experience generates destroys the non-knowledge, and returns one to project and knowledge. In this way non-knowledge is a goal that seems to not exist.

Gilles Deleuze also has many examples of the outside in his works, most of them not discussed at great length, and most not described completely. With Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980),[43] Deleuze describes the "war machine", which is linked to the nomadic form of society. Typically we think of a machine as something that completes a certain task. We have a saw to cut wood, we have a car to transport us from place to place, etc. The war machine is a type of machine in that it is a structure that is set up to complete a certain task, but it is possible that the war never comes to pass. The event of the war is

[42] Bataille, Georges. *Inner Experience*. 1954. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, 52. Emphasis in original.
[43] Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1980. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: The Athlone Press, 1987.

not necessary for the war machine to exist: "the war machine does not necessarily have war as its object, although war and the battle may be its necessary result."[44] For Deleuze and Guattari's concept, war is an example, although a loaded one. More important is the concept of a machine, a system, which is defined by an end that gives the machine purpose and direction. War defines the war machine, but that does not necessarily mean that war will result from the war machine. Deleuze and Guattari write that the machine is a system defined by an end that gives it purpose and direction, but the actual occurrence of that end is not necessary for the system to function. This does not invalidate the system; the system continues to be defined by its end, but is freed from its dependence on this end. So in a more local sense, "war" is the outside of this system. It is a presence that is perhaps never there, only there in theory.[45]

But the best example of this kind of theorizing is Maurice Blanchot, and especially his last two books, *The Step Not Beyond* and *The Writing of the Disaster*. We can read these two as one volume, seeing the first book as a more general and theoretical premise for treating one rather concrete example of the lack, the disaster, at length. In these works and others Blanchot proliferates figures of the lack, including absent meaning, non-meaning, the neuter, the sacred, and the outside. But his use of the disaster is arguably the most useful and enlightening.

In *The Step Not Beyond*, Blanchot established a unique form of writing that he used in this book and in his next book, *The Writing of the Disaster*. These two books were the last major philosophical works of his career and life. Most commentators refer to this form as "fragmented" or "fragmentary". However, the form of the book is both fragmented and coherent. It is conceptualized as a long essay, rather than a traditional book with multiple chapters, where each chapter deals with a separate theme, but all of the chapters cohere

[44] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 416.
[45] In the chapter below on *Gravity's Rainbow*, I more systematically construct Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "machine".

under some general theme. *The Step Not Beyond* does not have chapters even though it is a book-length study. In this way it presents itself as coherent and complete: it is one piece. But this long essay contains a series of vignettes, each marked with a diamond-shaped bullet, and each vignette ranges from a few words to a few pages long.[46]

These vignettes are clearly not chapters or sections, in fact they are more separate from each other than adjacent chapters or sections typically are. Sometimes the vignettes are related to other vignettes nearby, sometimes not. Often several vignettes seem to roughly coalesce around a certain theme, but this is not always the case. Further, there are vignettes that seem more fictional than philosophical. Many claim that the italicized vignettes mark these sections. This is often the case, but it is not an absolute rule in *The Step Not Beyond*: sometimes seemingly fictional parts appear in normal text, and sometimes italicized text is more philosophical.

Blanchot's fragmentary style is not only a simple innovation of using bulleted vignettes and no chapters, but rather of setting up rules and standards for his text, which he then purposefully breaks and transcends. Of course, to break the rules there also has to be enough content that follows the rules, to indicate that there are rules to break. In this way the reader is left both with a sense of order and a sense of chaos. In *The Step Not Beyond*, Blanchot writes that "through the fragmentary, writing and reading change functions" (*Step* 51). That is, using a fragmentary style like Blanchot does in this work forces the reader to be part of the creation of the text, and forces the writer to be part of the understanding of the text as a separate whole. This is a function of the useful mix of order and chaos in these texts. For example, the presence of italicized text in the book seems to mark fictional parts of the text. Most of the italicized parts are fictional, but not all of them are. So we have a feeling when we start reading italicized parts that they will be fictional,

[46] In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot refers to one of these "vignettes" as a "fragment" (*Disaster* 120). I choose not to use the term "fragment" since it encourages a too-simplistic view of the form of these two books.

but are not completely sure, and we can not say it is a rule that is followed completely. At the same time we can not say that no rule exists, since it is often followed.

These ideas are deeply informed by Blanchot's reading of Nietzsche's understanding of the Eternal Return. In *The Step Not Beyond*, Blanchot discusses Nietzsche at length, especially his concept of the Eternal Return. Blanchot takes the Eternal Return to mean that there is no present, only past and future. It is hard to imagine living with no present, but it is also impossible to define when the present takes place, and what its limits are. Blanchot pushes this idea further, showing that without the present, the past and the future are not distinguished; they are the same. This is indeed why the return is eternal: there is a continuous circulation of events and experiences. Our lives are governed by the rules of time, but at the same time we must admit that those rules are only an illusion. This is again the mixture of order and chaos that Blanchot's form evokes.

The Step Not Beyond confronts several established concepts such as "the present" and works to break down their clear, coherent meaning. Other concepts Blanchot addresses are death, writing, and knowledge, for example. One important "new" concept that Blanchot establishes here is the Neuter, which he also refers to as "*le il*".[47] This is a way to think about something that has a name, but is defined by what it is not. "The Neuter derives, in the most simple way, from a negation of two terms: *neuter*, neither one nor the other. Neither nor the other, nothing more precise" (*Step* 74). Nothing more precise, but at the same time nothing more elusive. How is it, Blanchot implicitly asks, that we can have such a "thing" (another term for the neuter) that defies definition? How can we live with an understanding of something that is neither nor, that depends on a binary and repudiates the binary at the same time? It is in these kinds of concepts that Blanchot finds inspiration.

[47] In the English translation, Lycette Nelson has translated this term as "the he/it", which is a rather clumsy term. There may be no better translation of the term, though, so I use the original French here.

The neuter is an important concept and deserving of further study, even though it is one example of several in these two works. I will leave the neuter in favor of the "disaster" treated in Blanchot's last book-length work. In any case, probably more important in *The Step Not Beyond* is the groundwork that Blanchot provides for *The Writing of the Disaster*, both in terms of form (the fragmentary) and content (the Eternal Return, the Neuter, etc.).

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot uses the concept of "the disaster", and he writes that as we typically understand the concept, disaster is impossible. What we call disasters are things that we cannot imagine actually happening to us, so at the moment that they do happen to us, and we survive them, they are no longer disasters, but rather subsumed into our definition of lived life. Therefore, no one can say that they have experienced disaster and can tell us about it. "We feel that there cannot be any experience of the disaster, even if we were to understand disaster to be the ultimate experience" (*Disaster* 51). "The disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing" (*Disaster* 7).

Yet, we use the term "disaster;" it is a readily recognized concept, which communicates a rather specific meaning. How is this possible, Blanchot asks, that no one has ever experienced the disaster, yet we are so familiar with it? How do we make such a thing a concrete part of our lives? How do we write about the disaster? The attempt to answer these questions does not only teach us about the concept of the disaster, but all the other figures of the outside as well.

Blanchot bewilders the reader in the first section of his book with statements like: "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. … To think the disaster is to have no longer any future in which to think it. … When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come" (*Disaster* 1). This strategy of describing by mutually contradicting statements continues throughout the book. This is another example of the

method described above for *The Step Not Beyond*, where a rule or program is set up and then purposefully rejected or violated, producing a sense of both order and chaos. Further, these mutually contradicting terms are not just methodological, but a reflection of Blanchot's point that the disaster somehow does not belong to experience. It is, it is not, and it also is apart from any concept of being (that is, of the verb "to be"). Even though Blanchot expresses suspicion at the method of describing by negative qualification (*Disaster* 92), this is his prime method of dealing with these concepts.

The Writing of the Disaster literally begins and ends with the word "disaster", and obviously the title highlights the word. The issue of the disaster is the focus of the first part of the book, and from then on it makes only fleeting and infrequent appearances in the rest of the book, although these appearances are usually poignant, and seek to bring a major point back to the prime example of the book. But Blanchot's effort to use the disaster as an example inevitably gets distracted. He has to deal with concepts such as writing, passivity, the Other (á la Levinas), language, the fragmentary, death, dying, concentration camps, etymology, and others in order to even start to do justice to the enigma the disaster presents us with. All of these concepts are linked to the disaster and in some way help us to understand the enigma, but they are also complicated concepts in their own right. In this way, this book focuses on the disaster even though much of the content does not refer directly to the disaster. Both of these characteristics of this book are examples of Blanchot's suggestion for dealing with these concepts: fragmentary writing. Blanchot does not only perform the fragmentary, but also attempts to describe it in both of these books.

Blanchot's answer is that to write about the disaster, our writing must be fragmentary. All writing is necessarily fragmentary, because it is not possible to communicate purely, so works which present themselves as coherent are only coherent in

appearance. That is, Blanchot is not proposing a new way of writing as much as proposing that we be more honest about the limits of our abilities as writers. Writing should be more purposefully fragmentary, Blanchot writes, in trying to describe a concept by surrounding it with words, knowing that none of these words, nor any collection of words, will reach the center of an accurate description. We should not try to directly describe the concept; this is doomed to a worse failure than a fragmentary approach, although the fragmentary approach is also doomed to failure. Our method should not be to hammer away at a concept, a concept enclosed in a word or set of words, trying to directly describe what the concept is or means. We should recognize the inevitable incoherence of even the most purposeful and directed description, and somehow approximate the concept through a variety of strategies of description. This is one of the reasons why Blanchot uses both fiction and philosophy in these books: both modes have potential to contribute to the description of the concepts, there is no reason to limit oneself to one genre. It is also why Blanchot both proposes and destroys various rules of description. What is important in this method is that one does not have to *not* describe directly. An attempt at direct description can contribute as well, but it is just another mode among many. In both of these books, Blanchot has vignettes that are more or less direct descriptions of a concept, but these are in concert with other ways of describing that do not fit our normal way of rationally describing an idea.

Both of these books use the aforementioned method of fragmentary writing. The effect that the method has is that no rules apply, but that does not mean that chaos rules. Chaos is not the only possible result of breaking down boundaries and standards. Attempts at direct description are not ruled out, nor are fictional representations of philosophical concepts or contradicting oneself. Any method is allowed, since we cannot say for sure what combination will produce the best result. So, we have in these works a variety of

attempts at describing ideas, some more direct than others, some more dramatic than others, some more understandable than others. In the contradictory passages cited above, Blanchot is not trying to confuse the reader, but rather is trying to break down the assumption that the author has a direct conduit to the reader's understanding. My interpretation of the fragmentary method contrasts with this linear concept of understanding that we usually hold. Blanchot wants to surround the point of understanding with as many reasonable attempts at description as possible, perhaps to create both a kind of scatter-shot description so that different shots may appeal to different readers, but also perhaps to allow the reader to approximate that point by a kind of vague process of averaging and triangulation.

However, fragmentary writing is not just a process of putting the pieces of a puzzle together, or fitting together the "fragments" of a broken whole. "Not every fragment is related to the fragmentary. … There cannot be a successful, a satisfactory fragment, or one indicating the end at last, the cessation of error, and this would be the case if for no other reason than that every fragment, though unique, repeats, and is undone by repetition" (*Disaster* 42). Often commentators on these books describe "the fragmentary" as Blanchot's method of having a series of short vignettes, often called "fragments" themselves, which are not arranged in a strict organization, and can have a variety of voices and methods of communication. This definition of the fragmentary is overly simplified, however, for fragmentary writing is not just a formal trick that Blanchot employs. Fragmentary writing is not just writing a series of fragments. Rather it is realizing the fragmented nature of all writing, and writing in a way that might come to terms with this incoherence.

Fragmentary writing, then, is not for the feint of heart, for it faces up to the illusions that we create to understand our world. Blanchot writes that it is a risk:

"Fragmentary writing is a risk, it would seem: risk itself. It is not based on any theory, nor does it introduce a practice one could define as *interruption*" (*Disaster* 59, emphasis in original). Fragmentary writing causes another paradox: we are using it to better describe and deal with the world, but to use it we must release the need to describe and understand. Only then will understanding come. This makes it an impossible necessity: "Then, since nothing escapes it because of its omnipresent unity and the perfect cohesion of everything, there remains no place for fragmentary writing unless it come [sic] into focus as the impossible necessary: as that which is written in the time outside time" (*Disaster* 61).

So it is with the concept of the disaster. We cannot directly describe the disaster, and we should respect this impossibility, even while working to describe it in this roundabout way. This surrounding of the concept is fragmentary in at least two ways. First and foremost, we assume that the concept itself will be absent from the description, a fragment missing (paradoxically, when a fragment of the whole is missing, it makes the object "fragmentary"). While Blanchot does write many times "the disaster is …", his method of contradiction shows that a complete definition, a one-to-one relationship, will not come to pass. Second, there will be no certain set of items to include in this kind of a definition, so one will never be able to say that the surrounding definition is complete, not fragmented. For Blanchot, though, fragmentation is "the mark of coherence all the firmer because in that it has to come undone in order to be reached" (*Disaster* 60).

Obviously, this method of communication is not unique to describing the disaster, but it is the method we should use to describe any of these figures of the outside we encounter. And by the time of *The Writing of the Disaster*, it is clear that we will only find more and more of these figures to describe, rather than rooting out all the remaining questions to come to an absolute description of this philosophical problem. This is why Blanchot's more important contribution is his thoughts on how to deal with the situation of

the disaster, even if his choice of the disaster as a figure is also innovative. His choice of the disaster marks a kind of familiarity with this philosophical problem by this point. We no longer need to take on traditional philosophical figures such as death or God, and we no longer need to create new figures like the neuter or the war machine. We can take the concept embodied in a word we can hear every day and demonstrate the importance of the outside, and what to do about it.

Blanchot is no longer dazzled by the question of the outside, but is rather dealing with the effects of the presence of the question. The fragmented mode of these two books and the corresponding entreaty for others to deal with philosophical concepts in a similarly incoherent way provide a basis for the next stage of philosophical thinking. Blanchot does not only dwell on the idea of the disaster as an example of something that we recognize but cannot experience, but also proceeds to consider what we might do with this strange state of affairs. In *The Step Not Beyond*, Blanchot establishes his own method of dealing with these questions, and then in *The Writing of the Disaster* he uses the strong example of the disaster to turn his attention to the necessity of using such a method to deal with the philosophical questions of the day. In these two books, Blanchot also theorizes the way we need to write about the disaster, and this enacts a purposefully fragmentary way of writing. This is a way of writing that surrounds the point that you are trying to describe, rather than focusing directly at that point. So, the correct approach is a fragmentary approach that does not strive for coherence.

The way Blanchot deals with this popular concept of the outside is especially insightful in the body of philosophical work we had—or if you like, have—in the postmodern period, and in addition, his efforts to go beyond mere description and bring us to a necessarily tentative understanding of what we might actually do to deal with this state of affairs are truly significant. The only other philosopher who seems to do such a

thing in this period is Gilles Deleuze (with Felix Guattari in the co-authored works). It will be these philosophers who will help us transition to the next post-postmodern era, whether we end up determining such a period or not.

The connection from these philosophical thoughts to the study of the novel is straightforward. Novel theory is a contradiction in itself, something like calling Blanchot's philosophy a theory of the outside. In conventional terms, a theory provides a coherent explanation and description of a particular problem. Novel theory does not do this for the novel, and Blanchot's philosophy does not do this for the outside. In a sense they do everything but this, recognizing the essential lack of these concepts.

Criticism of the novel, then, should be purposefully fragmentary, and similar to what Blanchot seems to propose. This will not produce a new theory of literature or of the novel, nor will it build knowledge in the way that we typically think of scholarly work doing. Rather it opens a space for human communication about all kinds of concepts and texts, while at the same time maintaining the important human creativity that the restrictions of communication can inhibit. To date, we have a huge scholarly institution studying literature, and the purpose is to generate and disseminate new ideas on literature, so that in a piecewise fashion we add to the world's knowledge about literature. The novel shows that this project, like the project of narratology, makes some intuitive sense, but is ultimately doomed to failure. The project that we should be embarking on is much less easy to categorize and institutionalize, but the novel shows us that this is the way to go.

3. Boundaries reconsidered: the puzzle novel

In this study, I hope to move towards what novel theory, as described above, suggests would be a more appropriate criticism of the novel. This involves an admission that this study is necessarily incomplete, and seeks to surround its particular outside with words, hoping that the reader will be able to take something from that fragmentary text and make their own meaning.[48] In the end, all of the qualities of the novel and of criticism of the novel, for better or for worse, apply to the present study, in its creation, reading, and use. Therefore my purpose is to present a text that is not completely coherent, but provides a thread a reader may follow to get to their own understanding. As Blanchot so elegantly shows us, this is both all that we can hope for and the highest goal we can have as writers (*Disaster*).

A puzzle novel is structured in such a way that the reader must piece together the basic story in order to understand the plot of the novel because neither are given to the reader in a clear way. The novel presents itself as unfinished, and requires a reader's input. A traditional novel does not require this construction: the story and plot are clearly explained (even if the story and plot are complicated).

The basic puzzle metaphor is a jigsaw puzzle. When you construct a jigsaw puzzle, you assume that the pieces provided can create some coherent picture. You assume that there are the right number of pieces: not too many and not too few. You assume there are boundaries to the puzzle, and moreover straight pieces, corner pieces, and interior pieces that clarify those boundaries. You assume that the pieces given are the pieces to the puzzle you presume you are working on, and not to some other puzzle.

[48] See the previous chapter, where the concept of the "outside" and the use of a "fragmentary" text are discussed.

This refers to the puzzles with which most of us are most familiar: mass-produced commercial puzzles. The metaphor is more exact if you consider an original puzzle painted and cut by an artist: a puzzle that has no duplicate. In this case you may not have a picture; you do not know if you have the right amount of pieces; you know that pieces will possibly fit together, both because of the shape and of the image; fitting the pieces together is difficult but not impossible, so the puzzling is never so hard as to appear random; the pieces already fitted may change character and cease to fit or fit better elsewhere upon finding other pieces; the pieces fitted together add to the confidence that success is possible and/or the process is worthwhile; the initial interest in puzzling gives way to the satisfaction of the already fitted pieces, etc. With an original puzzle, one has more of a feeling of struggling with another consciousness, a consciousness that may or may not be trustworthy in upholding the "contract" between the puzzle maker (author) and the puzzler (reader).

We could think of the reading process of a traditional novel under the puzzle metaphor. As you read the novel, the pieces of the story are given to you one by one, along with directions as to where in the puzzle you should fit the pieces. The novel itself presents to you a system to complete the puzzle. There is a process of puzzling, but the reader is not active in constructing the puzzle. Probably most important in the traditional novel is neither the amount nor the type of material that is included in the story, but rather the cues the novel provides to the reader to put the right pieces in the right places in the right order. These cues are traditionally expected of narrative; in fact, some have a hard time describing something as narrative if these cues, which can come in a variety of forms, are partially absent or inconsistent.

The "puzzling" of a traditional novel is not a puzzle novel in the terms I use. The puzzle novel asks the reader to pick up the pieces of the narrative after reading the book

and construct the story. In this way, the puzzle novel sees reading as necessarily a process of re-reading. The first read-through of a novel is just data-gathering; it is not yet reading the story. The process of re-reading opens up the reading experience to endless repetition, with each iteration different than the others. Once the reader must re-read the novel, once this concept is established as a normal reading strategy, the typical concept we have of reading a book from first page to last page is undermined. "Reading" is something completely different now, and can be said to be not only a recursive or repetitive process, but an endless process. One is never done reading a puzzle novel.

In addition, the novel provides all the material to understand the story, but requires creative work from the reader. The puzzle novel is not only complicated or hard to understand. The puzzle novel is not only a long novel or a novel with a lot of characters or detail. A puzzle novel is not just a novel that makes the reader think hard. The puzzle novel has to force the reader to use the pieces given to him or her to construct a story, not just comprehend a story.

Many theorists of the novel find themselves having to specify that what is commonly called a "novel" is not necessarily their object of study. Lukács contrasts the "novel" that he assumes in theorizing the form with the "entertainment novel", which in many ways looks like a novel but ignores many of the innovative narrative possibilities that the novel form offers, and therefore is not a real novel (*Theory*). Bakhtin delineates a "First Line" and a "Second Line" in the production of the modern novel, emphasizing that it is the Second Line that interested him, because the First Line only mimics the style of the novel, but does not truly invest itself in the heteroglossia on which the novel capitalizes ("Discourse" 415–416).

Many novels can be thought of as puzzle novels according to the definition so far. However, I choose a more specific definition of the genre in my study. The justification

for my specific focus is not absolute, other than the absolute fact that no study should claim to encompass all of the facets of one novel or of one novelist. However, nor should any study claim that a specific focus comes to an absolutely correct conclusion with which its readers should unconditionally agree. The best justification for my focus is that it is useful.

One can think of the puzzle novel on several levels of a pyramid, each level up being more specific and containing less examples. It is not necessary to specify such levels exactly, but it is useful to have a concept that this variation exists, and that ultimately what I want to focus on is one of the higher levels. But again this is an image that we have to use and abuse, for there can be any number of tops of any number of pyramids, and I am creating a particular one for this study.

First, the puzzle novel does not ask the reader to fill in pieces with special outside knowledge or sources. In puzzling out the story, the reader has only the information that the novel gives to him or her. In his study of *Ulysses*, Leo Bersani proposes a "naïve" reader like this;[49] I detail Bersani's study in the next chapter. I find the assumption of this kind of reader useful for other later novels as well.

Second, it is an important aspect of each puzzle novel that it encourages engaging in the puzzle, that it gives the reader reason to believe that the puzzle can be completed. In many ways the novel simply appeals to our human need to put forth an effort to understand a somewhat unclear text. But the novel cannot appear completely chaotic, or fragmented in a careless way.

Third, if the reading experience of a text reasonably meets the reader's expectations of that experience, then the reader is compelled to work out the meaning of the text. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) was uncomfortable for many

[49] Bersani, Leo. *The Culture of Redemption*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, 155.

readers in the 1970s, but if the same text appeared in the 1870s, it would not have reasonably met readers' expectations. It would have been seen as nonsense, chaotic. We do not search for meaning in every confusion we encounter, rather we look for meaning where it seems beneficial to do so within the limits of time and effort. But, in principle, readers must search for meaning given a reasonable text. In fact, we could say that this is a basic human need, that all other things being equal, one will put forth an effort to understand a text when an understanding does not come automatically.

Fourth, because the reader is an important maker of meaning in the reading process, the reader has to be the one finally to decide if the puzzle is complete. The novel does not do this for us. In this more specific conception, most of the assumptions listed above about the puzzle are not valid. We do not know if there are too many or too few pieces, we do not know what the picture is, etc. If the puzzle is not complete, the reader needs to decide if it will ever be completed, and if not what meaning that has in itself. Ultimately, this is an individual decision, and reflects that cooperative nature of meaning making in the reading process of a puzzle novel.

The puzzle novel defies narratology not because its operations are so dispersed or diffuse that they can not be mapped, but rather because this can only be done for one novel at a time (if even this is possible), and because ultimately this mapping, more clearly than with other novels, leads the reader to a place where the reader has to decide for him or herself how "finished" the reading is. So a conclusion about the operation of the puzzle novel can and has to be made, but it also has to be both informed and authoritative and provisional. Generally, my idea of the puzzle novel is not a theory, in the classic sense. I do not create the definition of a genre into which I place examples. At the same time, it would be disingenuous to claim that something of a "theoretical" motivation does not

obtain in this study. In the same way that a puzzle novel uses and abuses concepts, I use and abuse the concept of the theory in forming this concept of the puzzle novel.

Because of all of these qualities, the puzzle novel breaks boundaries, but at the same time it does not disregard or destroy boundaries. The puzzle novel somehow does both, it uses and abuses boundaries and definitions and innovations and assumptions. The puzzle novel invites us to create a new kind of criticism, the kind of criticism Lukács and Bakhtin advocate.[50] It is, essentially, as inclusive a criticism as criticism can be. It is a criticism not "freed" of anything except extremism. It is pulled on all sides by mutually opposing forces, by which it stands straight and has meaning. It does not stand straight because it adheres to a strongly positivistic theoretical foundation. The puzzle novel perhaps does not even rest on the ground at all, or has only an infinitely receding dot of contact with the ground. The puzzle novel does not stand by its own construction but rather because of what it is pulled by, and by the fact that it is not pulled disproportionately in one way or in another.

The puzzle novel does not kill the author á la Barthes,[51] but it does not doggedly follow authorial intention. The assumption of the real-life author as the narrator in a novel and/or the god-like guiding force behind the narrative is still strong in literary study, and still needs to be countered by pushing ourselves to discuss texts as texts, not as creations. However, a concept of a real-life author as God of the novel is not forbidden in studying a novel; this concept serves as one of the cables pulling the novel up, but without other opposing cables the novel would fall into simplicity and meaninglessness, or would need the superficial support of a strong *a priori* theoretical basis.

The puzzle novel does not adhere to super-textual structures (or textual structures), but it does not dismiss structure. Even more so, a puzzle novel will often propose

[50] See the previous chapter, where Lukács and Bakhtin's ideas on criticism are discussed.
[51] Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Image Music Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

structures within itself or refer to structures outside the text as macro-level organizing principles, only to undermine those structures while using them or even paradoxically flatly denying that structure after using it. The reader is left to determine what the meaning of this is, if one is to take the structure seriously or not, and why in either case.

The assumption we often have about reading a novel from first page to last page is both exploited and undermined in the puzzle novel. That is, the puzzle novel does not destroy the linear book reading process, though one could theoretically make this conclusion. By this I mean that one could construct a "theory" about a particular novel or novels that relies on an inflexible definition of a linear reading process, defining anything that deviates from this linearity as destroying the linear reading process. However, in making this conclusion one would have to disregard the obvious organization of the puzzle novel, which almost always places certain events in certain places in the book, even if at the same time it is clear that the reading process is truly a never-ending process of re-reading. Ultimately the puzzle novel accomplishes two opposing things. One should see this as a useful proliferation of meaning and possibilities rather than a contradiction that logically produces nothing, and is therefore useless. The puzzle novel produces more and does more by not following traditional logic, rather than dismissing itself.

A puzzle novel is not reader-centered. It does not transfer all of the making of meaning onto the reader. Sometimes in discussion of these kinds of texts, it seems that this is the case, but this comes from the tradition of seeing the reader as merely a consumer of meaning. These texts work against that assumption, and the tendency is therefore to define them as diametrically opposed to that structure. This is not the case for the puzzle novel, because it is suspicious of following any one concept absolutely, whether that concept is squarely in the mainstream or directly opposed to the status quo. In the same way the puzzle novel is not author-centered, either. It is not even character-centered or narrator-

centered, or centered on any particular narrative or textual phenomenon. If we have to say that the puzzle novel is centered on anything, we would have to say it is read*ing*-centered, which also means writing-centered. The puzzle novel innovates with the concept of authorship.

The puzzle novel allows readers to leave the novel without solving or completing the puzzle, but the reader in this case still leaves with some sense of story and plot. This reader refuses the encouragement to engage further, but does not leave empty-handed. This power of refusal is not a rejection of the novel, and it is a place all readers have to come to at one point or another. This refusal, of course, may be temporary or permanent. In either case, the reader is not left with chaos and incoherence. There is a sense of plot and story, an understanding of what the reader has participated in making, but has not been able to complete. The puzzle novel does not expect the reader to find the key to the plot of the novel by hard work, and at this point the reader can, sated, leave the novel. In this set-up, until the reader finds the key and ends the reading process, the reader is not satisfied, does not have a sense of story, because such a novel dangles the prospect of a coherent plot to consume in front of the reader, which is a carrot for which all readers must long. Rather the puzzle novel still dangles this carrot, but by the making of meaning being a cooperative and inclusive process, the feeling of a plot comes even during the process, balancing the need for an absolute coherent completion and the need to continue reading.

This list of ways that the puzzle novel uses and abuses different aspects of reading is not complete, but rather serves as a set of examples for the kind of in-between-ness in which the puzzle novel resides.

It is clear from the review of novel theory and narratology above[52] that the puzzle novel described here is, necessarily, a novel. As all novel theorists recognize, there may be

[52] See the previous chapter.

novelistic aspects to texts that we call different genres, such as poetry or drama. But this does not make them novels, nor does it deny the special place the novel holds as a genre. In different ways, novel theorists clearly describe the modern novel as the most potent instantiation of these "novelistic" qualities, not denying that other genres, especially in the modern era, may have become "novelized" to a certain extent. In the end, it is impossible for a poem to be like a novel and remain a poem. However, a novel may be like a poem, and still be a novel.

In focusing on the selected novels below, it may seem that this type of puzzle novel has come and gone within the twentieth century. However, its advent and decline may be only apparent. Just like the modern novel as addressed by Bakhtin, the puzzle novel possesses qualities that may be seen going back all the way to ancient history, and a kind of puzzle novel may still be in production today. This study does not seek to make definitive statements about such things, but rather to provide a framework within which readers can investigate these issues themselves. In the end, the puzzle novel may have been a gimmick. This may be why its time so quickly passed. This may be a function of such trends and movements changing more quickly now than before. Or its time could be seen as almost a century and therefore not so short. Or perhaps it is a form linked to postmodernism, and its possible disappearance shows that we are beyond that era or sensibility. Or the puzzle novel served a purpose, and to write more puzzle novels now would be uninventive.

But, especially with the novel genre, it is entirely possible (maybe probable) that the trends outlined in this study have been changed in a way that takes the puzzle novel of the twenty-first century out of the visible spectrum that this study sets up. This is one possible area among many for future studies, along with taking the framework set up in

this study and considering other texts, and even re-considering the novels that I address below. My readings of puzzle novels below are also not meant to be conclusive.

One rather important criterion in determining the puzzle novel for this study needs to be addressed, and will serve as the main organizing principle for my readings of selected novels below. In looking at novels in the terms set out above, I have found an interesting commonality among several different novels that meet these criteria. All of them have a rather simple structure at one level that contains a core story, and then on another level displays extra material. The core story is rather traditional in structure (but the reader only understands this story through re-reading and puzzling), focusing on one main character over a chronological series of events. The extra material is everything in the novel that does not directly narrate this core plot. In *Ulysses*, the core story is Bloom's day, and any reader knows that much of the material in the book is not needed to narrate this story. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the core story is Slothrop's nine months, and an abundance of other material is also included. In *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) the core story is Eddie Hobson's, and the other material is not needed for this simple narrative.

It seems that this core story plus extra material scheme is the major structure through which the novels considered below have tried to accomplish the paradoxical experience of reading described above. The core story in a puzzle novel follows a traditional plot line: a protagonist who goes through some kind of significant change over time, and the experience of that change is narrated. These events are narrated in chronological order, and the events do not have large time gaps; the reader is "with" the main character during the process of the change. The core story could be narrated in a much shorter text excerpted from the novel. Although, to make this cut properly, one would have to be at an advanced stage of puzzling. Even this determination of the core story in these works is a particular construction of a particular reader, but in relative terms

it seems justified to say that most readers, in puzzling the novel, would realize these core stories in these ways. One of the assumptions I make here is that readers often try to find the thread of a story by following what seem to be main characters, and keeping track of the cause and effect of what happens to them. Generally, I find that at this level the puzzle novel does not frustrate the expectations of the readers.

The material in the novel that is not part of the core story can serve a variety of purposes, but all of these relate to the core story. In the limit case, this material serves as a diversion from the puzzle, connected by not being connected through the puzzle. Because of the puzzle structure, including the anchor of the core story, the extra material has a wide breadth of area of operation while still being in a coherent work. The readings provided below largely will take on a two-part structure. First, a description of a particular puzzling of the core story is given. While all acts of the puzzling of these novels can be different for different readers, this part of each novel seems to allow the author or narrator to dominate and to a large extent determine the meaning-making of the narrative. Still, for each novel my re-construction of the core story varies, sometimes taking care to show exactly how one creates this story, sometimes glossing over this procedure. Second, a consideration of the extra material in each novel is given, and the effect of this material varies widely among the three novels. This is because it is in this realm that the novels allow the reader more space to be creative, in some cases turning the tables on the more author-centered core story puzzle and allowing the reader to dominate in the making of meaning. In each case I try to comment on the effect of each puzzle considering both of these stages, but I also hope to do so in a way that makes it clear that each reading is provisional and paradoxical, in the manner necessary for a puzzle novel. My greatest hope is that these readings will give the reader reason to go to these puzzle novels themselves to see if they come to similar or different conclusions in puzzling out the novels. To take my readings as

definitive or as a replacement for puzzling out the novels oneself would be a mistake, and would be unfortunate.

4. *Ulysses*: puzzle novel foundations

Ulysses serves as a kind of introductory text in my study, because it is can be seen as one of the first puzzle novels. It is not the focus of my study, and I do not pretend to contribute much to Joyce or to *Ulysses* scholarship in my analysis. This is especially because these fields of scholarship are incredibly huge, detailed, and sophisticated. In fact, I largely reflect Leo Bersani's comments (*Culture)* on *Ulysses* in light of my concept of the puzzle novel. In addition, my perception is that the character of much of the scholarship on *Ulysses* adheres to the traditional modes of literary analysis that theorists of the novel insist is useless in coming to terms with what the novel actually does. This strikes me as particularly interesting and potentially telling, that this is happening in scholarship on one of the first modern texts to make blatantly clear the multiple possibilities of the novel form. It is almost as if the scholarship is innovative in an inverse proportion to how the novel is innovative. However, the investigation of such a revolutionary study is also not my focus.

Ulysses certainly deserves our critical attention. *Ulysses* is so celebrated because it changed our concept of reading. Leo Bersani, in *The Culture of Redemption* (1990), asserts that *Ulysses* "asks that we be nothing but the exegetical machine necessary to complete its sense" for "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" (*Culture* 175).

I propose to consider the puzzles in novels using only the material that is given to the reader in the text of the novel itself.[53] This becomes a big problem in puzzling out *Ulysses*. The world of criticism that surrounds this novel is huge, and much of it relies on

[53] This, among many other details of the kind of "puzzle novel" I consider in this study, is detailed in the previous chapter.

extra-textual material, including material coming from Joyce himself. This means that the scheme about *Ulysses* from Joyce is not used in this analysis, to give one example. *Ulysses* is such an infamous example of narrative that often readers who have not encountered the text before are encouraged to prepare for the reading by delving into some of this scholarship and other primary sources to orient and organize their reading before approaching the actual text of the novel. Personally, this always strikes me as somewhat backwards, another example of Joyce scholarship getting ahead of itself, but the main point is that this kind of reader is not the proposed reader that Bersani and myself assume.

Bersani also postulates a purposefully naïve reader of *Ulysses* in *The Culture of Redemption*: "Let us approach *Ulysses* as naively as possible, while admitting that this decision can be little more than a ruse" (*Culture* 155). This is the kind of reader I also propose for all the novels addressed in this study. Bersani writes that *Ulysses* is a novel which not only presents a puzzle to the reader, but also gives the reader all the necessary tools to complete the puzzle: "*Ulysses* is often hard to read but, more than any other work of literature, it is also a guidebook to how it should be read. … Joyce … helps us on the road to all those recognitions and identifications necessary for the 'right' reading of *Ulysses*" (*Culture* 163–4). If we agree with Bersani, then already the status of *Ulysses* as a puzzle novel is in doubt, according to the terms I set out above. These "recognitions and identifications" seem to be the important and explicit connections among parts of the narrative that are necessary in traditional fiction. Because of this, solving the puzzle in *Ulysses* is more of a deciphering exercise than a creative process. But it is exactly the "enormous exegetical work" that *Ulysses* requires of its reader that makes it very close to a puzzle novel. I realize that it may be strange to begin with an example of a "puzzle novel" as the *first* puzzle novel and now claim that in truth it is not a puzzle novel in total. But I trust by now the reader is becoming accustomed to such contradictions and paradoxes, and

more conventionally the step that *Ulysses* takes in the history of the novel in terms of the puzzle novel is impossible to ignore. Also practically, *Ulysses* provides an important foundation with which to compare the other texts in this study, and presumably many other modern and postmodern novels. Below I determine two puzzles in *Ulysses*: a puzzle to determine the plot in the story time, and a larger puzzle to determine the plot of the rest of the lives of the main characters. These align roughly with the core story and extra material, respectively.

In working through the core story puzzle, I will assume less reader knowledge of *Ulysses* itself than is conventional. On the one hand this is necessary to describe the puzzle, and on the other hand it is desirable given the different kind of analysis this study wants to enact. The review of the core story puzzle in *Ulysses* given below is rather thorough, which is necessary not only for the purpose of delineating this story in this novel, but also to serve as a basis and comparison for similar structures in other, later novels. Also, I find it important to emphasize what the naïve reader's perspective on *Ulysses* would be, since in this day and age such a response to this text is hard to imagine.

The reader can interpret a reliable plot in *Ulysses*, an event-based summary of the story from the morning of June 16, 1904 to the morning of June 17, 1904. This may seem a simple task, but for the naïve reader, constructing this summary is a puzzle. For any part of the text of *Ulysses* the main puzzle 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 certain narrator identities seem to exist in disparate parts of the text.

The narrators in the novel are Stephen, Bloom, or Molly through interior monologue, or one of 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 chapters. 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 usually 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 story time, but I will deal with this material later. Below, I outline the narrator as I have puzzled it out by chapter and indicate the simplest events that can be puzzled out.

4.1 The core story of *Ulysses*

It is widely recognized that the first half of *Ulysses* is narrated in a much more conventional style than the second half, although the reasons for this continue to be hotly debated. Joyce employs reliable authorial narrators in *Ulysses*, but only as one option among many. The first chapter, "Telemachus", mostly uses this narrator, although we do hear some of Stephen's interior monologue. For literary scholars, and certainly for Joyce or *Ulysses* scholars, it is only with an effort of imagination that we can picture the naïve reader approaching this chapter. It cannot be immediately clear that the digressions from the authorial narrator into Stephen's interior monologue are just that: digressions and not different parts of one narrator, or that the authorial narrator is the one to be trusted, and Stephen's interior monologue serves more than anything as character embellishment rather than narration of the story and plot itself.

This chapter serves as an example of the puzzle that is needed to figure out the narrator identities. Because there are no explicit indications when the narrator shifts from Stephen's interior monologue to the authorial narrator, the reader must have a strong sense of Stephen as a character to separate out the parts of his interior monologue and the parts

with an authorial narrator. Also, one cannot have a good judgment of the authorial narrator as reliable unless one has a rather wide knowledge of the whole novel, and is able to determine that the events that are being narrated are rather standard realism. So the reader is already re-reading here: once the reader has the knowledge necessary to draw these boundaries—and at least one reading of the entire novel is needed to begin doing this—then the reader can confidently determine what events are really happening in the chapter. In this way, the novel requires a large amount of work for seemingly little payoff: just knowing the basic events of the simple core story. This quality repeats throughout the first half of *Ulysses*.

Knowing the narrator in "Telemachus" (that is, in re-reading "Telemachus"), the naïve reader can rather easily determine the story events in this chapter: Stephen starts his day at the abandoned watchtower he lives in, speaking with his roommate Buck Mulligan. None of this discussion seems particularly important with respect to the rest of the core story.

The second chapter, "Nestor", is mostly Stephen's interior monologue, although there are also places where the authorial narrator guides the reader. In this way it is the inverse of "Telemachus" with regard to authorial narration and internal monologue, but still the reader relies on the authorial narrator to communicate the story events, as would be expected. Here Stephen teaches a class then speaks with his boss Mr. Deasy and receives his wages.

"Proteus" is almost completely Stephen's interior monologue, and perhaps because of this the scene is elusively simple (or vice versa): Stephen walks and thinks on the strand, and perhaps he masturbates. Over the first three chapters, which make up part I of the novel, there is a progression from a dominant authorial narrator to a dominant interior

monologue narrator; the narration goes more and more inside of Stephen's head, and we get less and less reliable descriptions of events.

Part II, which contains the bulk of the book, begins with "Calypso". Several of the chapters in this part require the same kind of rather simple puzzling employed in Part I to identify the narrator. In a strict sense, "Calypso" continues the type of narrator in the previous chapter, "Proteus", but with a new character through which the interior monologue is delivered: Leopold Bloom, announced immediately at the beginning of the chapter. "Calypso" employs mostly Bloom's interior monologue with the minority presence of an authorial narrator in a similar way as "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, and artistic interior.

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 fifth chapter "Lotus Eaters", the sixth chapter "Hades", the eighth "Lestrygonians", the eleventh "Sirens", and at least half of the thirteenth chapter "Nausicaa". All of these chapters follow the puzzling process described for part I.

"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. "Lotus Eaters" follows Bloom as he gets a letter at the post office addressed to Henry Flower, his pseudonym. Bloom reads this love letter from Martha Clifford. In "Hades" Bloom shares a taxi with other men to attend Dignam's funeral.

With the seventh chapter, "Aeolus", a more difficult narrative structure begins to appear. As mentioned above, there will still follow at least two chapters where the Bloom-

centered narration will reign, but interspersed will be more difficult puzzling tasks for the reader. "Aeolus" has an authorial narrator who presents the text as a series of vignettes that look like newspaper stories; the chapter is set in a newspaper office. Bloom is there to speak with the editor about an advertisement, and Stephen makes an appearance. Absent the separation into vignettes and the newspaper-like headlines for each vignette, this chapter would be narrated much like the other Bloom-centered narrated chapters. The newspaper set-up obviously coincides with the location of the narration, in a newspaper office. This rather obvious narrative innovation adds to the Bloom-centered narration another layer of narrative consciousness that the reader must recognize. There is clearly some narrator, at least in this chapter, who is presenting the Bloom-centered narration to the reader. In other chapters like "Calypso" the narrator has chosen to be invisible, while here in "Aeolus" the narrator becomes more apparent. This addition of a layer or layers is really what the rest of the book innovates with in various ways. No longer do we have Bloom as the narrator, or an invisible narrator presenting Bloom. This narrator or narrators is now obvious and visible, if still undefined in the narration. "Aeolus" introduces us to this narrative presence in a rather gentle way, for the newspaper headlines do not disrupt the narration of events in the chapter; as noted above one could mostly read the chapter without the headlines and understand it pretty well. However, in re-reading, we now need to consider if that "invisible" narrator is as benign as it seems to be.

In "Lestrygonians", chapter eight, the narration is similar to "Proteus", here with Bloom providing the interior monologue rather than Stephen. Bloom walks along the strand, thinking and speaking with people who pass. By returning to this type of narration, again hiding or obliterating the mediating narrator we have in the previous chapter, the novel shows that it has not given itself over to a different kind of narration. So in a sense we have to see "Aeolus" as a change, but that change does not completely rely on a linear

reading of the novel. The novel has some concept of which chapters precede which, but does not organize itself strictly according to a linear reading.

Chapter nine, "Scylla and Charybdis" is roughly half Stephen's interior monologue, and half authorial narration. Thanks to the authorial narrator, the scene is clear: Stephen is at the library with some other men, discussing Shakespeare. Bloom makes an appearance, so that now the two main characters of the book have crossed paths twice, but not interacted.

"Wandering Rocks" mostly uses an authorial narrator, with the narrative again presented in a series of short vignettes. This chapter shows a number of people walking after lunch, and each vignette is focalized through one of these people. However, the sections that focus on Stephen and Bloom both use the interior monologue of Stephen and Bloom, respectively. Again, the scene is deceptively simple, for the only event is that people are walking and talking after lunch. This chapter adds another slightly different narrative strategy to the variety of strategies used so far. Up to this point the only characters that we have experienced as focalizers are Bloom and Stephen, the main characters of the book. Now we suddenly get a large number of secondary characters as focalizers. This again forces the reader to recognize more readily a narrative level above the main characters. This chapter exposes some of the assumptions we make when we speak in conventional narratological terms. Technically, this chapter is not narrated any differently than any of the others. In the vignettes that do not feature Stephen and Bloom, we have an authorial narrator focalizing the narrative through a particular character. We have had this in most of the chapters previous to this, at least in part. But the sheer number of characters in this one chapter, and the obvious fact, even on a first, linear reading, that these characters are not main characters in the book, make us again recognize a higher narrative level. Usually, in the chapters with Bloom-centered narration, for example, we

assume that this level does not exist, and for all practical purposes we label Bloom as the narrator.

In the eleventh chapter, "Sirens", again the Bloom-centered narration is dominant, perhaps with more of Bloom's internal monologue than we get in other such chapters. This, of course, excepts the opening sixty-three lines, which in terms of identifying a narrator are all but impenetrable. Other than the opening, and in terms of the narration, "Sirens" is not particularly different than other chapters. In chapter eleven, Bloom is in a pub writing a letter to Martha.

"Cyclops" again turns our attention to narrative levels, in yet another different way. In chapter twelve, we have a first-person narrator: an unknown character tells the story of Bloom's near escape from the attack of an anti-semite in a pub. Here we not only depart from the focalization through Bloom or Stephen, but literally this unnamed character is the narrator of the chapter, rather than the focalizer. In a linear reading of the book, the reader has to doubt that this character will now become a main character, and indeed his dominance is limited to this chapter. But of course the story narrated here is not irrelevant, in fact it centers on Bloom. In terms of the narration, in some ways this chapter might remind us of "Wandering Rocks", where we are also suddenly turned away from Stephen and Bloom. But here the change is in the narrator himself and the change is to one other personage. In narratological terms, looking at only this chapter, this unnamed character is simply the narrator. In the context of the novel as a whole, we must acknowledge a higher narrative presence.

The thirteenth chapter, "Nausicaa", again shows how the narrative in *Ulysses* both changes and stays the same. The first half of "Nausicaa" uses free indirect discourse focalized through a girl on the beach. The second half uses the Bloom-centered narration, for Bloom is sitting nearby on the beach. It is possible that the first half is Bloom's

imagination of the character's narration (hence the free indirect discourse instead of interior monologue), and if we took this as accurate, we could identify the chapter as another example of Bloom-centered narration. But even if it is similar to other chapters in this way, in no other chapter is there such a consistent and sustained imagination through the narrative structure. If we consider the first half of the chapter as narrated by another narrator focalizing though the girl on the beach, this is another narrative set-up that we have not yet encountered in the novel. In terms of the story events, Bloom is watching the girls on the beach, and possibly he masturbates. In yet another way, although not in a completely new way, the narrator is complicated in this chapter.

In my view, "Oxen of the Sun" is the chapter where the limits of reader competence are really tested, as is Bersani's claim that the novel provides a guide to its own reading, and readers just have to "catch up" with the exegetical work the author has already done. This is always a subjective judgment, but it seems to me that identifying the narrative strategy in this fourteenth chapter without the help of information from outside the novel is perhaps too difficult a task for the reader, if the reader is not an expert on the history of the English language. The narrator in "Oxen of the Sun" is authorial, but the style of the chapter makes it very difficult for the naïve reader to interpret events. The narration mimics successive stages in the history of the English language, and the changes between styles are not announced or managed in any way by the narration. The narrative strategy here deals directly with language itself, which makes it qualitatively different than changing the personage of the narrator or focalizer as above. Obviously, Joyce wants to say something about language itself in this chapter, perhaps in a similar way as he wants to say something about music in "Sirens", but this focus of "Sirens" does not necessarily directly affect the narration (except for the opening "song", which admittedly is uninterpretable narration-wise), where innovation in the language of the chapter itself

must have an impact on how the reader understands the way the story is narrated. That is, the language a novel uses has a more direct impact than the music it tries to imitate.

It strikes me that the foregoing is a particular problem in the logic of the novel. The story of this chapter is that Bloom comes to the maternity hospital to visit a friend, and meets Stephen in a room full of medical students telling vulgar stories. Bloom follows Stephen as he leaves the hospital, and they spend the rest of the story together. Bloom and Stephen have crossed paths twice in the story to this point, and now they finally unite, in the most difficult chapter for the naïve reader to understand. Of course, in subsequent chapters the reader will realize that Bloom and Stephen now occupy the same story space, and the effect may be to disrupt the part of the text where they actually meet, make it in some sense a black box. In any case, clearly here perhaps more than in any other chapter, the reader senses the presence of the higher narrative presence.

"Circe" has an authorial narrator as well as Bloom's and Stephen's interior monologues, and in this way shows clearly that Stephen and Bloom now share the stage, perhaps to emphasize their uniting in the last chapter. The narration in the fifteenth chapter is similar to the Bloom-centered chapters, but now rather "Bloom and Stephen-centered" instead. This is a slight difference, but since Bloom's interior monologue and Stephen's are so distinct throughout the novel, the reader does not have a significant problem making sense of the narration. However, other than this innovation, the narrative strategy in a sense goes back to "Aeolus" in mimicking another genre in one of the chapters of this novel. "Circe" is presented in the style of a play. This is a curious mix of genres, since in a play we typically assume a clear and consistent authorial "narrator" who presents the text in a way that follows the conventions so strictly that we do not have to think of this narrator as a narrator at all. However, here we have interior monologue included in a way that violates the conventions of drama, which again shows that *Ulysses* is indeed a prime

example of a novel. Similar in a general way to "Aeolus", the effect is however quite different, in that the genre that is mimicked has a larger impact on the story in the chapter. Here one cannot "read past" the dramatic presentation as one can read past the newspaper headlines. The story is that Bloom and Stephen are in nighttown, visiting Bella Cohen's brothel.

With chapter sixteen we begin part III of the novel. Here, well into the story and after five hundred pages of narrative innovation, in "Eumaeus" we have a traditional, distinct authorial narrator, and we see Bloom and Stephen make their way to Bloom's house, talking along the way. By now, of course, the reader does not rely on the assumption that the silent narrator is irrelevant, so this conventional presentation cannot be truly conventional. Also, the conventionality of this chapter probably sets up the reader for the following chapter, which, while not as practically difficult as "Oxen of the Sun," poses some of the most difficult narrative questions of the novel.

"Ithaca" is a favorite chapter for the critical attention of *Ulysses* scholars, because it highlights the quality of *Ulysses* as a puzzle. The narration itself in this chapter is technically the same as in "Eumaeus," but the chapter is presented in an unconventional way: the whole chapter is narrated in a question-and-answer format. Both the questions and the answers are narrated in the manner of an authorial narrator, and not as a character within the story. So, the first question is if there are two narrative presences here, or if there is just one narrator both asking and answering. The text does not give us much evidence to decide one way or the other. But more importantly, since the questions and answers remain in the realm of an authorial narrator, they are often naturally metafictional. That is, they ask and answer questions about the story itself. Obviously, one would expect the answers from an authorial narrator to be reliable in such a context, and so this chapter at first appears to the reader as a key to the rest of the narrative. And indeed, the questions

asked and the answers provided seem to deal openly with many of the questions the reader has had about the story as it has progressed.

Interestingly, though, the apparent correctness of the information given in "Ithaca" comes under serious question when one investigates other material provided in other places in the novel. This is so much so that it seems that the correctness is indeed just apparent, and the narrator is unreliable. However, these questions apply mainly to information about Bloom's past (the larger puzzle, see the next section), not the story-time events. So, in terms of the core story, the reader can rather easily interpret what is happening: Bloom and Stephen arrive at Bloom's house, sit in Bloom's kitchen talking and drinking cocoa, then urinate on the lawn before Stephen leaves, declining Bloom's offer to stay the night. "Ithaca," probably more than any other chapter, both encourages and frustrates the questioning of many things about the novel, including our main question in this review, to wit, who is the narrator?

"Penelope", the last chapter in the book, is also a critic's favorite, but this time the reason is the opposite of why "Ithaca" is a favorite. Chapter eighteen is devoted to Molly Bloom's interior monologue, and because of this is both intriguing and from the very beginning obviously diffuse. Here in the last chapter we again get a narrative strategy that we have not experienced before: even though Molly is a major character, the narration has not been focalized through her, nor has she served as a character narrator. Her narration refers to many important larger issues, but in terms of the core story, for the last time events are deceptively simple: Molly lays in bed the next morning, thinking. All of the places where there is an extended interior monologue feature an almost complete lack of story events, and this chapter follows this pattern.

Above I have discussed the narrative strategy employed in each chapter of *UIysses*, along with the core story events that one can comprehend through working out these

narrative strategies. The core story itself could be described in a short paragraph, so most of the discussion above is about the narration. This is telling: the reader must first get a grip on the narrative strategy in each chapter, and then go back and interpret the events. For most of the chapters, once one has a good idea of how the chapter is narrated, understanding the story events is not so difficult. What is difficult is determining the narrative strategy, and in some places it proves close to impossible. This stepwise process is already a certain kind of puzzle, but it is a puzzle that is solvable. The reading described above shows that there is little doubt what happens in the core story, meaning that the novel and the reader have come to a kind of accord. Because of this, the core story puzzle in *Ulysses* does not quite fit my concept of the puzzle novel.

However, *Ulysses* also presents a larger puzzle. The story so far is quite simple, and the puzzling has only been a deciphering exercise. In terms of what happens, this is a simple story that takes little time and focuses on few characters, and is not all that interesting. But, even for the naïve reader, this is clearly not the limit of the puzzle in *Ulysses*.

4.2 The larger puzzle of *Ulysses*

The puzzle of the novel can also be understood to reach beyond the story time of the novel, and indeed no reader of *Ulysses* would think that the event summary described above is the complete plot. The novel is also the life stories of the main characters of the book: Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. 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" (*Culture* 158). 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, but again this must be done through a puzzling process. The smaller puzzle was a process of identifying how the story was being told, and using that information to interpret the events of the story. The larger puzzle is more complicated.

Joyce tells the story of these characters' lives, but he places pieces of these life stories in various places 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 puzzle offers the reader space to participate in making meaning in the text. However, I will show that the larger puzzle, even though it may offer this opportunity, ultimately denies the opportunity for the reader to participate. This prevents *Ulysses* from truly being a puzzle novel in my conception, even though historically and even in more general terms it is an important foundational text.

The best example of the larger puzzling process 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 puzzling 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 does reflect the puzzle novel's strategy of creating a kind of paradox, or satisfying two contradictory impulses at once. The puzzling together of Bloom's life has been done elsewhere, perhaps most notably in John Henry Raleigh's *The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom* (1977).[54] Subsequent criticism has revealed the many errors that this book makes, and the correct solutions are still debated. Some questions still remain, but through puzzling 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 puzzling that makes up this story, as I have done for the core story. As I mention above, the core story puzzling will serve as a comparison for my readings of other novels below, while this larger puzzle is qualitatively different from those other puzzles, and therefore a detailed comparison is unnecessary. Further, 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 has spawned. In other words, this puzzle is already out there in the scholarship, and I do not find it useful to try to collect it all here. However, to give a flavor of such puzzling, I provide a couple examples of the insights that this puzzling process produces below. In general, though, the important point is that even this larger puzzle 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 smaller puzzle is already an in-depth reading process, the larger puzzle is even more involved, but this by itself does not mean that the novel hands the

[54] Raleigh, John Henry, *The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom:* Ulysses *as Narrative*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977.

making of meaning over to the reader, or that *Ulysses* is a puzzle novel in the terms I have outlined.

To give me a vocabulary for making a distinction between the kind of puzzle that leads to this author-reader accord and puzzles that do not, I turn to Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze provides us with a theory of games which is useful in distinguishing puzzle novels, for the puzzle is a type of game. Deleuze's "ideal game" has "no pre-existing rules, each move invents its own rules" and in the ideal game "all throws affirm chance and endlessly ramify it with each throw." However, because of this, "such a game seems to have no reality. … [The ideal game] cannot be played by either man or God."[55] In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze calls the ideal game the "divine game", and opposes it to the "human game."[56] All puzzle novels resist being simply human (normal) games, but it is impossible for them to become ideal games. We can judge puzzle novels as being more or less close to the ideal game, realizing that it is impossible to assert that a novel is indeed the embodiment of an ideal game. Puzzle novels allow the reader to change the puzzle more or less with each move. In this way I would call *Ulysses* a normal or human game, even though the reading and puzzling process that it enacts starts to look like an ideal game at some points. However, in the end, *Ulysses* makes its own rules and plays by these rules. Bersani indicates as much in the quote given above: *Ulysses "*asks that we be nothing but the exegetical machine necessary to complete its sense" (*Culture* 175).

Ulysses presents itself more as a normal puzzle, including the larger puzzle, than an ideal puzzle. The point of the larger puzzle 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

[55] Deleuze, Gilles. *Logic of Sense*. 1969. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 59–60.
[56] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. 1968. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 282.

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 naïve reader, not the perspective of the advanced state of Joycean scholarship we have today. The amount of indeterminacy the naïve reader sees in *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 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 have been answered through a detailed reading process and scholarship, we can say that the novel in a general sense is indeed more of a normal puzzle than an ideal one. 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.

Ulysses is a web of associations; so many facts from the characters' pasts illuminate events in the story time. One example is the relationship between Bloom and Molly, and specifically their faithfulness to each other. In constructing the larger puzzle, we learn that Bloom is aware that Molly is having an affair with Blazes Boylan. This does not appear particularly to upset Bloom, perhaps since 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 chapter four, 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 puzzle, 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 puzzling the larger puzzle, 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 smaller puzzle. With the larger puzzle 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.

In "Nausicaa", Bloom watches girls on the beach, and possibly masturbates. Again, with the smaller puzzle, Bloom appears as a sleazy voyeur (in fact this fits in well with his postal romance), but with the larger puzzle it appears that Bloom takes his pleasure indirectly, through observation and imagination, rather than through actual sex, as his wife does. The larger puzzle 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 puzzles are not progressive, but rather recursive or dialogic. The smaller puzzle is necessary to complete the larger puzzle, but we puzzle out the life stories to better understand what happens during that one day of the smaller puzzle. 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 puzzle solved, the novel becomes simple again, but elegantly and wonderfully simple. After the puzzling process, *Ulysses* becomes like a traditional 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 traditional epic novels. Rather than follow the characters' lives as they are given, we learn about the characters through actively solving the puzzle. In this way the puzzle in *Ulysses* requires reader input, but the effort of the reader to solve the puzzle does not change the ultimate outcome. That is, each move in the game does not change the rules of the game, making this more of a normal than an ideal game. As Bersani writes, the outcome is given beforehand, even if the (naïve) reader does not know this as she or he is reading the novel. Through its normal game, the novel is finite.

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: he creates a novel that connects us with the humanity of his characters by creating a paradox, a novel that is a normal puzzle, yet retains a vitality that we would normally associate with ideal games. Exactly because of this it is an important text to study in terms of the puzzle novel, even though I have to conclude that *Ulysses* is not a good example of the puzzle novel as I have want to define it for this study.

5. *Gravity's Rainbow*: the puzzle novel comes of age and starts to disappear

With *Ulysses* as a prime example of a puzzle novel that delivers on its promises (and therefore is not really a puzzle novel),[57] the rest of the texts I will analyze problematize the concept of the puzzle novel while still using the puzzle construct (and therefore are more accurately puzzle novels).

Consider Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* as the prime example of the postmodern novel. This novel took Joyce's innovations in *Ulysses* to an extreme, where the novel defines the reader as the primary maker of meaning. *Gravity's Rainbow* is perhaps as close to the ideal game that a coherent novel can get. Readers have many chances to change the puzzle to their own designs.

Gravity's Rainbow innovates with almost all narrative conventions, giving the reader plenty of space to create his or her own meaning. Brian McHale (1989)[58] writes that *Gravity's Rainbow* relies on modern modes of reading (our human need to search for meaning) to produce disorientation and confusion. Ultimately, *Gravity's Rainbow* carefully "sets itself against this Modernist mindset, chiefly by luring the paranoid reader … into interpretive dark alleys, cul-de-sacs, impossible situations, and requiring him to find his way out by some other path than the one he came in."[59] This "Modernist mindset" is not a way of reading confined to the modern period. After the modern period readers have not done away with the idea that they should search for coherent meaning in a text. However, McHale is exactly correct that *Gravity's Rainbow* relies on this mode of reading to lure the reader into the puzzle. As Bersani puts it, "It is as if we could know everything and still not know what kind of text *Gravity's Rainbow* is" (*Culture* 189).

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[57] See the previous chapter on *Ulysses* as a puzzle novel.
[58] McHale, Brian. "Modernist Reading, Post-Modern Text: The Case of *Gravity's Rainbow*." *Poetics Today* 1 (1989): 85-110.
[59] McHale, "Modernist Reading, Post-Modern Text: The Case of *Gravity's Rainbow*," 107.

This is very different from *Ulysses*, even though there is a certain progression between the two. *Gravity's Rainbow* is close to the ideal game because the puzzle in the novel does not resolve to a clear solution, but the novel is not simply confusing. There is a lot of sense to be made from puzzling the book, which in a perverse way makes its decoding even more difficult. This sense encourages the reader to continue to puzzle out the more difficult parts of the novel. But the novel ultimately leaves large parts of its plot unclear, and open for interpretation. This freeing of the reader that *Gravity's Rainbow* revels in was a revolutionary idea at the time of its publication; like *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow* was too revolutionary for even some serious readers when it came out.

Gravity's Rainbow is a useful example to think about where such a reading process can take us and the novel. This novel can start to show the endlessly variable, but at the same time purposeful and useful, meanings that can be, and must be, made from a novel that encourages the kind of reading strategies in which the novel excels.

In broad terms, I will describe the structure of *Gravity's Rainbow* as quite similar to the structure of *Ulysses*. *Gravity's Rainbow* also has a core story that needs to be puzzled out and then a kind of larger puzzle that deals with the material that does not directly narrate the core story. Because of this, the structure of *Gravity's Rainbow* in some ways can be seen as rather traditional: at its core, *Gravity's Rainbow* has a simple story consisting of a chronological series of events involving a main character. Even though *Gravity's Rainbow* is held up as the antithesis of anything "traditional", this structure is clearly present. Even in this very innovative text, the narrative uses and abuses narrative conventions. That is, it does not just abuse them (it has alternative and confusing narrative structures), it also uses them (it has a chronological story, one main character, etc.).

4.1 The core story of *Gravity's Rainbow*

The core story of *Gravity's Rainbow* is the story of Tyrone Slothrop. Slothrop goes from blissful ignorance to a difficult knowledge of his past, and the ultimate impossibility of completing that knowledge causes him to disintegrate, to disperse. However, this core story is only understandable after a considerable amount of work on the novel. This is still rather similar to *Ulysses*, although the kind of puzzling that *Gravity's Rainbow* requires to interpret the core story is quite different from the puzzling of the core story that *Ulysses* requires, namely the identification of the narrator and narrative strategies.

For *Gravity's Rainbow*, the reader has to determine the borders between the core story and the extra material. *Gravity's Rainbow* does not put obvious narrative obstacles in the reader's way like *Ulysses*, but rather simply because of the abundance of information included in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it can be difficult to determine the relative importance or use of various pieces of information. Further, and probably more importantly, *Gravity's Rainbow* does not provide the typical connections and signposts that narrative gives to the reader to make sure the reader follows the right thread through the book. With *Ulysses*, it is almost as if nothing can be understood until the narrative complications are understood. These narrative complications are very much like a code, or a lock and key. Once you have the key, the information in the story is presented in a rather clear way. This is not the case with *Gravity's Rainbow*. All of the information we need to understand the core story is there right in front of us, no key is needed to understand it, and especially the Slothrop story is mostly narrated in a rather conventional mode. The problem is picking out any one narrative thread (such as the core story) from all of the information that is given to us. The novel itself does not help us much in making such determinations. So *Gravity's Rainbow* is in one way more open than

Ulysses, since it does not "hide" the story from the reader, but it is also more deceptive, hiding that story in plain sight.

In the end, the biggest clue that Slothrop is the main character, and his story is the core story, is that his actions are the only ones that are represented consistently throughout the book, and are represented in a chronological way. Further, in terms of plot, there is a certain arc to the Slothrop story that encourages us to see it as indeed a story.

This quality of providing information clearly, but confusing it by the presence of other information and a lack of typical narrative cues, is difficult to explain and to support with examples of close reading. First, one has to have a sense of the whole novel to really understand that such a strategy is implemented in a regular way throughout the novel. Without writing an *S/*Z-like book on *Gravity's Rainbow* (and maybe even then), one cannot communicate how these narrative strategies really work in the book. In a sense, one must either leave such a claim on an abstract level, unsupported with specific "evidence", or bring the claim down to that specific level, and imprison it in the particular, not really supporting the general claim. In a novel such as *Gravity's Rainbow*, how can the reader believe that one example, or three, or twenty, really shows a pattern, or rather really shows a pattern that is more important or prevalent than other patterns? This is most likely an example of how normal criticism fails with the novel. If you take any one of these episodes and quote it and dwell on it, one of the effects is to make that example representative. The interest will be in the example(s), and not in the general claim, or rather the interest will be in how the example "proves" the general claim.

In the interests of satisfying various readers, I propose a compromise. I would like to briefly present a rather abstract example: not as detailed and closely read as many would like, but also not letting a grand claim stand without any textual support. Simply, I would like to look at the first several episodes of the novel, and claim that the juxtaposition of information

without narrative guidance in the beginning of the book is the kind of thing that happens throughout the book.

Episode 1 (*GR* 3–8; I refer only to Part I here) opens without reference to any of the main characters, and with very little actually happening. Pirate Prentice wakes up from a dream to save his comrade from a nasty fall, and sees a V-2 rocket vapor trail. Episode 2 (*GR* 8–17) continues with Pirate in his maisonette, as he prepares a "Banana Breakfast" for all present. He is called away to retrieve a message that has come via the rocket, and the episode finishes with a nightmare sequence of a monstrous Adenoid who will swallow London. Pirate does appear now and then in the rest of the novel, but more as a member of a cast of characters rather than as a focus of a story.

In episode 3 (*GR* 17–20) we are introduced to Slothrop, but do not see him yet. Teddy Bloat photographs Slothrop's cubicle, especially his map of his London sexual conquests. In episode 4 (*GR* 20–30) we see Slothrop in action for the first time, for he has also been assigned to go see the rocket strike to which Prentice was called. Much of the narrative of this episode focuses on Slothrop, but not on what he is doing in the story time, but rather his recent girl-chasing in London, his worries about the rockets, and his Puritan ancestry in the U.S. At this point, even though we have now seen Slothrop and learned about his past and ancestry, Prentice still seems like a much better candidate for the main thread of the story. Slothrop could easily be just another person assigned to the same place that Prentice is.

Indeed, episode 5 (*GR* 30–38) leaves Slothrop and returns to Prentice, although in a different context and with different people. Prentice focalizes part of the narration of a séance, whose results mostly seem to impact Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake, lovers attending the séance. All of the first five episodes (*GR* 3–38) occur on the same day.

Episodes 6 and 7 (*GR* 38–48) follow Roger and Jessica and establish their love affair in detail, and episodes 8 and 9 (*GR* 48–61) deal with discussions about Slothrop and the

continued narrative of Roger and Jessica. This couple, or more likely Roger, become candidates for the main character, for Prentice has receded and Slothrop is not present, only talked about. Slothrop does not appear again until episode 10 (*GR* 61–72), and that episode narrates his hallucinations as a testing subject being given sodium amytal, so his "action" is limited.

For a reader who has read and re-read the whole of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Slothrop material stands out as important to the story. But to a reader without this overall knowledge (a naïve reader), there is little reason to see Slothrop and his story as any more important than any number of other characters. In fact, to this point Slothrop does not seem to have a story. The information that we get about Dr. Jamf's experiments on Slothrop when he was an infant and the attention that staff at "The White Visitation" and ACHTUNG pay to Slothrop is telling once we can connect that information to other events involving Slothrop in the book. But the narrative gives us no help in making these connections. At the same time, this information is narrated, it is not hidden other than in plain sight.

This narrative strategy continues throughout the book (and not only with the Slothrop story), and we have only just begun to introduce the characters and situations that the novel deals with in its pages. That is, the Slothrop thread continues to be distracted by new and unusual narrative situations that the reader has to consider with no clear guidance. Slothrop consistently appears, but his presence and the importance of his story, as indicated by the examples above, is not clear until one re-reads the book. This is primarily the reason why many people see this novel as chaotic, while many after deep study see a fanatic attention to detail and structuring. Of course, once one is this far into reading (re-reading) the book, one realizes both that the Slothrop story is the core story and that the other material is not irrelevant. In fact, most if not all of the information seems to have a connection to Slothrop. Again, my rather random example of the first ten episodes shows this: Prentice, Mexico,

"The White Visitation", and pretty much all of the other information given in these episodes seems not to narrate Slothrop's story, but at the same time it must be connected to Slothrop in some way.

4.2 The "extra material" in *Gravity's Rainbow*

It is in dealing with this "extra material" that we find it is not separate from the core story, and after understanding the core story the reader cannot ignore the other information. To again go back to *Ulysses*,[60] that novel is a complicated process of decoding the meaning intended by the author, rather than a complicated process of the reader creating her or his own meanings. That is, in *Ulysses* the extra material in the end serves only to make the story in the novel more complicated, but never does the puzzling of the extra material threaten the coherence of the core story. One can see the extra information in the story having a line of flight[61] that is U-shaped in *Ulysses*: all of it returns to and contributes to the core story, making the novel as a whole apparently coherent.

The structure of *Gravity's Rainbow* departs from *Ulysses* at this level. The extra information given does not circle back to the core story, it shoots out along a vector from the core story. The lines of flight of the extra information in *Gravity's Rainbow* are defined by their point of origin (which is on the core story) and their continual departure from that origin. The information is connected to, related to, and originates from the core story, but never circles back. The line also has no endpoint, like a vector. This quality leaves the reader with a more difficult question: what does this information mean to the core story? It is clear that there is a connection; the connection gives the motivation to consider the material at all.

[60] See the previous chapter.
[61] I use this term in the ways suggested both by Gilles Deleuze and Stefan Mattessich. Mattessich, Stefan. 2002. *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Durham: Duke University Press.

But since the information is not recursive to the story, the novel is not coherent in the end. But it is not incoherent, either.

Because the lines of flight do not "return" to the core story does not mean they are irrelevant. A line, no matter where it goes, provides a guide back to the origin, if the reader wants to follow that line. Stephen Mattessich (2002) asserts that *Gravity's Rainbow* has "a preoccupation with the idea of origins,"[62] illustrating this at one point by quoting a passage from *Gravity's Rainbow* where a colonial ship sails backwards through its journey from America to England, ending with "Presto change-o! Tyrone Slothrop's English again!" (*GR* 204). In the same way, the reader can trace back the origins of any of the lines of flight that the novel sets off. However, at the same time each unit away from the core story on any of the lines of flight in *Gravity's Rainbow* produces more problems, most of which are never resolved. In this way *Gravity's Rainbow* creates a situation that is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the machine,[63] which undoubtedly informs Mattesich's reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* and other Pynchon novels. Mattessich claims:

> The text could be said to approach here a kind of singularity, to converge toward an infinitely dense vanishing point. … The breakdown of narrative unity at the end of the novel could be said to embody this involution as a kind of spinning or cracking up, a stringing out of the addicted text, an emetic production of its internal contents, its discourses, all the things it seems to know. In this way, Pynchon 'breaks' his machine.[64]

In order to address this issue more accurately, and to again provide a certain vocabulary with which to discuss this strange situation *Gravity's Rainbow* puts its reader into, I would like to review Deleuze and Guattari's writings on "machine" in a particular way so that I can then

[62] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*, 85.
[63] A detailed discussion of this concept appears in the next section.
[64] Mattessich, Stefan. 2002. *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Durham: Duke University Press, 194.

use and abuse these concepts myself in my reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Again here I am not interested in producing a definitive statement on what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the term "machine" so I can then use that term in that way. Even less am I seeking to provide an authoritative comment on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy; rather I am seeking to *use* their concepts in an effort to produce insights into a novel that seems to be struggling with many of the same issues that the concept of the machine does. A criticism of my use of Deleuze and Guattari should be on the basis of the use it has for reading *Gravity's Rainbow*, not whether it is a reading consistent with other Deleuze and Guattari works, or whether it is the "right" interpretation of these texts. Anyone who takes Deleuze and Guattari at their word should not have these kinds of absolute judgment as their goal.

4.2.1 Deleuze and Guattari's "machine"

A theoretical and philosophical perspective on such a seemingly unusual situation—where a book promises something and does not deliver it, but for a reason—will be useful. Here I will discuss works by Gilles Deleuze (with and without Felix Guattari) to provide such a perspective. One of the important facets of the puzzle novel is the situation that while puzzling any puzzle novel, the reader cannot be certain at any particular point that mastering the story line is (or is not) possible. Perhaps the ultimate decision that needs to be made is if the puzzle is "finished" or not, and if it is not finished, whether it can be completed at all, and in either case what the effect is on the story. Above I claim that this ultimately needs to be an "individual" decision, although this admittedly tries to instantiate an absolute willful and capable individual subject. With this reference to Deleuze and Guattari I hope to usefully complicate that insinuation. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari help with this issue in the development of their concept of the "machine" over several works.

Here I review three important works by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (one of them authored by Deleuze alone) that deal with the idea of the machine. Two of the works, *Proust and Signs* (1964) and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), are studies of literary works while *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) is not devoted to one such subject of analysis. I begin with a critical review of the way that Deleuze (and Guattari) use the idea of the machine in these three works. My conclusions are mainly related to the reading strategies and outcomes that such a novel forces on a careful reader, and the concept of the machine helps to make more sense of how and why these outcomes come about and why they are important in the novel. This review is being constructed for this particular purpose, and undoubtedly other readers of Deleuze and Guattari would come up with different reviews of a concept such as the machine in their works.

In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze produces what is perhaps his most direct description of a machine, constructing a "literary machine" through an analysis of Proust's novel. Deleuze begins by establishing that the "modern work of art has no problem of meaning, it has only a problem of use" (*Proust* 146). By this he means that while the logos must find meaning "in the whole to which it belongs", the antilogos is a "machine and machinery whose meaning depends solely on its functioning, which, in turn, depends on its separate parts" (*Proust* 146). So, just because the modern work of art does not follow the logos that more traditional art does, this does not mean that there is indeterminacy in producing meaning. Meaning is only produced in a different way, through a machine, which produces meanings through its separate parts.

Deleuze directly addresses the choice of "machine" as a concept in this situation. He asks: "Why a machine? Because the work of art, so understood, is essentially productive—productive of certain truths" (*Proust* 146). "Again, there is no truth, but orders of truth, just as there are orders of production" (*Proust* 148). Deleuze goes on to determine that the three

orders of truth are singular, general, and universal, and there are corresponding three kinds of machine. Essentially, Deleuze claims that the first kind of machine is necessary for any narrative structure like a novel, but is also (therefore) rather standard and uninteresting. The first kind of machine is "defined chiefly by a production of *partial objects* as they have been previously defined, fragments without totality, vessels without communication, partitioned scenes" (*Proust* 150). Any narrative can and must provide these partial objects.

The second type of machine is also not very revolutionary, although it is certainly not something that all novels contain. It is also not a progression from the first type of machine, but rather a "new order of production": "The second type of machine produces resonances, effects of resonance. … Further, art produces resonances that are not those of memory. … This is because art sets up a resonance between two remote objects" (*Proust* 151). These resonances do not exist for their own sake, but rather produce an "essence": "And what is produced by the process of resonance, in the resonance machine, is the singular essence, the Viewpoint superior to the two moments that set up the resonance, breaking with the associative chain that links them" (*Proust* 152). The production of this machine resides in the spaces between objects, and moreover it is not the resonances produced that matter, but rather the essence enabled by the resonance. Later in *Proust and Signs* Deleuze connects this "Viewpoint" to the position of the narrator in the book. Through resonances between remote objects, the narrator becomes an important presence in the book as an essence (*Proust* 168). Referring to Proust, as Deleuze does throughout the book, the second machine is like time regained and the first machine is like time lost. Time lost is rather simply a partial object, a memory to be ruminated on. Time regained, however, requires a connection between the present and the past, a kind of revision of personal history, which requires something like a narrator in a story.

Deleuze asserts that Proust shows us the possibilities of a "literary machine", the third type of machine, which produces effects that can be compared to an electromagnetic effect. This is where the machine "works" to its ultimate capacity. In a more personal and local sense, these effects can be seen as a reader having experiences analogous to the resonances Proust describes. The book has an "effect" on the reader's life by making the reader's life experience different than if the reader had not read the book. But this is not the only effect the book has: "*It is the work of art that produces within itself and upon itself its own effects, and is filled with them and nourished by them*; the work of art is nourished by the truths it engenders" (*Proust* 154, emphasis in original). This is what makes such an effect a machine: "The entire interest thus shifts from the privileged natural moments to the artistic machine capable of producing or reproducing them, of multiplying them: the Book" (*Proust* 155). Deleuze compares this machine in Proust to Joyce's machine for producing epiphanies. The book or work of art is there for the subject to use, like a machine: "The artist, and the reader in his wake, is the one who 'disentangles' and 're-embodies': setting up a resonance between two objects, he produces the epiphany" (*Proust* 156). The literary machine then is the tool by which the reader produces the effect, so one cannot rightly say that the book has an effect on the reader, but rather the book is used by the reader to produce an effect (on the reader). And what is more, other works of art can also use the book to produce further effects.

The third machine produces "forced movement", which seems to impose a kind of imperative on the other two machines. Without the third machine, we can take or leave the other two machines, but with the machine of forced movement, we must use the machines. The thing that distinguishes this third order of truth (universal) and thereby the third machine is time. And where there is time, there is death (*Proust* 159). With the idea of death included in the process of production, we are impelled to engage the literary machine to produce effects on ourselves, on others, and on other works (*Proust* 160). This forced movement

implies that the understanding of literary texts is more than a game. By this we see that the third machine is not a machine like the other two, which focus on how the work can be and is used, but rather a machine that shows us the importance and imperative of taking the literary machine seriously.

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari return again to the idea of the machine. Early in the book Deleuze and Guattari refer to a "Kafka-machine", indicating that the works that Kafka has given us either constitute or contain a type of machine unique to themselves:

> A Kafka-machine is thus constituted by contents and expressions that have been formalized to diverse degrees by unformed materials that enter into it, and leave by passing through all possible states. To enter or leave the machine, to be in the machine, to walk around it, to approach it—these are all still components of the machine itself: these are states of desire, free of all interpretation. The line of escape is part of the machine. (*Kafka* 7)

That is, in reading Kafka, we are not presented with a task of interpretation, of decoding and understanding and moving on. In reading Kafka we are implicated in a machine that we cannot escape, or better put, if we do escape that is still part of the machine.

Deleuze and Guattari position their thoughts on Kafka as beliefs:

> We believe only in a Kafka *politics* that is neither imaginary nor symbolic. We believe only in one or more Kafka *machines* that are neither structure not phantasm. We believe only in a Kafka *experimentation* that is without interpretation or significance and rests only on tests of experience. … A writer isn't a writer-man; he is a machine-man, and an experimental man. (*Kafka* 7, emphasis in original)

On the one hand our concepts related to a text or to a group of texts (such as Kafka's novels, his letters, or his diaries) can only be personal beliefs with no grounding in rational support. On the other hand, Kafka's texts disallow this kind of engagement with the texts, causing the reader to respond only to politics, machines, and experiments that relate to experience rather than to beliefs. Deleuze and Guattari also introduce in *Kafka* another term for "machine" or "desiring-machine", the "assemblage":

> Writing has a double function: to translate everything into assemblages and to dismantle the assemblages. The two are the same thing. This is why we have been distinguishing in Kafka's work instances that are in fact enmeshed in each other—first, *machinic indexes*; then, *abstract machines*; and finally, *the assemblages of the machine*. (*Kafka* 47, emphasis in original)

The machinic index is the rule by which a machine or assemblage functions, since one thing Deleuze and Guattari are clear on is that a machine must function, must produce. It seems in this passage that the "assemblage" is actually the working machine, the machine in its prime:

> The machinic indexes are the signs of an assemblage that has not yet been established or dismantled because one knows only the individual pieces that go into making it up, but not how they go together. … There is thus a machinic index each time a machine is being built and is beginning to function, even though one doesn't know how the disparate parts that make it up and make it work actually function. (*Kafka* 47)

Further, even though we have the machinic index and the machine is at least starting to work, in a sense we can never specifically identify what this index is. We cannot define the rule by which the machine works, even though we see that it does function. Or, perhaps we cannot understand how the "disparate parts" actually conform to the rule and cause the machine to

work. In any case, the "abstract machine" is the machine that is beginning to work: it has its parts and its index, and is functioning in some way, but is not complete.

The "assemblage of the machine" is the highest state of the functioning machine, because at this point the machine dismantles both the meaning of the text and the machine itself, and through this dismantling continues to another level of understanding in the text.

> The assemblage no longer works as a machine in the process of assembling itself, with a mysterious function, or as a fully assembled machine that doesn't function, or no longer function. It works only through the dismantling that it brings about on the machine and on representation. And, actually functioning, it functions only through and because of its own dismantling. It is born from this dismantling. (*Kafka* 48)

This is not really the end of the machine. In fact, it is the purpose of the machine in the first place. Without the assemblage, the abstract machine in a literary text would be a simple process of decoding. Read the text, figure out the code, decipher the meaning through the code, and the reader is done. Without the assemblage, the abstract machine would be allowed to develop to perfection, cleanly communicating an absolute meaning from the writer to the reader. This deciphering is one type of understanding of a text, but it is not the kind of understanding that texts such as Kafka's lead the reader to.

> The assemblage appears not in a still encoded and territorial criticism but in a decoding, in a deterritorialization, and in the novelistic acceleration of this decoding and this deterritorialization. … Here, then, are the new characteristics of the novelistic machinic assemblage in opposition to the indexes and the abstract machines. These characteristics impose not an interpretation or a social representation of Kafka but an experimentation, a socio-political investigation. (*Kafka* 48)

The simple decoding of a text would be "interpretation" here. "Social representation" would be another simple decoding, although a decoding of a direct message about a social situation. In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari want to stress that Kafka's works are unavoidably political, but not in the sense that they simply advocate one side over another. Rather they draw the reader into an experimentation or investigation with the book and social life whose outcome is not pre-determined. It is this kind of "product" that the assemblage, the highest order of machine, is supposed to produce.

In this way the use of the machine is much different than an individual act of decoding a text. This is not a situation of the author playing a series of one-on-one games with individual readers. Early in the book Deleuze and Guattari proclaim that literature is essential for social change:

> Literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation. … The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: *literature is the people's concern*. (*Kafka* 17–18, emphasis in original)

And later in the book, they specify this enunciation in terms of the concepts of machine and assemblage that they have been dealing with in the book:

> An assemblage, the perfect object for the novel, has two sides: it is a collective assemblage of enunciation; it is a machinic assemblage of desire. … The machine is not social unless it breaks into all its connective elements, which in turn become machines. … That which makes a machine, to be precise, are connections, all the connections that operate the disassembly. … That the technical machine is only a piece in a social assemblage that it

> presupposes and that alone deserves to be called machinic introduces another point: the machinic assemblage of desire is also the collective assemblage of enunciation. … There is no machinic assemblage that is not a social assemblage of desire, no social assemblage of desire that is not a collective assemblage of enunciation. (*Kafka* 81–82)

In other words, there is no reading of the Kafka text—which must contain such machines and engage in the process of identifying, building, and ultimately dismantling those machines to create meaning and to understand the text—without an engagement with the social and political. No one reader can do this him or herself; the reader must engage in the social to make sense of the text.

In terms of this study, the main contribution of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is to connect the abstract machine, the machinic index, and the assemblage of the machine to other concepts, namely the plane of consistency and stratification.

Deleuze and Guattari try to create an environment within which we can discuss how different things relate to each other without referring to an exterior presence that justifies the comparison. "It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends, instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value" (*Thousand* 22). The plane of consistency is a sort of unity because it is all-consuming. Within the plane of consistency, "strata" of different types operate (*Thousand* 71). But Deleuze and Guattari insist that the strata do not really exist in any stable form, implying that they are metaphors used wisely (*Thousand* 63). The effect is that all things are relational to each other, rather than referring to a "transcendent end", and that these relationships are fluid but real. More specifically to the reading experience, Deleuze and Guattari claim, "There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). …

[O]ne cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside" (*Thousand* 23). This clearly connects with Deleuze and Guattari's concepts in *Kafka* where readers cannot avoid the social or their own connection to the text. The meaning being made in, of, and through the text is neither simply an individual nor a social creation, it is a collaboration among the individual, the social, and the text.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, it seems that the abstract machine is more related to the plane of consistency, and the machinic assemblage is connected to the strata of various types:

> The *abstract machine* sometimes develops upon the plane of consistency, whose continuums, emissions, and conjugations it constructs, and sometimes remains enveloped in a stratum whose unity of composition and force of attraction or prehension it defines. The *machinic assemblage* is something entirely different from the abstract machine, even though it is very closely connected with it. First, on a stratum, it performs the coadaptations of content and expression, ensures biunivocal relationships between segments of content and segments of expression, and guides the division of the stratum into epistrata and parastrata. Next, between strata, it ensures the relations to whatever serves as a substratum and brings about the corresponding changes in organization. Finally, it is in touch with the plane of consistency because it necessarily effectuates the abstract machine on a particular stratum, between strata, and in the relation between the strata and the plane. (*Thousand* 71, emphasis in original)

In this passage it seems that the assemblage does a lot more work than the abstract machine does. It seems that the abstract machine only constructs the output of the plane of consistency, whereas the assemblage maintains all kinds of activities and relationships through the operation of the strata. Indeed the assemblage in *Kafka* is where the most

important uses are produced, while the abstract machine only serves as a necessary construct to connect the reader, the social, the writer, and the book. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari depict the assemblage as more important than the abstract machine:

> An assemblage is necessary for the articulations of the organic stratum to come about. An assemblage is necessary for the relation between two strata to come about. And an assemblage is necessary for organisms to be caught within and permeated by a social field that utilizes them … Assemblages are necessary in order for the unity of composition enveloped in a stratum, the relations between a given stratum and the others, and the relations between these strata and the plane of consistency to be organized rather than random. In every respect, machinic assemblages *effectuate* the abstract machine insofar as it is developed on the plane of consistency or enveloped in a stratum. (*Thousand* 71, emphasis in original)

The importance of the assemblage is based on the function or use of the assemblage. Through its operation of the strata, the assemblage allows different things to happen, including the effectuation of the abstract machine itself. It seems that without the diligence of the assemblage, all would fall into abstract machine chaos. The abstract machine is chaos because it proposes to provide a unitary meaning from the text, and builds its provisional and hypothetical machine in hopes of producing this meaning, but of course such a meaning will not be produced. So there is an inconsistency between what the abstract machine wants to do and what it can do, while the assemblage is more consistent in this sense.

This becomes a bit more understandable when Deleuze and Guattari bring these concepts around to the ideas of the individual and the social, as they eventually do in *Kafka* as well: “But the abstract machine of language is not universal, or even general, but singular; it is not actual, but virtual-real; it has, not invariable or obligatory rules, but optional rules

that ceaselessly vary with the variation itself, as in a game in which each move changes the rules" (*Thousand* 100). Here, of course, Deleuze and Guattari implicitly refer to Deleuze's discussion of the ideal or divine game in *Difference and Repetition* (1968)[65] and *The Logic of Sense* (1969),[66] where the ideal game is an impossible game that cannot be played by humans or God since the rules of the game change constantly.[67] By themselves, abstract machines are impossible, or are completely indeterminate.

> That is why abstract machines and assemblages of enunciation are complementary, and present in each other. The abstract machine is like the diagram of an assemblage. It draws lines of continuous variation, while the concrete assemblage treats variables and organized [sic] their highly diverse relations as a function of those lines. (*Thousand* 100)

The assemblage organizes the chaos of the abstract machine, or provides an environment in which the abstract machine can go on producing endlessly variable meanings without falling into ignorance and non-existence; in fact, the vain hypothesizing of the abstract machine is a part of the assemblage of the machine, and therefore contributes to production. Deleuze and Guattari are careful not to give the impression, though, that this is a simple binary.

> We should not conclude from this that the assemblage brings only a certain resistance or inertia to bear against the abstract machine; for even "constants" are essential to the determination of the virtualities through which the variation passes, they are themselves optionally chosen. (*Thousand* 100)

In fact the constants are part of the variability, since without such constants we would not be able to identify the variable as variable. Without some sort of organization, the continually varying would appear as white noise. Deleuze and Guattari do not say that the assemblage

[65] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. 1968. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
[66] Deleuze, Gilles. *Logic of Sense*. 1969. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
[67] This is discussed in the previous chapter as a construct through which to think about *Ulysses*.

does not restrict the abstract machine, but that it does not "only" do this. In fact, it does much more: it provides the means for the abstract machine to operate. With this in mind, the individual and the social can be discussed.

> There is therefore no basis for a distinction between a constant and collective language, and variable and individual speech acts. The abstract machine is always singular, designated by the proper mane [sic] of a group or individual, while the assemblage of enunciation is always collective, in the individual as in the group. … The abstract machine does not exist independently of the assemblage, any more than the assemblage functions independently of the machine. (*Thousand* 100)

So it seems that the abstract machine is analogous to the individual (or groups smaller than the social) and the assemblage is analogous to the social. But again this binary cannot be seen as so simple, for both terms depend on and exist within each other. The individual cannot communicate on his or her own, and neither can the social. The abstract machine cannot operate without the assemblage, and the assemblage cannot operate without the abstract machine. This reflects *Kafka*, with the connections among the machinic assemblage, the collective assemblage of enunciation, and the social assemblage of desire. What we should look at in texts, then, is how the useful fictions of the "individual" and the "social" are used in literary texts, and how the two are really inseparable from and necessary for each other.

Another aspect of these concepts related to the machine that is in *Kafka* but that Deleuze and Guattari do not review in *A Thousand Plateaus* is the fact that the assemblage, as the highest and most important order of machine, operates by dismantling itself. In fact, the discussion in *A Thousand Plateaus* seems to place the assemblage as much more constructive than this. Deleuze and Guattari choose in *A Thousand Plateaus* to use the term

"assemblage" for this reason: the assemblage is no longer a machine. A finished, well-functioning machine in a linear, direct sense does not exist.

A machine is either in the process of creating itself (the abstract machine: it is only a machine if you think of it in the abstract, thinking of what it could be or is in a process of becoming) or in the process of dismantling itself. This is because the process of reading is not a simple process of decoding or of interpretation. There is no one meaning to be gained from the reading process: the task of the reader is not to identify that one meaning. However, as readers we cannot approach a text without having this kind of linear reading process in mind. Otherwise it is difficult to imagine why we would approach a text at all, especially a text such as *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Even if we know that an absolute meaning cannot be found, we have to try to see where this process of understanding brings us, and what kind of meaning we can interpret from the text. That is, the *use* of this reading strategy does not have to depend on a belief that the strategy will work, will live up to its own promises. Further, the meaning that a reader can create from a text is not without bounds. The text itself sets up a certain kind of environment for the reader to create within, and different texts create different kinds of environments. In the sense of the process of reading a novel, we can see the abstract machine as the rather traditional process of identifying the meaning in the novel, which is given to the reader in a way that the (expected) reader would most probably consider straightforward and clear. The reader constructs working hypotheses and possible structures within which to understand the content of the novel, and both the writer and the reader rely on certain assumptions of shared knowledge. The reader must know that these hypotheses and structures are only provisional, but at the same time the goal of this machine in creation is an understanding of the text as the author intended.

This is the construction of a machine that we might call an "understanding machine". This is my term, and is simply a re-naming of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts in terms of the puzzle novel as I have described it. However, I am not establishing this term to improve upon or replace Deleuze and Guattari's work, but rather to work with it, or extend it for my purposes. The understanding machine is mostly an individual process, and even though the goal is some specific meaning that exists outside of the reading experience, Deleuze and Guattari, in their depiction of the abstract machine, show us that even this process can be completely variable. At some point, however, the understanding machine reaches its limit, and we have to consider what kind of assemblage the novel operates under.

This point of transition is where the reader and the writer meet. The reader reaches the limit of the information that the writer has given to the reader, and to go further is really the creation of the reader alone, although within an environment suggested by the writer and the social field around the novel. It is at this point that the rules of thumb we have assumed are able to enact the understanding machine have to be reconsidered and possibly broken down, rules such as the separation between the author and the novel, the novel and the society, and the reader and the writer.

This is why the abstract machine becomes an assemblage of enunciation. The understanding machine, just as it is about to reach its goal and achieve an understanding of the text, dismantles itself, showing that the machine cannot be completed, and an absolute author-intended meaning cannot be gleaned from the text by the particular understanding machine the reader has been creating or by any other abstract machine. Rather the machine dismantles, leaving us with an assemblage that carries vestiges of the process of the abstract understanding machine, but moves beyond the abstract machine on a line of flight to a different, more social and at the same time individual meaning. Moving to an understanding

of the novel in terms of the assemblage that it operates under is the deepest understanding of the novel, and at the same time the most serious violence that one can inflict on the novel.

4.2.2 The machine in *Gravity's Rainbow*

Gravity's Rainbow, then, creates an assemblage of enunciation by dismantling the abstract understanding machine, which was in the process of being built. What is strange here is that the machine is broken, but not discarded, and the reader is at a position of having a lot of knowledge and understanding related to the narrative because of the machine, but at the same time having to admit that that machine, in the end, simply does not work. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that the assemblage is a state of freedom can be misleading. Freedom is not a state of ultimate detachment. Freedom is not doing "whatever I want", both because in the end this is not what we would really want, and is not possible in a social world. Freedom is something in between being completely alone and being completely determined by others. There are vestiges of the abstract machine in the assemblage, just as in breaking our understanding machine for *Gravity's Rainbow*, we proceed with the knowledge and questions that the understanding machine gave us.

So we could say that *Gravity's Rainbow* simultaneously gives and takes away because of the vector-like quality of the extra information in the novel. Any further explanation of the story is compensated by giving the reader a further set of questions to answer. The issue, therefore, is not whether factors in the novel are connected to the Slothrop story, because they all are. It is a basic premise of the novel that all things are connected, and one clear way they are connected is by being on a line of flight. The question is therefore how they are connected.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the other figures in the novel tend to serve a certain purpose for the Slothrop story, a purpose that is not altogether unique in storytelling, and understandable given the Slothrop story. But this information that is "given" by these figures to the understanding of the story is also "taken away" in kind, by raising questions that equal if not outnumber the questions that the figure answers. In this way such figures are part of the extra material in the novel, and in considering them one realizes the lines of flight they take from the core story. By these lines of flight such figures push the abstract understanding machine towards an assemblage of enunciation.

I will take two examples of characters to illustrate this: Oberst Enzian and Katje Borgesius. This novel provides all kinds of examples that one can look at in this context, and in some ways whatever is chosen is necessarily somewhat random, at least from the perspective of the puzzling reader. I choose characters to focus on because the study of narrative and indeed the theory of the novel often put special importance on characters. We seem to require characters to have a story, even though that is probably an assumption that should be challenged. In any case, I choose characters to be able to speak in the same realm as the narrative and novel discussion above. Further, I choose these two characters because they are not obscure, so they are potential points of entry into the larger puzzle of *Gravity's Rainbow* for a reader who has already resolved the core story, but at the same time their relation to the Slothrop story is anything but clear, both before and after puzzling out their connections. However, the same caution voiced above about close reading for the core story has to be repeated here. These characters are chosen only as examples, and not representative examples or models. Further, the role they play in the extra material in the novel that I determine does not have to be the absolute conclusion; other readers may come up with other readings within this same framework. It is the framework, or, even, the motivation, that produces readings such as this that is more important than these readings themselves.

Even though in many ways *Gravity's Rainbow* does not follow a conventional time structure, the Slothrop core story is chronological throughout the book, so it does make some sense to consider how and why things happen earlier or later in the novel. As I describe above, the puzzle novel does not do away with conventional structures, but rather uses them less consistently and more purposefully. Enzian does not become a part of the story proper until "In the Zone", but in episode 14 of Part 1 it is described that Blicero names Enzian, his "African boy" who he found in southwest Africa and was in a similar kind of voluntary sexual bondage with Blicero in Africa as Katje and Gottfried are in other parts of the book. Already in this part, focalized through Blicero, we are told of Blicero's meeting of Enzian and his knowledge that in the story time Enzian has moved on, and is in Germany. Again we are presented with information about a character well before we meet this character her or himself in the story narrative. And again he is introduced in an unconventional way:

> Brought up into a Christian ambience, this was difficult for him [Blicero] to see until his journey to Südwest: until his own African conquest. Among the abrading fires of the Kalahari, under the broadly-sheeted coastal sky, fire and water, he learned. The Herero boy, long tormented by missionaries into a fear of Christian sins … To find, back in the hinterland, up in an outstretch of broken mountains between the Namib and the Kalahari, his [Blicero's] own faithful native, his night-flower. (*GR* 101)

The Herero, especially the group in Germany in the story time, have been referenced earlier in the book, but Enzian has not, nor has any other specific Herero. So, the "Herero boy" in this passage suggests that we know which specific boy is being referred to, but in fact we do not. This is another example of the narrative strategy in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where typical connections and introductions are not made, and things are never really introduced, but always already just there.

Later on, after Enzian has appeared in the story, a seemingly more objective representation of this time in the Herero lands is given, not quite focalized through Enzian, but focusing on him as a character. While the successive waves of German attacks continued, Enzian's mother took him and joined a group trying to escape across the Kalahari desert. During the journey, his mother and everyone but Enzian died, and nomads brought him back to his home village. By then the village was completely under the oppressive control of the Germans. Weissmann, who is the same as Blicero—"Dominus Blicero" was his SS code name (*GR* 327)—was one of the invaders. "Weissmann, the European whose protégé he became, always believed he'd seduced Enzian away from religion. But the gods had gone away themselves: the gods had left the people. . . . He let Weissmann think what he wanted to. The man's thirst for guilt was insatiable as the desert's for water" (*GR* 328).

Among other things, this establishes Enzian's link to other characters, especially Katje and Gottfried, as "belonging", or having belonged, to Blicero. It was Enzian, as a boy alone with Blicero in the "hinterland" quoted above that asks Blicero to fuck, using the name of God, which emphasizes another of the differences between black Enzian and white Blicero. It seems that Enzian was not in contact with Katje or Gottfried in Blicero's sexual arrangements, but in the section quoted from above, Blicero compares Enzian with the other two, and even goes so far as to wonder why the "black girl" did not appear to complete the quartet of two pairs: black boy (Enzian)—white boy (Gottfried), white girl (Katje)—black girl. Later in the story, and for different purposes, Katje seems to fill the role of both white and black girl, however.

Blicero was in Africa putting down the Herero uprising, the success of which drives Enzian and the other "Zone-Hereros" to live in exile around Nordhausen, Germany, enacting their plan of extinction of their kind. Essentially, the Germans colonized Southwest Africa from 1884 and in the ensuing decades committed genocide on the Hereros. The only ones that

survived either escaped or agreed to be put in a relocation camp for life. How the Zone-Hereros came to move relatively freely in Germany is not known, but their status is decidedly marginal and displaced.

Enzian is the natural leader of a group of Hereros in Germany (called the Schwarzkommando), and he is always travelling with them. "He is Nguarorerue here. The word does not mean 'leader' exactly, but 'one who has been proven'" (*GR* 321). The story between Enzian's boyhood with Blicero and his current leadership position is not given; how he has proven himself is not exactly known. However, it is clear that Weissmann brought him to Europe:

> Enzian has grown cold: not so much a fire dying away as a positive coming on of cold, a bitter taste growing across the palate of love's first hopes. . . . It began when Weissmann brought him to Europe: a discovery that love, among these men, once past the simple feel and orgasming of it, had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing. Demanded, in his [Enzian's] own case, that he enter the service of the Rocket. … He was led to believe that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood. . . ." (329)

By bringing Enzian to Europe, Weissman/Blicero both loses Enzian as his "love" and sexual partner, and sends Enzian on his own rocket odyssey. However, this must not happen immediately, since in episode 11 of part 2, Pökler focalizes the strange vision of Enzian and Weissmann at the Versuchsanstalt (*GR* 410). So there was some time when Enzian and Weissmann remained together in Europe. In any case, Enzian's story seems quite idiosyncratic, which may be part of how Enzian has proven himself and risen to the position of leader of the Schwarzkommando. How the other Southwest Africans got to Germany is not clear. But this passage also points to the important motivation of the Rocket in Enzian's, and

in the Schwarzkommando's, life. This becomes even more explicit: in Enzian's words, "'If the Rocket was his life, then I would belong to the Rocket'" (*GR* 331).

Enzian's first appearance as a character in the story time is with Slothrop, and therefore is a part of the core story. This scene is brief, but poignant and perhaps significant. Slothrop meets Enzian in episode 1 of part 3, when Enzian throws racist Marvy off a train (*GR* 293). Major Marvy of the U.S. Army is portrayed as an almost ridiculously abhorrent character, obese and extremely racist. Slothrop and Marvy are talking on the top of a train to Nordhausen (mostly Marvy is talking at Slothrop), and Enzian cuts off Marvy's racist diatribe against the Schwarzkommando riding the train. While Marvy's speech is debased, Enzian's is sophisticated, stylish:

> "You know what I think? They have a *plan*. Yeah. I think it's rockets. Don't ask me how, that's *awful* dangerous. You can't trust *them*— With *rockets*? They're a childlike race. Brains are smaller."
>
> "But our patience," suggest a calm voice now out of the darkness, 'our patience is enormous, though perhaps not unlimited." (*GR* 292, emphasis in original)

With that Enzian throws Marvy off the train. At the time of the story Marvy appears as a comical idiot only, but later he plays an important part in a plan to castrate Slothrop for research purposes. Enzian introduces himself to Slothrop in this scene, and is portrayed as content and knowledgeable, leaving Slothrop impressed:

> "Don't know about that 'free,' Oberst."
>
> "But you are free. We all are. You'll see. Before long." He steps away down the spine of the freighttop, waving a beckoning German good-by. "Before long. . . ."

> Slothrop sits on the rooftop, rubbing his bare feet. A friend? A good omen? *Black rocket troops?* What bizarre shit? (*GR* 293, emphasis in original)

Here it is made clear what a spectacle it is to see a group of black German rocket troops in the Zone. There are not many people in the story that Slothrop calls a "friend", or acts towards as a friend. But there is not much here to suggest a connection between Enzian and Slothrop other than they both happen to be on the same train and have this interaction.

However, two episodes later, we go back to the Hereros, but in a much more general context, as mentioned above. There is essentially a history lesson on the Hereros told in terms of the Schwarzkommando of the novel. The Schwarzkommando are second-generation exiles from Southwest Africa. They have chosen a curious and poignant response to their status as exiles: "Revolutionaries of the Zero, they mean to carry on what began among the old Hereros after the 1904 rebellion failed. They want a negative birth rate. The program is racial suicide. They would finish the extermination the Germans began in 1904" (*GR* 321). Here in episode 3 of "In the Zone", this plan apparently is to take all the fun out of colonizing for the colonizers. "How provoking, to watch one's subject population dwindling like this, year after year. What's a colony without its dusky natives? Where's the fun if they're all going to die off?" (*GR* 321). Important here is that this is a "racial suicide", not a personal or even a group suicide. Their plan is to diminish until there is no one left, to limit births to keep the birth rate negative. Their plan is not to kill themselves bodily, but to no longer be created. This is described as a clear choice between "tribal death, or Christian death" (*GR* 322). But at the same time, the Schwarzkommando have been influenced by living in Europe, and part of the appeal of the plan is the mysterious motivation: "They calculate no cycles, no returns, they are in love with the glamour of a whole people's suicide—the pose, the stoicism, the bravery" (*GR* 323).

But this must be connected to the Rocket in some way, first because as quoted above Enzian essentially replaces Blicero with the Rocket, and because Enzian is the leader of the Schwarzkommando. Also, through their actions, it is clear that they are following rocket strikes, and eventually it becomes clear that Enzian is leading his Schwarzkommando on a search for pieces of the Rocket. Eventually we see the Schwarzkommando interrogate an engineer that worked at Peenemünde on the Rocket (*GR* 462), indicating that they are interested in how the Rocket works, perhaps with the aim to build one. Overall, we eventually realize that their plan is to build another rocket, since the most important part of their search is for the Schwarzgerat, but why exactly they want to do this is not clear. Following the Rocket in the Zone means following Slothrop, and considering Slothrop as one of the variables in their search. On page 333, the Schwarzkommando refer to Slothrop without using his name, not saying much specific about him (except not to trust him), but indicating that Slothrop is a certain kind of force to be reckoned with in the Zone for the Schwarzkommando. Near the end of the book we see the Schwarzkommando travelling with the 00001, the "second in its series" (*GR* 739). Apparently they have succeeded in assembling their own rocket, and they commence to fire it.

Enzian, and the Schwarzkommando, over the course of the book develop an obsession for finding the 00000 rocket, or parts of it, and finding information about how it was built and building one of their own. The exact motivation of this obsession is unclear, in the same way that the drive Slothrop has to find the rocket is mysterious. Slothrop probably has a better reason: he may think that by finding the rocket he will find out what really happened to him as a child. But it seems that by halfway through the book Slothrop already knows quite a bit about what happened to him, and it is unclear why he would need to know more.

In considering what connection Enzian and the Schwarzkommando have to the core story, we have to think about what Enzian does to the core story as a *story*, or, what function

Enzian serves in the plot of that story. Probably the best conclusion is that Enzian serves the purpose of showing that it is not only Slothrop who is obsessed with the Rocket. With Enzian and the Scharzkommando, we cannot dismiss Slothrop's paranoid search for the Rocket as simply an idiosyncratic quirk. The Rocket apparently has grabbed hold of others, who have grabbed hold of Slothrop as part of their need to find out something about the Rocket. Enzian and the Schwarzkommando have a commitment to tribal extinction: they have a belief and a rationality for their plan. The seriousness of their intentions is made clear by the narrative. But by page 534, Enzian seems to indicate that "the search will rule", and this is the search for the Rocket. The Rocket now supersedes the tribal suicide plan. Perhaps as further proof of their turning away from the death plan, they are trying to save one of the Schwarzkommando's sisters from danger in this section (part 3, episode 22). Apparently the death of a tribal member is suddenly not such a good thing after all. Maybe there is hope in the rocket.

Enzian serves a simple purpose, which could be served by a much simpler device than Enzian and the Schwarzkommando. Questions that Enzian raises in addition to providing this information on the Slothrop story are legion, and they overlap with questions other characters raise. Enzian's connection to Blicero is not clear, even though Blicero is the closest character to him. They had their encounter in Africa, and apparently at some point Enzian was Weissman's "monster" while working in the German military establishment. The relationship between the two men, and the private motivations each of them has, are so complicated and yet only invoked, never fully described. How much does Enzian know about Katje and Gottfried, also subjects of Blicero's dominance? Did Enzian come to Germany of his own free will or was he somehow coerced by Weissman? Did Enzian come to Germany with the Schwarzkommando or did he somehow form or join the group after leaving Weissmann? Do the other Schwarzkommando really believe in him as a leader? Does Enzian see Slothrop as

anything more than one of the many figures he encounters in his search for the rocket? What is his attraction to the rocket, other than the gendered explanation given in the quotation above? Especially in the context of the dramatic and unique social suicide plan, why is building a rocket such a strong draw?

To show that Slothrop is not unique, Enzian is a character who is not only obsessed with the Rocket, but has every reason not to be obsessed. He is an outsider and exile, he is a leader with followers to be concerned about, he has a religious and philosophical commitment to tribal extinction which must be put aside for the Rocket, etc.

The very completeness of this story drives the reader to investigate whether there is more to this story than appears, to see if this complicated subplot fits in as a piece of the understanding machine: is there a bigger purpose to the story of Enzian and the Schwarzkommando than to serve as a foil for Slothrop? The answer, ultimately, is no, the Enzian story has its origin in the core story, but takes off on a line of flight that does not return to the core story, that does not contribute to the understanding of the story. Further, by raising these questions, the Enzian story starts to dismantle, to break the understanding machine, pushing it towards an assemblage. This judgment, that the answer to this question is indeed "no", is ultimately a subjective answer, and more importantly has to always be a provisional answer. It is impossible to prove that something is not there without making the world the map. The questions given above are again relatively random, and certainly a subset of the questions that could be asked.

Enzian's story is intensely detailed, complicated, and interesting, and important information is left out. Enzian provides an important adjunct to Slothrop's story, but through that connection drives the reader off on a vector of question-asking that shows no hope of return to the Slothrop story. The Enzian story puts the reader at the transition point between the abstract understanding machine and the assemblage of enunciation, having to take into

consideration both the evidence for the core story that the understanding machine has been able to produce, but at the same time having to deal with the uncertainty of the rest of the Enzian story. The reader is not left on his or her own so much as the reader is educated, socialized, and then set free by the narrative.

The character of Katje Borgesius is perhaps an even better example of the transition from the abstract machine to the assemblage in *Gravity's Rainbow* than Enzian, since her character is less extreme. In one way, she is also a foil for Slothrop, but of a more conventional kind: she is the love interest. The scenes where Slothrop and Katje are together are decidedly romantic, not just sexual, and throughout the rest of the novel after they part Slothrop continually thinks about her, even though Slothrop continues to have sex with various women after Katje.

Katje and Slothrop meet famously, of course, as Slothrop saves Katje from being eaten by the octopus Grigori (*GR* 188–189). The reader has the possibility to know that this is a set-up, having seen the octopus being conditioned on pages 115–116, although it is not probable that the reader is able to make this connection without puzzling first. Slothrop, no fool, catches on quickly, questioning the others' participation in the "saving" and suspecting right away that he is being manipulated. Why and how, though, he does not know. Katje plays her part, and after being saved and continuing breakfast with the group on the beach, begins their romance with a classic line. "Katje squeezes Slothrop's arm and tells him just what he wants to hear about now: 'Perhaps, after all, *we were meant to meet*. . .'" (*GR* 191).

That night they get together in Katje's room, where, while fucking, someone steals all of Slothrop's clothes and identification. After chasing the thief in the rain for some time, he returns to Katje's room, a strange move when clearly the woman is complicit in the theft. She opens her door saying, "'Tyrone, I missed you.' He shrugs, convulsive, helpless, showering both of them. 'It's the only place I knew to come.' Her smile slowly unpurses. Gingerly he

steps across the sill then, not sure if it's door or high window, into her deep room" (*GR* 208). Slothrop stays in that room for his time at the Casino, and his "heart" stays with Katje for much of the rest of the novel.

To Slothrop, it is clear that there is some kind of conspiracy against him, but he naturally decides he has no better choice than to play along with it. He does this so well that he seems to fall for Katje, either assuming she has feelings for him or ignoring the possibility. He even explicitly excuses her complicity:

> Seductress-and-patsy, all right, that's not so bad a game. There's very little pretending. He doesn't blame her: the real enemy's somewhere back in London, and this is her job. She can be versatile, gay, and kind, and he'd rather be warm here with her than freezing back under the Blitz. But now and then . . . too insubstantial to get a fix on, there'll be in her face a look, something not in her control, that depresses him, that he's even dreamed about and so found amplified there to honest fright: the terrible chance that she might have been conned too. (*GR* 210)

Here not only is Katje not guilty, but complicit in another way, another one "conned" along with Slothrop. This allows Slothrop to understand Katje in a deeper way. She is no longer just one of Them. Of course, this is Slothrop's own making of Katje, and from the quote above it seems even Slothrop is not completely convinced that this look of hers is substantial enough to really be saying what he thinks it is saying. In any case, Katje "nudges at the shutters of his heart, opening to him brief flashes of an autumn country he has only suspected, only feared, outside him, inside her. . . ." (*GR* 210).

The varied conversation that Katje and Slothrop have in episode 3 of part 2 shows what each of them can and can not reveal. And inevitably Katje leaves Slothrop unannounced, and Slothrop already knows that he will not see her again. He sees her leaving

a cigarette not fully smoked (*GR* 229) as a sign that she has feelings for him. In the first three episodes of part 2 Slothrop and Katje have met, connected, and departed, and Slothrop feels the effect of this short time with Katje in a way that he does not feel for any other of the many women he comes into intimate contact with in this novel.

Several places in the rest of the novel Slothrop refers to Katje. In the midst of a discussion of something completely unrelated is this:

> Double integral is also the shape of lovers curled asleep, which is where Slothrop wishes he were now—all the way back with Katje, even lost as he might feel again, even more vulnerable than now—even (because he still honestly misses her), preserved by accident, in ways he can't help seeing, accident whose own much colder honesty each lover has only the other to protect him from. . . . *Could* he live like that? (*GR* 307, emphasis in original)

Slothrop "still" misses Katje well into the novel. The parenthetical insertion in the quote above confirms that Slothrop is not just yearning for some earlier, simpler time that happens to include Katje, he really misses her. There are also more subtle indications of Katje in Slothrop's mind and heart, such as in episode 7 of part 3, where in a quick prolepsis, Slothrop is reminded of Katje: "… it will be months yet before he runs into a beer advertisement featuring the six beauties, and find himself rooting for a girl named Helen Riickert: a blonde with a Dutch surname who will remind him dimly of someone. . . ." (*GR* 387).

More specific to this novel, Katje can also serve another rather conventional role: one of the many operatives of Them that Slothrop encounters. She is perhaps more sinister in this role than others, getting closer both physically and emotionally to Slothrop than any of the others who are chasing him, and Katje clearly has orders to do what she does. In this role, however, Katje is pictured as sympathetic, both to the reader and to Slothrop (which enhances the romantic love interest role she plays). Slothrop quickly realizes that she is an agent, but

by the time he comes into contact with Katje, this does not surprise Slothrop anymore. Not only because Slothrop perhaps loves Katje, but also because he knows by now not to over-react, Slothrop accepts Katje for what she is: a pretty girl who he likes to be with who wants to gather information from him that he does not know he has. The novel by this time has firmly established that any strict binary between friends and enemies is useless.

But again all of this seems a rather normal purpose to the story. Katje's vector, however, goes in the direction of "Them". Throughout the novel, the specter of Them hovers over Slothrop, rarely coming close but always present. In Katje, Them is as close as it can be. Katje gives some information on how they work to gather information, what kind of resources they have at their disposal. But, again perversely, the reader and Slothrop do not know any more about what information they want to have. Probably the most significant piece of information that Katje provides for Slothrop is that They have the kind of resources that allow for sending a woman like Katje to con Slothrop into supposedly saving her from an octopus, and then essentially living with him, always available to relieve those post-lesson hardons (*GR* 214), while he is at the Casino. This both indicates the importance of his own self to Them, but also their power and resources, for who knows how many such people are willing to give of themselves in the way Katje does for Them?

As for Katje herself, she seems to be rather good at what she does (willing to complete much more extreme assignments than pretending to be attacked by an octopus and fuck an American), but in the end does what she is told and is not part of the assumed masterminds behind Them. When Slothrop gets Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck drunk and thereby gets him to give him some information about the plot against him (which again is information given that produces more questions), Dodson-Truck "vanishes" from the Casino. Apparently, because of his indiscretion, Dodson-Truck has been called off the assignment, or worse. Katje confronts Slothrop furious—"madder than a wet hen" (*GR* 223)—saying "'You bastard.

You've sabotaged the whole thing, with your clever little collegiate drinking game'" (*GR* 224). Slothrop immediately asks "'What whole thing, Katje?'" (*GR* 224), by which of course Katje does not mean whatever ultimate plan They have for Slothrop, but her orders at the Casino. Since soon after this, Katje departs, she may be upset that Slothrop has caused a situation where they will take her away from this assignment, away from Slothrop. In any case, Katje attacks Slothrop, which turns into a violent fucking, which turns into talking about rockets falling on London, which turns into Slothrop reciting technical rocket details. Then Slothrop falls asleep and Katje leaves.

Katje seems genuinely to be ignorant of their motivations, as well, and while she may be an operative, she is largely in the dark. If she is in the dark, and she is the operative who is closest to Slothrop and therefore the narrative in the novel, then who is not an operative? Who really does have the answers? Anyone? Again we are left with some basic questions answered, but some more interesting, disturbing, and impossible questions unanswered.

Katje's character, too, sends the reader on a line of flight from the core story that the reader must consider as a possible further development of the understanding machine. At first it seems that Katje serves a clear purpose to the core story, to the abstract machine, but eventually Katje, like Enzian, breaks that machine by, ultimately, over-doing it (in terms of the novel, not in terms of the story). Katje gives too much information, and information that is not clearly related or unrelated to the core story. So the reader is now entering the realm of the assemblage, where the reader has the information that the novel provides—both the information that clearly works in the abstract machine and the information that breaks that machine—and has to proceed to make meaning from the story as best as the reader can in that precarious situation. It would not be useful to speculate on what kinds of meanings readers can make from this situation, and indeed the character of the assemblage is that the outcome

of the assemblage is both contextualized but also unpredictable. In this way, the reader is set off on a line of flight of her or his own.

In this reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*, I have proposed that the "lines of flight" of the extra material in the story are like vectors, as opposed to the U-shaped lines of flight in *Ulysses*. This may strike some readers as contradictory to *Gravity's Rainbow* itself, since the parabola, the flight of the rocket, is such a common presence in the novel. However, the novel plays with the idea of a parabola in some form being just a part of an elliptical or circular shape, and that we see only the "rainbow" or parabola because the world itself gets in the way. This is not to say that the circle (or the parabola) is akin to the vector, but to say that the novel is not clearly structured "like" a parabola, circle, mandala, or any other one shape, even though it invokes consideration of all these possible structuring metaphors. This invocation without resolution is of course very much in line with *Gravity's Rainbow* as a puzzle novel, and could also be said to be "vector-shaped" itself. Of course, a vector has no shape, but rather an origin and a past, without a clear future.

The core story of *Gravity's Rainbow* serves as the machine in the process of being built, the machine that seems to be starting to produce, and the abstract understanding machine. Again, because the machine is not complete, though, the abstract machine can only work on the level of hypothesis or provisional assertions and proofs. When the reader starts to deal with the assemblage quality of the narrative, she or he also ends up going back to that core story to test these hypotheses more strictly, and, for *Gravity's Rainbow*, this further complicates the reading experience and shows how the book is really an assemblage to the maximum possibility, only masquerading as an abstract machine when it absolutely has to.

The core story is Slothrop's, and Slothrop not only completely fragmentizes at the end of the story, but throughout the novel little by little changes or loses his identity as a complete being. In some places his dispersion is detailed, and in other places such statements as

"Slothrop, though he doesn't know it yet, is as properly constituted a state as any other in the Zone these days" (*GR* 295) position Slothrop as the standard by which to gauge the Zone, rather than the other way around. But by the end of the book, it is clear that while there may have been some kind of plan to set Slothrop aright and coherent by allowing him to enter the Zone, the opposite has happened.

> There is also the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly—perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, *his time's assembly*—and there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn't. The plan went wrong. He is being broken down instead, and scattered. (*GR* 752, emphasis in original)

A bit later we see the well-intentioned Seaman Bodine's perspective on the disintegrating Slothrop:

> He's looking straight at Slothrop (being one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together, even as a concept—"It's just got too remote"'s what they usually say). Does Bodine now feel his own strength may someday soon not be enough either: that soon, like all the others, he'll *have* to let go? *But somebody's got to hold on, it can't happen to all of us—no, that'd be too much . . . Rocketman, Rocketman. You poor fucker.* (*GR* 755, emphasis in original)

This passage indicates many things about Slothrop's disintegration. It seems to depend to a certain extent on other people's efforts to perceive Slothrop as coherent. They can try harder and see him as integrated, or just let him go. Throughout the book Slothrop has been perhaps more a concept than a character (remember his introduction in absentia), so that identity should not surprise us, but the disintegration encompasses both of these and any other

identities that have been assigned "Slothrop" (such as "Rocketman", how Bodine refers to him in the passage above). From Bodine's perspective, it is somehow a tragedy that Slothrop will end up disintegrated, not among the other coherent beings. None of this, however, gives us much information about what it really means for a person to disintegrate.

> Further, though, Slothrop, in his disintegrated status, does not disappear.
>
> It appears that some part of Slothrop ran into the AWOL Džabajev one night in the heart of downtown Niederschaumdorf. (Some believe that fragments of Slothrop have grown into consistent personae of their own. If so, there's no telling which of the Zone's present-day population are offshoots of his original scattering. (*GR* 757)

By disintegrating and scattering, Slothrop has proliferated himself, rather than obliterated himself. How and why this happens, if it is figural with Slothrop as a concept being disseminated around the Zone, or a mystical physical reincarnation, or something else, is impossible to determine. A reading of this disintegration as compared with the dismantling of the machine of the novel is certainly possible.

Even though we can, and have to, say that "Slothrop" is the center of the structure of the story of the novel, Slothrop himself is uncertain. The understanding machine is broken not only in the sense of being limited to making sense of the core story and nothing else. In the end it seems the understanding machine has actually been a complete failure, for the core story is not really a story after all. But how can we call it a complete failure if we would not know the core story is not a story if the understanding machine had not helped us come to this conclusion? This of course leads us as readers to participate in the paranoia that Slothrop specializes in: if the main character is not really a character, then how can this be a story? In this question is the encapsulation of the assemblage of this novel. Clarity and confusion bring us to a place where we have enough knowledge to ask the most basic questions possible.

Without this knowledge, this information, these questions are not possible, but with these questions, we wonder why we have the knowledge in the first place. *Gravity's Rainbow* in the end creates a paradox. Here the reader is required to make meaning in the text; in fact, the reader is goaded into it. But what meaning is to be had? In the end, it can be said that the reader knows more than the reader of a traditional novel, having chased down the meaning in the story through the process of identifying and creating and dismantling an understanding machine. But at the same time the reader knows less, having to ask a question such as: how is this a story?

Indeed, in a certain way, *Gravity's Rainbow* cannot be a story, but the reader cannot say that she or he has not experienced something like a story in reading through the understanding machine and the assemblage. This novel does not just create chaos, allowing readers to create whatever meaning they want from the novel, but at the same time the novel does not dominate the experience of understanding the novel. In this way, a novel such as *Gravity's Rainbow* is a paradox, creating a paranoid experience of reading. This is the paranoid experience that is not necessarily destructive, for as Bersani points out about *Gravity's Rainbow*, the opposite of paranoia is not something we would wish for, either. The opposite of paranoia would be an uncritical acceptance of any truth we are offered (*Culture* 103). *Gravity's Rainbow* creates a useful paranoia, one that indeed risks being destructive, but surrounds the reader with the apparatus of the novel, so that when the reader gets to the place of asking how can this be a story, how can this be a novel, the reader is in good company. Perhaps contradictory, frustrating company, but also potentially enlightening and motivating company. This is why we must join in with the closing lines of the novel: "Now everybody—."

6. *Prisoner's Dilemma*: the puzzle novel as novel

To bring the discussion of *Gravity's Rainbow* in the previous chapter back to the basic jigsaw puzzle metaphor, it is clear that most if not all of the possible transgressions of the puzzle game are performed in the novel, but still there is enough of an adherence to the rules of the game to encourage puzzling of the story. As described above, this creates a situation where the reader's opportunity to create meaning with the text is maximized, to the extent that the novel flirts with the border of becoming chaotic.

Later novels, especially U.S. novels after *Gravity's Rainbow*, do not seek to continue to push the boundaries in this way. In fact, one way of looking at some of these novels is that they regress to a more conventional form of storytelling, taking a novel such as *Gravity's Rainbow* as an example of a limit text (and either *Ulysses* or any one of the formulaic traditional novels as the other limit, depending on the spectrum one wants to construct), and seeing what is possible within the limits. I identify one particular way of deploying the puzzle metaphor as allowing more of the pieces of the puzzle to fit (although perhaps after the re-reading work, not in a linear fashion as with traditional novels, perhaps similarly to *Ulysses*), and carefully choosing specific "pieces" that are missing, or do not quite fit exactly, to make a certain point. Of course, usually these pieces are of basic importance to the project of the novel rather than an expendable detail, so the impact of this lack is given more force than any of the huge amount of open questions left in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Further, the pieces that are chosen to not fit can produce a layering effect of the puzzling of such novels that brings in a different kind of, and arguably quantitatively more, creativity on the part of the reader. This is not puzzles upon puzzles as in *Ulysses*, but rather unexpected turns to the puzzle that can cause the reader to go back and understand the puzzle already constructed in a different way, creating a different puzzle out of the same pieces.

Again, I am not interested in making a claim for the "majority" of or the "most significant" literary novels of the late twentieth century. I am not even saying that there is a distinguishable line of novels that originate in *Gravity's Rainbow* and proceed in a deterministic progressive line. However, I find it important nonetheless to connect certain novels in terms of the puzzle structure to *Gravity's Rainbow*, divorced from such strict lines of inheritance or lineage. Also similar to the above, my motivation here is to perform a puzzle reading of a certain novel that I find useful in this context, but that could be read differently within this framework, and that further is positioned as an example, albeit a carefully chosen one.

Further, now I would like to return to the discussion in a previous chapter, where I reviewed various philosophical sources and ended up discussing Maurice Blanchot's last major works (*Step* and *Disaster*) in terms that dovetail nicely with the particular puzzle structure of these later novels. Blanchot's example of the disaster, and his suggestion that to write the disaster we must write in a purposefully fragmentary way, also relates to the "piece left out" concept. This fragmentary writing, Blanchot asserts,[68] should seek to surround the point that we are trying to describe, while never directly describing that point. To write about the disaster, we should talk around the concept in a kind of approximation or process of elimination. Also, we should value a diversity of approaches to describing the disaster. Blanchot's reason for purposefully fragmentary writing is pragmatic: he says that all writing is incoherent, anyway, and writing that pretends that it is coherent is much less useful than writing that admits its own incoherence. A concept such as "the disaster" is the piece that is missing from a text, even though it is the purpose or end of the text. So the piece left out of the jigsaw puzzle is of prime importance, even though it is outside of the narrative.

[68] The short summary provided here does not originate from a particular part of either *The Step Not Beyond* or *The Writing of the Disaster*, so it is impossible to provide page references to the works. The previous chapter that discusses Blanchot does provide direct citations since it is a longer discussion of the works.

In this chapter I choose as my example of such a novel *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) by Richard Powers. *Prisoner's Dilemma* provides a puzzle that only resists solution at the very end of the puzzling process. It leaves out important pieces of the puzzle (like a jigsaw puzzle, the reader does not know these pieces are missing until the very end), which leaves the reader with both a sense of order and an opportunity to be creative. In this way *Prisoner's Dilemma* allows the reader to change and define the puzzle, but only to a limited extent. However, the changes that the novel allows in this limited area allow the reader to define the basic purpose of the whole novel. In this way the amount of creativity the reader has is truly huge, for the reader helps determine the most basic foundational concepts on which the novel rests, as well as being able to create large systems of meaning that all are mostly coherent, but not completely coherent. The question that *Prisoner's Dilemma* ultimately leaves the reader with is "who is the author?", a question that is asked on a variety of levels, and yet provides a kind of unifying uncertainty.

The page-to-page reading experience of *Prisoner's Dilemma* meets traditional expectations of story construction much more than *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Ulysses*. Because of the more straightforward way of narration in *Prisoner's Dilemma*, I do not find it useful to document my summary of the various stories in the novel in the way that was necessary for *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses*. Even a serious reader of the earlier novels needs such guidance in working through criticism on the novels, whereas *Prisoner's Dilemma* gets at many of the same critical questions without having to go through the narrative pyrotechnics that the earlier novels do. So, in the following I provide direct textual evidence only when I judge that a serious reader needs this guidance.

The typesetting and titling of the chapters in *Prisoner's Dilemma* indicate that there are three kinds of chapter in the book (one could also determine four kinds; see below). One kind of chapter appears quite normal: the chapters are consecutively numbered and printed in

normal text, with no title other than the chapter number. It turns out that this narrative is also chronological. The second kind of chapter has titles that consist of dates chronologically arranged from 1939 to 1945, and is set in italicized text. The third kind of chapter has descriptive titles such as "Riddles" or "Breaking the Matrix" (so they are "undated") and is also set in italicized text. While two of these groups of chapters follow a linear chronological order in the book, the third does not, and all three types of chapter are integrated in the book. The result is that from chapter to chapter time shifts greatly although the general progression is forward in time. Even with this first impression *Prisoner's Dilemma* presents itself as containing multiple narrative threads, and the implicit challenge to the reader is to figure out how the threads relate to each other.

In *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the normal-text narrative can stand on its own as a traditional story. We could pick out these chapters as a short novel on its own. This part of the novel is chronological, there is a rather conventional story line, and many of the typical narrative connections that *Gravity's Rainbow* omits are present. Eddie Hobson, Sr. is the protagonist in the normal-text narrative, and this part of the novel has a consistent and apparently reliable authorial narrator. Eddie is the patriarch of his Midwestern American, two-boy, two-girl family. Eddie is a retired high-school history teacher, and he constantly asks challenging intellectual questions of his children, who always have the answers. Eddie's hobby is Hobstown, the creation of another world that involves Eddie speaking for long hours into an old Dictaphone. Eddie has a mysterious sickness, a sickness that causes him to have seizures which knock him unconscious and that keeps getting worse. However, Eddie Sr. refuses to seek treatment for his illness, or even to go see a doctor.

In the normal-text narrative, after years of denying the seriousness of his affliction, Eddie finally agrees to check into a veteran's hospital for treatment. Eddie soon runs away from the hospital and disappears, but his son Artie figures out where to look for him by

listening to the Dictaphone recordings: Alamogordo, where Eddie happened to be when the first A-bomb was tested. The family does not truly realize that this is the cause of his sickness until he disappears from the hospital. Eddie Sr. has radiation poisoning, for which there is no treatment, hence his refusal to go to a doctor. Eddie Jr., the youngest child, drives west to find his dad, and realizes that Eddie Sr. came to Alamogordo to finish what was started there: his death. In the closing chapter, the other three children listen to what is left of Hobstown and start to record their own story over the tape.

The normal text narrative has a clear story structure, with a problem that mounts as the description of the interesting family situation continues through most of the bulk of the narrative. The climax is when Eddie Sr. checks into and disappears from the hospital, and the family have to figure out where he has gone and why. The story ends with the closure of Eddie Sr. tragically, but necessarily, dying or killing himself, leaving traces of himself both at the Alamogordo visitor's center and on the Dictaphone tape. From these traces his children have to take up the challenge and create their own lives, figuratively spreading Eddie Sr.'s ashes and recording over his Hobstown.

The narrative in the other types of chapter is quite different. Both kinds of italicized chapter are parts of a narrative set farther in the past, during World War Two. The first kind is marked by having chapters with dates from 1939 to 1945 and authorial narration. The character of the dated italicized chapters is determined through a puzzling process, specifically by comparing repeated text in different chapters in the book. The dated italicized chapters are a transcript of Hobstown: what Eddie's children listen to and record over at the end of the normal-text story, the remnant or supreme creation of Eddie Sr.'s twenty-year-long obsession.

In the normal text narrative, after Eddie Sr. has run away, Artie listens to the tape that Eddie Sr. has left. Eddie Sr. leaves many erased tapes, and only one with any sound. The first

two sentences Artie hears are given in one of the last normal-text chapters, chapter 18 of a total of 21 normal-text chapters: "Everything we are at that moment goes into the capsule: a camera, a wall switch, a safety pin. The task, a tough one, is to fit inside a ten-foot, streamlined missile a complete picture of us Americans, circa 1939" (*PD* 316). In this chapter, Artie proceeds to listen to most of Hobstown, but not the whole thing.

These sentences in the normal-text narrative are therefore identified as the very beginning of Hobstown (at least the Hobstown that Eddie Sr. left when he went to the hospital), and they are the same two sentences that begin the first dated, italicized chapter on page 41. The ensuing dated italicized chapters are the continuation of Hobstown that Artie and his two sisters listen to in full in chapter 19, one of the last normal-text chapters. Since these chapters are a transcript of Hobstown, the narrator of these chapters is meant to be Eddie Sr. His method of narration is rather authorial, not personal, so before this puzzling takes place the reader has no reason to think the narrator of these chapters is Eddie Sr., or any other character. Hobstown even includes Eddie Sr. as a character, but the character is not narrated in the first person. The Eddie Sr. in the normal-text narrative is narrating a fictionalized version of himself in the dated italicized chapters, in Hobstown. It is clear that the puzzle reading of *Prisoner's Dilemma* is indeed a re-reading. Without taking the novel as a whole, none of these narrative conclusions can be made. Further, the impact of identifying the different qualities of the chapter simply cannot be represented in a study such as this one. One must read and live with the novel in order to make these simple connections, and when explicating the connections in this way, they appear rather simplistic than artistically simple. This is another example of how the novel exposes the restrictions of scholarly criticism.

The undated italicized chapters, on the other hand, have a first person and more subjective narrator, but before puzzling out the qualities of these chapters, the reader has a hard time identifying just who constitutes the voice of these chapters. Through puzzling, we

find these chapters are a transcript of what the children record on the Dictaphone after listening to Hobstown. Again, we come to this conclusion by recognizing repeated text in the novel. In chapter 21, Artie records over his father's voice, saying "Somewhere, my father is teaching us the names of the constellations" (*PD* 344). This sentence is repeated as the first line of the "Riddles" chapter on page 13, the first undated, italicized chapter, and the first chapter of the book. The three children take turns recording episodes from their childhood and stories that they heard their parents tell, and this is the content of the other undated, italicized chapters in the book. All of this information that is in some way "behind" the words of this series of chapters is in no way explicitly indicated anywhere in the novel. Without puzzling out these connections, the reader cannot know that these chapters are narrated by the Hobson children. Each of these chapters, then, has a different first person narrator, but since they are all Hobson children, and they are all narrating things about the Hobson family, they are all very similar. Without puzzling out the narrator identity in this way, the narrator in these chapters seems consistent enough to be one narrator, but just different enough to make it difficult to be confident with this conclusion.

The piecing together of this puzzle has to do with authorship. The clues are textual—that is, parts of the text of the book direct us to other parts of the text of the book—and indicate to us which parts are narrated by whom. To this point, the questions left have to do with the effect of the story as a whole, but we seem to have a mastery over who wrote what. So far *Prisoner's Dilemma* requires the reader to engage in a puzzling game to make sense of the text, although at the same time without playing this game the narrative provides a readily-understandable thread of a story through the book. In this way the normal-text narrative is a "core story" for this novel. There is material that clearly links the other chapters to this core story, as well. For example, the dated italicized Hobstown uses Eddie Hobson as a character, supposedly narrating parts of his life that pre-date the normal-text narrative. The connections

between the children's undated italicized chapters are more difficult to know, but most of these chapters seem to deal with the same characters as the normal text narrative does, albeit without naming them. Knowing the authorship and narrator identity through these puzzles, the reader seemingly can now proceed to a straightforward interpretation of the story of the book. The two kinds of italicized chapters are to be taken as more or less a commentary on the lives of the characters described in the more traditional normal text narrative, perhaps in a way similar to the two-part puzzle structure of *Ulysses*. We can use the italicized chapters to bring more life and insight into the neat normal text story.

However, in the analysis above we have ignored three chapters in the book that will continue our questioning of authorship and complicate the puzzle in *Prisoner's Dilemma*. This will also lead us to create a fourth kind of chapter, or to problematize the chapter designations we have made so far, despite the sound conclusions we have made above, clearly indicated by the text. That is, considering the vast majority of the text of the book, only ignoring three short chapters, we can make sound, logical, normal game conclusions about the novel.

In looking at the chapter entitled "V-J", which is placed between chapters 19 and 20 of the normal text narrative, we realize that the names we have been using for the different kinds of chapters are perhaps inappropriate. We should be designating the italicized chapters according only to the narrator, either first-person or authorial, not according to the obvious appearance of the title. "V-J" is an undated, italicized chapter, but it describes events in Eddie's life before his children were born with authorial narration. In fact, it shows Eddie listening to a Dictaphone tape left by Walt Disney, and after listening to it, re-threading the tape and recording over Disney's recording. As an undated italicized chapter, this chapter should be a part of what the children record over Hobstown, but in two ways this is impossible. It uses authorial narration, whereas all the other undated italicized chapters use

first person narration, and it authoritatively describes a time before the children were born, while the other chapters subjectively describe events within the children's lives.

This chapter forces the reader to consider that the chapters in first-person narration compose the children's recording, while third-person chapters are Hobstown, created by Eddie Sr., regardless of the appearance of the titles. While this is a basic difference in understanding the chapters, it actually causes little change in the identification of the chapters in the book. All of the chapters so far considered remain as before, but defined by narrative voice rather than by title, "V-J" fits into Eddie's Hobstown. This is not completely comfortable, for there is no clear reason why the chapters would then be titled and typeset as they are. But it does seem to produce a more coherent narrative chapter system.

"V-J" closes with a sentence spoken by Eddie Sr.: "It's one of those unrepeatable days in mid-May, and all those who are still at home sit down to dinner" (*PD* 333). It is not exactly clear in the narrative, but this is probably the beginning sentence of Hobstown, since it seems that at the end of "V-J" Eddie is beginning his project by recording over Disney's voice. This conclusion, though, also requires another leap of interpretive faith in that we must see the first thing Artie hears on the tapes on page 316 as not the beginning of Hobstown. Perhaps Artie did not start the tape from the beginning.

Complicating things further, the "unrepeatable days in mid-May" sentence begins the last chapter of the book, "1979", a dated italicized chapter with an authorial narrator, and therefore, in either understanding, a part of Eddie Sr.'s Hobstown. This chapter should then be the beginning of Eddie's Hobstown. But the chapter shows Eddie coming home, unexpectedly alive, in 1979. This is not a likely beginning to Eddie's project, especially given the description of how and why he begins the project in "V-J". The identification of the chapter according to narrative voice and the repeated text confirm that this is the start of Hobstown. But the content of the chapter does not allow for this.

There is no way to interpret "1979" so that it follows the puzzling rules established so far, but there is also no way to interpret the chapter to exempt it completely from these rules. It has to only partially fit the puzzle. With "V-J", we can create a system that allows this chapter to fit, but it performs a certain violence on the obvious appearance of the book, and the puzzling the reader has done to that point. The puzzle exists only for the novel to willfully refuse to complete the puzzle, to purposefully leave out a piece of the puzzle so that it can not be completed, but the novel does so in a way that the reader can not deny the puzzle that is already constructed. All the same, even the incomplete puzzle is clearly important for understanding the story.

The question that Powers leaves us with is "who is the author?" By "1979", the novel calls into question the existence of all the narratives in the book while simultaneously asserting the power of those narratives. For every step of the puzzle in this novel before 1979, there is strong textual evidence to support the logic of the step. But ultimately the text fails us, we cannot make a conclusion about "1979" that has the support of the rest of the text, as the other connections have. In a strange way the reader is seemingly alone (autonomous) in her or his understanding of the book, yet at the same time is surrounded by the novel itself and the system that has led the reader to this place. Further, "1979" is not just a gimmick, a "but then again maybe the butler did it" at the end of a detective story. "1979" shows us that separate logical constructs can work with the same material that we have been given in the novel. It causes us to truly reconsider the rest of the book, rather than literally "problematize" the rest of the book.

One can imagine different possible readings that seek to reconcile these conflicts, but each of these possibilities must honor parts of the logic of the game and defy other parts. That is, none of these possibilities are completely correct or clearly incorrect. I have started to give an idea of some of these interpretive connections that the reader can start to make above, and

I will not continue to give exhaustive examples of such possibilities. They all lead to the same contextualized and logically frustrated end. The reader is not confronted with a myriad of details and narratives, from which she or he needs to take a heavy hand in making sense of the story, like *Gravity's Rainbow*. Rather, the finishing is the reader's own, while the story as a whole remains a communal creation. This is how and why *Prisoner's Dilemma* leaves a piece out of its puzzle, emphasizing both the order to be had by the pieces that fit and the freedom to be had by the piece missing. This is also why it is not a gimmick ending, since it is not a hidden alternative key to the story that makes all the pieces fit into place. Rather it breaks the whole puzzle, but only at this very late stage in the puzzling. This obviously can relate back to Deleuze and Guattari's machine, which is either in the process of being built or of dismantling itself, which I describe in detail in the previous chapter.

However, we still have one more chapter in *Prisoner's Dilemma* to discuss, which will further our questioning of authorship. "Calamine" is a very short chapter, less than a page, and it is the second-to-last chapter in the book, just before "1979". "Calamine" is also another chapter that does not follow the original chapter scheme, for it appears in normal text, but has an undated title, not a number. The narrator is first person. By these qualities, this chapter does not fit any of the possible categories established above.

"Calamine" starts with the same sentence as "1979" (the "unrepeatable days in mid-May" sentence, page 347, which is repeated twice), and proceeds to roughly follow the scene of "1979" as well. "Calamine" describes a day in mid-May with a different family than the Hobson family in "1979". In this family, there are five children, and the middle son is narrating in first-person while in the Hobson family there are four children with an authorial narrator. The "Calamine" family's narrator's brother is home from medical school; "1979"'s Artie is home from law school. The "Calamine" family's narrator's father died of cancer the previous winter; in "1979" Eddie walks in the front door when the family has given him up

for dead. “Calamine” ends with this (remember it is the middle son narrating): “I have had an idea for how I might begin to make some sense of the loss. The plans for a place to hide out in long enough to learn how to come back. Call it Powers World” (*PD* 345). In “Calamine”, we are to see that the Hobsons are a fictive version of the author’s family.

In one way, “Calamine” can be seen as a rather unsophisticated move by the author, where he shows his hand and cannot resist explicating to the reader that his fiction is indeed grounded in his own lived reality. It risks the simple metafiction that we have so many examples of in the postmodern era. The novel again risks being a gimmick.

But “Calamine” lifts the whole story to another level, employing the concept of the book itself to show how we try to puzzle out our own lives. This is a basic theme of this book, with multiple people creating their own Hobstowns to sort out their own lives. The author of the book is not clearly an outside, he is another point on the plane of consistency. Through its successive phases of puzzling out the story, this novel plays into the reader’s traditional sense of a hierarchy in the reading experience, the most basic of which is the author as the creator, and the reader as the consumer. Even to this last step, the novel relies on this hierarchy, brings the reader up successive steps of the story to the pinnacle, where the author simultaneously shows his face and hides his presence, indicates his reality and asserts his fictiveness. Again the machine is either being built or dismantling. Again the puzzle novel uses and abuses our conventional expectations for reading strategies and innovations with those strategies. In the end, a character with the author’s name can never be the author, it can only be a representation. However, using representations of known people has a different narrative effect than characters that have no such common reference.

In fact, with “Calamine” we are encouraged yet again to look at our chapter system, even though it is now both broken and working, to see if the inclusion of “Calamine” affects our consideration of the other chapters. The first chapter of the book, the undated italicized

"Riddles", narrates in first person children lying on the ground with their father looking at the constellations. In this chapter, it is "we children" who are lying with the father, typically answering questions about the constellations. "We are all already expert at second-guessing. The five of us are fluent, native speakers of the condensed sign language, the secret code of family" (*PD* 13). Later in the chapter, the narrator says the father has gone, leaving among other things, "And the five of us, of course. The sum total of his lessons" (*PD* 16). Five? It is technically possible in these passages that the narrator is including Ailene, Eddie Sr.'s wife, but the character of the narrative does not suggest this. "Calamine" has five children, of course, the Powers children. Is "Riddles" also about the Powers family, rather than the Hobsons?

With this in mind, we can find other questionable places in the book, such as the undated italicized chapter, "The Dominant Tense". This chapter is narrated like the other supposed Hobson children's recordings, but part of the chapter speaking about the "father" includes "Dad probably should have been an engineer, the only line of work that fit his temperament. … He would have become one, too, if it hadn't been for the detour that history arranged for him. He wanted me to take up the work he never did, but on that hope I could not deliver. My product has to be another" (*PD* 83–84). In what we know about Artie, Rachel, Lily, and Eddie Jr. (the four Hobson children), none of them do anything that deals with producing a "product", while obviously a novelist does. These questionable parts probably all occur in what we have been considering the Hobson children's recordings, and this makes sense since the narrative identity in these chapters is more diffuse, and the content that the middle child in "Calamine" would want to address would reside best in these chapters. No clear conclusion can be made about these chapters, then, how much they are fictionalized versions of the author's life and how much they are more purely fictionalized

Hobson children's narration. Perhaps this distinction starts to be more and more useless the more we think about it.

This is another way that the novel leaves us with the question of "who is the author?" *Prisoner's Dilemma* seems to leave only a small area of the story untold, just a few small questions, but through these questions it calls into question all the bases we stand on in reading, and in this way this unwritten area is much larger. That is, in a way this peeking out from behind the curtain would seem to give us more information as to how to deal with the piece missing from the puzzle, but in fact all it does is show us how important it is to take that creation, that decision, with care. It simply increases the stakes of the game, it does not help us complete the game.

In this novel, until "Calamine", we are merely asked as readers to imagine what the story might be. Even though other forces are inevitably at work, until this chapter the story maintains the separation between the world and the book on the one hand, and the author on the other, even though it integrates the reader as a maker of meaning in similar ways as do *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses*. With "Calamine", this separation disappears, we are confronted with the reality of fiction and the fiction of reality, and the reader must suddenly recognize her or his place beside this book, this story, and this author in the plane of consistency. This is the place that *Prisoner's Dilemma* takes us to, ultimately. It is a place that asks incredible things of the reader, yet also teaches the reader how to belong in that place. This is a very different thing from *Ulysses* being a puzzle that is also a guide to its own puzzle. *Prisoner's Dilemma* takes on the task of helping the reader live in the world, rather than helping the reader read the book. This is obviously an unwriteable part of a story, and it is the crucial piece of the puzzle that must be left out of the narrative proper. Efforts at directly teaching this kind of idea are clearly failures; it must be done in a fragmentary way.

That we may determine what place *Prisoner's Dilemma* takes the reader to in reading the novel distinguishes the reading experience of *Prisoner's Dilemma* from that of *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Gravity's Rainbow* also requires the reader to participate in finishing the story of the novel, but the way the novel does this is much less defined. *Prisoner's Dilemma* surrounds a point of information, rather than trying to explain it directly, just as Blanchot claims we must do with the disaster. The novel, even though it is more understandable than *Gravity's Rainbow*, is ultimately fragmentary like *Gravity's Rainbow*. By the time the reader has any kind of idea of what the missing pieces are, he or she is deeply involved with figuring out the puzzle, and deeply invested in the novel. Only after the reader truly becomes surrounded with the words in *Prisoner's Dilemma* do they start to get an idea of what the novel really focuses on, even if, at this point, that focus remains unclear, a fragment.

Ulysses ends with a chapter devoted to the interior monologue of one character, indicating that somehow through the ultimately subjective we can get to a universal of human existence and community. *Gravity's Rainbow* ends topically in a rather grim way: the main character dispersed, a deadly rocket about to be fired. But these events, and indeed the puzzling of the story, somehow indicate that the solution to destructive paranoia is human connectedness, and the very end of the book is an appeal to cooperation and communion. *Prisoner's Dilemma* ends with the concept of freedom. In the end, perhaps the most crucial lesson the puzzle novel teaches us is that like paranoia, but in an inverse way, freedom is not always positive. We can be too free, left to make our own individual, solipsistic meanings from texts that do not confront us with the ethical choices of those meaning-makings. *Prisoner's Dilemma*, out of the three novels addressed in this study, shows us (really *shows* us) the need to negotiate things such as freedom and paranoia in conjunction with other thinking humans, other readers, and other writers.

Conclusion

One area for possible further research related to this study is to investigate how twenty-first century literary novels can be read through a puzzle novel framework. As I detail above, the concept of the puzzle novel can be employed in various different ways, and I have chosen one particular way for this study. In terms of my puzzle novel concept in this study, it seems that puzzle novels have not been produced since the end of the twentieth century. This is most clearly shown by looking at the novels of the two authors in this study who lived to publish in the twenty-first century. Thomas Pynchon published *Vineland* in 1990, and while this might be read as a puzzle novel, it is often seen as his weakest novel. *Mason & Dixon* from 1997 has been received more positively, and clearly departs from the kind of puzzle novel that *Gravity's Rainbow* was, as does his 2006 *Against the Day*. Even more extremely, critics are puzzled by the striking conventionality of *Inherent Vice*, published in 2009. Similarly, Richard Powers proceeds from *Prisoner's Dilemma* to produce interesting and well-received novels at an astonishing rate, but none of them fit into my conception of the puzzle novel. His novels before 2000 could be read in terms of a different kind of puzzle novel, but since 2000 his novels take a different turn, with *The Time of Our Singing* (2003) and *The Echo Maker* (2006) hard to imagine in terms of the puzzle novel at all.

In this conclusion I do not want to make a specific argument about the import of such a literary history. Rather I just want to suggest that this study could be seen as a kind of case study in periodization, or in postmodernism. In my conception, the puzzle novel does seem to be inescapably a postmodern form, whether we take that word to refer to cultural and social realities or artistic forms, or both. If my kind of puzzle novel is no longer produced, that may provide support for an argument that we have progressed beyond the postmodern period. Even more tenuous would be an argument about what period we are now in, or even more

radically if we are beyond the need to label historical and artistic periods. The failure to find a better label than adding to the previous period "post-" in the postmodern period (that is, "post-postmodern") already shows a kind of discomfort with labeling. It may be that the specific insights this study produces are limited to the postmodern era, but as I hope I have shown, the motivation for this study, and the need to produce a more accurate criticism and theory of the novel, remains as current and pressing as ever.

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