

“One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small.” Discuss this claim in relation to any work or works of literature. You are free to define what is small in any way that interests you.

If logic is defined as a “method of human thought that involves thinking in a linear, step-by-step manner,” then *Ulysses* (1922), *chef-d’œuvre* of Irish writer James Joyce, supports Bachelard’s claim. The events of *Ulysses* take place over one day (16 June 1904) in one city (Dublin), but readers experience, and marvel at, the everyday everywhere. As Joyce noted, “in the particular is contained the universal,” and *Ulysses* employs various narrative techniques which transcend the logical, and depart from the contemporary novel, to encourage readers to recognise this.¹ This essay will explore three in detail: stream of consciousness, relating a character’s chaotic and unfiltered thought-process; a secondary narratorial voice which Hayman calls the ‘Arranger’; and the network of intertextual allusions. In so doing, it also hopes to justify T.S. Eliot’s assertion that, in 1923, *Ulysses* was “the most important expression which the present age ha[d] found.”²

I. Stream of Consciousness

In *Ulysses*, Joyce describes what protagonists think; consequently, exposed to a multiplicity of perspectives, readers learn to appreciate the power of the imagination. Even the simplest experiences incite complex trains-of-thought dealing with humanity’s most contentious questions, as we see in the third chapter *Proteus*.³ The introduction to interior monologue is gentle - the only instance on the novel’s first page is the word “chrysostomos,” - but by *Proteus* the ratio of interior monologue to third person narration is nearly eight to one, and Molly’s triumphant thought-soliloquy in *Penelope*, which lacks any punctuation, is fully-developed stream of consciousness.⁴

Proteus is, above all, a chapter of metamorphosis: in the *Odyssey*, the sea god Proteus has the ability to shapeshift, just as Dedalus’ thoughts modulate in content (focus, mood) and form (literary style, rhythm). On the chapter’s first page alone, for example, his mind becomes the mind of “Aristotle, Boehme, Hamlet, Blake, perhaps Lessing, perhaps Gutzkow, and an upside-down Berkeley.”⁵ Throughout, reality (visual input, plans for the day, personal experience) stimulates imagination (thought, philosophical ruminations), before the cycle recommences, as the following summary of an excerpt illustrates. When Dedalus sees a group of midwives walking onto Sandymount Strand, he imagines the bag which one of them carries containing a “misbirth with a trailing navelcord,” prompting him to think about umbilical cords as connecting everyone to Adam and Eve, and Eve’s navel-less belly. Dedalus then considers his own parentage, Father-Son consubstantiality, the “illstarred heresiarch” Arius, and so on, until his reflections are cut short by reminders of what he has been tasked with that day, then he imagines again.⁶

By the end of *Proteus*, readers, experienced with Dedalus’ musings, might be encouraged to respond to the novel’s details similarly. When a handkerchief-less Dedalus carefully sets down “dry snot picked from his nostril on a ledge of rock,” Joyce is describing an everyday bodily task.⁷ Critics have tried variously to assess the significance of this

¹ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 505.

² T.S. Eliot, ‘Ulysses, Order and Myth’, *The Dial*, November 1923.

³ The third chapter of *Ulysses*. Although the 1922 edition contains no titles, this essay follows scholarly tradition, and Joyce himself, in referring to chapters by the Homeric episodes to which they correspond.

⁴ The ‘technic’ of *Proteus* is listed as “monologue (male)” and “soliloquy” in the Gilbert and Linati Schemata respectively. Gilbert Schema: Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s “Ulysses”: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), p. 41. Linati Schema: Originally enclosed in James Joyce, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 271. Reproduced by John Hunt.

⁵ J Mitchell Morse, ‘Proteus’, p. 37, in *James Joyce’s “Ulysses”: Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

⁶ U 38. This essay cites *Ulysses* with ‘U [page number]’, following scholarly tradition. The edition used is: James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922).

⁷ U 50.

moment: Richard Ellmann, pre-eminent biographer of James Joyce, proposes, for instance, that his backwards glance afterwards suggests that “art is not self-isolation, that it depends upon recognition of other existences.”⁸ In my reading, the detail recalls the colour “snotgreen” from the first page of *Proteus* when Dedalus is considering the diaphane in Aristotelian philosophy, which itself recalls Mulligan’s description of the sea beside Dublin as “snotgreen” in the first chapter *Telemachus*, reworking the Homeric phrase “winedark sea,” and thus harks back to Joyce’s distaste for the Irish Literary Revival.⁹ In a sense, however, it does not matter what this symbolises, only that readers find themselves compelled to search for symbolism in Joyce’s descriptions of the most ordinary moments; *Ulysses*, by employing stream of consciousness, teaches us to imagine, finding the large in the small, a lesson we might also apply to our own lives, which are no more or less ordinary than those of Dedalus and Bloom.

II. The Arranger

Although critics were once reluctant to recognise it, stream of consciousness was never enough for Joyce; the innovations of the voice which David Hayman calls the ‘Arranger’ are “what makes *Ulysses* truly revolutionary.”¹⁰¹¹ The Arranger is, Hayman explains, a presence who “exercises an increasing degree of overt control over increasingly challenging materials,” and who, Kenner adds, “exists side by side with a colourless primary narrator who sees to the thousand little bits of novelistic housekeeping no one is meant to notice [...] without which nothing could get done at all.”¹²¹³ To my eyes, *Ulysses* itself describes this narrative voice even better, as the “mirror within a mirror”: the Arranger looks at the reflection of the novel in a “retrospective arrangement,” which is itself a reflection of reality.¹⁴ The Arranger’s omniscience and attention to minutiae are supra-logical, but encourage readers to recognise that every detail is intentional, threads of the novel’s rich tapestry; only by acknowledging the smallest parts and their inter-relations can we begin to appreciate, and experience, the larger whole.

The Arranger’s playful interference is first felt in *Aeolus*, in which Bloom attempts to place an advertisement in the newspaper; the chapter’s prose is punctuated by headlines, and features a myriad of rhetorical devices. In *Wandering Rocks*, he keeps track of what dozens of Dubliners are doing to the minute; in *Sirens* he makes music out of words; he transforms *Ithaca* into a catechism. A closer look at *Oxen of the Sun* will be necessary, however, to explore his handiwork in detail. Despite the chapter’s notorious difficulty, it is a favourite among amateurs and experts alike: the Arranger narrates Bloom’s visit to the hospital where Mina Purefoy is giving birth in a series of 32 literary parodies.¹⁵ He begins with pagan incantations, follows with Latin and Latinate prose, and soon mimics a slew of literary illuminati, from the satirist Swift, to the historian Gibbon, and the novelist Dickens, before closing with late 19th century street slang.¹⁶ In so doing, the Arranger establishes parallels between the evolution of English prose style and the growth of the foetus, and form reflects content. Even before reading *Oxen of the Sun*, it is clear that Joyce sought to replicate procreation: the nine notebooks in which he drafted the chapter correspond to the nine months of pregnancy,

⁸ Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 26.

⁹ U 5.

¹⁰ e.g. “As far as literary history is concerned, Joyce has till recently been pretty firmly typed as a stream-of-consciousness novelist. The older critics concentrate on the first nine episodes and on the last one (about one third of the book) and either read the other episodes as if they were stream-of-consciousness or condemn them as marred by misplaced ingenuity.” Ben D. Kimpel, *The Voices of “Ulysses”*, *Style*, 9, 3 (Summer 1975), 283-319, p. 283.

¹¹ Patrick Hastings, ‘Voices in the Text’, *Ulysses Guide*, <<https://www.ulyssesguide.com/voices-in-the-text>> [accessed July 2025]

¹² David Hayman, *Ulysses: the Mechanics of Meaning* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 84.

¹³ Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 67.

¹⁴ U 393.

¹⁵ Not a favourite for Harriet Shaw Weaver, though; she said of *Oxen of the Sun*: “I think this episode might also have been called *Hades* for the reading of it is like being taken the rounds of hell.”

¹⁶ *Oxen of the Sun* alone took Joyce about 1,000 hours to write, and no wonder.

the forty paragraphs the forty weeks.¹⁷ So why use literary parallels specifically, if not only to show off Joyce's skill as a writer?¹⁸ Perhaps, as Gordon argues, they complement yet more parallels, demonstrating that "everything grows according to the same organic laws."¹⁹ Jordan suggests instead that the many narrative voices operate like a Cubist painting, allowing us to see the same plot "from every perspective at once."²⁰ In any case, under the Arranger's influence, an everyday birth becomes so much more than just that in how we see it, and yet stays the same: we experience the large in the small by bending the laws of the novel.

III. Intertextuality

Joyce's novels are notoriously allusive; the database FWEET houses 99,788 annotations for *Finnegans Wake*, many of these intertextual.²¹ *Ulysses* too makes reference to a myriad of works, as varied as epic poetry, narrative poetry, opera, song, theatre, philosophy, and theology.²³ Each draws the reader in a different direction, imbuing the smallest details with multi-layered significance and promoting critical reading; the Homeric allusion - that is, references to the *Odyssey*, whether parallels or subversions - will serve as an excellent example. It strikes us even before we turn over *Ulysses*' first page; the title is the latinised Odysseus, and the 1922 edition's "white letters on a blue field" on the cover recall the "white island rising from the sea" and the modern Greek flag.²⁴ Within the novel correspondences to the *Odyssey* exist at three textual levels: basic plot and protagonists; chapters and sections; words and phrases.

Only the first, the broadest, has been studied extensively; here, references frame the novel's narrative and elevate the ordinary. Bloom, a middle-aged Jewish advertising canvasser, corresponds to Odysseus, the champion of Greek mythology; our lives are worthy of no less scrutiny and appreciation than the adventures of epic heroes. Where *Ulysses* departs from Homeric ideals, Joyce redefines heroism to "respond to the uncertainties of people about traditional values."²⁵ As the novel progresses, for example, we become aware of Molly's intent to have an affair with 'Blazes' Boylan, her manager for an upcoming concert, which takes place sometime after four o'clock. Bloom also knows, and while his wife's unfaithfulness troubles him, he is reluctant to face the truth for too long and does not interfere.²⁶ In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus returns home in disguise, he wins the arrow-shooting contest and kills the suitors of his loyal wife Penelope. If Bloom's inaction is not merely the result of cowardice, it is an effort to quietly

¹⁷ Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 14.

¹⁸ Some, including Virginia Woolf, might have argued just this. After completing *Ulysses*, she wrote in her diary: "I'm reminded all the time of some callow board [sic] schoolboy, say like Henry Lamb, full of wits & powers, but so self-conscious and egotistical that he loses his head, becomes extravagant, mannered, uproarious, ill at ease, makes kindly people feel sorry for him, & stern ones merely annoyed."

¹⁹ John Gordon, "The Multiple Journeys of 'Oxen of the Sun'", *ELH*, 46, 1 (Spring 1979), 158-172, p. 158. He elucidates: "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, and also cosmogony, theogony, and the life-journeys of a language, a literature, a race, a world, and a man."

²⁰ Daniel Jordan, "'The Oxen of the Sun'", Yale Modernism Lab, <<https://campuspress.yale.edu/modernismlab/the-oxen-of-the-sun>> [accessed July 2025]

²¹ FWEET can be found here: <http://www.fweet.org/pages/fw_srch.php> [accessed July 2025]

²² And there are many more to be found, even by inexperienced readers; as an example, I read "past Eve and Adams" on the novel's first line as a reference to Stephen Adams, the pseudonym of 19th-20th c. composer Michael Maybrick, best known for the highly popular song *The Holy City* (which begins 'Last night I lay a sleeping, There came a dream so fair'), to which Joyce alludes in *Stephen Hero* and *Ulysses*. This is perhaps the most-read line of the novel, and yet I can find no evidence of anyone thinking the same.

²³ e.g. *The Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Don Giovanni*, *Seaside Girls*, *Hamlet*, *The Metaphysics*, *The Bible* respectively.

²⁴ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 524.

²⁵ Shadi Neimneh, 'The Anti-Hero in Modernist Fiction: From Irony to Cultural Renewal', *Mosaic*, 46 (December 2013), 75-90, p. 75.

²⁶ e.g. U 250.

endure, choosing peace over conflict. To Joyce, therefore, the modern man survives not by triumphing, but by continuing, and merits no less credit for it.

At the second textual level, Homeric allusions only appear to scholars or second-time readers, and complicate our understanding of characters or events; here, *Ulysses* is a palimpsest writing over itself with a network of symbols. Joyce's parallel between the milkwoman in *Telemachus* and Athena, for example, challenges us to scrutinise a minor character. Dedalus reads her as personified Ireland instead, constrained by history - that "nightmare from which [he is] trying to escape" - while Joyce reaches for something more distant; in a character oft-neglected, we find an illustration of the author's method.²⁷ We might also compare these correspondences: Ireland, unlike the powerful Athena, serves Haines, her "conqueror," and Mulligan, her "gay betrayer."²⁸ (Haines, the Oxford student, represents England, who 'conquered' the nation through the Act of Union in 1800; Mulligan, who invited Haines to stay in Dublin, represents the Irish who 'betray' the nation by refusing to advocate for home-rule.) These conflicts between correspondences - is the milkwoman Athena or Ireland? - reveal the subjectivity of meaning, transcending logic.

The third textual level appears less significant: references as words and phrases colour our reading experience but have to contend with many others; Homer is named just twice, Shakespeare 51 times. In the first pages of *Ulysses*, however, such references establish the novel as mock-Epic, toying with tension between the ordinary and the mythic. The novel's first spoken words - "introibo ad altare Dei" - begin Mulligan's mock-mass, while recalling the opening of Epic poetry; divinity is involved, the words are sung, to readers unfamiliar with Latin 'introibo' sounds like 'in Troy', the setting of the *Iliad*. Dedalus' first sleepy utterance is "tell me Mulligan," a comedic subversion of the invocation of the Muse in English translations of the *Odyssey*. Ezra Pound, great poet though he was, was wrong when he called Homeric allusions "scaffolding."²⁹ Nabokov mistook them for "pretentious nonsense."³⁰ At all three levels they strive beyond the confines of the text, heralding a new genre of literature, bending space (adventures across the Mediterranean vs walks around Dublin) and time (the ancient world vs 1904) to explore the quotidian through the lens of the Epic, enabling readers to experience, yet again, what is large in what is small.³¹

To conclude briefly, we find much supporting evidence for Bachelard's claim that "one must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small" in *Ulysses*; stream of consciousness, the Arranger, and innovative intertextuality all follow the Modernist tradition of experimenting with the unconventional and illogical to fulfil this paradox. A rebel like Blake, Joyce wanted "to see the world in a grain of sand"; in *Ulysses*, he shows us, and himself, how.³² His predecessors failed because the novel, as Eliot saw it, was insufficient; Joyce "felt a conscious or probably unconscious dissatisfaction with the form," and wrote something else instead.³³ No word will describe what *Ulysses* really is, nor ever should; it is nevertheless my hope that, through exploration of narrative techniques unique to the work, this essay has outlined the ways it departs from logic to find the large in the small.

Most of all, like his contemporaries, Joyce was interested in the subjective experience: *Ulysses* celebrates the myriad ways of seeing our universe, such that even the smallest detail offers fertile ground for exploration, our own

²⁷ U 34.

²⁸ U 13.

²⁹ Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 406. For more, see A. Litz, 'Pound and Eliot on Ulysses: The Critical Tradition', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 10 (Fall 1972), 5-18.

³⁰ Vladimir Nabokov, 'Vladimir Nabokov Talks About Nabokov', *Vogue*, December 1969.

³¹ As Joyce commented, in *Ulysses* "there is no past, no future; everything flows in an eternal present." Robert Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage* (London: Vikas Publications, 1970), p. 22.

³² William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence* (1803, published posthumously in 1863).

³³ T.S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', *The Dial*, November 1923.

Odyssey, a voyage of discovery through art.³⁴ *Ulysses* is, we come to learn, a tribute: to life, to love, to meaning, even if we have to make it up ourselves. The novel's last word is "yes." For a readership crippled by the First World War, which saw 40 million casualties, the survivors of which Gertrude Stein described as a "lost generation," what message more necessary?³⁵ In the rubble, the human spirit; in the everyday, the extraordinary; in the smallest detail, the greatest significance... if only you cared to "close your eyes and see."³⁶

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Word Count: c. 2,100 (excl. footnotes & bibliography)

³⁴ cf. "the only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is." in chapter 2 of *La Prisonnière*, book 5 of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, trans. Moncrief.

³⁵ Ernest Hemingway, 'Une Génération Perdue', in Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Scribner's, 1964).

³⁶ U 37.