Writing the Cultural Field: The First Edition of *Ulysses*

What is in some ways the central pun of *Ulysses*, when Martha Clifford confuses “word” and “world,” is not so much a bit of clever wordplay as it is a reflection of common experience […]. That relationship was a slippery one for Joyce’s characters in part because it was slippery for Joyce himself, first as an artist and second as a language teacher living in various polyglot communities of Europe, and in part because it was a slippery one for the public at large at a time when the world and the word were beginning to converge in disorienting ways.¹

I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality. (JH 521)

Although *Ulysses* is traditionally considered the apex of modernist writing, in a number of ways it exhibits many of the features of postmodern writing, including fracturing the reading experience, abandoning the distinction between high and low culture, forcing readers to acknowledge the artificiality of writing and reading, and exposing the absent centers around which discourse is constructed. These qualities are typically linked with the postmodern writing of Joyce’s protégé, Samuel Beckett, but Joyce’s writing is bursting through its seams with the same qualities that we have been taught to find in Beckett, Thomas Pynchon, Vladimir Nabokov, and other writers more commonly linked to postmodernism. In *Ulysses* Joyce creates a text that continually forces readers to reread and rethink and revise their approach to the plot and the characters presented within it, one that challenges the various relationships between reader, writer, and text, blurring the boundaries between them.

Throughout *Ulysses*, particularly through the figure of Bloom, Joyce shows the great things that can be accomplished when we embrace the emptiness and artificiality of the writing machine.² Functioning as a *bricoleur*, Bloom is able to take from the sources that surround him, whether he is reading Shakespeare or *Sweets of Sin*, the romance novel he buys for his wife. Both the high- and low-culture texts that Bloom encounters recur in his thoughts throughout Bloomsday, and his ability and willingness to view Shakespeare on the same level as pornography is one of Bloom’s defining features. This openness separates him from Stephen, whose ability to engage with texts depends primarily on whether they are sufficiently difficult.³ Stephen memorizes lofty speeches about literature; Bloom wipes himself with the “prizewinning story” that he pulls from a magazine. Stephen’s modernist qualities as a reader of the world contrast with the postmodern outlook that Bloom brings to his day, as, rather than attempting to iron out the wrinkles between reality and its conversion into words, Bloom instead accepts the “contrary ways” that separate writing and reality.
Ultimately, Bloom is the ideal reader for *Ulysses*—attentive, intuitive, not terribly concerned with distinctions between high and low culture, willing to dig and work at reading, aware that he can never fully understand the world, able to take in the text and allow it to interact with the inner workings of his mind. We see this, for example, in Bloom’s continual recycling of the language of Martha Clifford’s letter throughout the day, as her mangling of language (the misuse of “word” and “world,” f.e.) becomes for Bloom an opportunity to engage with a viewpoint outside his own. In Bloom, Joyce presents the ideal postmodern reader and writer; he is able to collate sources from all aspects of life, able to acknowledge the inherent distortion in every act of reading and writing, able to deal with the gaps and cracks that fracture every attempt to capture reality through writing. He takes in various sources and gives them free reign, putting no boundaries or limits on their interaction. When he eventually spits them back out, they are inevitably distorted, hopelessly intertwined in fractured, chaotic, unpredictable, and beautiful ways. By forcing us to accept the stylistic artifice present in the various methods of written presentation, to question the techniques of reading with which we have been taught to approach a text, Joyce impels us to see the artifice present in all writing and all reading. Only after we have accepted it, surrendered to it, and embraced it can we ever explore our relative freedom within its boundaries. Writing is unable to express this reality adequately—none of the episodes allow us to become Bloom, to experience life fully through a character and become him through the act of reading his thoughts. High modernism seems to aspire to this quality, to this hyperrealism, through its use of internal monologue and other techniques to allow us to experience what Virginia Woolf calls “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day.”

Why then is “Joycean” considered by many to be synonymous with “modernist”? In his study of modernism and its influence on the rest of the twentieth-century, for example, Morton P. Levitt posits Joyce as a metaphor for modernism, as the figure that best exemplifies what “modernism” means, with *Ulysses* as a kind or *ur-text* for modernist writing; Levitt concludes that “the Modernist Age might as tellingly be labeled the Age of Joyce” (10). Levitt lists a series of modernist concerns—complex narrative viewpoints, an individualized concept of time, an ironic tone, deeply embedded metaphorical structures, the use of myth, and a “diminished yet still central vision of man surviving, of man persisting, a revised yet still powerful humanist vision” (10)—that he identifies with Joyce and that he subsequently traces throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Levitt’s use of Joyce as the “emblem” of the modernist novel is representative of how we have been trained to view him—or, better, how he has trained us to view him (253).

As an author, as a public figure, Joyce was determinedly modernist, exercising as much control as possible over his books, his image, and his legacy. He endeavored to create and maintain a view of himself as an omniscient, omnipotent, and indifferent creator. In *Portrait*, Stephen Dedalus strives to be the artist standing above his creation paring his fingernails, and in some ways, at least publicly, this is an accurate description of how Joyce wants us to see him. Importantly, it is also how Stuart Gilbert, Richard Ellmann,
Hugh Kenner, and the early generations of Joyceans wanted us to see him. This trend began with Joyce himself, though, as there are countless examples of Joyce’s preoccupation with the space into which his texts were turned into books. Here are just a few: Joyce’s censorship letters and battles over *Dubliners*, his interest in promoting his books, his use of advertising and popular culture both within and without his works, his concern with the status of his books as high or low culture, his involvement with book design and proofreading, his influence on Gilbert’s *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study* and other reviews and critical analyses of his works, his superstitious desire to have his works first published on his birthday, his audio recordings of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” and portions of *Ulysses*, and his involvement with the book of criticism that preceded *Finnegans Wake*. In this essay I will be primarily focusing on Joyce’s involvement in the first edition of *Ulysses*, one of the most important and famous examples of this division in Joyce that has resulted in his being mistakenly considered a modernist writer.

And it is in looking at how he juggles the competing roles of writer and author that we begin to see how truly divided Joyce appears and how influential that division has been in our understanding of Joyce. Within *Ulysses*, Bloom comes into contact with a variety of sources, and what makes Bloom such a memorable character is his willingness to let these sources freely engage with one another in his mind. By the end of the day, these sources are hopelessly corrupted, but the point of the novel is that this doesn’t matter. Every attempt to speak or communicate is essentially corrupted in its movement from one person to another, from one medium to another; the beauty lies in the individual consumption and response to the constant *bricolage* that is postmodern existence. Contrasting this theory espoused within *Ulysses*, however, is Joyce’s vastly different treatment of *Ulysses* once he released it into the cultural field. Rather than allowing the book to take on a life of its own among its consumers (as the book itself argues that books always naturally do), Joyce attempted to control every aspect of its consumption that he possibly could. In *The Scandal of Ulysses*, Bruce Arnold writes, “Unlike most writers, who see a complete manuscript or typescript go to the publisher and then, after a holiday, a rest, a pause for reflection and regeneration, begin something new, Joyce’s involvement in his book right up to a month before publication left him physically prostrated after its appearance. […] It is not until mid-March of 1923, more than a year after the appearance of *Ulysses*, that he takes up his pen again and writes two pages” (31-32). From his molding of the audience through the pricing and publication of the first edition, to his influencing of Gilbert and other critics in the months following its publication, to his obsession with continually emending, revising, and correcting each subsequent edition, Joyce asserted his authority at every possible step as *Ulysses* made its way into the cultural field.8

Nowhere is the tension between Joyce-the-writer and Joyce-the-author clearer than in Joyce’s treatment of the first edition of *Ulysses*. Due to a number of circumstances both within and beyond his control, *Ulysses* was treated from its earliest stages as a hallowed, important work of literature, as more than a mere book containing a text. Throughout the early stages of its publication and the obscenity trials that resulted in it being banned, Joyce and Sylvia Beach orchestrated something remarkable, carving out a unique
place for *Ulysses* in the cultural field. Through both careful planning and random accident, the first edition of *Ulysses* became a landmark of publishing history and a cultural phenomenon unlike anything ever seen before it. Due to the controversy surrounding its status as a banned book, *Ulysses* existed long before it was available to an audience in a complete, bound edition, and this allowed Joyce the time and the opportunity to mold the world into which his book would be brought. And Joyce shrewdly used these seemingly unfortunate circumstances to his advantage in order to manipulate both the surroundings of his book’s publication and his status as an author.

In *The Textual Condition*, Jerome McGann argues for the importance of looking beyond the linguistic act of reading a book when studying its impact and its effect on readers. In comparing the postmodern text of *Ulysses* to Joyce’s modernist behavior during its publication, McGann’s differentiation between linguistic and bibliographic codes is an important tool for discussing the implications of this shift. McGann argues that too often the “reading” of a text has been limited to an analysis of the text’s linguistic code – what it accomplishes strictly through its words. Thus McGann uses the distinction between linguistic and bibliographic codes to distinguish between our experiencing of the words themselves and our experiencing of the physical book in which the words are presented. Aspects of the bibliographic codes include “typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as ‘at best’ peripheral to ‘poetry’ or ‘the text as such’” (13).

McGann’s distinction between these codes is especially important in this discussion of Joyce because there is a disconnect between the linguistic and bibliographic codes of the first edition of *Ulysses*. Within the text, Joyce is interested in breaking down the barriers between high and low culture, in relinquishing his authority and autonomy, and ultimately in doing away with a concrete vision of reading and writing as separate acts. However, the bibliographic code of the first edition of *Ulysses* says something very different. The volume itself is markedly different from other books, both in its increased price and in its physical construction, which set it off as something beyond an ordinary book. The first edition of *Ulysses*, published in Paris through Beach’s bookstore Shakespeare and Company (which only subsequently became a press), was printed in a limited run of 1000 copies, and the book advertises its own publication strategy: “THIS EDITION IS LIMITED TO 1000 COPIES: 100 COPIES (SIGNED) ON DUTCH HANDMADE PAPER NUMBERED FROM 1 TO 100; 150 COPIES ON VERGÉ D’ARCHES NUMBERED FROM 101 TO 250; 750 COPIES ON HANDMADE PAPER NUMBERED FROM 251 TO 1000.” This description carefully outlines the hierarchy of consumers – there would only be 100 of the most exclusive, most expensive, signed editions, as opposed to the 150 unsigned copies printed on the Arches paper, and the 750 copies printed on unidentified handmade paper. In addition to the exclusivity of the three “first” editions, the price also demarcated the editions as extraordinary. The 100 signed copies were sold for 350 francs each, more than 350 percent higher than Weaver’s original proposed edition; the 150 copies on Arches paper sold for 250 francs; and the 750 copies on the unidentified handmade paper sold for 150 francs. At
150 francs, the lowest-priced volume still sold for sixty percent higher than Weaver’s edition would have been priced. The price of the book translated to approximately thirty dollars, which some sources say in 1922 would have been enough money to live on for a month. Furthermore, an unprecedented 66 percent of the royalties from the book went directly to Joyce – in contrast to the 15 to 20 percent that he would have received with an ordinary edition – which basically “had the effect of turning every purchaser of the edition into a quasi-patron, someone directly supporting the artist himself” (Rainey 53). Since virtually every aspect of the book had been designed or approved by Joyce himself, it made the book essentially a piece of art with a recognizable creator, a book as notable for its exterior appearance as the text that it contained within it.

The physical book is 732 pages and weighs 1.55 kilograms (over three pounds) and, after considerable effort, it was bound in the blue and white colors of the Greek flag (for Odysseus). The simplicity of its design belies the tremendous effort that went into its construction, as the creation of determinedly simple looking cover – blue with the white lettering in all capitals, “Ulysses by James Joyce” – caused lengthy delays in the proposed publication date. In addition, Joyce’s well-known emendations and revisions contributed to the difficulty in the creation of the first edition of *Ulysses*. As Arnold points out, “Joyce was obsessively interested in the very thing that he was least able to control: the physical appearance of the book. He exercised much more power than most authors, because of the curious and highly personal relationship established between himself and Sylvia Beach, and with Darantiere [the printer] as well” (33-34). The enormous debate about what the “original” *Ulysses* looked like, the result of Joyce’s continual editing and revising, speaks to the effect that Joyce’s tampering has had on the book. Joyce maintained strict control over the volume, clinging to his authority and constructing an authorial image of himself as a godlike figure, a master puppeteer, standing above his creation paring his fingernails. Joyce also became intimately involved in the reviews and criticism of the book, as he attempted to control even the individual consumption of the book. The larger point is that the bibliographic and linguistic codes of *Ulysses* are in stark contrast to one another, and the contradictions between Joyce’s textual and metatextual behavior are largely responsible for our mistaken view of him as a modernist writer. We cannot approach *Ulysses* without being influenced by the tremendous web of discourse already surrounding it; rather than allowing the world to shape and mold it, Joyce continually sought to perfect his book, to get it in the precise condition that he imagined it. He could not relinquish his grasp on it, could not accept the inherent distortions that occur once a text is released into the outside world.

In his famous essay “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” Pierre Bourdieu diagrams the varying fields in which a writer exists, the various level of social reality in which he/she operates. A major goal of Bourdieu’s essay is to demonstrate the inverse relationship between the literary or artistic field and the field of power: “Thus, at least in the most perfectly autonomous sector of the field of cultural production, where the only audience aimed at is other producers (as with Symbolist poetry), the economy of practices is based, as in a generalized game of ‘loser wins’, on a systematic inversion of the
fundamental principles of all ordinary economics” (39). Bourdieu discusses this in terms of painting, Symbolist poetry, and, in a much more detailed diagram, the French literary field in the second half of the nineteenth century (49). In a more modern setting, we might think about indie music in the past twenty years, a setting explored in Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity*.

Like the artistic field described by Bourdieu, in which artistic capital is gained by being unsuccessful in the field of mass culture, Championship Vinyl, the record store in which *High Fidelity* is set, exists in an inverse relationship to the field of power that governs the rest of the world. The character of Barry epitomizes this “upside-down economic world” that comprises the artistic field as described by Bourdieu (40). In his determination to fill his “all-time top-five” lists with unknown songs and albums, he exposes what Rob Fleming, the novel’s comparatively levelheaded protagonist, calls “snob obscurantism” (147). We see the tension that Bourdieu identifies affecting Rob as he tries to live both within the real-world (in which he is expected to maintain relationships with others, make a living, and deal with adult emotions) and the artistic world (in which he is supposed to scorn monetary success, capitalist values, and mainstream recognition). The tension between these two worlds drives the novel and causes Rob’s constant struggles in his relationship in the real world with his girlfriend and in his relationships in Championship Vinyl with his coworkers.

Joyce, like Rob Fleming (or anyone attempting to succeed within both the artistic field and the field of power), had to deal with the difficulty of maintaining both roles, of attaining success at both social levels, of turning the cultural/symbolic capital of the literary field into real-world capital. Bourdieu describes the tension of writers: “They tend to be torn between the internal demands of the field of production, which regard commercial successes as suspect and push them towards a heretical break with the established norms of production and consumption, and the expectations of their vast audience” (50). By fashioning his identity as the master craftsman of modernism, Joyce allowed himself the greatest possible control over the publication and reception of his books, to position *Ulysses* at the high end of both the artistic field and the field of power. Importantly, however, to do this he had to behave in a way that is at odds with the aesthetic principles championed by Bloom within *Ulysses*. Bloom demonstrates the freedom that comes as a result of the death of the author – by allowing the texts that he reads throughout Bloomsday to jumble together, Bloom exemplifies the postmodern outlook that we must adapt to navigate successfully the determinedly difficult *Ulysses*. When we look at Joyce’s behavior regarding the publication of the book, it appears very much at odds with what he is trying to accomplish within the text itself.

Much of Joyce’s motivation for involving himself in the real-world lives that his texts eventually grew into was selfish, as he strove for money, fame, and literary status. Concerning the first edition of *Ulysses*, Joyce was interested in making the book a spectacle, equivalent to a piece of art, unavailable yet highly desirable to the common reader. In “Consuming Investments,” his discussion of the history of the first edition of *Ulysses*, Lawrence Rainey describes the book as an unprecedented site of authorial intervention in which “the marketing practices […] were essentially monopolistic manipulations of supply and demand,
actions characteristic not of a free market, if such a thing exists, but of unconstrained cartels” (73). Joyce strove to position *Ulysses* somewhere new in the field of cultural production, a place that Rainey links with the modernists: “Literary modernism constitutes a strange and perhaps unprecedented withdrawal from the public sphere of cultural production and debate, a retreat into a divided world of patronage, investment, and collecting” (75). We are reminded again of Joyce’s famous desire to “keep the professors busy for centuries” with *Ulysses’* many gaps and silences, and Joyce’s behavior toward the first edition seems aimed at “the professors” rather than the general public, aimed at filling the book with gaps and silences but filling the world with curiosity and critical debate. Thus it is Joyce’s concern with constructing a specific audience for and a specific vision of *Ulysses* by the reading public that is largely responsible for *Ulysses’* position as the “emblem” of the modernist novel.

From its beginning, *Ulysses’* existence as a book was surrounded by metatextual discourse, as the talk about the book threatened to swallow up the actual impact that it could potentially have on the literary community. The controversy regarding its ban in the United States and the media circus surrounding the trial helped to multiply this discourse in an unprecedented way, as an entire country was exposed to “the book” long before being exposed to the text or having any legal way of accessing it. Seven books devoted to *Ulysses* preceded its first legal publication in the United States, evidence of Joyce’s intense desire to mold carefully the environment into which *Ulysses* was to be published. At the same time as it sparked curiosity, this discourse threatened to displace the book, lessening its effect on both its critical and popular reception. Joyce worked to control the metatextual discourse surrounding *Ulysses* by becoming involved in the reviews and the critical response to the book, trying to make it accessible and orderly and modernist, while, at the same time, turning the physical book into a piece of high art that was beyond the grasp of the reading public. Dealing with these opposing aspects of his work forced Joyce to focus intently on his role in manipulating the reception and interpretation of *Ulysses*, a role that he had become increasingly familiar with throughout the long censorship battles with Grant Richards and the publication of *Dubliners*.

Rainey unravels the web of discourse surrounding the initial publication of *Ulysses* and exposes the motives of Beach and Joyce in their decision to publish the first edition of the novel as a “deluxe” edition rather than as a normal or even a private edition. Joyce initially planned to have *Ulysses* published by Harriet Weaver in a relatively traditional manner, in basically the same way that he had published *Portrait*. Plans were made to publish both American and British editions of the book – with Weaver undertaking the British edition through the Pelican Press and publishing the individual episodes in the *Egoist*, the monthly journal that she owned. Ben Huebsch would oversee the American edition, as he had previously with *Portrait*, while the individual episodes were being published in the *Little Review*. Rainey discusses a third plan for publication suggested by John Rodker while Joyce was in Paris. This edition, the first private edition proposed for the novel, ultimately fell through because the length of the novel was unfeasible for Rodker’s small handpress. Rainey points to it as an important incident, however, because it was Joyce’s first exposure to the possibility
of offering the novel as a private or “deluxe” edition, an alternative to the traditional editions being proposed by Weaver and Huebsch.\(^{21}\)

However, it soon became clear to Joyce that *Ulysses* would be too large and too controversial to work as a traditional book, forcing him to change his publishing strategy. From its inception, Joyce was conscious of and concerned with the cultural field into which *Ulysses* was being brought – willing to adapt both the text and the book when it became clear that it would be difficult to get it past the censors – and, when circumstances arose that made it necessary to abandon his initial plans for publication, he took full advantage of the strange circumstances that threatened to overshadow his book, ultimately turning them to his advantage. During the censorship battles and as the anticipation and discourse surrounding *Ulysses* multiplied, it became clear to Joyce that Weaver would be unable to publish the book in England, as it had been effectively banned in both England and the United States. Beach, who owned the bookstore Shakespeare and Company in Paris, took over the publishing rights to the book, and during this time Joyce and Beach initiated the publishing strategy that played an important role in the positioning of *Ulysses* prior to its publication. By carefully manipulating the cultural field – through his statements in interviews, his manipulation of critics like Larbaud and Gilbert, his interaction with other literary giants like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and his evolving strategy for publishing the first edition of *Ulysses* – Joyce effectively negated the seemingly insurmountable problems threatening to overshadow his work. He emerged from the other side of controversies that threatened to swallow up his book with a product that everyone wanted, that was desired and praised, that was both a work of fiction and a piece of art. By switching to the deluxe edition, Joyce effectively shifted the market for *Ulysses*, increasing demand by decreasing supply.

Rainey describes several important ways in which the deluxe edition altered the reception of *Ulysses* as a book. One of Rainey’s primary arguments is that Joyce deliberately manipulated Beach’s role in the proceedings to allow himself and his book to appear as underdogs and create a positive feeling in the public about the daunting, controversial book. A feature in the *London Observer* was published only a week after Joyce informed Weaver that Beach’s would be the only edition published at that time.\(^{22}\) In it, the writer, Sisley Huddleston, describes Beach’s interaction with Joyce: “James Joyce was almost in despair when an American girl, Sylvia Beach, who courageously founded a little library of English books […]], came to the rescue. She has undertaken to have printed in France and to publish privately the big and strange volume. Whatever may be thought of the work, it is going to attract almost sensational attention” (Rainey 58). This article helped set the tone for the public’s reception of *Ulysses*, presenting Joyce as the author in despair, being helped the courageous American girl who came to the rescue of the literary giant. Beach humanized Joyce, making him not only the author of a controversial and “dirty” book, but also an underdog worthy of assistance. The author of the “big and strange” volume needed to be rescued by the “little” library – like the narrator’s description of Maria in “Clay,” Sisley’s article repeatedly clues us in to how we are meant to view Beach – “a little library,” “an American girl.”\(^{23}\) Before the text had even been published, the narrative of its
creation was in the mind of the reading public, and the deliberate marking of *Ulysses* as underdog led to its unprecedented position as a desirable piece of cultural capital by common readers, serious collectors, and literary scholars.  

The Huddleston feature is not the only one of its kind, and it is in fact somewhat representative of how the legend of *Ulysses*’ publication and success has accumulated in the past eighty years. In his foreword to *James Joyce’s Letters to Sylvia Beach: 1921-1940*, A. Walton Litz demonstrates the kind of deification of Joyce and mythologizing of *Ulysses* that is at least partially responsible for the current way that we view the mythic initial publication. Discussing Joyce’s reaction to the fines levied at *The Little Review* for its publication of *Ulysses* in installments as it was written, Litz writes: “Exhausted and depressed by these events, Joyce dropped by Shakespeare and Company in early April 1921 to tell Miss Beach of the latest disasters. She came immediately to the rescue” (viii). Litz’s introduction to the story is representative of the way that scholars have treated the legend of *Ulysses* publication, recycling the language of the Huddleston article. Thus, the monolithic *Ulysses* became the underdog – bashed by judges and banned from publication – with the help of Shakespeare and Company, the tiny bookstore that came to the aid of the ailing giant.

Arnold views Beach’s involvement more objectively: “Sylvia Beach spoke shrewdly when she said how fortunate a thing it was that *Ulysses* was banned. She claimed that it brought Joyce to public attention in a most compelling way, when the book he had written was, in her opinion, of appeal to a comparatively small group. She also felt it gave him the excuse to feel persecuted: ‘I wonder if he was ever that’” (42). Arnold’s description of Beach, as both a “shrewd” businesswoman and “a warm-hearted and generous woman” (40) is less reliant than Litz’s on previous accounts of the *Ulysses* legend, and, as a result, allows us to start unraveling this web of myth that surrounds the book. A primary effect of the demystification of the Joyce-Beach union is the realization of just how cunning Joyce and Beach were in their manipulation of the potential audience for *Ulysses*. Beach wrote in a letter after her agreement with Joyce to publish the novel, “Its decided. I’m going to publish ‘Ulysses’ . . . in October . . . . !!! Ulysses means thousands of dollars of publicity for me”.

In the same letter she boasts that “it’s going to make us famous rah rah!”. For its publication through a tiny press with a relatively inexperienced publisher at its helm, *Ulysses* was certainly designed to appeal to the upper-class book buyer and to generate hype surrounding its publication. Furthermore, the censorship controversy allowed Joyce and Beach the opportunity to let the publication history affect the public’s feelings toward the publication, and the legend surrounding *Ulysses* – its censorship, its extreme length and difficulty, and the story of Beach coming to Joyce’s rescue – helped usher the “big and strange volume” into bookstores.

The result of the complicated publication of *Ulysses* was a shift in the way that we view the interaction between what Bourdieu identifies as the fields of power and of artistic production, a particularly modernist movement toward the increased awareness of and attention toward the materiality of the book: “In part the marketing of the first edition became an unintended experiment in the transformation of the common reader,
an experiment in which readers were solicited to take on a mélange of functions – to assume the roles of
collectors, patrons, or even investors – that overlapped in complex ways with their function as consumers” (44). By selling the book at a price that only collectors and book dealers could afford, Joyce and Beach effectively made the book an investment, a piece of cultural capital similar to a work of art, a tangible item that itself could appreciate or depreciate in value. Traditionally, owning a book meant significantly less than reading and understanding that book, and the actual physical book itself held little cultural capital (apart from the ability to discuss the text, to demonstrate a mastery of it). *Ulysses* marked an important change in this, a real-world shifting of focus from the text to the book, and Joyce was at the forefront of this twentieth-century fetishizing of the book.

The difficulty regarding Joyce appears when we compare his modernist desire to control every aspect of his books to his postmodern desire to embrace uncertainty and the centerlessness of life. How do we deal with this rift that exists between Joyce-the-writer and Joyce-the-author? How might we begin to reconcile these two Joyces – the private Joyce who composed the text of *Ulysses*, and the public Joyce, this conscious creation, who was spun into existence by these webs of metatextual discourse that were built around *Ulysses*-the-book? How did Joyce rationalize presenting a text about leveling the playing-field in the battle between high and low culture in a book that no one could afford?

Perhaps the more important question to ask, a question asked by Bourdieu at the end of “The Field of Cultural Production,” is “what is the degree of conscious strategy, cynical calculation, in the objective strategies which observation brings to light and which ensure the correspondence between positions and dispositions?” (72). In other words, how deliberate is this ignorance of the space between the aesthetic positions of the written world and the social dispositions of the real world? Bourdieu answers the question with a quote from Mallarmé which “provides both the programme and the balance-sheet of a rigorous science of the literary field and the recognized fictions that are engendered within it” (72). In this passage, Mallarmé discusses the position of calculated authorial ignorance in relation to the cultural field into which his work is published:

> We know, captives of an absolute formula that, indeed, there is only that which is.
> Forthwith to dismiss the cheat, however, on a pretext, would indict our inconsequence, […] and our engine I might say were I not loath to perform, in public, the impious dismantling of the fiction and consequently of the literary mechanism, display the principal part or nothing. But I venerate how, by a trick, we project to a height forfended – and with thunder! – the conscious lack in us of what shines up there. What is it for? A game. (*Field* 279)

Mallarmé and Bourdieu conclude that the position of the author is a game that the writer plays, a calculated manipulation of the tension between the aesthetic field and the field of power. It is a tension, of course, that can never be resolved, and the best that writers can do is acknowledge their roles and play them to the hilt.
This is what Joyce does, and if he seems to do it with too much intensity and too much seriousness, if he seems to sometimes believe that he is the godlike figure that he presents himself as to the public world, we need look no further than the texts presented within those expensive books which have taken on lives of their own on “best of the century lists” as the best cultural capital the twentieth-century has to offer. Because within these texts, Joyce surely acknowledges the game that he is playing in the real world, the game that a writer must play in order to counteract the tension inherent in his position between the competing fields of cultural production.

In 1921, Joyce wrote a long letter to Harriet Weaver responding to conflicting accounts of his life, including reports that he was a spy, that *Ulysses* was a German code, that he was a cocaine addict, that he founded dadaism, and that he was a Bolshevik propagandist (JIII 509-511). In this letter we find Joyce deconstructing his own identity, sifting playfully through the metatextual discourse created around him:

> A nice collection could be made of legends about me. […] I mention all these views not to speak about myself but to show you how conflicting they all are. The truth probably is that I am a quite commonplace person undeserving of so much imaginative painting. […] Here now is an example of my emptiness. I have not read a work of literature for several years. My head is full of pebbles and rubbish and broken matches and bits of glass picked up ‘most everywhere. (JIII 510-512)

In this letter, Joyce posits himself as an empty center around which discourse is infinitely layered, as a straw figure built by forces extending far beyond his texts. In this rare moment of joyous excitement at the games of writing and authoring, Joyce hints that he is aware of the contradictions inherent in his position in relation to his work, and this paradoxical position that he occupies situates him uncomfortably between word and world.

In “Nausicaa,” Bloom makes a gesture similar to the one made by Joyce in the above letter, as he walks along the beach after his encounter with Gerty MacDowell, the young girl he stares at longingly from afar. Like Beckett’s *Molloy*, the chapter operates by prying open the division between subject and object, between narrator and narrated, and demonstrating their messy interaction. It is this interstitial space that fascinates Joyce, this gap that opens up between the world and the words through which we understand and represent it. At one point during his walk, Bloom picks up a “bit of stick” and begins to write in the sand. He writes the letters “I.” and “AM.” and “A.” Realizing that someone will “tramp on it in the morning,” that his efforts are “Useless. Washed away. Tide comes here,” Bloom reluctantly erases his mark in the sand. It is a powerful moment, as “Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. Hopeless thing sand. Nothing grows in it. All fades” (13. 1258-1270). In some ways this is the conclusion that Joyce reaches. He is fascinated by the idea of creating his identity, of molding the field into which his texts are born as books, of putting in enough puzzles and irresolvable mysteries to keep us busy for years, of sculpting and molding and shaping the way he is seen by future generations, of playing this “game,” to use Mallarmé’s term for it.
Ultimately, Joyce writes the cultural field into which he publishes *Ulysses* just as carefully as he writes the text being presented within it. I imagine that we will continue to wonder about what the last word in the sand would have been – but of course there was no word, Bloom left the word unwritten, knowing that the world would be willing to write it for him.


2 Patrick A. McCarthy discusses Joyce’s various attempts in *Ulysses* to move away from traditional ways of viewing both text and book in his essay “Ulysses and the Printed Page,” *Joyce’s Ulysses: The Larger Perspective*, ed. Robert D. Newman and Weldon Thornton (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1987), pp. 59-74. McCarthy argues that ultimately Joyce wants to force readers to rethink their interaction with the text and with the book, and a primary way that he accomplishes this is through a manipulation of the traditional printed page. McCarthy compares Joyce to Laurence Sterne, arguing that “Joyce does abandon many of the conventions of English prose. And the reader inevitably loses his way and retracts his steps. This, however, is a deliberate exploitation (and subversion) of the print medium” (70-71). Furthermore, McCarthy rightly concludes that “We may begin *Ulysses* with the assumption that we will be spoon-fed information in an orderly fashion, but very soon we either abandon this assumption or abandon the book” (71).

3 Kevin J.H. Dettmar addresses this as “Toward a Nonmodernist *Ulysses*,” a chapter from *The Illicit Joyce of Postmodernism* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996), in which he argues that we need to question our preconceived notions of *Ulysses* as a modernist text “As a symbol of this shift [toward postmodernity] he brought Stephen Dedalus, the Romantic Artist with a capital A, back onstage at the beginning of *Ulysses*, only to upstage him with Leopold Bloom, the bricoleur – the inventive adman who solves his “aesthetic” problems with whatever materials are at hand” (170).


6 Levitt writes that, “*Ulysses* – and the Modernist novel for which it may stand as emblem – is profoundly humanistic because it involves us with characters whose solidity we recognize as comparable to our own; because it engages our emotions over the predicaments of other human lives; because it evokes our concern in a human cause we had long thought lost, enabling us to learn for ourselves about ourselves” (253). The problem with Levitt’s formulation, however, is that, as much as *Ulysses* pretends to be exhaustive (through its styles, its presentation of Dublin, its exposing of character), it is certainly not. Gaps and holes – in style, plot, and character – not only exist within the narrative but often drive the narrative. Like Stephen’s expenditures throughout the day, or like Molly’s list of lovers, what *Ulysses* gives us simply does not add up. We cannot recreate Dublin, or Bloom, or reality out of the what Joyce presents – none of the styles achieve that reality, and it is certainly the failure of these styles (particularly the modernist technique of internal monologue that Joyce uses for the majority of the first half of the novel) that provokes the shifting in the second half. For a fuller discussion of the effects of the shifting styles, see Karen Lawrence’s *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton UP, 1981).

7 This description of the artist’s role is spoken by Stephen Dedalus in the final section of *Portrait*, as he describes his aesthetic theories to Lynch: “The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (P211). This famous passage, cited so often as an expression of Joyce’s aesthetic beliefs, is certainly being treated ironically in *Portrait*. Lynch’s sarcastic response, “Trying to refine them [his fingernails] also out of existence,” is one clue. Another is the accumulation of phrases that Stephen heaps upon his description at every opportunity – “a cry or a cadence or a mood,” “within or behind or beyond or above,” and “refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.” A final clue is the use of the word “paring,” a word earlier used in a description of one of Stephen’s classmates: “And one day Boyle had said that an elephant had two tuskers instead of two tusks and that was why he was called Tusker Boyle but some fellows called him Lady Boyle because he was always at his nails, paring them” (P38). Taken together, these clues make it difficult to read this famous passage as an endorsement of the theory being espoused in it.

8 While “writer” and “author” are for most people synonymous, we need look no further than Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” and Michel Foucault’s “What Is an Author?” to find lengthy discussions of the rift between the writer, a private figure composing a text, and the author, a public figure engaging with the real-world existence of his/her work. Thus the postmodernist tendencies that Joyce displays as a writer have been occluded by the modernist


10 Rainey, 64: “Even the cheapest issue, priced at 150 francs (L3 3s., or $14.00), was not inexpensive. In Paris, it represented almost half a month’s rent for a studio in a moderately priced part of the city; in England, it approached or exceeded the average weekly salary for editorial staff of the city’s most prestigious magazine. To buy a copy of the first edition of Ulysses, in other words, was not an action that can be readily compared with the everyday purchase of a book; for those who were not wealthy, it required at least some deliberation, some consideration about disposable income and its allocation.”

11 Bruce Arnold, *The Scandal of “Ulysses”* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), p. 21. Arnold describes these difficulties: “Joyce had insisted on the blue and white colours of the Greek flag, which was kept flying in the bookshop in honour of Odysseus. Despite repeated visits to Paris, with colour samples, which were compared with the flag itself so that even looking at the cloth gave the owner of the bookshop a headache, the printer could not come up with the correct shade of blue. He eventually found printers’ ink in the right colour in Germany and then had to lithograph the background colour onto thick white paper to get the lettering pure white” (21).

12 In “Selling Ulysses,” Dettmar discusses Joyce’s various strategies for marketing Ulysses, focusing on his manipulation of the critics he worked with concerning Ulysses, including Valéry Larbaud, Carlo Linati, Herbert Gorman, Edmund Wilson, Stuart Gilbert, and Frank Budgen. In his detailed analysis of the interaction between Joyce and Budgen, Dettmar identifies Joyce’s stealthiness as a key to understanding Joyce’s desire to create an air of false authorial indifference. Dettmar cites a letter in which Joyce offers to pay secretly for revisions to Budgen’s *James Joyce and the Making of “Ulysses”*: “Although willing to pay, literally, for his meddling in Budgen’s text, Joyce was unwilling for the payment to appear to have come from him; Joyce would write Budgen a check for the charges, and Budgen would write the check to his publisher. Thus Budgen was to act as a screen, to shield Joyce from any apparent public involvement in this ‘independent’ work of criticism” (802). Kevin J.H. Dettmar, “Selling Ulysses,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 30.4, Summer 1993, pp. 795-812.


15 As they compile their lists of “best side one track ones of all time,” Barry complains that Rob’s list is too mainstream: “Couldn’t you make it any more obvious than that? What about the Beatles? What about the Rolling Stones? What about the fucking… fucking… Beethoven? Track one side one of the Fifth Symphony?” (147). In response to Barry, Rob asks, “are the Fire Engines, who appear on Barry’s list, really better than Marvin Gaye, who does not?”

16 Although Rob does not create art, and his primary roles in the system are consumer and purveyor, he does attempt to become what Michel de Certeau would call an “active consumer.” Rob repeatedly turns the consumption process into a site for production – of lists, of mix tapes, and of DJ set lists – and in each of these cases he deals with this tension that Bourdieu identifies within the competing levels at which the artistic producer must sell his work. Whether Rob is trying to sell his productions to girls in a club or to the workers in his store, he must navigate this tension.

17 Another comic example is Rob’s attempt to compile his list of top five Elvis Costello songs: “I go for “Alison,” “Little Triggers,” “Man Out of Time,” “King Horse,” and a bootleg Merseybeat-style version of “Everyday I write the Book”’ I’ve got on a bootleg tape somewhere, the obscurity of the last cleverly counteracting the obviousness of the first, I thought, and thus preempting scorn from Barry” (98).

18 In *James Joyce and Censorship* (New York: New York UP, 1998), Paul Vanderham makes an important point about the effect of the censorship on the understanding of Ulysses as a modernist novel. In his discussion of how the books preceding Ulysses described the novel, he points out that many “chose to divert attention from the controversial passages of the novel by discussing its Homeric parallels, its elaborate form, its style, and so on” (86). This focus on the structure of the novel (rather than on the way that it questions structure), on the underlying meaning (rather than on the way that it subverts and pokes holes in meaning), set the tone for the modernist critiques of Ulysses that have followed ever since.

19 From the beginning of his writing career, the physical environment surrounding Joyce’s texts was on his mind and was a topic of contention and concern. Perhaps due to his continual difficulty getting his work past the censors, Joyce recognized from early on that the publication of his texts was going to be a separate but equally challenging task as writing them had been. Vanderham describes Joyce’s attempts during his years at University College, Dublin to publish two of his essays. The two essays – “Drama and Life,” in which Joyce argued against the notion that drama should be moral, and “The Day of the Rabblement,” in which Joyce attacked Dublin’s Irish Literary Theatre for
producing mediocre plays – were censored, and Joyce was forced to publish them privately, introducing them with the comment: “These two essays were commissioned by the Editor of St. Stephen’s for that paper, but were subsequently refused insertion by the Censor (CW69)” (Vanderham 60).

20 The distinctions between “normal,” “private,” and “deluxe” primarily concern the percentage of royalties and the target consumer for the book: “An ordinary edition would have given Joyce royalties of 15 to 20 percent on gross sales; the [private] edition would have given him a higher figure, perhaps 25 to 30 percent […]. Equally marked were differences in the discount structure and venues of sale. […] An ordinary edition, or even a “private edition” of the American sort, was addressed primarily to individual readers. A deluxe edition, instead, was directed partly to a small corpus of well-to-do collectors but principally to the dealers and speculators who sold to collectors” (Rainey 51-52).

21 For a lengthier discussion of the various proposed editions of *Ulysses*, see Rainey, pp.45-50.

22 Rainey notes the problem that Weaver posed for the deluxe edition proposed by Joyce and Beach: “The ordinary edition and the limited edition entailed antithetical and incompatible understandings of production, audience, and market dynamics. They could not coexist. The persistence of Weaver’s plan for an ordinary edition posed an insuperable problem for Beach’s project” (56). Eventually, Weaver announced her intention to hold off indefinitely the publication of the ordinary edition, thus allowing Beach’s edition to have maximum impact.

23 We should also note the strange repetition of “almost” – Joyce was “almost in despair,” the book was sure to attract “almost sensational attention.” It is hard to tell whether this is a sign of some ulterior motive or merely poor writing.

24 As Rainey notes, this language is still being used by scholars today in discussions of how Beach and Joyce came together to publish *Ulysses*, particularly in the laudatory introduction to Banta and Silverman’s *James Joyce’s Letters to Sylvia Beach* (58). Melissa Banta and Oscar A. Silverman, eds. *James Joyce’s Letter to Sylvia Beach, 1921-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987).