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# Engaging Joycean and Post-Joycean Experimental Novels: Methods of Approaching "Writerly" Texts

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ENGAGING JOYCEAN AND POST-JOYCEAN EXPERIMENTAL NOVELS:  
METHODS OF APPROACHING “WRITERLY” TEXTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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We hereby approve the dissertation of

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Title: Engaging Joycean and Post-Joycean Experimental Novels: Methods of Approaching  
“Writerly” Texts

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Roland Barthes separated written texts into the readerly and writerly; readerly texts can be simply defined as more traditional novels, whereas writerly texts encourage and require the reader to take a far more active role in the process of making meaning in the text. James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* can be thought of as two excellent examples of writerly texts. Both make use of a combination of techniques in order to draw the reader more fully into the novel, engaging the reader in combinations of ways not always done in more traditional texts. Through using a combination of stream-of-consciousness writing, unreliable narrators, adaptations of history and mythology, and the use of the author as a character or narrator of a text, Joyce helped set the stage for the writing of experimental novels in twentieth-century literature.

Experimental novels since Joyce’s two landmark texts have made use of these four named techniques in order to experiment with how readers have viewed the conception of what it means to read a novel. Using Joyce’s novels as a starting point, I examine how the experimental novel has developed through the twentieth century. Each of the four techniques listed above is explored in a chapter of its own through readings of authors after James Joyce, including contemporary authors Mark Z. Danielewski, Roberto Bolaño, and graphic novelist Art Spiegelman. By using a specific set of tools when engaging an experimental novel, these texts become less frustrating and are instead rewarding experiences for both academic and general readers alike.