

Why should I read *Ulysses* by James Joyce?

Teacher's Notes proposed by Lect. Ann Marie O'Brien for English Matters'
IN-SET course ***English and Culture – Trinity College Dublin***

Ulysses is widely regarded as a significant work of modernist literature. It features rich characterization and referencing, humour, multiple styles, the stream of consciousness technique, careful structuring, puzzles, puns, parodies and innovative use of language.

Joyce the man

Born in Rathgar, south Dublin in 1882, the eldest of ten children, a Catholic.

Educated by the Jesuits in Clongowes Wood College, Co. Kildare and Belvedere College, Dublin, and later attended U.C.D. where he studied French, Italian and English. He was a brilliant student.

While growing up in Dublin, the family moved address many times due to increasing financial difficulties; they ended up living in inner city Dublin among the poor.

Consequently, Joyce gained an encyclopedic knowledge of the city and different classes of people which informed his writings about Dublin.

Joyce met his lifelong partner, Nora Barnacle, a Galway girl, in 1904. They married in 1931 to legitimize their two children.

Joyce spent most of his life in Europe from 1904, in such cities as Zurich, Trieste and Paris, dying in Zurich on 13 January 1941. He believed completely in his gift and was prepared to do whatever was necessary to have his writing published.

While he chose to live abroad, rejecting what he perceived to be a narrow minded, limited and materialistic Ireland dominated by the Catholic Church (he had already abandoned his faith), and occupied by uninspiring, corrupt politicians, Joyce never succeeded in getting Dublin out of his thoughts. He always wrote about Dublin 'because if I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of all the cities in the world'. Because he had grown up in Dublin, he was able to write about the city and its inhabitants very convincingly.

Ulysses

Joyce began writing the novel in 1912. It was published on 2 February 1922 by Sylvia Beach. Joyce was 40 years old at the time of publication. *Ulysses* records the journey of Leopold Bloom through Dublin on 16 June 1904 (the day of Joyce's first date with his future wife, Nora Barnacle). All the action takes place between 8am and 3am. The fact that Joyce chose the 16 June 1904 as the date for the novel suggests that the motivating force in writing *Ulysses* is love. We find Leopold Bloom is an affirming, life-enhancing presence in the novel and that life itself is affirmed. Joyce depicts Bloom as an unheroic, ordinary man with flaws and a capacity for love.

Note: Joycean enthusiasts and scholars annually celebrate 16 June as Bloomsday with enactments of scenes from the novel.

The title refers to Odysseus (*Ulysses* in Latin), the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, and establishes a series of parallels between characters and events in Homer's poem and Joyce's novel. The novel has 18 episodes or chapters (the episode titles do not appear in the novel).

Themes

Life and death. A central theme is the problems and possibilities of family love.

Main characters

Stephen Dedalus (a young teacher and aspiring writer), Leopold Bloom (a middle-aged Jewish advertising salesman) and Molly Bloom, his wife (a singer). The Blooms' son Rudy died when 2 months old and their daughter Milly works in Mullingar.

Bloom has now been living a life of enforced celibacy for 10-13 years as Molly refuses him. Her lover is Blazes Boylan,

Both Stephen and Bloom are alienated in their families and communities. Stephen, an agnostic, is alienated as a son and writer. Bloom is alienated as a Jew in an aggressively Catholic city and country, and as a parent. The two characters meet late at night when Bloom rescues Stephen from a fight. Although Stephen and Bloom's family relations are negative the ideal of family love is held up by Joyce.

Guidance in reading *Ulysses*

www.frankdelaney.com

Click on 'Podcast' tab. Type episode number in search box, eg. Episode 1. Press play.

www.ulyssesseen.com

Ulysses in a graphic novel format and with a reader's guide for the first two episodes.