THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO *ULYSSES*

Few books in the English language seem to demand a companion more insistently than James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a work that at once entices and terrifies readers with its interwoven promises of pleasure, scandal, difficulty, and mastery. This volume offers fourteen concise and accessible essays by accomplished scholars that explore this masterpiece of world literature. Several essays examine specific aspects of *Ulysses*, ranging from its plot and characters to the questions it raises about the strangeness of the world and the density of human cultures. Others address how Joyce created this novel, why it became famous, and how it continues to shape both popular and literary culture. Like any good companion, this volume invites the reader to engage in an ongoing conversation about the novel and its lasting ability to entice, rankle, absorb, and enthrall.

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EDITED BY

SEAN LATHAM

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Preface: Why Read Ulysses*?*

A volume like this sets out, as its name suggests, to be companionable: to provide some useful guidance about how to read *Ulysses* – a book known in equal parts for its immense achievement and unnerving difficulty. To begin, let's address the most basic of questions: *Why* read *Ulysses*? Even the most devoted Joyce scholars ask themselves this on occasion, and every year or so news arrives of some iconoclast who dismisses the work as nonsense, condemns its complexity as elitist, or laments the way it has destroyed the fine traditions of the novel. Make no mistake, there is something to such grievances.

Reading *Ulysses* is a significant undertaking, one that will demand vast amounts of your time, attention, and patience – resources that will themselves often be repaid by frustration, confusion, and even an occasional sense of betrayal. First-time readers, in particular, might feel some kinship with the students we find in Stephen's classroom in the book's second chapter. Trying ineptly to make a joke, he tells the boys that a pier is "a disappointed bridge," a half-built edifice that never reaches its destination and instead leads only into deeper waters (*U* 2.39). *Ulysses* might seem an equally "disappointed" novel, in which the aesthetic attempt to bridge minds, construct a world, or even resolve a very basic marriage plot all end abruptly amid deep waters.

After all, even after working arduously through hundreds of pages, we do not learn if the Blooms' marriage has a future; and despite its epic allusions to the *Odyssey*, Stephen ends the book as he began it: alone, adrift, and without a home. Back in the classroom, the young teacher and aspiring author attempts to regain the attention of his class by offering them this riddle:

The cock crew,
The sky was blue:
The bells in heaven

> *Were striking eleven.*
> *'Tis time for this poor soul*
> *To go to heaven.*
> (*U* 2.102–07)

The answer, "the fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush," is a nonsense joke (*U* 2.115). It cannot be divined in advance or deduced from the clue. No wonder the students barrel out of the room to recess as soon as the bell sounds.

So with such a warning in the opening pages, why don't we also head for the exits from a book that often seems equally solipsistic and elliptical? Can even the most pleasant of companions really justify a journey to the end of this narrative pier? Indeed, might we even end up like the children in one of Joyce's first short stories, "An Encounter," who set out on an adventure that leads first to boredom, then to mild titillation, and finally to a vague fear of punishment? Why, again, should we read *Ulysses*? Here are some possible answers:

- **Because it is there.** *Ulysses* towers over modern Western and now world culture as a lofty monument – albeit a monument whose meaning has changed considerably over the near-century since its first publication. In 1922, it was a banned book, famous as much for its alleged obscenity as for its aesthetic merit. Today, its sexual suggestiveness has largely paled, even if its sometimes baroque descriptions of the body's career – from outhouse to brothel to grave – can still unsettle a classroom. So *Ulysses* is no longer "there" in the way it once was, but it still looms on the shelves of literary people, in bookstores, on syllabi, in the annual Bloomsday celebrations around the world, and, of course, in Irish airport bookshops. It hails us as something worth trying, something modern, famous, and perhaps even beautiful.
- **Because it is a humane and intellectual challenge.** Part of the appeal also resides in what W. B. Yeats called the "fascination of what's difficult."[1] Generally speaking, *Ulysses* is not a difficult book to begin, but it is a very challenging book to finish. The opening episodes mix stream-of-consciousness with third-person narration to bring us into the overlapping worlds and minds of the characters. These sections are thick with plot and deeply structured by a set of mythic parallels to Homer's *Odyssey* – parallels that provide some guidance amid a welter of detail about workaday Dublin life on a warm summer day. At the midpoint of the book, however, such guideposts and even the mode of narration that had become customary fall away as Joyce sets out on

what Karen Lawrence calls a new "odyssey of style."[2] The epic plot, the shape of the characters, and even the book's representational strategies all shift as *Ulysses* becomes a book no longer just about a Dublin day in 1904, but about the very process of reading and interpretation itself. Difficulty, in short, becomes part of the book's point, and we test ourselves against it to uncover the challenges and mysteries that still shadow our lives and languages.

- **Because it celebrates everyday life.** Perhaps more than any other text, *Ulysses* lends weight and significance to objects, emotions, and experiences worn smooth by habit. It mystifies and even makes sacred the profane world around us. As Declan Kiberd argues, Joyce "believed that by recording the minutiae of a single day, he could release those elements of the marvelous latent in ordinary living, so that the familiar might astonish."[3] In the book, a key, a used bar of soap, a discarded newspaper, an empty biscuit tin, a cracked mirror, and even a simple kitchen tap all take on enormous consequence, becoming supercharged with meanings, histories, and even voices of their own. Watching the mundane world come vividly into being, we see into the dynamic complexity of our own everyday lives.
- **Because it puts hard and urgent questions to us.** In helping us see everyday life as an epic adventure, *Ulysses* also raises a complex series of ethical and political questions. Arguably the very first postcolonial novel – published just as Ireland achieved its independence – it inquires into some of modernity's most confounding concepts: race, nation, gender, class, and sexuality. In Stephen we encounter a colonial intellectual who wonders how to imagine – in a language not fully his own – an art, an identity, and a "conscience" for a country ruled from afar. Against this mournful figure destined for exile, the book poses Bloom, an uncertain Jew born in Ireland yet linked through family, religion, and culture to a larger exilic community itself on the brink of statehood. And these figures, in turn, are set against Molly, the daughter of a soldier, and herself not a native Dubliner, who nevertheless comes to symbolize the home toward which the narrative steadily drives its symbolic father and son. These cosmopolitan figures embody the complexity of a still unfolding modernity, their hybridity, mobility, and deep personal conflicts even more pressing now than they were a century ago.
- **Because it links us to communities of readers.** The very urgency of the ethical challenges *Ulysses* captures helps explain why a book so precisely (even obsessively) about Edwardian Ireland now commands a global audience of readers. It has been translated into dozens of languages and

has spawned its own secular global holiday called Bloomsday. Across the world every June 16, people gather to celebrate the book by retracing the steps of entirely fictional characters around a very real Dublin, by reading the entire book in a marathon, by attending concerts of Joyce's favorite music, and by sometimes just enjoying Bloom's quiet lunch of cheese and wine. To read *Ulysses* is to become a part of this community, one that includes many literary scholars to be sure, but is by no means exclusive to them. (Indeed, Joyce offers his own ironic critique of scholarly reading both in the library episode of *Ulysses* and later in *Finnegans Wake*.) An example of what we now call global modernism, this extraordinary book explores and, with each successive reading, extends the network of connections between communities of readers who find new things in the book – new ways of fashioning a sense of self, new ways of articulating the peculiar valences of a nation, new ways of imagining erotic possibilities, and new ways of charting the connections between the past, the present, and the future.

- **Because it continues to be an extraordinary imaginative resource.** What can it mean that this book about a smallish colonial capital ran immediately to several editions and sold hundreds of thousands of copies when it was first translated into Chinese? What of the fact that it has been adapted into film; reimagined as a graphic novel; transformed into musical performances; made the subject of paintings; referenced in pop songs, commercials, and television shows; and otherwise imitated and reproduced through nearly every kind of cultural form imaginable? Put simply, *Ulysses* remains a tremendous imaginative wellspring of ideas that continues to challenge us with its difficulty, its cultural and now global resonance, its deep ethical engagement with modernity, its fascination with an everyday life shot through with staggering importance, and its ability to invoke and sustain a community of readers. Thanks to the unusual spelling of its title, *Ulysses* is already its own plural, and in each reading we add to its dazzling multitude.

These are some of my own reasons for reading *Ulysses*, and each of the authors who has contributed to this volume also provides a distinctive answer of his or her own. This *Cambridge Companion* has been designed to provide first an overview of the career of the cultural object we call *Ulysses*. The three essays in Part I, "Making *Ulysses*," describe the book's long journey from its earliest manuscript drafts through its historical circulation among readers and scholars to its final arrival as an icon. Part II, "The Story of *Ulysses*," then provides a more general overview of the book's

major narrative features: its multiple beginnings, its basic plot and setting, and its equally diverse endings. Having provided these basics (and explained why there is actually nothing "basic" about them at all), Part III, "Reading *Ulysses*," offers four critical meditations on the most experimental episodes of the book. These chapters are thematically framed and thus rather than providing mere summaries, they instead offer exemplary interpretive lenses that refract some of *Ulysses*' central features. These have the virtue not only of offering one path through the complexity at the book's heart, but also of modeling basic questions about topics like the city, memory, interruption, and difficulty that resonate through all of *Ulysses*. Part IV, "Contemporary Theory and Criticism," then offers three more general readings of the novel; each synthesizes and exemplifies some of the most innovative new work being done on *Ulysses*. Rather than mechanistically focusing on a single school or approach, these final chapters instead examine the book's dense intertextuality, its innovative exploration of the nature of a fully embodied life, and its fascination with the liveliness of the object world. The *Companion* then concludes with a bibliography designed to offer a brief guide to major critical and scholarly resources: a reader's toolbox rather than a scholar's compendium.

Depending on your own reasons for reading *Ulysses*, you might want to deviate from the path laid out here – something easily done since all the pieces can be read independently of one another. A reader curious about Joyce's attempt to articulate what we now think of as a postcolonial or even post-national identity, for example, might want to skip the first section and begin instead with Enda Duffy's essay "Setting: Dublin 1904/1922" (Chapter 6), as well as those by Michael Rubenstein on the city (Chapter 8), Marjorie Howes on memory (Chapter 9), and my own on interruptions (Chapter 10). A focus on gender and sexuality might begin with Vike Martina Plock's "Bodies" (Chapter 13) and then turn to the pieces by Cheryl Temple Herr, Margot Norris, and Maud Ellmann (Chapters 11, 5, and 7, respectively). Alternatively, if you are looking simply for a clear narrative path through the book, you might want to read only Parts II and III. Or, for more experienced readers hoping to gain a sense of the history of scholarship on *Ulysses* and how our understanding of the book itself has changed in response to its greatest readers, the best place to start is Joseph Brooker's "Reception History" (Chapter 2) followed by the essays in Part IV. Finally, if you are interested in the question of how Joyce actually made *Ulysses* and what that, in turn, can teach us about the creative process more generally, then start with Michael Groden's essay (Chapter 1)

and jump ahead to Part II to see how the book emerged from a loose series of drafts and notes into a tightly organized epic of the everyday.

There is, in short, no right way through this *Companion*, just as there is no right way through *Ulysses*. Regardless of whether you are attempting your first passage through *Ulysses* or if you have made the journey before, my hope is that this book will offer you a fit set of companions to assist rather than shape your encounter with one of the world's richest, most challenging, and most rewarding intellectual odysseys.

Notes

1 W. B. Yeats, "The Fascination of What's Difficult," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, rev. 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), p. 93.
2 Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in "Ulysses"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), n.p.
3 Declan Kiberd, *"Ulysses" and Us: The Art of Everyday Life in Joyce's Masterpiece* (New York: Norton, 2009), p. 11.

Acknowledgments

Let me close this introduction with a short word about some additional companions whose hands grew calloused in carrying this book to its Ithacan end. Omer Kazmi, Christian Howard, and Kent Emerson – all graduate students at the University of Tulsa – provided invaluable research assistance. They checked the accuracy of each quotation, proofed every word, and tested each essay against their own considerable critical intelligence. Their names do not appear on the cover or in the notes, but their work should not be invisible; they made this book stronger, more accurate, and more useful than it otherwise could have been. For that I am very grateful. And I owe a debt of gratitude as well to the book's contributors, all of whom enthusiastically accepted my invitation and patiently suffered my sometimes bluntly wielded editorial pencil even while holding to tight deadlines. Finally, I'd like to thank the University of Tulsa, the *James Joyce Quarterly*, and the Pauline McFarlin Walter Chair of English and Comparative Literature, all of which provided the time and resources needed to complete this book.

James Joyce Chronology

1882 February 2: James Augustine Joyce is born in the affluent Rathgar suburb of Dublin to John and Mary (née Murray) Joyce.

1888 Enters Clongowes Wood College, a prestigious Jesuit boarding school.

1891 The Joyce family finances begin a long decline, leading to James's withdrawal from Clongowes and a series of periodic moves to avoid creditors.

1893 James enrolls as a scholarship student at the prestigious Jesuit Belvedere College.

1898 After a successful secondary school career, James enters University College Dublin, gaining a command of French, Italian, and German in addition to Latin.

1900 Presents a paper on "Drama and Life" at the university and writes his first (now lost) play, *A Brilliant Career*. Also publishes a review of Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* in the prestigious *Fortnightly Review*, prompting a letter of thanks from the author.

1901 Publishes a pamphlet, "The Day of the Rabblement," which defends the Irish Literary Theatre against the perceived provincialism of Irish nationalists.

1902 Completes his degree and leaves for Paris in December to study medicine.

1903 Attends only a few medical lectures and instead spends a good deal of time in the Saint Geneviève Library, recording his notes and ideas in a series of notebooks. Returns home after a telegram arrives telling him that his mother has cancer. She dies in August.

1904 This is perhaps one of the most significant years in Joyce's life, and he later sets *Ulysses* on June 16 ("Bloomsday") – the same

day that he likely goes on a first date with his future companion, Nora Barnacle. This same year, he publishes his first three stories – "The Sisters," "Eveline," and "After the Race" – in *The Irish Homestead*. He also teaches for a short time at a school in Dalkey and in August spends a few nights with Oliver St. John Gogarty and Samuel Chenevix Trench in a Martello tower. In October, he and Nora decide to leave Ireland and move first to Zurich and then to Pola (now Pula).

1905 In March, James and Nora move to Trieste, a cosmopolitan port city in the Austrian-Hungarian empire. Four months later, their first son, Giorgio, is born and they are shortly joined by James's younger brother Stanislaus who becomes a crucial (if often resentful) source of financial support. Joyce submits an early version of the story collection *Dubliners* to the Dublin publisher Grant Richards. The book raises a number of legal concerns about libel and obscenity; it will not appear in print for another nine years.

1906 The family moves briefly to Rome so James can take a job in a bank, only to return to Trieste after a few months. Work begins on "The Dead" and Joyce plans, though does not appear to write, a new story called "Ulysses."

1907 James publishes his first book, a collection of Symbolist-inspired poems entitled *Chamber Music*. Begins publishing articles on Ireland in a local Trieste paper, delivers a handful of lectures, and starts revising the autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero*. In July, the Joyces' second child, Lucia Anna, is born.

1909 Returns to Dublin twice during this year, the second time to open the city's first cinema – The Volta – with the backing of investors from Trieste.

1910 Returns to Trieste and is now caring for two of his sisters, Eva and Eileen. The girls help Nora care for the children, but the family remains poor and largely dependent on the steady financial support provided by Stanislaus. The Volta closes.

1912 Nora leaves Trieste for Ireland with Lucia; James and Giorgio soon follow. Reunited, the family leaves Dublin for what will prove the final time. After departing, Joyce writes and privately prints the crude broadside "Gas from a Burner," aimed at Dublin's printers and publishers.

1914 In a burst of creative activity, James finishes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, writes a play about marriage entitled *Exiles*, and begins work on *Ulysses*. With the help of Ezra Pound, an avant-garde periodical in London called *The Egoist* begins to publish *A Portrait* serially. *Dubliners* appears later in the year, its reception blunted by the start of World War I.

1915 The politically active Stanislaus is detained as war begins; James and his family, however, win passage to neutral Switzerland and settle in Zurich.

1916 *A Portrait* is published in New York. The Easter Rising in Dublin is violently put down.

1917 *A Portrait* is published in England. Joyce receives anonymous gift of £200 from Harriet Shaw Weaver, a wealthy Englishwoman who will become his regular patron. In the summer, he undergoes the first of many painful eye operations.

1918 With the support of Pound, Joyce sends the first three episodes of *Ulysses* to *The Little Review*, an avant-garde New York periodical edited by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap. Without Joyce's knowledge, some of the typescripts are edited to reduce the risk of suppression. The novel will continue to appear serially for the next three years, though four issues are seized for violating U.S. postal laws governing obscenity.

1920 The Joyce family moves to Paris, where James meets the city's famous artists and expatriates, forming close relationships with Adrienne Monnier, Valery Larbaud, and Sylvia Beach, the owner of the bookshop Shakespeare & Co. In September, the issue of *The Little Review* containing "Nausicaa" is seized for obscenity; a subsequent criminal trial of Anderson and Heap ends any chance of an American edition of *Ulysses*.

1921 Beach agrees to publish *Ulysses* in an initially limited edition of 1,000 copies by subscription only under the imprint of Shakespeare & Co. A French printer, Maurice Darantière, begins setting the proofs, which Joyce uses to introduce significant changes to the book.

1922 *Ulysses* is published on Joyce's birthday in February, but generally received as a difficult and deeply scandalous work. The Irish Civil War begins, and during a visit to Ireland, Nora and the children are forced to take cover when caught in a skirmish.

1923 Begins work on what will become *Finnegans Wake* but is known initially only as "Work in Progress" – a project that will absorb the next fifteen years of Joyce's life and conclude his career as a writer.

1924 The first section of "Work in Progress" appears in the *Transatlantic Review* but is generally seen even by Joyce's supporters as solipsistic and obscure.

1927 Portions of "Work in Progress" continue to appear, now in the journal *Transition*, edited in Paris by Eugène and Maria Jolas. Shakespeare & Co. publishes *Pomes Penyeach*.

1929 French translation of *Ulysses* appears. Lucia begins to show the first signs of a serious mental illness that will consume Joyce's energies and lead to her eventual institutionalization. In another setback, Samuel Roth begins publishing a pirated version of *Ulysses* in the United States.

1931 In March, James and Nora travel to London to obtain the marriage license necessary to protect the family's legal rights to inherit James's real and intellectual property. At the end of the year, John Joyce dies.

1932 Stephen James Joyce is born to Giorgio and his wife Helen (née Fleischman). Lucia's first hospitalization occurs.

1933 In the case of *The United States v. One Book Named "Ulysses,"* Judge John Woolsey lifts the American ban on the novel. Random House immediately publishes an American edition.

1936 Bodley Head publishes the first British edition of *Ulysses*.

1938 *Finnegans Wake* completed.

1939 *Finnegans Wake* is published in the United States and Britain, receiving mixed and often baffled reviews.

1940 As World War II rages, Joyce and Nora move to Zurich, leaving Lucia in a French sanitarium in Pornichet.

1941 After a troubled operation for a perforated duodenal ulcer, Joyce dies on January 13. He is buried in Zurich.

Abbreviations

Throughout this book, the following standard abbreviations are used for convenience. All other references are provided in endnotes following each chapter.

FW	Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake*. New York: Viking Press, 1939. Cited by page and line number.
JJ	Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. New and Revised Edition. New York: Oxford, 1982.
JJQ	*James Joyce Quarterly.* Cited by volume, year, and page number.
Letters I, II, III	Joyce, James. *Letters of James Joyce*. Vol. I. Edited by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Viking Press, 1966. Joyce, James. *Letters of James Joyce*. Vols. II and III. Edited by Richard Ellmann. New York: Viking Press, 1966.
P	Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Edited by Chester G. Anderson. New York: Viking Press, 1968.
SL	Joyce, James. *Selected Letters of James Joyce*. Edited by Richard Ellmann. New York: Viking Press, 1975.
U	Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Garland, 1986. Cited by episode and line number.