



How Am I Supposed to Read This?!

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The literary experiments of James Joyce

James Joyce. Loved by literature students; hated by English students. My first introduction to this Irish author came when I was required to read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

From the first sentence, I really didn't know if I could do it: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo." What, I thought? Moocow?! Where's the **punctuation**? Do I have to read an entire book like this? I could say that James Joyce was my least favorite author!

Now I still don't claim to love Mr. Joyce's stories, but I've learned to appreciate them. He is considered one of the greatest English-language authors of all time and his books are consistently in "100 best" lists.

James Joyce was born in 1882 in Dublin. He set all of his stories in Dublin, even though he lived much of his adult life overseas. His first published work was a collection of poems called *Chamber Music*. In 1914, the collection of short stories entitled *Dubliners* followed. *Ulysses* was introduced in both the US and England in serial form, meaning parts of it were released each week or month. In 1921 it was actually banned in the US, probably for boring people to death! No, it was banned because it was considered "obscene" and "radical". The use of **curse words**² made it obscene, and Joyce's unique style made it quite radical for the time. Of course, that style is why he is considered so great today. *Finnegans Wake*, his last and most experimental work, was published in 1939, two years before his death in Zurich.



June 16, the day on which the action in *Ulysses* takes place, is celebrated as "Bloomsday" by Joyce fans. In Dublin, people dress in period clothing, meet at the many locations throughout the city connected with the book, and replay scenes from the book. In other cities around the world, readings, discussions and performances are held.

JOYCE'S MOST FAMOUS BOOKS

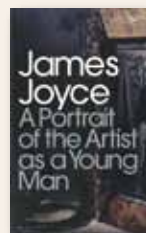
Dubliners

This is Joyce's most accessible book because it is written in a less experimental way than his later works. Fifteen short stories show episodes from the lives of common people in Dublin at the beginning of the 20th century. The entire book covers the cycle of life – from childhood to adolescence, adulthood, and eventually death.



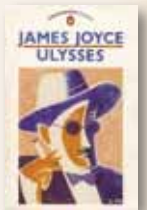
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

This book tells the story of the childhood, adolescence and young adult years of a man called Stephen Dedalus. It is written in a style called **stream of consciousness**³. This is when a writer simply writes the thoughts and feelings straight from a character's head. Joyce was one of the first to move away from plot-driven narrative (stories that are centered on the **plot**⁴, or action). We learn about Dedalus from inside his head, not from things that happen to him in the outside world.



Ulysses

The story of *Ulysses* parallels Homer's *Odyssey* (Ulysses is the Latin form of the name Odysseus). It deals with a day in the lives of two men – from 8am on June 16 to the early hours of the next morning. The main character is Leopold Bloom, the second character is Mr. Dedalus from *A Portrait*, and we are also treated to the thoughts of Bloom's wife Molly. The simple normality of the day is expressed directly through their thoughts, so we experience it as they do.



Finnegans Wake

Finnegans Wake is so **obscure**⁵ that when Joyce was writing it, even his friends thought he was losing it. Because of the many different literary styles Joyce uses, including stream of consciousness, the dream form and literary **allusions**⁶, even **scholars**⁷ can't agree on a basic plot description. He experiments with language as well, so sometimes it does not resemble standard English at all: "What clashes here of wills gen wonts, oystrygods gaggin fishygods! Brékkkek Kékkkek Kékkkek Kékkkek!"



Eveline

“Eveline”, the fourth story in *Dubliners*, is about a young Irish girl. Read this excerpt about Eveline’s life in Ireland and her plan.

Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence. (...) When they were growing up he had never gone for⁸ her like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl but latterly⁹ he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother’s sake. (...) Besides, the invariable squabble¹⁰ for money on Saturday nights had begun to weary¹¹ her unspeakably. She always gave her entire wages¹² – seven shillings – and Harry always sent up what he could but the trouble was to get any money from her father. (...) She had hard work to keep the house together and to see that the two young children who had been left to her charge went to school regularly and got their meals regularly. It was hard work – a hard life – but now that she was about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable¹³ life.

She was about to explore another life with Frank. Frank was very kind, manly, open-hearted. She was to go away with him by the night-boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres where he had a home waiting for her. (...) He had tales of distant countries. He had started as a deck boy at a pound a month¹⁴ on a ship of the Allan Line going out to Canada. He told her the names of the ships he had been on and the names of the different services. Of course, her father had found out the affair and had forbidden her to have anything to say to him.

(...) She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness.

DISCUSS

- 1 What is Eveline’s family like? What are her main worries?
- 2 Who is Frank? What is his job?
- 3 What is Eveline’s plan?

Now read the ending of the story to see how things turned out:

The boat blew a long mournful whistle¹⁵ into the mist. If she went, tomorrow she would be on the sea with Frank, steaming towards Buenos Ayres. Their passage¹⁶ had been booked. Could she still draw back after all he had done for her? Her distress¹⁷ awoke a nausea¹⁸ in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer¹⁹.

A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:
“Come!”



“I might easily have written this story in the traditional manner... Every novelist knows the recipe... It is not very difficult to follow a simple, chronological scheme which the critics will understand... But I, after all, am trying to tell the story in a new way.” (James Joyce about *Finnegans Wake*)

All the seas of the world tumbled²⁰ about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing²¹.

“Come!”

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy²². Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish²³.

“Eveline! Evvy!”

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.

DISCUSS

- 4 What happens at the end of the story?
- 5 Why does Eveline decide not to leave Ireland?

VOCABULARY

- 1 **punctuation** [pʌŋ(k)tʃə'ɪʃ(ə)n] – interpunkce
- 2 **curse word** [kɜ:s] – sprosté slovo, nadávka
- 3 **stream of consciousness** ['kɒŋʃənsɪs] – proud vědomí
- 4 **plot** – zápletka

- 5 **obscure** [əb'skjʊə] – nesrozumitelný
- 6 **allusion** [ə'lu:ʒ(ə)n] – narážka
- 7 **scholar** ['skɒlə] – badatel

DUBLINERS

- 8 **to go for sb** – napadnout někoho
- 9 **latterly** ['lætəli] – v poslední době
- 10 **invariable squabble** [ɪn'veɪrɪəb(ə)l 'skwɒb(ə)] – neustálé handrkování

- 11 **to weary** ['wɪəri] – unavovat
- 12 **wages** ['weɪdʒɪz] – mzda
- 13 **wholly undesirable** ['həʊli ʌndɪ'zɑɪərəb(ə)] – úplně nežádoucí
- 14 **at a pound a month** – s platem libru měsíčně
- 15 **blew... mournful whistle** – žalostně zapískal
- 16 **passage** ['pæsɪdʒ] – plavba

- 17 **distress** [dɪ'stres] – tíseň
- 18 **nausea** ['nɔ:siə] – nevolnost
- 19 **fervent prayer** ['fɜ:v(ə)nt] – horoucí modlitba
- 20 **to tumble** ['tʌmb(ə)] – valit se
- 21 **railing** – zábradlí
- 22 **frenzy** – panika
- 23 **anguish** ['æŋɡwɪʃ] – úzkost