*Ulysses*

A novel by JAMES JOYCE, written between 1914 and 1922, serialized from 1918–1920, and published in book form (to much controversy) in 1922. With T. S. ELIOT’s THE WASTE-LAND and VIRGINIA WOOLF’s JACOB’S ROOM, both also published in 1922, *Ulysses* helps establish 1922 as the peak year of ANGLO-AMERICAN MODERNISM. It is among the most stylistically diverse and boldly experimental English prose works of the twentieth century.

**Overview and Publication History**

*Ulysses* takes place over the course of one single day, June 16, 1904 (now known as Bloomsday, after its central character Leopold Bloom). It consists of 18 chapters (or episodes as Joyce called them), each one covering no more than one hour. Each episode has a specific style, although the styles of most of the earlier episodes are largely similar. Joyce wrote *Ulysses* between 1914 and 1922, although it began life in 1906 as a quickly abandoned short story for *Dubliners*. Joyce’s compositional practice was largely one of revision and addition: Joyce signed off the final revisions for *Ulysses* on January 30, 1922, days before its publication.

Episodes from *Ulysses* were serialized in *THE LITTLE REVIEW* from March 1918 to December 1920. Serialization was halted after the thirteenth episode (“Nausicaa”) occasioned a legal action over obscenity brought on by the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice (four episodes were serialized by *THE EGOIST,* but fears of prosecution prevented a fuller serialization). Joyce’s refusal to make any concessions towards publishing *Ulysses* in a climate where it was liable to be judged obscene led to its being published by SYLVIA BEACH, the proprietor of the SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY bookshop in Paris. The first edition was published on Joyce’s fortieth birthday, February 2 1922, in a deluxe edition of 1000 copies. In 1933U.S. District Judge John M. Woolsey ruled that the book was not pornographic and could be sold in the U.S. The Random House edition, the first legally available in the U.S., was published the following year and an English edition, published by the Bodley Head, appeared in 1936.

Because of its unusual publication history, all editions of *Ulysses* published in Joyce’s lifetime are flawed to varying degrees. A critical edition based on Joyce’s extant manuscripts, edited by Hans Walter Gabler, was published in 1984.

**Characters and summary**

The three main characters in *Ulysses* are Leopold Bloom, his wife Molly, and Stephen Dedalus. Bloom works as an advertising canvasser for the newspaper *The Freeman’s Journal*. Because he is of Hungarian Jewish descent, he is viewed with some suspicion by his fellow Dubliners (however, his Judaism is equivocal since his mother was not Jewish). Molly was born and raised in Gibraltar and works as a concert soprano. On the day *Ulysses* takes place, she is preparing to start an affair with her manager, Blazes Boylan, a local lothario. Ten years before the action of the novel, the Blooms’ son Rudy died days after being born; their marriage has never fully recovered from this event. Stephen Dedalus is reprised from *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*. At the end of that novel he proudly left Dublin to commence his artist vocation on the Continent. In between the two novels he was called back to Dublin to attend his mother’s deathbed. His mother’s death has left him bitter and guilty.

Joyce gave each episode a title to signal its correspondence to Homer’s *Odyssey.* While he refused to incorporate these titles into the book when it was first published, these are still commonly used to refer to the individual episodes.

1. “Telemachus” (8.00–9.00 am). *Ulysses* begins at the Martello Tower (a disused 19th-Century British military station) in Sandycove, south of Dublin. Stephen is with his friend Buck Mulligan and Mulligan’s English guest Haines. This chapter follows from the draft of an abandoned sixth chapter for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
2. “Nestor” (10.00–11.00 am). Stephen is at his job, teaching English at an élite boys’ school in the posh Dublin suburb Dalkey. He receives his pay and discusses history with the school’s headmaster, Garret Deasy.
3. ‘Proteus” (11.00 am–12.00 pm). Stephen is walking towards Dublin along Sandymount strand. This episode is dense as a great deal of it is Stephen’s internal monologue.
4. “Calypso” (8.00–9.00 am). The action turns to Bloom who is preparing breakfast for himself, his wife, and their cat in his house at 7 Eccles Street. He goes to the butcher’s, talks with Molly and then goes to the outhouse to defecate.
5. “Lotus Eaters” (10.00–11.00 am). Bloom goes to a post office to retrieve a letter from Martha Clifford, a woman with whom he is conducting an epistolary affair under the pseudonym Henry Flower. He then goes into a church and from there he buys some lemon soap. The episode ends with him visiting a Turkish bath.
6. “Hades” (11.00 am–12.00 pm). Bloom shares a carriage ride to Glasnevin cemetery to attend the funeral of his acquaintance Paddy Dignam.
7. “Aeolus” (12.00–1.00 pm). Bloom is at the offices of *The Freeman’s Journal* where he attempts to finalize the details of an advertisement. He misses meeting Stephen Dedalus who visits the offices to submit a letter written by Mr. Deasy. The episode is punctuated by a series of newspaper-like headlines (Joyce added these on the galley proofs for the first edition and so this stylistic feature was absent in the episode’s serialized appearance in *The Little Review*).
8. “Lestrygonians” (1.00–2.00 pm). Bloom wanders through central Dublin in search of a place to have lunch; he eventually settles on the pub Davy Byrne’s. The episode ends with him heading to the National Library, outside of which he barely avoids bumping into Blazes Boylan. Bloom’s hunger is reflected in the episode’s persistent reference to culinary and gastrological allusions.
9. “Scylla and Charybdis” (2.00–3.00 pm). In the librarian’s office of the National Library Stephen holds forth on his theory about Shakespeare’s composition of *Hamlet.*
10. “Wandering Rocks” (3.00–4.00 pm). This episode is divided into nineteen vignettes, each depicting a small scene within the city. Cumulatively the focus is on the city: Bloom, Molly, and Stephen only appear as bit-characters.
11. “Sirens” (4.00–5.00 pm). Bloom follows Boylan into the bar of the Ormond Hotel, which Boylan quickly leaves to go to his assignation with Molly on Eccles Street. The episode’s focus is on music and the style is informed by music in several dimensions.
12. “Cyclops” (5.00–6.00 pm). Bloom goes to Barney Kiernan’s pub to meet his friend Martin Cunningham. While there he engages in a heated discussion with a bitter nationalist named only as The Citizen (the character is based on Michael Cusack, the founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association), who berates him for his Jewishness. The episode is structured like a pub-tale and is punctuated by a series of mock-heroic burlesques.
13. “Nausicaa” (8.00–9.00 pm). Bloom is at Sandymount strand (although at a different part of the strand than the area Stephen visited in “Proteus”), where he espies a young girl named Gerty MacDowell. They flirt and he masturbates while she shows him her underwear. The episode is divided into two parts, the first from her point of view and the second from his. The Gerty section is narrated in a style that burlesques sentimental romance novels and women’s magazines.
14. “Oxen of the Sun” (10.00–11.00 pm). The action moves to the Holles Street maternity hospital, where Bloom finally meets Stephen. Stephen is drinking with Mulligan and some other medical students. Stylistically this is the most daunting episode in the novel: its narrative is conveyed through a series of nineteen stylistic burlesques that trace out the history of English prose styles from its beginnings in Latinate forms through Mallory, Pepys, de Quincey, Sterne, Sheridan, and others and it ends in a mishmash of drunken babble as the characters decamp to a nearby pub.
15. “Circe” (12.00–1.00 am). Bloom and Stephen arrive separately at a brothel in “nighttown,” Dublin’s notorious red-light district. Stephen hallucinates his mother’s ghost and destroys a lamp in the brothel. Outside he antagonizes an English soldier who punches him. Bloom tends to Stephen and the episode ends with Bloom’s hallucination of his dead son. The episode is structured like a play and the stage directions in this chapter alternate between moments of realism and extravagant instances of hallucination, with many other different forms and modes in-between.
16. “Eumaeus” (1.00–2.00 am). Bloom and Stephen take refuge in the cabman’s shelter by the Custom House preparatory to walking to Bloom’s home. Bloom and Stephen discuss the day’s events. The episode’s style follows from Bloom’s own literary aspirations.
17. “Ithaca” (2.00–3.00 am). This episode follows Bloom and Stephen back to Eccles Street. Eventually Stephen takes his leave and Bloom prepares to go to bed. The episode is structured like a catechism and engages in extravagant digressions.
18. “Penelope” (3.00–4.00 am). Molly’s stream-of-consciousness as she goes to sleep.

**Reception and impact**

*Ulysses* was recognized as a major work during its serialization, and on its initial publication in 1922 it was taken to mark a new era in the history of the novel. It has been translated into over forty languages and stands as a landmark work of international Modernism. Its critical reception traces out the development of literary theories across the 20th and 21st centuries. Critical studies range from FORMALISM and NEW CRITCISM to structuralism, deconstruction, PSYCHOANALYSIS, feminism, new historicism, post-colonialism, ecocriticism, and post-humanism..

**Key Critical Works**

Derek Attridge, ed., *James Joyce’s “Ulysses”: A Casebook,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of ‘Ulysses’*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, *“Ulysses” Annotated*, rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s “Ulysses,”* New York: Vintage, 1955.

Michael Groden, *“Ulysses” in Progress*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Ian Gunn and Clive Hart, *James Joyce’s Dublin,* London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.

Hugh Kenner, *“Ulysses,”* rev. ed., Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Terence Killeen, *“Ulysses” Unbound,* Wicklow: Wordwell, 2004.

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