

James Joyce: Here Comes Everybody

Not everyone considers Joyce a 'great' writer?

Purity activists campaigned tirelessly against Joyce's work; his writing was considered obscene and indecent. In the US, Joyce's second novel, *Ulysses*, was suppressed, confiscated, burned and, ultimately, banned in a 1921 court case. In the UK, no one dared to publish the book as printers could themselves be imprisoned for typing obscenities. In 1922, *Ulysses* was finally published in (less-prudish) Paris. However, the book was not legally available in the US or UK until the 1930s, and in 2010 *Ulysses 'Seen'* (an online graphic novel adaptation) was banned by Apple, due to its illustrations of nudity. Luckily for us, *Ulysses* [1] has just come out of copyright and is now widely and freely available in many formats.[1] And *Ulysses 'Seen'* [2] has resolved its disputes with Apple.

Joyce's texts have also been criticised for being difficult and pompous. According to fellow writer Virginia Woolf, Joyce spends too much time being 'tricky; startling; doing stunts'; *Ulysses* is 'diffuse. It is brackish. It is pretentious'.[2] Joyce's last book, *Finnegans Wake* (1939), is perhaps the most notoriously tricky text ever written; it regularly tops 'most difficult books' lists.

I find Joyce's 'obscenity' and 'difficulty' inspiring!?

Joyce's explicitness and experimental style are the means to an end, and that 'end' is the most effective expression of the human condition that I have ever read. Joyce captures human life in all its diversity. *Ulysses* is set on a single day (16th June 1904). However, just as in real life, Joyce's characters simultaneously exist in their own pasts; in a cultural past (including Homer's *Odyssey*); in a cultural present (including Irish politics, Catholicism, science, technology, and popular art forms); in consciousness (thoughts, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile experiences); in unconsciousness/ semi-consciousness (including dreaming and being intoxicated); and in the future. Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [3] (1916), gives unparalleled insights into the life of one individual from childhood to adulthood, giving us all of his thoughts and experiences. Joyce's short story collection, *Dubliners* [4] (1914), explores humanity from a community perspective; the stories focus on how people interact or, more often, *fail* to interact. In *Finnegans Wake* the main protagonists, HCE and ALP, are simultaneously individuals and universal representations of humanity; along with many other names, HCE is both 'Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker' and 'Here Comes Everybody', while ALP is 'Anna Livia Plurabelle', Dublin's river Liffey, and also femaleness itself.

Given Joyce's commitment to expressing the fullness of life, it is inevitable that he sometimes discusses supposedly obscene bodily experiences, such as defecation and sex. This commitment also explains why it became necessary for Joyce to use apparently complex techniques, such as 'interior monologue [5]' and 'portmanteau words [6]'. Joyce's 'obscenities' and 'tricks' are necessary for his art.

[1] A hypertext version of *Ulysses* is available on <http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/%7Eerac101/concord/texts/ulysses/> [7]

[2] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 2, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), pp. 199-200.

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