



Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Life in Joyce's Masterpiece

Declan Kiberd

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Why James Joyce's great modernist masterpiece is a book that can teach ordinary people to live better lives.

Declan Kiberd, professor of Anglo-Irish literature at the University College Dublin and Ireland's premier literary historian, offers an audacious, pioneering new take on James Joyce's masterpiece. *Ulysses*, he argues, is not an esoteric work for the scholarly few but indisputably a work rooted in the lives of ordinary citizens, offering a humane vision of a more tolerant and decent life in the modern world.

Structuring his analysis around the mundane pleasures highlighted throughout the work—including waking, walking, and drinking—Kiberd progresses through each of *Ulysses*'s episodes to elegantly reveal that Joyce's ultimate goal was to create a book honoring the richness of daily life. At a time when most other modernist authors adopted a rather dismissive tone toward popular culture and the emerging noise of industry, Joyce wrote *Ulysses* to extol the everyday man and embrace the bustle of middle-class streets. He wanted to infuse that commonplace Dublin world, in all of its grit and vulgar physicality, with a fierce passion and a miraculous interiority that would illuminate its underlying beauty.

For Kiberd, the seemingly banal hero of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, embodies an intensely ordinary kind of wisdom and, in this way, offers us a model for living well, in the tradition of Homer, Dante, and the Bible—all of which Joyce drew on in writing his book. By shedding light on Joyce's celebration of everyday life, Kiberd rescues *Ulysses* from the dusty shelves of rarified literary neglect and presents it to the audience it was originally written about and for which it was intended.

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