

GEOFF WILKINS' SECOND BLOG – JAMES JOYCE

You've had my favourite film, now my favourite writer.

Some of you will not be surprised to learn that it's a tie between William Shakespeare and James Joyce. But we can save WS for 'favourite dramatist', so let's talk about JJ.

He has an unfortunate reputation for being "difficult". His last work, the multi-lingual *Finnegans Wake* (no apostrophe!) is certainly pretty hard going- it's actually much easier to understand through an audio book than from the printed page – [try this](#). And some people find *Ulysses* hard going.



But start at the beginning. His first substantial work was *Dubliners*, a collection of short stories about Dubliners. These generally appear in lists of the greatest ever English-language short stories, and are certainly not difficult. The final story, 'The Dead', is almost a short novel. (John Huston made it into a film. It's much jollier that the title suggests – see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVJc9fzqAcl>.)

Then came *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which is also a pretty easy read. The title suggests that it's Joyce's fictionalised account of his own youth in Dublin (under the name 'Stephen Dedalus'). And there's clearly a lot of autobiography there – but it's best now seen as a forerunner of *Ulysses*, in which Stephen Dedalus is also a major character.

'Stephen Dedalus' in [Ulysses](#) still at least partly represents Joyce. It has been suggested that the germ of the book may have come from an incident when a drunken Joyce was rescued from a difficult situation by a Jewish acquaintance, as is Stephen by Bloom near the end of *Ulysses*. But the real hero of *Ulysses* is of course Leopold Bloom. After an initial section about Stephen, the bulk of the book describes just 24 hours in Bloom's life, on 16 June 1904 ('Bloomsday'), as he makes his way around Dublin.

(There is an elaborate structure of the book related to Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, which is about Odysseus, also known as Ulysses – but unless you're a glutton for punishment you can ignore this.)

In fact, I'm not going to say anything more about this wonderful book. Please take the plunge and start reading...

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