

James Joyce: Reinventing Identity, Language and Tradition

James Joyce is universally acknowledged to be one of the most crucial and challenging authors of the twentieth century. His work is of moment because of its radical experimentalism and the degree to which it registers many of the key aspects of modernity, such as urban life, migrant and subaltern experience, popular culture, and the overspill of the political into the personal. Further, his writing through its dazzling linguistic diversity and inventiveness captures the fluid and protean nature of the modern world.

Joyce is above all of significance because of the way in which he upturned fictional conventions and reinvented all of the forms which he inherited including the short story, the novel, the *Bildungsroman*, and the epic. He transforms and expands the possibilities of narrative and invents fresh modes of representation that more aptly render aspects of modern experience. His fiction at once repudiates established novelistic traditions and fully absorbs and redefines them. His encyclopedic works reference and reconfigure most of the signal texts of Western and non-Western culture including *The Odyssey*, *The Books of Kells*, *The Divine Comedy*, the operas of Mozart and Richard Wagner, and *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* amongst numerous others. In inventing the one-day novel in *Ulysses* and the cryptic, nocturnal dreamscape of *Finnegans Wake* Joyce produced fictions that defy categorization but that are yet interwoven with a host of informing historical, political, and cultural contexts.

Joyce's positioning and affiliation as a writer are equally plural and complex. He is viewed at once as a quintessential Irish author whose writing is indivisibly connected with Irish culture and society and as an international modernist whose oeuvre floats free of national or local constraints or tradition. His fiction may be held to scrutinise aspects of Irish identity and of colonial experience and also to examine the hybridity, ambiguity, and shifting nature of modern existence.

This research strand centring on the work and legacy of James Joyce will study his radical interrogation and reformulation of identity, language and tradition through focusing on the historical, political, cultural, material, and aesthetic contexts of his work. Special attention will be paid to the role of history and memory in his compositions and detailed study will be undertaken of the political and cultural formations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century Irish society that act as a necessary basis for the interpretation of his texts. The identification, assembly, and analysis of the wide network of source materials that inform Joyce's individual works will be a primary goal of this overall project. Joyce's interrelationship with the Irish Literary Revival will be studied and his complex connections with key contemporary figures including Oliver St John Gogarty, George Moore, W.B. Yeats, and J. M. Synge will be examined. The extent to which the renegotiation of Irish identity in the post-Famine era by writers, politicians, and social activists inflected Joyce's revolutionising of the modern novel will also be considered.

The comparative dimensions of Joyce's work will be a particular area of concentration in this research project. Its role in European and Anglo-American modernism will be explored and the parallels between his writing and that of other key figures in this protean movement will be scrutinised. The history of the reception of Joyce's writing and its varied legacy for differing aspects of world literature will form a further key aspect of this research strand. The extent to which his work provides a symbolic matrix for the rethinking of identity and social values in late twentieth century fiction and literary theory will be probed. In particular the continuing influence of Joyce on the Irish novel in the latter decades of the twentieth century will be examined.

This research strand will also focus on the genesis and evolution of Joyce's writing and will centre attention on the creative processes by which his texts were composed and the shifting forms that they assumed. Joyce's work will be seen as one in a constant state of evolution and revision. The

heightened interpretive role assigned to the reader in this oeuvre which refuses to settle into final form will be studied and the interpretive demands and cruxes with which it confronts its audience will be examined in detail.

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