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Ulysses (The Gabler Edition)



Synopsis

Considered the greatest 20th century novel written in English, in this edition Walter Gabler uncovers previously unseen text. It is a disillusioned study of estrangement, paralysis and the disintegration of society.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ulysses is one of those big, mad bellwethers of a book that X will tell you is the biggest, best, most important blah blah blah and Y will tell you is a load of badly written tripe. Neither X nor Y tend to notice that the book consciously encourages both responses...but, well, I'll get back to the academic riffing in a minute. I first tried to read Ulysses aged about 14 (I was an annoying little boy that way) and didn't get very far. The first three chapters are set in and around the mind of Stephen Dedalus, one of the most ridiculously clever and over-educated characters ever conceived, as he takes breakfast with some friends, teaches in a school some miles south of Dublin and walks along a beach. Along the way, his mind ruminates on subjects as diverse as 16th century underworld slang, his dead mother, and something he calls "the ineluctable modality of the visible" which I'm still struggling with. But he's a curiously ambiguous character, this Stephen; he fancies himself as a poet and rebel but when, on the beach, he picks his nose, he has a quick look around to see that nobody's watching before he smears the snot on a rock. (Joyce likes to poke fun at pretension this way - although he doesn't suggest that Stephen's ideas or rebel stance are completely hollow, either.) The 14-year-old me didn't get that far. I gave up. It wasn't until I was 19 or so that I got as far as chapter four and encountered a Mr. Bloom, pottering around the kitchen making breakfast, that I

started to get a grip. Bloom is one of the most likeable characters in fiction. He's a quiet, rather shy, oddly intelligent advertising salesman married to a voluptuous siren of a wife, Molly.

I have frequently heard Ulysses proclaimed the best book ever written, but I could never understand why. I purchased this edition of the novel three years ago, and since then it sat on my shelf, a mighty 900 page undertaking that I kept putting off. I was reluctant to read it, for I have often heard how difficult it was to get through. Finally, I have read it, and though I believe it presumptuous to call any one book "the best book of all time", I certainly believe that Ulysses could claim that title. First off, it is not a difficult read. If you could get through A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, you can get through Ulysses. I heartily recommend this edition because of the brilliant introduction by Declan Kibard. Before I read Ulysses, I could not understand how this could be the best book of all time. According to my understanding, it was a novel detailing, in 900 pages, one day in the life of a Jewish Irishman, Leopold Bloom. A totally unremarkable day at that. After reading Kibard's introduction, I was fiercely eager to begin the novel. In his introduction, totally some 70 pages, Kibard answers the precise question I had: Why would this book be called the best of all time? This book is never boring, and is actually a quite enjoyable read. It is arranged in 18 chapters, and to me, the most astounding aspect of this piece of literature is the fact that every chapter is written in a different style. Joyce wanted to show that "originality" in terms of style was merely a new arrangement of previous styles, and so shows his brilliance as a writer by changing his technique and method completely in each chapter. It is indeed difficult to believe they were written by the same person.

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