



Ulysses And Us: The Art Of Everyday Living

Declan Kiberd

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Declan Kiberd argues that 'Ulysses', far from being the epitome of elitism, was always intended as a book for the common people. Kiberd explains that Joyce's book offers a democratic model for living well under the pressures of the modern world.

Ulysses And Us: The Art Of Everyday Living Details

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Ed Smiley says

This book takes head on the assertion that Joyce's work is an incomprehensible amalgam of obscure symbols, or the disorderly assembly of random experience in all its vulgarity. Joyce is a very sophisticated writer, nonetheless, and this books seems to almost try too hard to wrest that there book back from the perfessors. Still it is a worthy goal.

Joyce said of himself that he was a foolish man who wished to write a wise book. His method is to recreate life, not by describing it, but plunging the reader into it without explanation or justification, and to overlay it by the suggestion of ultimate significance through a technique of style that brings an epic dignity to the banal. And far from contempt for the readers, Joyce respects them far to much to foist on them a diluted version of his vision that would decline to insist that they employ their wits.

Kibert takes us through chapter by chapter, theme by theme, without emphasizing excessively the obscure matrix of correspondences in which Joyce framed the book. He declares, "[t:]he aim of art is not to depict a set of incidents, for that would be no more than information. It is rather to relate each event to the life of a storyteller, so that it can be conveyed as a lived experience. Ulysses is the work of a storyteller, not a novelist." These correspondences give additional symbolic power and richness to the work, if the reader notices them, but they are not as nearly necessary to the enjoyment of the text as close attention, patience, humor and empathy. And it is towards the human, the humorous, and the humane that Kibert leads us, telling us, of Joyce and his work, " life so lived finally reveals an order hidden from those caught up in the day-to-day accidents of its unfolding. What seemed like random incidents are revealed in the end to be part of some fore-ordained plan. There is providence in the fall of a sparrow, the hairs on our heads are numbered, and the man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are portals of discovery."

Jim says

Fascinating book that takes as its jumping off point that Ulysses has been hijacked by the Joyce industry and has much to offer the lay reader. (Sorry, can't bring myself to write "common man" without fearing I'll come off like Barton Fink.) Kiberd's criticism brings home a number of points I'd never really considered before. Everyone knows why the book was set on June 16, 1904, but Joyce labored on the novel during the Great War and Easter uprising, and so writes with foreknowledge of the world that is waiting for his irrepressible Dubliners. Kiberd's book isn't a guide, and reads like a series of lecture from a wise and learned professor who has been thinking and writing about Irish literature all his life. A pleasure to return to Dublin via Kiberd's insight, and while I don't agree with everything he posits, I think he succeeds in wresting Ulysses away from the specialists and returning it to the rest of us. As William Faulkner said, Ulysses should be read the way a preacher reads the Old Testament: with faith.

Paul Bryant says

A rightharted but wrongheaded attempt to reboot Ulysses as a fount of the zen wisdom of everyday life and a book every ordinary reader should eagerly glom onto. This is a very stupid idea. God bless Declan Kibert for having such a stupid idea, but God curse all his friends and editors for not strenuously dissuading him from writing this turgid self-defeating attempt to do the impossible.

He's an academic who rages against the elitism of academia, the abstruseness of the professors, and wants to lead a people's revolution to take back Ulysses from their undead mottled hands and torch their fusty theses and caper up and down the quadrangle yelling "Free Joyce from the Joyceans!". He says :

It should be as accessible to ordinary readers as once were the Odyssey, the New Testament, the Divine Comedy and Hamlet.

I dunno, this kind of jazz baffles me. What readers did those things have? Er, none except the teeny weeny eeny minority who were literate, so by definition, not "ordinary". Maybe some ordinary types got to see Hamlet and hear the Odyssey being declaimed. Anyway, he says

Any teacher knows that many students today sprinkle their essays with quotations from the lyrics of rock music and from popular films. This suggests that they still yearn for instruction from artists on how to live.

And he proposes that Ulysses is the thing to replace the aphorisms of Eminem and Katy Perry. You know, I think somebody slipped something in Declan's drink when he wasn't looking. Ulysses is not for the ordinary reader, however you teach it. That's the main problem. But the other, worse, problem is that Declan writes in the same way that all the jawbreaking Joyceans do. Let's open this book at random. Page 176.

Although Bloom can at one moment feel that all is lost, turning down the frieze on a doily in a gesture which reverses that in the morning when he straightened Molly's bedspread, his use of water imagery suggests acceptance of what has happened between her and Boylan : "as easy stop the sea". Hours later, Molly will use the same image of the sea to explain her adventure so this line also carries a suggestion that the Blooms are married not just in law but in the profound depths of a shared imaginative life.

Just the same professorial Joycean jabber and blather you have read, or hopefully, avoided, in a jillion previous tomes. I don't need it, neither do you. You need to read Ulysses instead because you're not an ordinary reader.

Read on and off over the the last 2 years, but today I just got f-f-f-f-f-fed up of it.

Sam Baber says

It didn't hurt to alternate between this book and the text itself but I'd hoped the author would've had a bit more playful tone in some of his analysis.

Mark André says

Ulysses and Us was disappointing.

The editing and proofreading did not serve the author well.

Factual errors, questionable readings, and outlandish ideas litter the book. Its generally enthusiastic reception fairly reflects the morose state of Joyce scholarship these days. (*updated 4.4.18*)

Keith Talent says

There seem to be two responses to "Ulysses" these days. The first is to proclaim the work's awesomeness by citing Joyce's exquisite mastery of language and form. The other is to complain about how hard it is to read and to conclude that the man was a pretentious charlatan. You wouldn't know it from reading the reviews for "Ulysses" on this site, but there exists another way of responding to "Ulysses": there are people out there who love "Ulysses" not as a towering colossus of the western canon, but as a beautiful and moving work of literature. Some of us love "Ulysses" in the same way that many people love "Pride and Prejudice" or "Lucky Jim" or "Cold Comfort Farm", as a work to keep coming back to for pure pleasure. It's even been rumoured that some hardcore fans waste entire evenings in the rapt study of Bloom's itinerary, in much the same way that Tolkien nerds pore over maps of Middle Earth.

Joyce made it clear what he thought was the chief glory of "Ulysses": that it presents the most completely and vividly realized character in world literature. He also insisted that he conceived that character sympathetically, calling him simply "a good man". Joycean scholarship, however, has presumed to know better. It is true that early critics of "Ulysses" were often willing to engage with the content, rather than with merely the form, of the book. Unfortunately, social snobbery often prevented perceptive early critics like Wyndham Lewis and Harry Levin from appreciating the humanity of Joyce's cast of impecunious provincials. Levin, in his otherwise excellent early study of Joyce's oeuvre, goes so far as to call Bloom a "pathetic little man" (or words to that effect). Later critics have been less snobbish, but at the cost of abandoning all interest in "Ulysses" as a human drama and condemning it to a slow death at the hands theory-addled professionals and their increasingly baffled students.

Declan Kiberd's new book asks us not only to take a more sympathetic view of Joyce's hero, but also to read "Ulysses" in the same way that its principal models were read of old: as a guide for how to live our lives. In his first two chapters, Kiberd reminds us of how Joyce, uniquely for a high modernist, was sympathetic to the emerging middle class and its bourgeois values. Kiberd might have gone further here: he might have reminded us that while, say, TS Eliot espoused various forms of elitism and contempt for modernity, and while Ezra Pound wound up on Italian fascist radio frothing at the mouth about wicked Jews wrecking the world economy, Joyce portrayed with deep sympathy an astonishingly appropriate twentieth-century Everyman: a tolerant, deracinated, socially undistinguished Jew who works in advertising. (It's interesting that while he praises Joyce for extolling the type of common man whom his contemporaries held in contempt, Kiberd can't help but contrast an idealized Edwardian "civic bourgeoisie" with the apparently less virtuous masses of our own day. Like Joyce's sniffy contemporaries, Kiberd sees salt-of-the-earth virtue in the idealized masses of the past while holding his nose when confronted with the unwashed of his own day. I suspect Joyce would have found rather more to admire in the society of the early twenty-first society than does Kiberd.)

Kiberd's timely book makes a compelling case for reading "Ulysses" as a paean to the richness and dignity of everyday life. You may be less than convinced by his claim that "Ulysses" presents us with a set of instructions on how to live our lives, and you may wind up less sanguine than the author about the allegedly exemplary character of Bloom's life, but you'll find gems of wisdom here that will send you back to "Ulysses" afresh. (It's worth noting that the book contains readings of each of Ulysses's eighteen chapters that presuppose a certain familiarity with the novel. It may not, therefore, be the best introduction for the novice, but it would still be useful to have it at your elbow when attempting "Ulysses" for the first time.) If

you care about "Ulysses", or think you might care given a little effort and guidance, buy this wonderful book.

James Murphy says

It wasn't simply the cover that grabbed my attention: a photo showing Marilyn Monroe in short shorts and sleeveless top sitting in a park reading Ulysses. You can tell she's reading near the end of the novel, probably the Molly Bloom soliloquy. Of course! But I'm passionate about James Joyce and his novel Ulysses, too. The subtitle can be misleading--The Art of Everyday Living. My first thought was that it's one of those books of popular psychology or light philosophy using literature as a loose base. However, the agency of the subtitle is through Joyce's book rather than Kiberd's. Ulysses and Us is one of the better works of Ulysses scholarship I've read. According to the author, Joyce wanted to create a reading experience so unique that new types of readers would be formed. He spends a considerable amount of time discussing his idea that Joyce saw banality in literature because the modern novel was focused on the bohemian. Therefore he set out to produce a work in which the bourgeois is welded to and overcomes the bohemian. Ulysses in this sense is a self-help manual in which an older man teaches a younger one how to live and be whole. Because Joyce saw that the middle class had no real public culture which promotes its importance and triumph, meaning everything is reduced to mass entertainment, he wanted to write a novel showing the bourgeois and everyman as heroic, in this way teaching us a new, better way of living. Following chapters outlining those general ideas, Kiberd gives the reader an impressive and fairly comprehensive critical analysis of each chapter in Ulysses. And he ends with several fascinating chapters which explain Ulysses's relation to The Odyssey, The Divine Comedy, The Bible, and Hamlet. It's near the end that Kiberd makes one of his most intriguing points, that in being deliberately obscure about his novel's meaning Joyce inadvertently encouraged the creation of a small industry dedicated to interpreting the novel and that this may have lessened the importance of reading it. I like to think Marilyn wasn't discouraged. I remember reading somewhere that she enjoyed a literary novel, so maybe she did read Ulysses. We can understand why.

MJ Nicholls says

Hey, pleb! Ever fancied reading the second hardest masterwork by James Joyce, but felt too damn plebeian to do so? Has it ever occurred to you, as you sit in your disreputable alehouse quaffing toxic hemlocks to escape the hell of your nine-to-five backbreaking manual occupation, that a 933pp novel about a cuddly Jewish-Irishman and his quirks is the solution to the pain of being born poor, dumb and drunk? Maybe you haven't read a book since school, and even then, you only skim-read the first two pages, you lardy ignoramus? Perhaps you think, in your infinite plebitude, James Joyce is a runner-up on The X-Factor? Oh, you silly proletariat fool! Come hither, does Declan Kiberd have a book for you! In fact—no he doesn't. He has a book for us clever people who have already read *Ulysses*. A book written especially so us eggheads can feel better about our elitist tendencies and continue to plough our self-regarding furrows by pretending we are reading a text written for the Everyman rather than Everyman-in-a-Thousand. See what I did there? Or are you too busy rolling around in your own vomit to notice? Kiberd's book is at its most engaging when moving section by section, although overall it reads more like a brilliant riff on his most beloved book rather than a coherent reading of *Ulysses* for the plebs. Nice try, though.

Max Nemtsov says

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John says

I am planning yet another attack on Mount "Ulysses." I have learned from my succeeding at scaling Proust's Peak that it's pointless for me to undertake a frontal assault. I need to proceed by indirection.

In the case of Proust I learned to cope with the "loneliness of the long distance reader" by ingesting six or seven biographies of Proust and his mother before I picked up "In Search of Lost Time" again. After that bit of guidance and instruction, I read the novel through - all 3300 pages - twice - and was sorry that the book wasn't even longer.

In the case of Joyce, Ellman's biography didn't have the same effect. So I've been searching for some commentary, some initial perspective that will give me a toe-hold for my exploration of Joyce's great novel. I'm hopeful that Kiberd's book provides just that. The first two chapters seem promising. Now if anyone can give me directions to the top of Mount Musil I would be most grateful.

I'm now reading "Ulysses and Us," and it does convey a sense of what Ulysses is all about - at least Kiberd's view, but at least it's a useful point of departure. I'm planning to read introductions to the novel by Hugh Kenner, Richard Ellman, and then I might have a chance of completing the novel on my own. Otherwise it's merely an incomprehensible mess of pointless words.

I've also acquired a series of lectures on Ulysses from the Teaching Company. These might be worth listening to, perhaps not.

t says

hep akl?mda ke?ke ayn? anda ulysses'i de okusayd?m dü?üncesi vard? art?k ulysses'i okurken yan?na eklerim bir de bu kitap gibi sadece tutunamayanlar üzerine bir kitap olsayd?

Shashi Martynova says

Engaging, loving, lovable, effervescent, and absolutely needed in Russian.

Beth says

Ulysses is one of those books that it definitely helps to have a guide for, and Kiberd's text is informative and helpful without assuming the reader is ignorant. The author provides a chapter by chapter analysis of Joyce's work, as well as chapters which discuss overall themes in the larger work. I still believe that Ulysses is best read in a group where discussion is possible, but, if you were reading alone, this would definitely help with context and interpretation.

Lisa says

I bought this at the Dublin Writers' Museum, and I started reading it in the home of Leopold Bloom!

But I lost interest in it well before I got to the chapter about Molly. To see my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.wordpress.com/201...>
