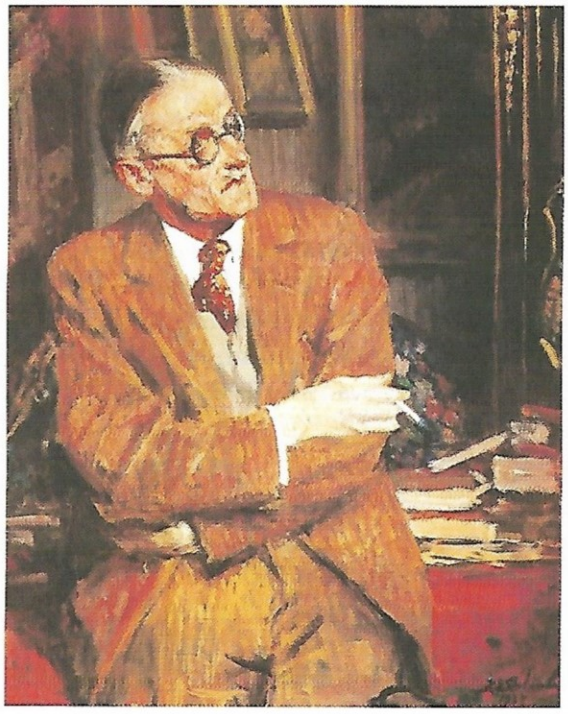

James Joyce (1882-1941)

James Joyce is one of the most important novelists of all time and one of the greatest innovators of 20th-century prose writing. He was born in Dublin in 1882 to John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane Murray, who belonged to the Catholic middle class. When Joyce was a child, his parents lost their wealth and his father lost his job as a tax collector.

In 1898 Joyce started studying Italian, French and English at University College, Dublin, where he also started writing literary reviews and articles.

In 1904 he met Nora Barnacle, who later became his wife. When the director of the Berlitz Institute of Trieste offered him a teaching position, Joyce moved to the Adriatic seaport city, then still belonging to the Austria-Hungary, where he worked on two of his best-known literary works: ***Dubliners*** (1914), a **collection of short stories** written using a naturalistic style, and ***A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*** (1916), a sort of a **semi-autobiographical *Bildunsgroman***. The protagonist of the book is Stephen Dedalus, a young artist who rebels against his country, his family and religion and leaves Ireland in a sort of self-imposed exile to find freedom.

TEXT STORE
6.14 *J. JOYCE*

In Trieste Joyce became friends with the Italian writer Italo Svevo, who greatly influenced Joyce's style and themes. In 1914, when the First World War broke out, Joyce moved to Zurich, where he started working on what would become his masterpiece, *Ulysses* (1922). In Zurich he also made the acquaintance of the poet, Ezra Pound. ***Ulysses*** reproduces the structure of Homer's *Odyssey*: the 18 chapters of the book draw inspiration from similar episodes contained in the Greek epic poem, thus giving the idea of a contemporary epic narration. The narration follows the actions of **one single character**, Leopold Bloom (the modern Ulysses), who wanders through the city of Dublin **in one single day** (16 June 1904). Through the use of the **stream of consciousness technique** Joyce enters Bloom's mind and allows the reader to follow his fragmented thoughts, sensations and perceptions. Despite its intrinsic difficulty, heightened by the obsessive use of the stream of consciousness, the rudeness of its language and the frankness of some of its themes, *Ulysses* remains an unrivalled milestone not only in the development of Modernist writing, but also in the realm of 20th-century literature.

In 1920 Joyce moved to Paris, where he started working on his last novel, *Finnegans Wake* (1939). After the Germans occupied France in 1940, Joyce and his family went back to Zurich, where he died in 1941.

Joyce is to be considered one of the greatest representatives of Modernism.

LITERARY NOTEBOOK

BILDUNGSROMAN

The German word *Bildungsroman* means 'novel of formation' and refers to a novel which portrays the process of the growing up of a character. It usually focuses on one single character and describes his/her journey towards maturity. Famous examples of *Bildungsroman* are *Tom Jones* (1749) by Henry Fielding, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, and, in more recent times, the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling.

JOYCE AND IRELAND: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

Joyce's literary works reveal his complex relationship with Ireland, his mother country: even though he left Dublin in 1904, Joyce's works are all obsessively set in Ireland, which he both loved and hated. Joyce's self-imposed exile gave him the chance to represent Ireland and its capital with a certain objective distance.

For Joyce Ireland was a country dominated by stagnation and stasis, but was also his main source of inspiration: in all of his works Joyce drew inspiration from Irish people and places, which he portrayed with vivid realism and attention.

▲ Celebration of Bloomsday in Dublin.

Ulysses (1922)

James Joyce

PLOT

Ulysses is a long, complex novel set in and near Dublin on one single day, 16 June 1904. Its 18 'episodes' narrate the actions and interactions of three characters. First we meet the young Stephen Dedalus, whom Joyce had already presented in his previous novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He is the protagonist of the first three episodes, grouped as Part I: 'The Telemachiad'. The next and main section (episodes 4-15) is called 'The Odyssey' and focuses on the urban wanderings of Leopold Bloom, a middle-aged Jewish advertising salesman. Finally, the third section, called *Nostos*, brings Leopold back home to his loving but unfaithful wife Molly. The section ends with the spectacular adventure of Molly's monologue, nearly 1600 lines of free-flowing stream of consciousness prose in eight unpunctuated sentences, concluding with a triumphant affirmation of love and acceptance of her husband, Leopold.

A MODERN ODYSSEY

In a narrative that wanders through the city of Dublin, ironically reflecting the travels of wanderers like Odysseus, Leopold Bloom and the Jews, Joyce's *Ulysses* is **an epic novel which offers different visions of daily life, personal attitudes, political and cultural discussion and reflection on the human condition**. Its styles are multiple and varied; its language and structure inventive and fanciful as Joyce delights in upsetting sentence structure, playing with and inventing words, delighting in sound patterns. Each episode offers its own style and Joyce prepared his own outline for this immense creation, indicating for each episode: a title referring to a character or incident from Homer's *The Odyssey*, a time and place, a part of the body (heart, liver, stomach...), an art (music, painting...), a colour, a symbol and a narrative technique. Joyce's constant references to Homer's *The Odyssey* and to the world of ancient mythology adds a layer of universality to the events narrated in the novel and at the same time ironically underlines the squalid reality of modernity, which lacks the heroism of the ancient world. In this sense the 'mythical method' adopted by Joyce in *Ulysses* is very similar to the one used by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*: both writers use ancient myths to represent the modern world as a place where heroism has disappeared and sterility dominates.

ZOOM IN

The lasting popularity of Joyce's novel is still to be seen today in Dublin, where brass plaques set into the pavement mark the sites of events in the novel's episodes. Every year 16 June is celebrated as **Bloomsday** in Dublin (and elsewhere, in Trieste for example). Joyce fans dress up in Edwardian costume and retrace Bloom's wanderings with events and readings of excerpts in their original settings in Dublin. Bloomsday has become a sort of unofficial holiday in Dublin.

JOYCE'S STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the most remarkable features of Joyce's *Ulysses* is its **narrative style, which represents the triumph of one of the most interesting techniques of Modernist writing**: the 'stream of consciousness' technique. By relying on the massive use of this narrative technique, Joyce's novel tries to reflect the workings of the mind of its protagonist, Leopold Bloom, whose incoherent flux of ideas, thoughts, mental associations, impressions and memories is rendered on the page without any logical or rational organisation.

ZOOM IN

Joyce's *Ulysses* focuses on the actions of **one character** on **one single day**. Like *Ulysses*, another Modernist novel, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), exploited the same literary topos. Joyce and Woolf used this narrative device as an act of rebellion against Victorian prose writing, which was based on the variety of characters and events, and also as a way of showing the importance of subjective time against objective chronological time.

Unlike Woolf's style, which is characterised by the poetical attempt to express the characters' free thoughts in a syntactically-controlled way, Joyce's style is an attempt to get rid of any kind of control over the character's thoughts, which flow on the page freely and incoherently as they do in Bloom's mind. The result is a kaleidoscopic, estranging, disturbing and shocking novel, which represents one of the best examples of Modernist experimentation in prose writing.

042

Yes I said yes I will yes

WARM UP

1. **Read the text contained in the ZOOM IN above. Eliminate the punctuation, all capital letters and all brackets.**

1 Can you still read it?

2 Can you still understand its main content?

The passage you are going to read is probably one of the best examples of Joyce's narrative experimentation. It is an excerpt from Episode 18 of *Ulysses*, an uninterrupted 60-page long flux of thoughts passing through Molly's mind while she is in bed in the morning. This episode is also the conclusion of *Ulysses*.

ah yes I know them well who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they dont know neither do I so there you are they might as well try to stop the sun from rising tomorrow the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons[1] on Howth head[2] in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat[3] the day I got him to propose me yes first I gave him a bit of seedcake[4] out of my mouth and it was leapyear[5] like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didnt know of Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves and the sailors playing all birds fly and I say stoop and washing up the dishes[6] they called it on the pier[7] and the sentry[8] in front of the governors house with the thing round his white helmet poor devil half roasted and the Spanish girls laughing in their shawls and their tall combs and the auctions in the morning the Greeks and the Jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe and Duke street and the fowl market all clucking[9] outside Larby Sharons and the poor donkeys slipping[10] half asleep in the shade on the steps and the big wheels of the carts of the bulls and the old castle thousands of years old yes and those handsome Moors all in white and turbans like kings asking you to sit down in their little bit of a shop and Ronda with the old windows or the posadas glancing eyes a lattice hid for her lover to kiss the iron and the wineshops half open at night and the castanets and the night we missed the boat at Algeciras[11] the watchman going about serene with his lamp and O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens yes and all the queer[12] little street

1 **rhododendrons:** rododendri (fiori)
2 **Howth head:** promontorio vicino a Dublino
3 **straw hat:** cappello di paglia
4 **seedcake:** torta fatta con i semi
5 **leapyear:** anno bisestile
6 **stoop [...] dishes:** gioco della cavallina
7 **pier:** molo
8 **sentry:** guardia
9 **clucking:** crocchiante
10 **slipping:** che scivolano
11 **Algeciras:** città del sud della Spagna
12 **queer:** strana

and pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a flower of the mountains yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breast all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad yes I said yes I will Yes.

COMPREHENSION

2. Read the passage silently and put pauses ('✤') in it. Start this way:

'ah yes I know them well ✤ who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all ✤ who ah that they dont know neither do I ✤ so there you are they might as well try.'

1 Is it easier to understand this way?

2 Why?

ANALYSIS

3. Underline the word 'yes' in the text.

a How many times is it repeated?

b What effect does this repetition create?

4. When does the repetition of the word 'yes' become more intense? Why?

5. In the passage there are three recurring elements that help to link and organise Molly's thoughts: the mountains, the sea and the flowers. Underline them using three different colours.

6. In the passage the word 'sun' is repeated three times. What particular thought does it generate each of the three times it is repeated? Quote from the text.

– 1st time: .....

– 2nd time: .....

– 3rd time: .....

7. What is the function of the word 'sun'?

a It brings back Molly's past memories.

b It shows that Molly's stream of consciousness is a free association of thoughts.

c It shows that Molly's thoughts are totally random.

8. Focus on the 'stream of consciousness technique' used by Joyce.

a Are there any examples of **grammatical inconsistencies**?

b What is their effect?

9. Is there any punctuation in the text? What effect does this create? Choose among the following:

a It makes the passage very difficult to understand.

b It makes the flux of thoughts difficult to follow.

c It underlines that thoughts are not rationally organised.

d It recalls the narrative style of the Victorian Age.

10. How many examples of subordinate sentences can you find? What does this suggest about the hierarchy of Molly's thoughts?

INTERPRETATION

11. What is the relation between Molly's memories of her encounter with Bloom and her days in Gibraltar?

12. Do you think Joyce succeeded in representing Molly's flux of thoughts?

YOUR VOICE

13. What would happen if a 19th-century author such as Dickens read the passage you have just read? He would probably be horrified and would immediately rewrite it to transform it into an easily readable and well-structured passage. Put yourself in the shoes of a writer like Charles Dickens and rewrite Joyce's passage (or simply a part of it) in a traditional way. What are the main changes you would make? Which narrator would you choose? Would you write it using a first-person narrator? Share your reflections with your classmates.