

ENGLISH 440F (01) (W): JAMES JOYCE (MWF 11:30-12:20) – Jonathan Morse

The hero of Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*, an American attached to the Italian army during World War I, suffers two terrible wounds. The first, to his body, comes from an Austrian mortar shell that almost kills him. The second, to his sense of reality, comes when he returns to the front after weeks in the hospital and hears a patriotic Italian soldier say, "What has been done this summer cannot have been done in vain."

"I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain," the American remembers later. "I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear. . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene."

As of 1918, the year when World War I came to its end, many people felt that way. To them, the Gettysburg Address kind of language that had sent them off to war in 1914 seemed to be nothing but lies. But they didn't know how language could be made truthful again. Fortunately, truth came to their rescue just four years later, in the glorious year 1922.

To see what that rescue involved, click on the three writing samples under English 440F on the web page at <http://jonathanmorse.net>. The first of those samples comes from Sinclair Lewis's once famous, now forgotten novel *Babbitt*, which was published in 1922 but (topical references aside) might just as well have been published in 1852, the year of the second sample. But when you look at the third sample, from E. E. Cummings's war memoir *The Enormous Room*, you'll see something different. *The Enormous Room* was published in 1922 just like *Babbitt*, but unlike *Babbitt* it speaks of its new experiences in new language.

And of all the many language experiments that came to fruition in 1922, the most wonderful is James Joyce's enormous novel *Ulysses*, which just may turn out, one of these years, to be the greatest comedy in all the long history of western civilization. That, at any rate, will be the thesis behind this course.

We'll spend about half the semester on *Ulysses* accordingly, reading it in tandem with the tale it retells, *The Odyssey*. Leading up to that experience, we'll also read Joyce's volume of short stories *Dubliners* and his short autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. To end the course, we'll look at (but not read all the way through) the logical outcome of the language experiment that is *Ulysses*: Joyce's last work, *Finnegans Wake*, a strange and wonderful descent into the dreamworld where the parts of speech are born.

You may not be the same after the experience, but the language you live through is guaranteed to look more interesting. Two five-page papers (one each about the two short books), one ten-page paper about *Ulysses*, midterm, and final. Texts: Homer, *The Odyssey*; Joyce, *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*; Don Gifford, "*Ulysses*" *Annotated*.