

## Irish National Library puts James Joyce manuscripts online

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The Irish National Library has digitized its rare James Joyce manuscripts and put them online. It's a major move that makes Joyce's handwritten notes and drafts available to scholars for free, at anytime. Joyce, who died in 1941 at age 58, is considered one of modernism's most important and influential writers, but scholars have not had free access to his papers.

His grandson Stephen, who is custodian of his estate, has long held tight reins on the Joyce materials under his control: He charged high fees, refused scholars the right to quote from Joyce's work and shut down the Irish government's planned public readings of the centenary of "Ulysses" when he threatened litigation. But on Jan. 1, many of James Joyce's works, including his letters, moved into the public domain.

The library was quiet about putting the manuscripts online; they've been available since April 10. The announcement of the availability of the Joyce manuscripts had been tucked into news on its website headlined "[more service enhancements](#)."

There are three [main files](#): The Circe episode of "Ulysses," "Finnegans Wake" drafts from 1923, and a collection known as the Joyce Papers 2002, c.1903-1928. The [Irish Times](#) has spent some time combing through the resources and has a quick primer:

A reader may well be relieved to learn that the "Finnegans Wake" documents can be safely ignored, or at least left for much later attention; they are mostly page proofs with some pretty modest corrections. This means that all the numbers from MS36,639/15 (yes, it is a bit of a mathematical maze) on down can be left out of the reckoning.

It is in the other two categories, the "early notes" and the Ulysses notes and drafts, that the real meat of the collection is to be found. Although the collection is titled "The Joyce Papers 1903-1928," it is quite possible that the very first set of documents -- a series of extracts from Dante -- dates from a good deal earlier, possibly from Joyce's time in university or even from his school years in Belvedere.

The next document (MS 36,639/2/A), if it had been discovered on its own, would in itself and of itself be a source of great excitement. It is a commonplace book, which Joyce used for an unusual variety of purposes: as an account book, as a repository of various passages and poems from his reading that struck him (Ben Jonson is a particular favourite); reading lists; thoughts and reflections on aesthetics; remarks on friends (JF Byrne, for instance); and, eventually, notes for Dubliners and for the figure of Stephen Dedalus as he emerged in the later fiction (some of the notes even look forward to Ulysses).

Currently available in PDF, the library has promised that higher resolution digital copies will be available June 16 -- which is known to Joyce fans as Bloomsday, named for the character in his novel "Ulysses."