



# The Isle of Man in Epic Imagination

The influence of Mann on Joyce and how to reclaim the Island's  
status as a central force for political and cultural innovation

**Simon Collister, PhD**



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Explored how the Island is portrayed by early C20th writers articulating new worlds.

## How it's going >

To what extent did James Joyce view the Isle of Man as representing a powerful and progressive future for a new, modern Ireland?

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## The Isle of Man in Epic Imagination


Wed, 02 Feb 2022

James Joyce's great novel, *Ulysses*, was first published 100 years ago, on 2 February 1922.


Few people realise the number of references to the Isle of Man and Manx matters within this great work of modern literature, so it is worthwhile to use this 100th anniversary to offer Simon Collister's excellent essay on the subject here.

His essay offers not just a reading of the Isle of Man's place in the great Modernist novel, but also its place within Joyce's wider thinking, in the earlier and contrasting *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, and it offers suggestions of how we might reflect on the Isle of Man and what it is to be Manx today...


Enjoy!




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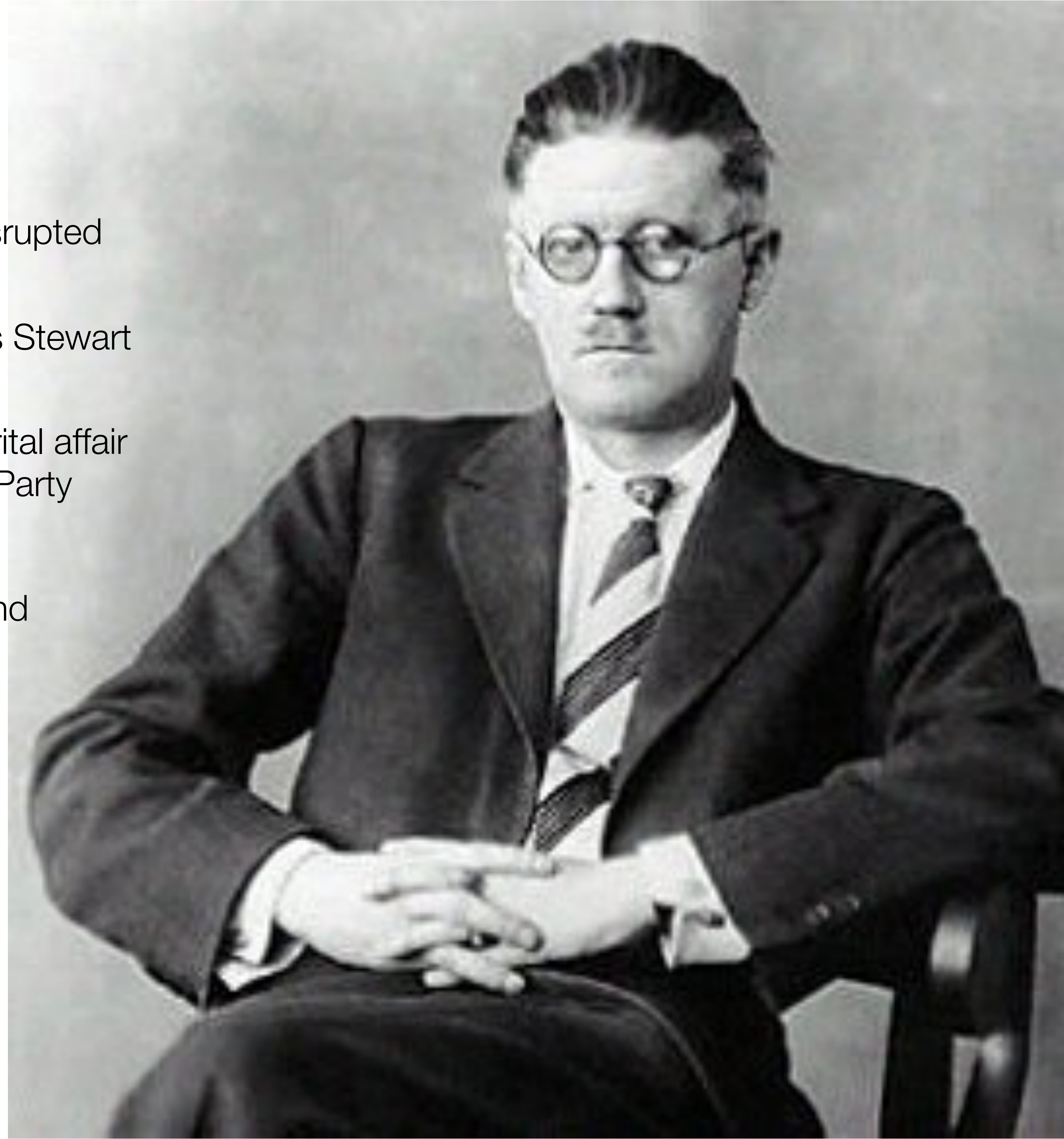
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# Joyce's background

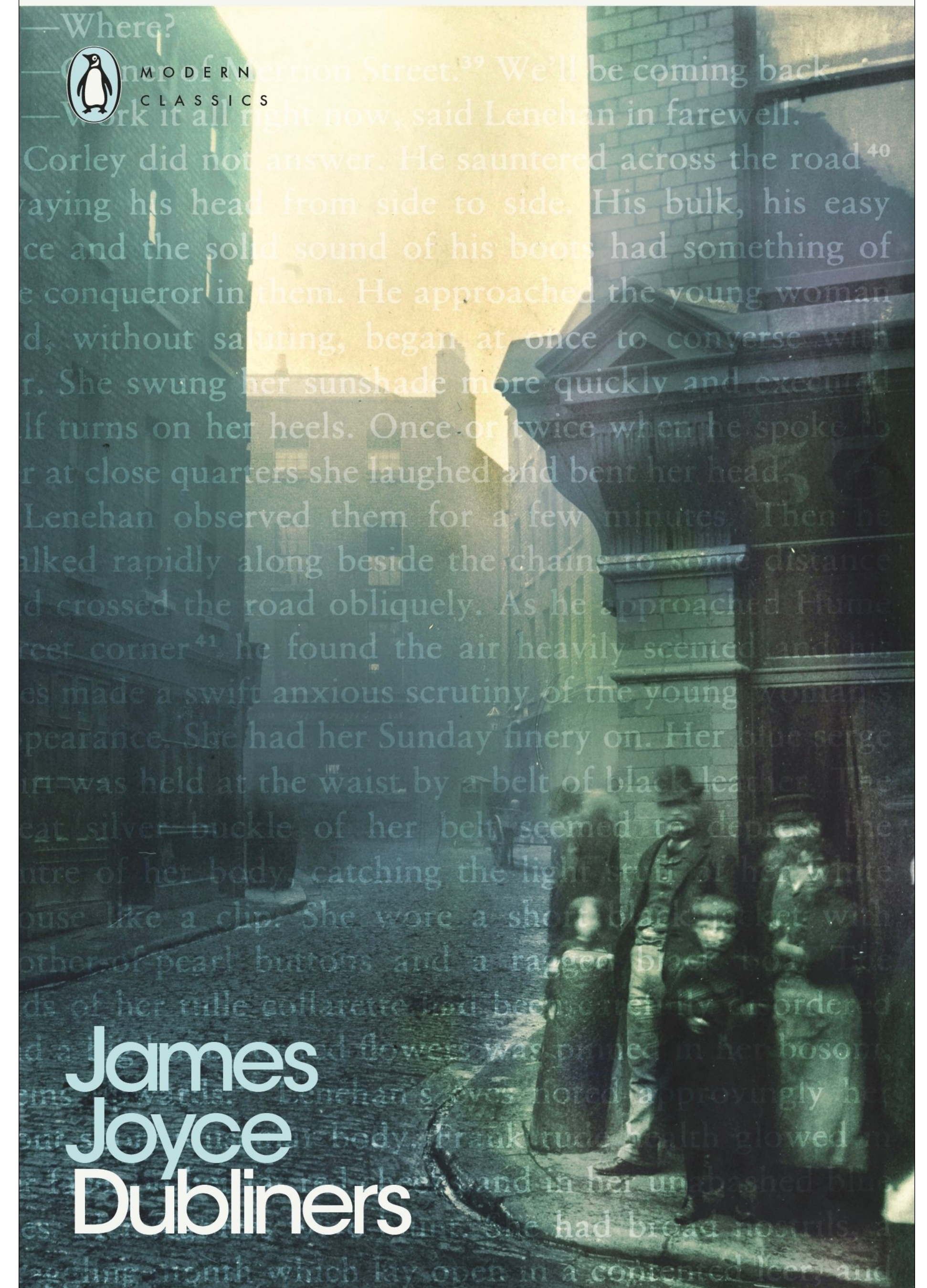
- Born Dublin, 1882 into a middle-class family, later disrupted by poverty
- Family staunch supporters of Irish nationalist, Charles Stewart Parnell; leader of the Home Rule League
- Home Rule movement foundered following extra-marital affair - helped by from Catholic Church and British Liberal Party
- Rejected “two empires” - Roman Catholic and British
- Clear ‘Modernist’ writer; consumerism, technology and greater freedom are key themes
- Towering figure in C20th literature
- Lived in self-imposed exile: Trieste, Zürich, Paris
- Major works:
  - Dubliners (1914)
  - Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)
  - Ulysses (1922)
  - Finnegans Wake (1939)





# Dubliners (1914)

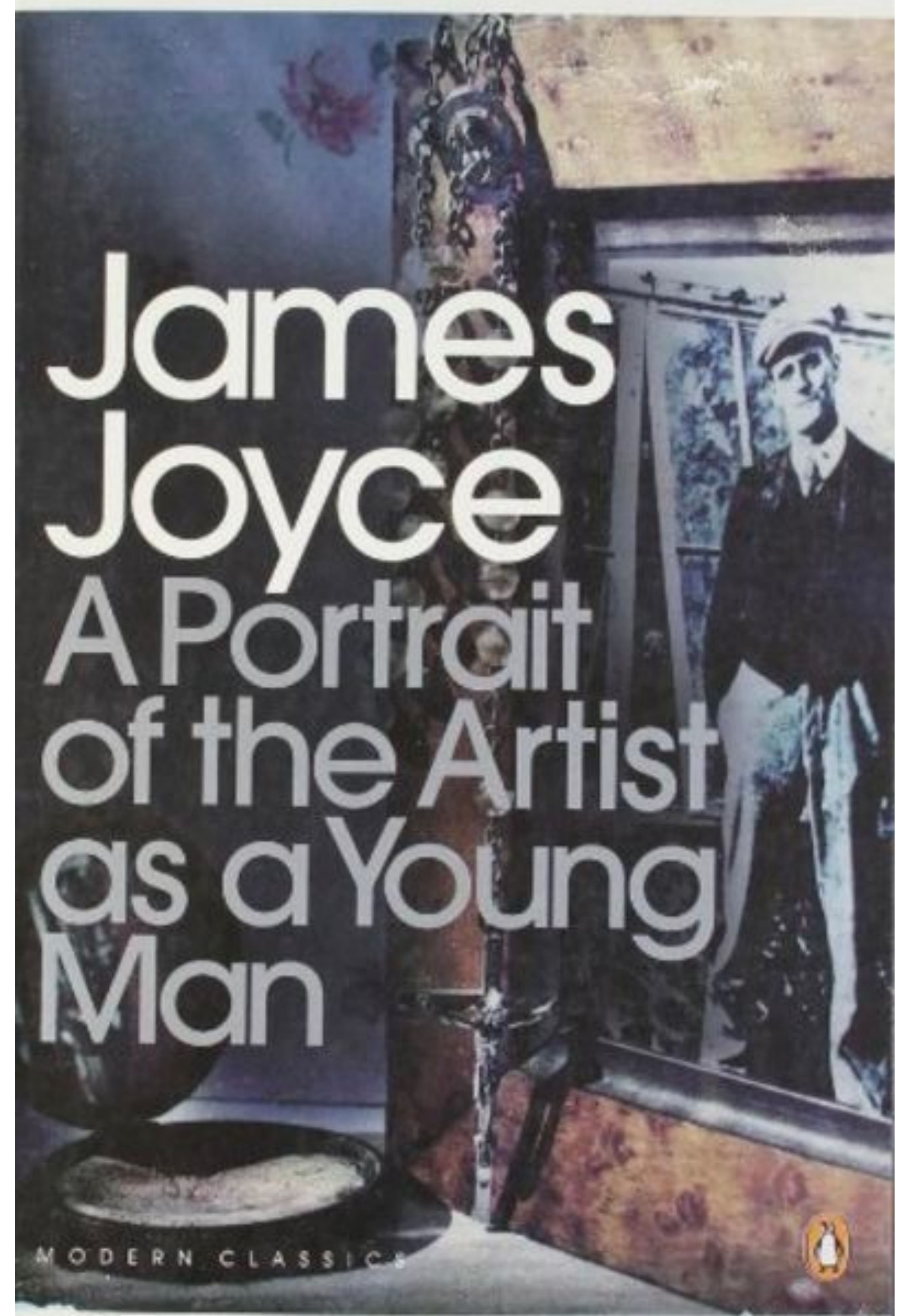
- Short-story collection
- Intended to portray Dublin (and Ireland) as a sclerotic, paralysed and paralysing place
- Isle of Man appears... But only passing references
- Mainly as destination for inbound and outbound tourism
- Not intended as a flattering depiction





“

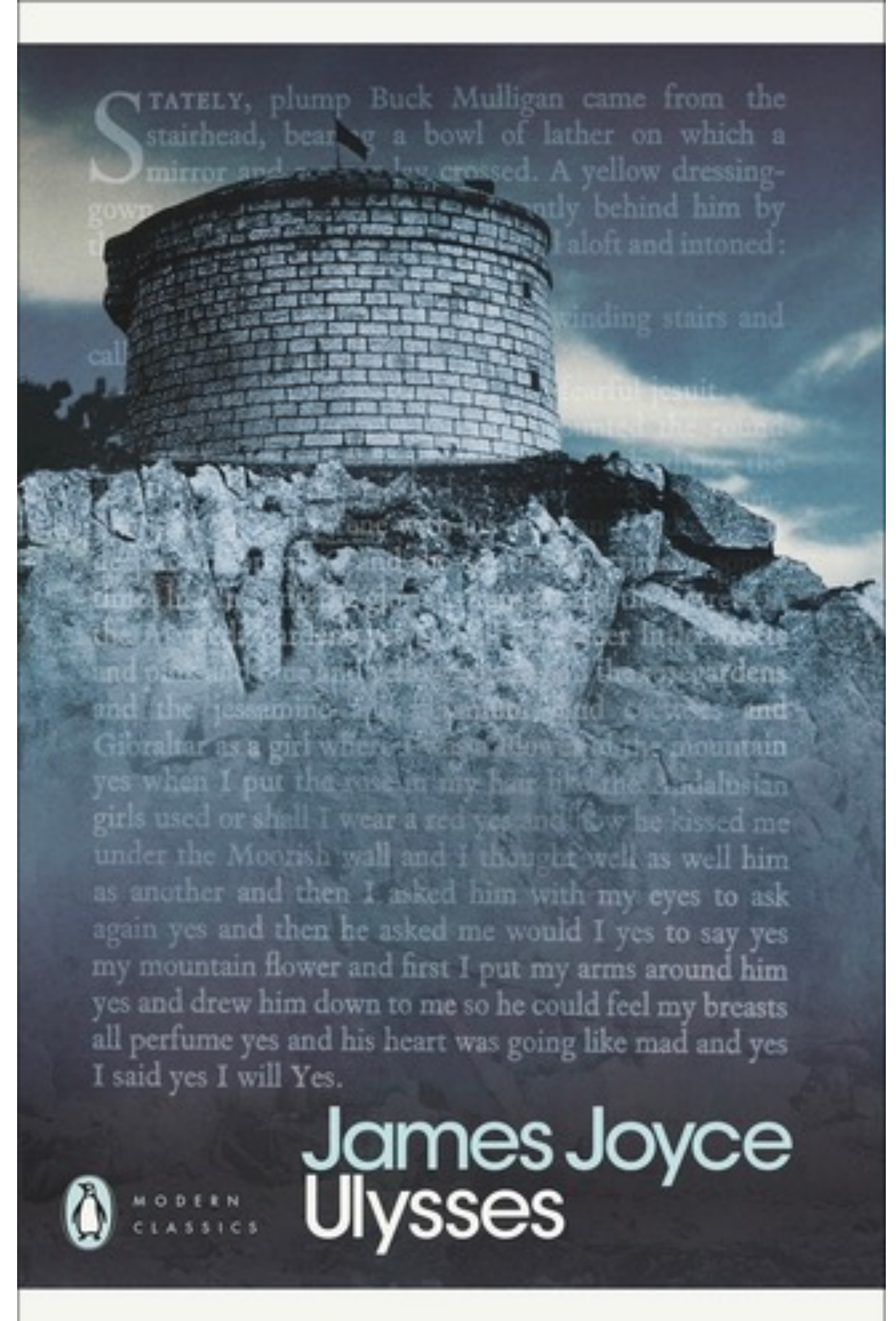
**I go to encounter for  
the millionth time the  
reality of experience  
and to forge in the  
smithy of my soul the  
uncreated conscience  
of my race.**





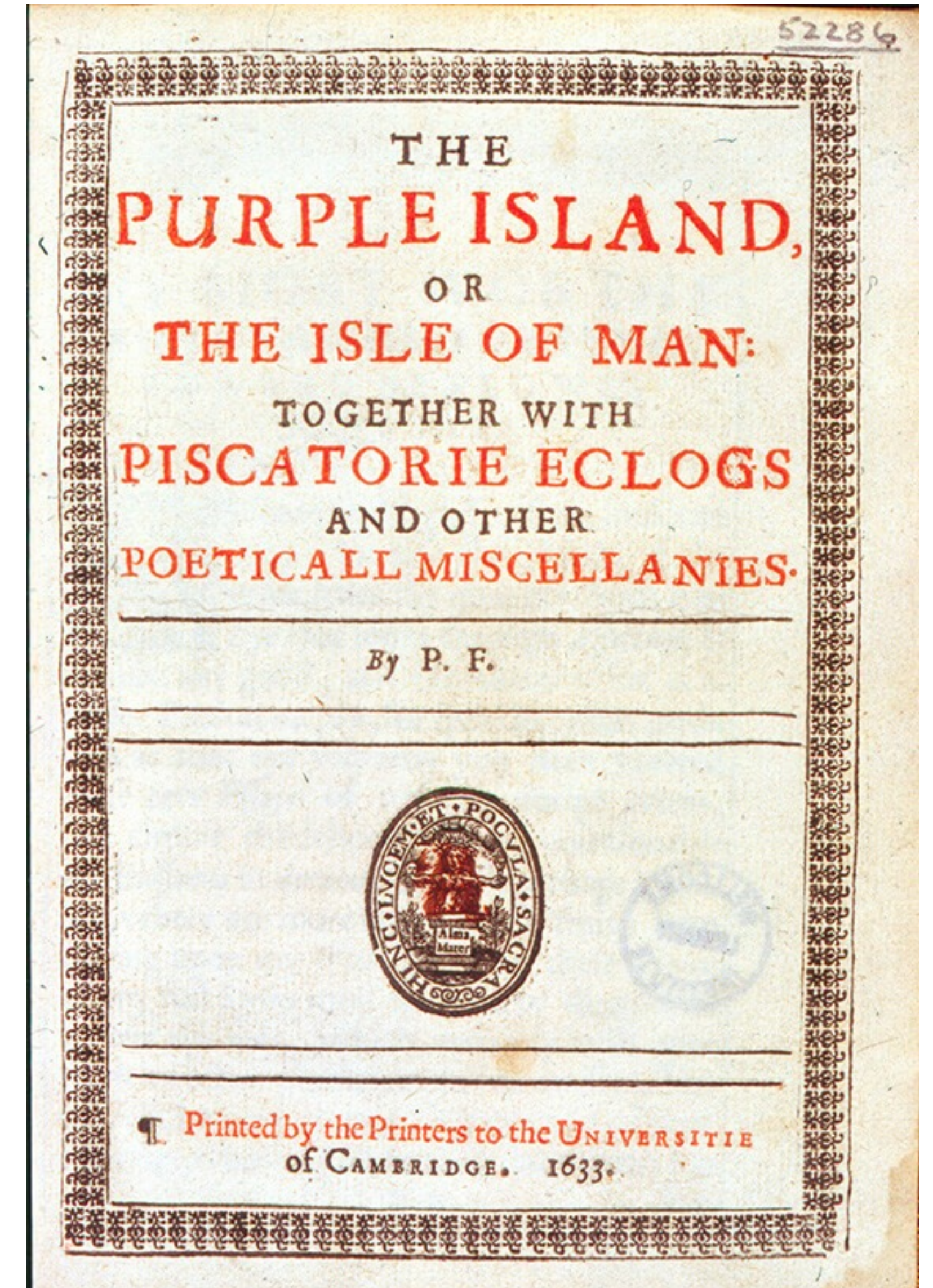
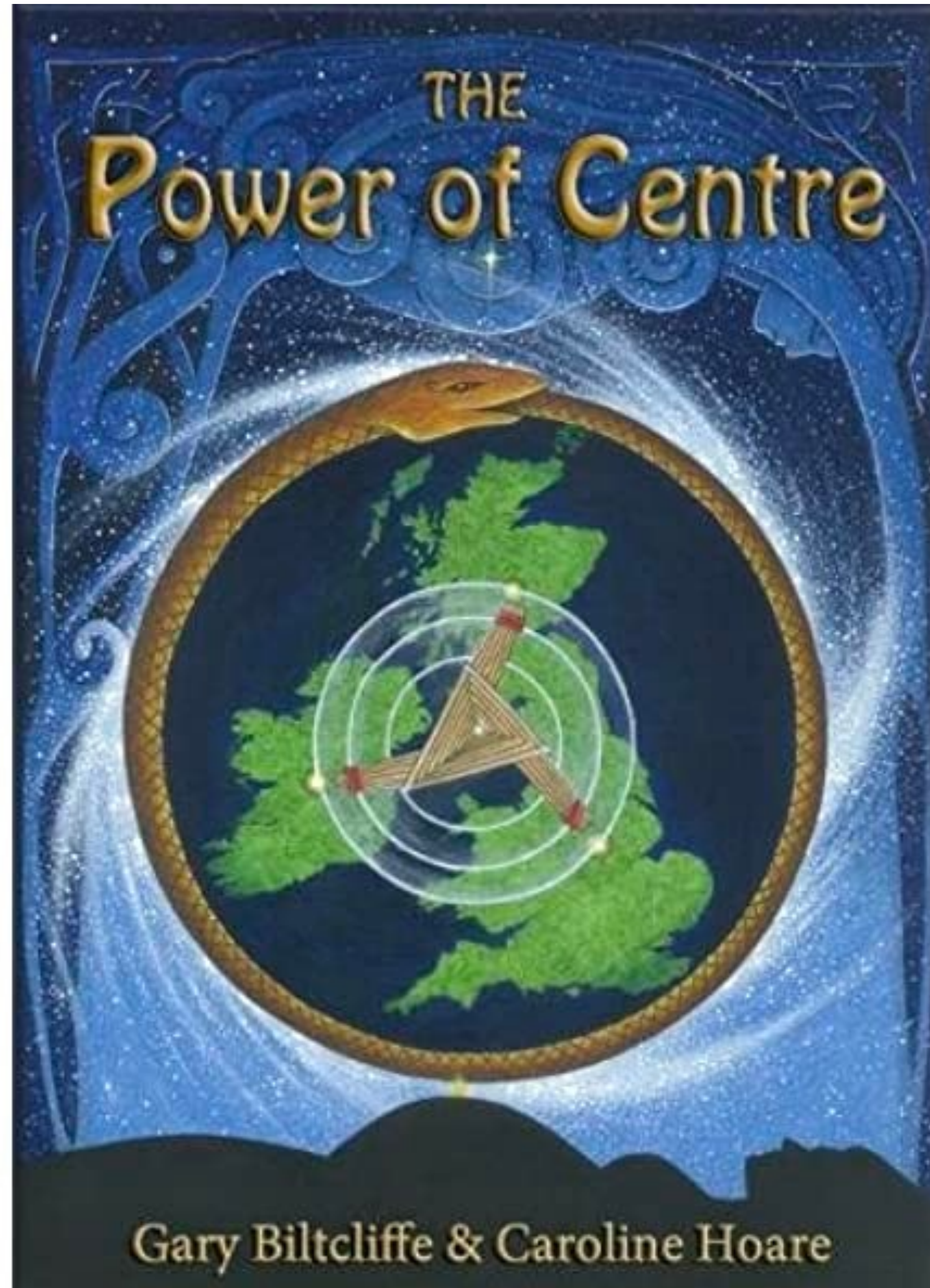
# Ulysses (1922)

- Published in February 1922, Ulysses reimagines Homer's Greek epic poem as taking place over the space of one day in Dublin in 1904
- Joyce saw his own work as a new modernist epic setting out a powerful vision of a modern Ireland
- Arguably, the Isle of Man plays an important part in this plan





# Few esoteric notes to start





# The House of Key(e)s

- We first meet the Island when novel's protagonist, Leopold Bloom, attempts to sell an advert to local businessman, Alexander Keyes
- As the book unfolds the significance of home-rule becomes clear...

## HOUSE OF KEY(E)S

— Like that, see. Two crossed keys here. A circle. Then here the name Alexander Keyes, tea, wine and spirit merchant. So on.

Better not teach him his own business.

— You know yourself, councillor, just what he wants. Then round out the top in leaded: the house of keys. You see? Do you think that's a good idea?

The foreman moved his scratching hand to his lower ribs and scratched there quietly.

— The idea, Mr. Bloom said, is the house of keys. You know, councillor, the Manx parliament. Innuendo of home rule. Tourists, you know, from the isle of Man. Catches the eye, you see. Can you do that?



“

**Through a seemingly innocuous newspaper advertisement, Bloom ably draws attention to the striking divergence between Irish and Manx political history in order to mobilise the Isle of Man's historical and geographic associations with self-sufficiency and independence in the service of a sophisticated, if pithy, critique of the often violent and moribund Irish situation.**



# “Homerule sun”

- Bloom’s employer, the nationalist newspaper, The Freeman’s Journal, has a masthead featuring a sun rising behind the Bank of Ireland above the heading ‘Ireland a nation’
- This is reimagined throughout the book as a shining beacon of a “homerule sun” which, again literally and figuratively guides the novel’s events from sunrise to sunset.
- As Bloom journeys across Dublin he is continually chasing down Keyes to secure the ad sale. Bloom (who is also Joyce’s alter-ego) is literally and symbolically chasing home rule throughout the book





# A new era dawns?

- Later, the Isle of Man makes an important re-appearance in a dream-like sequence late in the evening
- Although played out with different layers of symbolism, it's clear that the Isle of Man's political status and democratic institution is a significant theme for Joyce
- Can be argued the Isle of Man and its House of Keys is the embodiment of a modern and progressive solution for Irish Independence

JOHN HOWARD PARNELL: (Raises the royal standard) **Illustrious Bloom! Successor to my famous brother!**

...

LEOPOLD BLOOM: (Embraces John Howard Parnell) We thank you from our heart, John, for this right royal welcome to green Erin, the promised land of our common ancestors.

(The Freedom of the city is presented to him embodied in A Charter. **The keys of Dublin, crossed on A crimson Cushion,** are given to him. He shows all that he is wearing green socks.)

...

LEOPOLD BLOOM: **My beloved subjects, a new era is about to dawn.** I, Bloom, tell you verily it is even now at hand. Yea, on the word of a Bloom, ye shall ere long enter into the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future'.

...

ALEXANDER KEYES: **When will we have our own house of keys?**

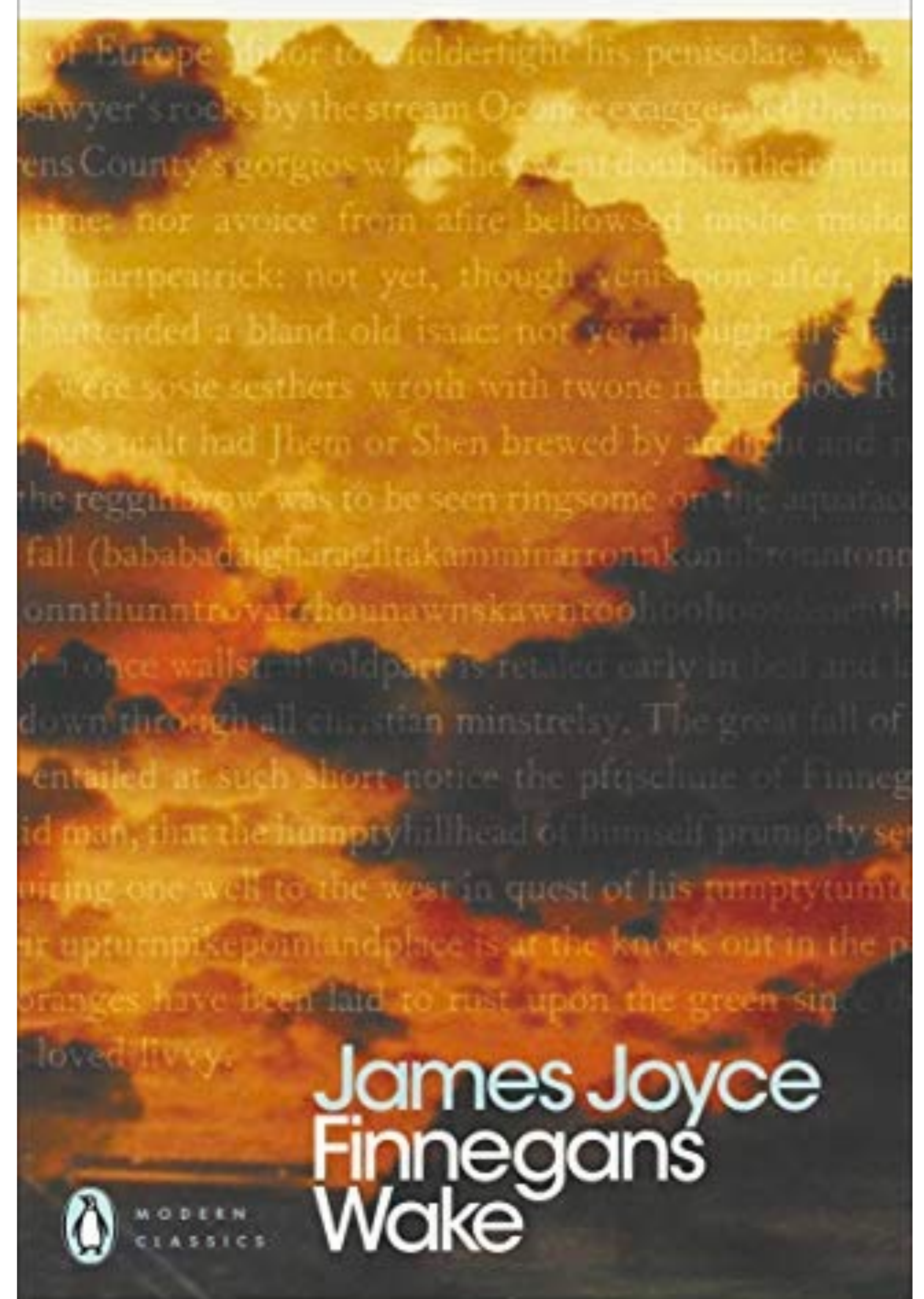
...

(A rocket rushes up the sky and bursts. A white star falls from it, proclaiming the consummation of all things and second coming of Elijah. Along an infinite invisible tightrope taut from zenith to nadir the End of the World, a two headed octopus in gillie's kilts, busby and tartan **filibegs, whirls through the murk, head over heels, in the form of the Three Legs of Man.**)

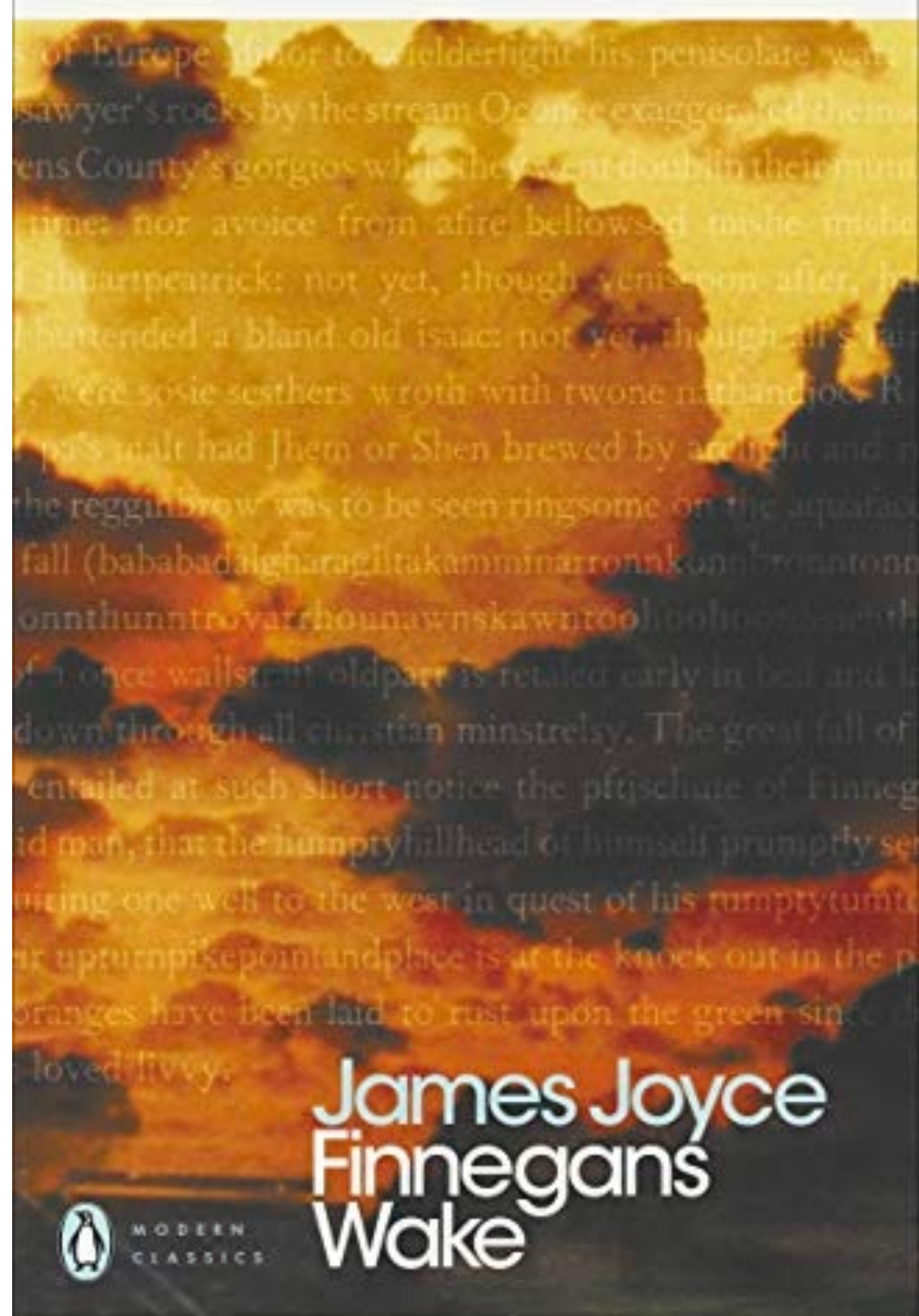


# Finnegans Wake (1939)

- In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's final – and most complex – book, we find once more the Isle of Man, its history and political status littered throughout.
- The challenge, however, is that finding specific meaning in *Finnegans Wake* can be difficult as the book is written entirely as a dreamscape
- Characters dissolve and morph into other figures and objects, using a form of English Joyce invented which builds a dazzling array of portmanteau words from around 60 other languages.





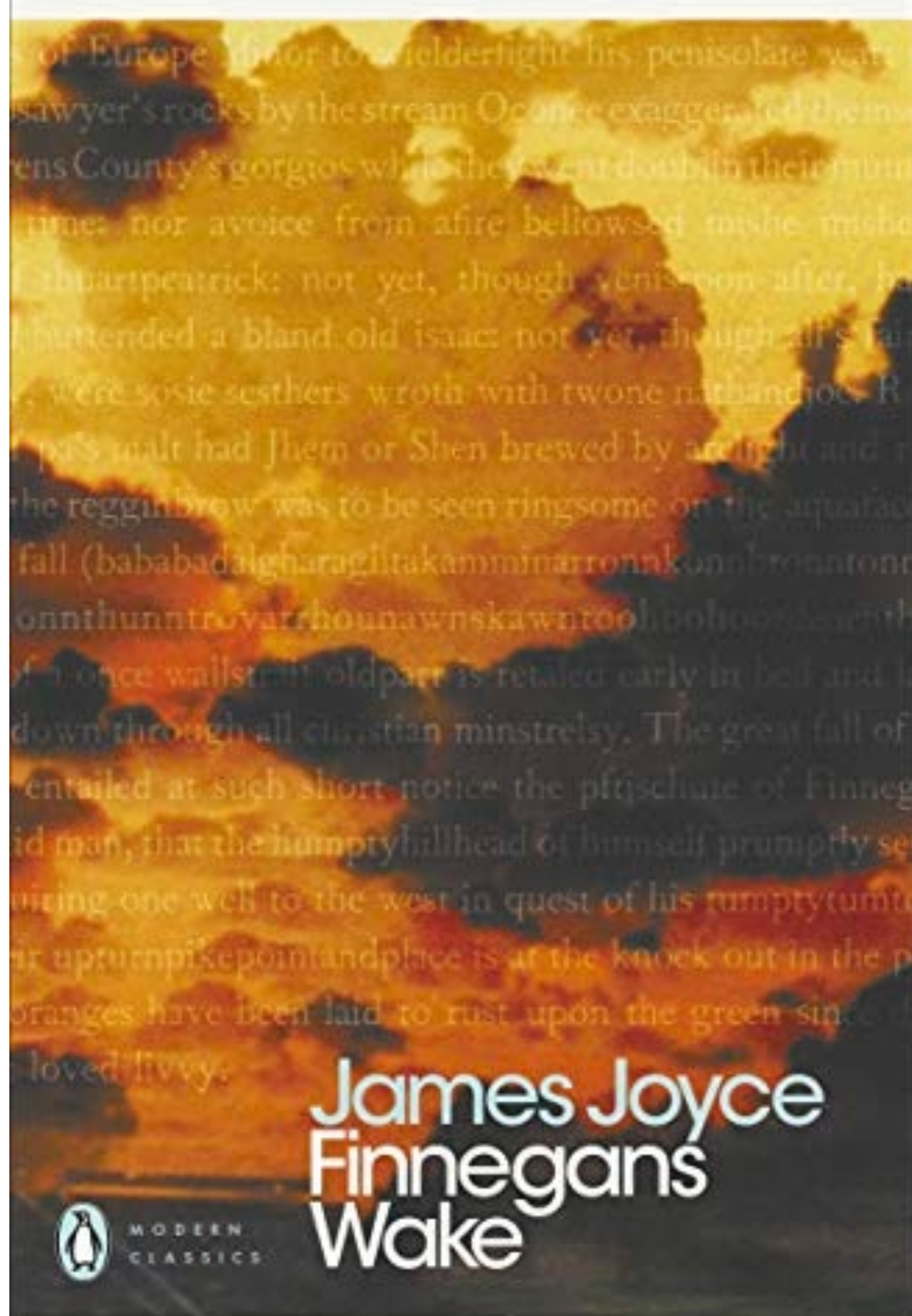


riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend  
 of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to  
 Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passen-  
 core rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy  
 isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor  
 had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Ocone exaggerated themse  
 to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper  
 all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to  
 tauftauf thuartpeatrick: not yet, though venissoon after, had a  
 kidscad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all's fair in  
 vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a  
 peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory  
 end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.

The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonner-  
 ronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntooohooordenenthur-  
 nuk!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later  
 on life down through all christian minstrelsy. The great fall of the  
 offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan,  
 erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends  
 an unquering one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes:  
 and their upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the park  
 where oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since dev-  
 linsfirst loved livvy.





Last line of  
the book



then. Finn, again! Lake. Bussortthee, mememormee! Till thous-  
endsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a  
long the

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend  
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linsfirst loved livvy.



# Isle of Man influence pre-publication

- The book articulates a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic, modern Ireland.
- One built from Irish mythical foundations, later emboldened by Norse/Viking legal institutions
- But the Isle of Man being a key part of this project

“Humptydump Dublin squeaks through his norse,  
Humptydump Dublin hat a horriple vorse,  
And, with all his kinks English  
Plus his Irishmanx brogues,  
Humptydump Dublin’s grandada of rogues”

From ‘Haveth Childers Everywhere’ (1931) - serialised extract of FW’s ‘Book III’.



# Finnegan who?

Two Finnegans in the story's title...

1. **Tim Finnegan** - a music-hall song character dies and is reborn at his own wake thanks to the revivifying effects of whiskey splashed on him by friends and family
2. **Finn McCool** - mythical Irish giant and founder, of course, of the Isle of Man...

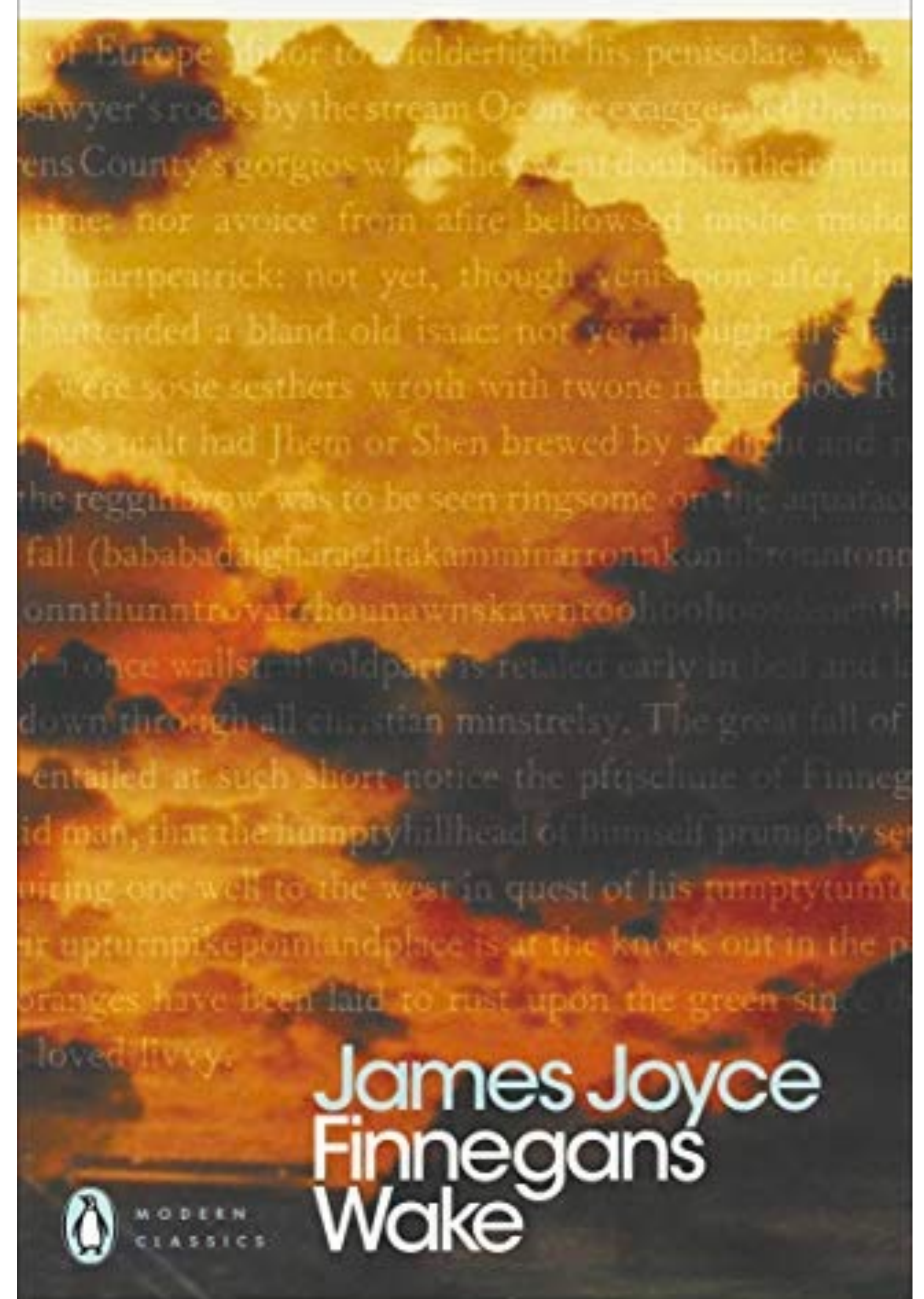
“

**Yet is it, this ale of man, for him,  
our hubuljoynted, just a tug and a  
fistful as for Culsén, the  
Patagoreyan, chieftain of  
chokanchuckers and his moyety  
joyant, under the foamer  
dispensation when he pullupped  
the turfeycork by the greats of  
gobble out of Lough Neagh.**

Finnegans Wake, 310

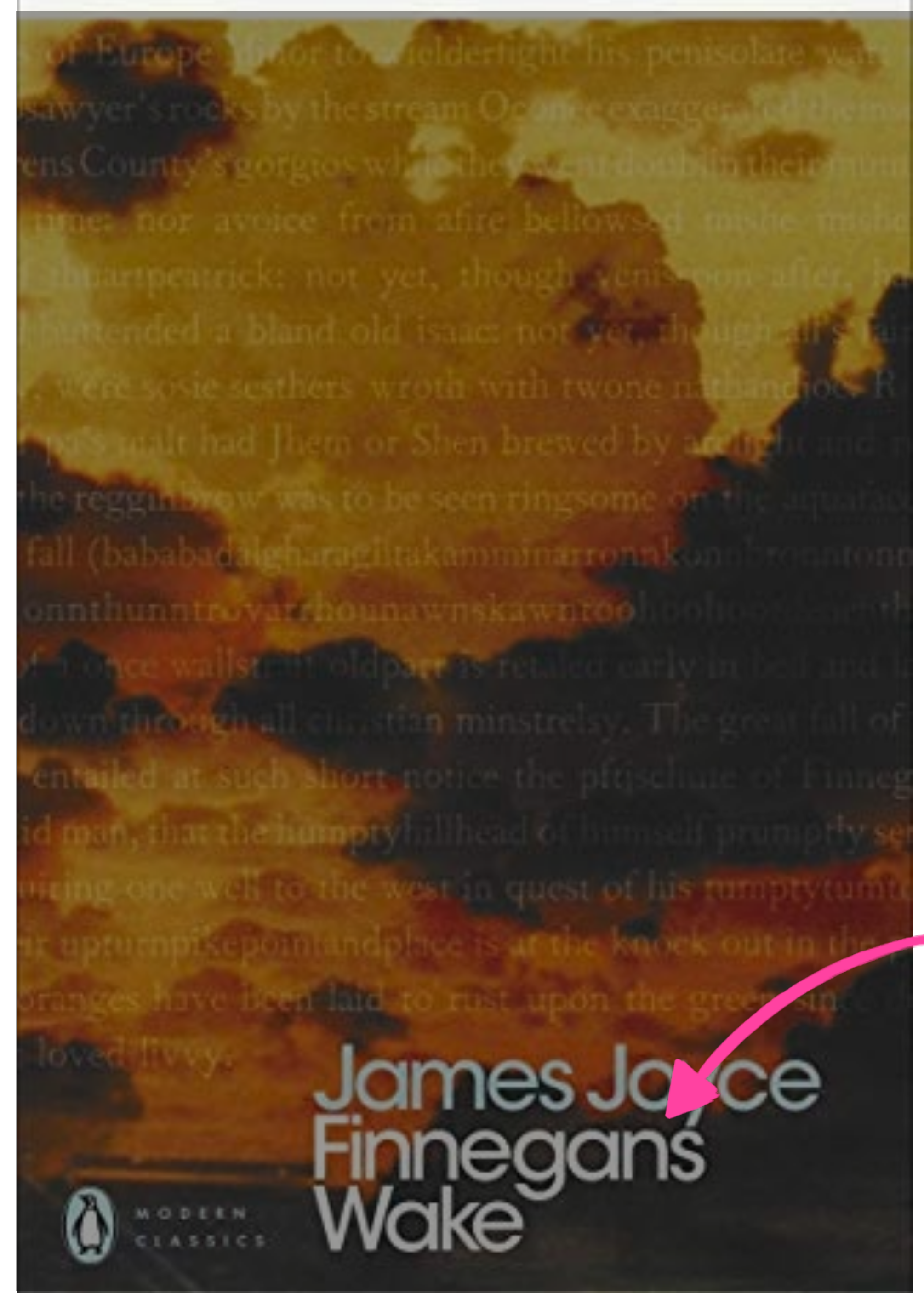


# Wake or wake?





# Wake or wake?





# Wake or wake?

- Double-meaning of 'wake' is central to the story
- Is Finnegans Wake suggesting a funeral and end of the Irish nation? Or is it about its re-awakening?
- It ends with the wife of the main character urging him to wake up as night turns to day.
- An ending powerfully reflecting a line from Ulysses spoken by Joyce's alter-ego....

“

**History is a  
nightmare from  
which I am trying  
to awake**

Ulysses, 34



# Isle of Man references

- Joyce knew Island in immense detail
- Uses this knowledge to bring to life key strands of the book's narrative
- Particularly evident articulating modernist values, e.g. sexual and gender equality or fluidity, political or religious freedom or independence, shared culture and history

“isle of manoverboard”

“the ives of Man”

“the calves of Man”

“the Calif of Man”

“the isle of Mun, ah!” (i.e. Mona)

“nor a minx from the  
Isle of Woman”

“Minxy was a Manxmaid  
when Murry WOT a Man”

“Manx Presbyterian”

“Diet of Man”

“Doomster” (i.e. Deemster)

“goodrid croven in a tynwalled tub”

“breastlaw’ (i.e. Manx common law).



# The ‘Dwyergray Ass’ + ‘Four Old Men’

- One of the book’s main characters – a “**dwyergray ass**”  
- who leads ‘four old men’ through the novel -  
**represents “among other things, the Isle of Man,**  
once owned by Ireland”
- They fundamentally represent Ireland’s four provinces,  
while the name ‘Dwyergray’ evokes Edmund Dwyer-  
Gray owner of the *Freeman’s Journal*
- Again we discover the donkey/‘Homerule Sun’  
symbolising the Isle of Man leading Ireland towards an  
enlightened future





# Summary

- **Both Ulysses and Finnegans Wake articulate a vision of a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, modern Ireland**
- **Ulysses draws on classical mythology and The Wake on Irish mythical foundations and Norse/Viking legal tradition to forge a new Ireland existing outside of Roman Catholic and British imperialism**
- **The Isle of Man is arguably one consistent theme used in both works as an inspirational and aspirational model suggesting the opportunity for Ireland**



# Final thoughts...

saying he was copying out the script of his remarks at the 21st meeting and commanded, 'Print that, Miss Cunard!' <sup>55</sup>

The possibility of that old impossibility, a trip to Ireland, arose once more. Nora at least seriously considered it,\* and Constantine Curran urged Joyce to come over. He contemplated approaching as close to Ireland as the Isle of Man, but no farther:

I am trying to finish my wip [Work in Progress] (I work about 16 hours a day, it seems to me) and I am not taking any chances with my fellow



“

**Inhabited for millennia, by the turn of the 20th Century, Man was - as it remains today - a self-governing dependency of the British Crown. Part of neither the United Kingdom nor Great Britain, Man stood in dramatic contrast to the political and historical realities of ... colonial Ireland. And indeed it was that very contrast upon which Joyce would eventually seize.**



# What would Joyce do now?

- Have we fulfilled the expectations set by Joyce?
- Are we a proud country held up as a beacon of progress and modernity?
- How can we reclaim the status set by Joyce (and others)
- For the Island to move forward and succeed in new and epic ways, we need to draw on the epic imagination around the Island as distilled by Joyce and reimagine our own contribution to the world going forward
- Like Joyce - looking to our neighbours with shared historical, political and cultural legacies is not a bad starting point to re-shape our own future.



**Thank you.**  
**Questions?**

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