



Reading Joyce

David Pierce

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'Is there one who understands me?'

So wrote James Joyce towards the end of his final work, *Finnegans Wake*. The question continues to be asked about the author who claimed that he had put so many enigmas into *Ulysses* that it would 'keep the professors busy for centuries' arguing over what he meant. For Joyce this was a way of ensuring his immortality, but it could also be claimed that the professors have served to distance Joyce from his audience, turning his writings into museum pieces, pored over and admired, but rarely touched. In this remarkable book, steeped in the learning gained from a lifetime's reading, David Pierce blends word, life and image to bring the works of one of the great modern writers within the reach of every reader. With a sharp eye for detail and an evident delight in the cadences of Joyce's work, Pierce proves a perfect companion, always careful and courteous, pausing to point out what might otherwise be missed. Like the best of critics, his suggestive readings constantly encourage the reader back to Joyce's own words.

Beginning with *Dubliners* and closing with *Finnegans Wake*, *Reading Joyce* is full of insights that are original and illuminating, and Pierce succeeds in presenting Joyce as an author both more straightforward and infinitely more complex than we had perhaps imagined. T. S. Eliot wrote of Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses*, that it is 'a book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape'. With David Pierce as a guide, the debt we owe to Joyce becomes clearer, and the need to flee is greatly reduced.

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