3. What stretch of highway in the United States is charmingly beautiful and stands in total contrast to Mencken’s description of the houses in Westmoreland County? Describe this stretch in detail, focusing on architectural characteristics.

4. Do you agree with Mencken that Americans are psychologically obsessed with ugliness? If you agree, try to find reasons for this obsession. If you disagree, prove that Mencken is wrong by citing instances in which typical Americans have promoted beauty and good taste.

5. If you were to oversee a development of beautiful homes, what aesthetic requirements would you insist on? Describe the development in concrete terms.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. Write an essay describing the town or city where you live.

2. Write an analysis of Mencken’s diction in this essay, paying particular attention to his use of adjectives.

HELL

James Joyce

James Joyce (1882–1941) is considered by many to be among the most significant novelists of the 20th century. He was born in Dublin, Ireland, and educated at University College, Dublin. Joyce, a writer who pushed language to its outer limit of comprehensibility, wrote poetry, short stories, and novels. His major novels include A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), Ulysses (written between 1914 and 1921 and published in the United States in 1933), and Finnegans Wake (1939).

Joyce, in this selection from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, shows us the wreathing fires of hell and persuades us to smell its stench of brimstone...
and sin. The description that follows is so graphic, so detailed, and so filled with such shuddering imagery, that we almost believe that someone has returned from this dreadful place to tell the tale.

—

1 Hell is a strait and dark and foulsmelling prison, an abode of demons and lost souls, filled with fire and smoke. The straitness of this prisonhouse is expressly designed by God to punish those who refused to be bound by His laws. In earthly prisons the poor captive has at least some liberty of movement, were it only within the four walls of his cell or in the gloomy yard of his prison. Not so in hell. There, by reason of the great number of the damned, the prisoners are heaped together in their awful prison, the walls of which are said to be four thousand miles thick: and the damned are so utterly bound and helpless that, as a blessed saint, saint Anselm, writes in his book on similitudes, they are not even able to remove from the eye a worm that gnaws it.

—They lie in exterior darkness. For, remember, the fire of hell gives forth no light. As, at the command of God, the fire of the Babylonian furnace lost its heat but not its light so, at the command of God, the fire of hell, while retaining the intensity of its heat, burns eternally in darkness. It is a neverending storm of darkness, dark flames and dark smoke of burning brimstone, amid which the bodies are heaped one upon another without even a glimpse of air. Of all the plagues with which the land of the Pharaohs was smitten one plague alone, that of darkness, was called horrible. What name, then, shall we give to the darkness of hell which is to last not for three days alone but for all eternity?

2—The horror of this strait and dark prison is increased by its awful stench. All the filth of the world, all the offal and scum of the world, we are told, shall run there as to a vast reeking sewer when the terrible conflagration of the last day has purged the world. The brimstone too which burns there in such prodigious quantity fills all hell with its intolerable stench; and the bodies of the damned themselves exhale such a pestilential odour that as saint Bonaventure says, one of them alone would suffice to infect the whole world. The very air of this world, that pure element, becomes foul and unbreathable when it has been long enclosed. Consider then what must be the foulness of the air of hell. Imagine some foul and putrid corpse that has lain rotting and decomposing in the grave, a jellylike mass of liquid corruption. Imagine such a corpse a prey to flames, devoured by the fire of burning brimstone and giving off dense choking fumes of nauseous loathsome decomposition. And then imagine this sickening stench, multiplied a millionfold and a millionfold again from the millions upon millions of fetid carcases massed together in the reeking darkness, a huge and rotting human fungus. Imagine all this and you will have some idea of the horror of the stench of hell.

3—But this stench is not, horrible though it is, the greatest physical torment to which the damned are subjected. The torment of fire is the greatest torment to which the tyrant has ever subjected his fellow creatures. Place your finger for a moment in the flame of a candle and you will feel the pain of fire. But
our earthly fire was created by God for the benefit of man, to maintain in him
the spark of life and to help him in the useful arts whereas the fire of hell is
of another quality and was created by God to torture and punish the unre-
pentant sinner. Our earthly fire also consumes more or less rapidly according
as the object which it attacks is more or less combustible so that human inge-
nuity has even succeeded in inventing chemical preparations to check or
frustrate its action. But the sulphurous brimstone which burns in hell is a sub-
stance which is specially designed to burn for ever and for ever with un-
 speakable fury. Moreover our earthly fire destroys at the same time as it burns
so that the more intense it is the shorter is its duration: but the fire of hell has
this property that it preserves that which it burns and though it rages with in-
credible intensity it rages for ever.

—Our earthly fire again, no matter how fierce or widespread it may be, is
always of a limited extent; but the lake of fire in hell is boundless, shoreless
and bottomless. It is on record that the devil himself, when asked the ques-
tion by a certain soldier, was obliged to confess that if a whole mountain were
thrown into the burning ocean of hell it would be burned up in an instant like
a piece of wax. And this terrible fire will not afflict the bodies of the damned
only from without but each lost soul will be a hell unto itself, the boundless
fire raging in its very vitals. O, how terrible is the lot of those wretched be-
ings! The blood seethes and boils in the veins, the brains are boiling in the
skull, the heart in the breast glowing and bursting, the bowels a redhot mass
of burning pulp, the tender eyes flaming like molten balls.

—And yet what I have said as to the strength and quality and boundless-
ness of this fire is as nothing when compared to its intensity, an intensity
which it has as being the instrument chosen by divine design for the punish-
ment of soul and body alike. It is a fire which proceeds directly from the ire
of God, working not of its own activity but as an instrument of divine
vengeance. As the waters of baptism cleanse the soul with the body so do the
fires of punishment torture the spirit with the flesh. Every sense of the flesh
is tortured and every faculty of the soul therewith: the eyes with impenetr-
able utter darkness, the nose with noisome odours, the ears with yells and
howls and execrations, the taste with foul matter, leprous corruption, name-
less suffocating filth, the touch with redhot goads and spikes, with cruel
tongues of flame. And through the several torments of the senses the immor-
tal soul is tortured eternally in its very essence amidst the leagues upon leagues
of glowing fires kindled in the abyss by the offended majesty of the Om-
nipotent God and fanned into everlasting and ever increasing fury by the
breath of the anger of the Godhead.

Consider finally that the torment of this infernal prison is increased by the
company of the damned themselves. Evil company on earth is so noxious
that even the plants, as if by instinct, withdraw from the company of what-
soever is deadly or hurtful to them. In hell all laws are overturned: there is no
thought of family or country, of ties, of relationships. The damned howl and
scream at one another, their torture and rage intensified by the presence of be-
ings tortured and raging like themselves. All sense of humanity is forgotten.
The yells of the suffering sinners fill the remotest corners of the vast abyss. The mouths of the damned are full of blasphemies against God and of hatred for their fellow sufferers and of curses against those souls which were their accomplices in sin. In olden times it was the custom to punish the parricide, the man who had raised his murderous hand against his father, by casting him into the depths of the sea in a sack in which were placed a cock, a monkey and a serpent. The intention of those lawgivers who framed such a law, which seems cruel in our times, was to punish the criminal by the company of hateful and hurtful beasts. But what is the fury of those dumb beasts compared with the fury of execration which bursts from the parched lips and aching throats of the damned in hell when they behold in their companions in misery those who aided and abetted them in sin, those whose words sowed the first seeds of evil thinking and evil living in their minds, those whose immodest suggestions led them on to sin, those whose eyes tempted and allured them from the path of virtue. They turn upon those accomplices and upbraid them and curse them. But they are helpless and hopeless: it is too late now for repentance.

VOCABULARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strait (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflagration (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fetid (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parricide (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similitudes (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prodigious (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noisome (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allured (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offal (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pestilential (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>execrations (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upbraid (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE FACTS

1. How thick are the walls of hell?
2. What peculiar characteristics does the fire of hell have?
3. What is the greatest physical torment that the damned of hell suffer?
4. What is the source of the fire in hell?
5. How were parricides punished in olden times?

THE STRATEGIES

1. Examine carefully this description of hell. What is its overall structure? How are its paragraphs deployed?
2. Examine paragraph 4. How is it developed? What is its purpose?
3. What is the purpose of mentioning the "earthly prisons" in paragraph 1?
4. Examine paragraph 5. How is this paragraph structured? What technique does the writer use to make his description so vivid?
5. In the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the preacher delivers this description of hell in a sermon. Identify at least one technique that the preacher uses to involve his listeners in the description.

**THE ISSUES**

1. For the most part, modern minds have rejected the medieval view of a physical hell, where the damned suffer such tortures as heat, cold, foul smell, laceration, and persecution from demons. What, if anything, has replaced this notion of hell?

2. In your view, why do many people believe in paradise and hell? What disadvantage or advantage does the lack of belief in these places provide?

3. What effect do you think this sermon on hell might have on young boys listening to it? What is your opinion of the technique used?

4. Is torture as a means of punishment ever justified in a civilized society? Why or why not?

5. A portion of Dante's hell was reserved for those who encouraged others to sin. Where in this excerpt does Joyce express a similar idea? Why do both Dante and Joyce call down a harsh judgment on those who aid and abet evil?

**SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING**

1. Write an essay on hell as it is described here, arguing for or against a belief in its existence.

2. Write a brief description of heaven following the example of this selection.

**A WORN PATH**

Eudora Welty