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| Bloomsday |
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| Bloomsday, June 16th, is an annual global literary holiday honouring the characters of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*; the celebrations are marked by readings, reenactments, pub-crawls, and other activities relating to passages from the novel. The day takes its name from the protagonist of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, whose odyssey through Dublin on Thursday, June 16, 1904, provides the narrative thrust of the story. Joyce chose the date for the diurnal narrative since it marks his first date with his future wife, Nora Barnacle. |
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Will anybody remember this date?’ (*James Joyce’s Manuscripts and Letters at the University of Buffalo* 103).  On June 27, 1929, the 25th anniversary of Bloom’s peregrinations, Adrienne Monnier hosted the *Déjeuner Ulysse* at the Hôtel Léopold in Les Vaux-de-Cernay (just outside Versailles) in order to celebrate the release of the French edition of *Ulysses* published by her bookshop, la Maison des amis des livres, in February earlier that year. This was exactly seven years after her partner, Sylvia Beach, had published the first English edition at her bookshop Shakespeare & Co. across the street on rue de l’Odéon. Monnier’s guests included Édouard Dujardin, Paul Valéry, Philippe Soupault, Jules Romains, Léon-Paul Fargue, Samuel Beckett, Thomas McGreevy, and others. On the way home from the luncheon, ‘Beckett kept imploring Joyce to have the bus stopped so they might have a drink at some wayside cafe; Joyce several times obliged him, rousing Paul Valéry and Adrienne Monnier to anger. At last Beckett had to be, as Joyce said, “ingloriously abandoned by the Wagonette in one of those temporary palaces which are inseparably associated with the memory of the Emperor Vespasian”’ (Ellmann 616).  The first official ‘Bloomsday’, as the event is known today, was organized in Dublin on June 16, 1954, by John Ryan and Brian O’Nolan (also known as Flann O’Brien, Myles na Gopaleen, etc.). Ryan, co-founder of the Irish literary magazine *The Envoy*, had edited a special issue on James Joyce in April 1951 and wanted to mark the 50th anniversary of Bloom’s journey with a ‘pilgrimace’ (Ryan and Donleavy). O’Nolan was writing an article for the *Irish Times* called ‘J-Day’, in which he calls out ‘America’s monopoly of comment on the value of Joyce’s work’ and argues that ‘Joyce was illiterate’ (‘Bloomsday’). In *Dead as Doornails*, Anthony Cronin recalls that Ryan came into Davy Byrne’s pub and indicated that he had a secret plan afoot. Cronin agreed to keep the secret; shortly thereafter, O’Nolan, also demanding secrecy, informed Cronin of ‘the jant’ to celebrate ‘the day of your man’s book’ (Cronin). Each attendee would represent a figure from the novel. The clandestine coterie comprised Ryan (Myles Crawford), O’Nolan (Simon Daedalus and Martin Cunningham), Cronin (Stephen Daedalus), Patrick Kavanagh (the Narrator/Muse), Tom Joyce (a dentist and cousin of Joyce’s) and Dr. A. J. Leventhal (Leopold Bloom), a lecturer at Trinity College, who was chosen by the organizers — apparently unbeknownst to him — to ‘symbolically represent the Jewish community’ (Cronin). The plan was to retrace Stephen Dedalus and Bloom’s steps from Martello Tower to Nighttown. They met at the architect Michael Scott’s house next to the tower the morning of the 16th and, continuing the tone started by Beckett on the 25th anniversary of Bloom’s Day, O’Nolan arrived already drunk; Kavanagh ‘appeared to have been absorbing refreshment by some secret chemical process known only to himself’ (Cronin). Kavanagh and O’Nolan decided to scale a rock face in order to get to the Martello Tower, but, as they climbed, a scuffle ensued and the two had to be pried apart by the rest of the assembly. Two horse-cabs had been hired to take the revellers along Paddy Dignam’s funeral route, where they planned to stop at the various pubs along the way. Joyce’s cousin Tom had inherited the family’s famous tenor voice; he sang James Joyce’s favourite song, ‘Silent, O Moyle, Be the roar of Thy Waters’ as they drove through the city. Though there are conflicting accounts of how the day ended, Cronin says ‘the trip ended happily in the back bar of the old Bailey.’ Once at the pub, ‘another drink seemed more attractive than a long tour of Joycean slums, and the siren call of the long vanished pleasures of Nighttown’ (Costello and Van de Kamp). An 8mm film shot by Ryan, which includes the illustrious authors urinating at Sandymount Strand, is available at openculture.com (‘The First Bloomsday’). A year later, on June 16, 1955, Joyce’s brother Stanislaus died in Trieste.  In 2004, Bloomsday became a flashpoint for the tensions between the James Joyce Estate and Ireland. The Irish Government invested hundreds of thousands of pounds for ‘ReJoyce Dublin 2004’, a celebration of events, public readings, and exhibitions commemorating the 100th anniversary of Bloom’s day. Stephen Joyce, the literary executor of the Joyce Estate, threatened that public readings and the exhibition, ‘James Joyce and *Ulysses*’, at the National Gallery would breach the Estate’s copyright. The *Oireachtas Éireann* (the legislature of Ireland) was forced to pass the emergency ‘Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) [referred to as the ‘James Joyce Bill’]’ so that the celebrations and exhibitions could continue unmolested.  Back in 1954, the *Irish Times* observed, ‘[w]hen the hundredth anniversary of Bloomsday comes round, Leopold Bloom either may be forgotten, or may stand in stony effigy as high as Nelson stands to-day’ (‘Bloomsday’). Over 100 years later, on each June 16, the echoes of Joyce still ring in, and far beyond, the Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis. |
| Further reading:  (Bloomsday)  (Costello and Van De Kamp)  (Cronin)  (Ellmann)  (James Joyce's Manuscripts and Letters at the University of Buffalo: Essays in Culture and Counterculture)  (Joyce and Gilbert)  (Ryan and Donleavy)  (The First Bloomsday: Watch Dublin's Literati Celebrate James Joyce's Ulysses in Drunken Fashion, 1954) |