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Ulysses 1922-2022: Creative Reinventions

Anne Fogarty
University College Dublin

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Joycean anniversaries have always served as important milestones. Inevitably, they further add to Joyce's worldwide brand and cement his value as an incontestably global author. But more importantly they also provide opportunities to revisit and re-evaluate his work for aficionados and open it up for the uninitiated. In Ireland, significant years such as 1982, the anniversary of Joyce's birth, and 2004, the anniversary of Bloomsday, have proven vital for an increased appreciation of Joyce as a writer who directly connects with and speaks to contemporary Ireland. Joyce has in recent decades transmogrified from a scandalous author, upstart outsider, and foreign import to a kindred spirit and congenial but always challenging artistic role model.

2022 marked the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses* on 2 February 1922. Movingly, the no. 1 copy of *Ulysses* signed by Joyce "in token of gratitude" and given to Harriet Shaw Weaver, his British patron and friend, forms a centrepiece of the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) which opened in Autumn 2019. Akin to the *Book of Kells*, it resides in a dimly lit glass case open at the dedication page on the top floor of the museum. Thus, generously but daringly, a book that normally is kept in the vaults away from prying eyes because of its financial and cultural value is given a dedicated public space of its own where it can be viewed by all. It now has become a totemic object in modern day Dublin but also a living force in its cultural scene.

Many of the events to mark the anniversary of *Ulysses* were steered by this new museum. Dublin overall and the Tower in Sandycove in particular may have been deemed an *omphalos* in the "Telemachus" episode but Joyce's work is of course of global interest. This short overview will largely concentrate on events in Dublin in 2022, but they represent only part of a worldwide web of celebratory activities. Cognisant of how easily dedicated acts of homage can get lost, a website sponsored by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (https://ulysses100.ie) and curated by MoLI acted as a portal with the purpose of listing and permanently recording all of the Joyce-related events last year. It brings together a disparate programme of happenings that captures the dynamic nature of current interactions with Joyce's work.

A half-day seminar on 4 February "Translating 'Penelope'", co-organized by Anne Fogarty and Margaret Kelleher, featuring readings by actors, Olwen Fouéré, Christiane Reicke, and Roxana Nic Liam, of sections of the text in French, German, and Irish and papers by Luca

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Crispi (University College Dublin), Valérie Bénéjam (University of Nantes) and Emily Ridge (University of Galway) was one of the first academic occasions re-engaging with *Ulysses* in Dublin in 2022. The readings and papers conjointly drew out the polyvocal nature of Molly Bloom as a figure and of the multiple even opposing ways in which the concluding episode of *Ulysses* may be read. A lecture on 6 October in the James Joyce Centre, North Great George's Street, by Joshua Kotin (Princeton University) analysing the records of Sylvia Beach's lending library in Shakespeare and Co. provided a fascinating set of insights into the reading habits of ex-patriate readers in Paris in the 1920s and early 1930s (the preponderance of whom were women) and their surprising and eclectic interests which do not match our configuration of a modernist canon.

Plurality, openness, and creative plasticity were key aspects of the ambitious *Ulysses 2.2* project led by MoLI in association with Anu theatre company and Landmark productions. Different artists were invited to respond to or riff on each of the eighteen episodes of *Ulysses*. Stretching from February 2022 to February 2023, performances took place at different venues in Dublin and throughout the country. The result is a breath-taking array of innovative and thought-provoking work across a wide span of artistic and academic disciplines. The original and provocative responses moved entirely away from the decorum of Bloomsday on which *Ulysses* is usually performed or read aloud verbatim. These experimental takes on *Ulysses* from numerous different angles dared to be irreverent and not simply to parrot or repeat Joyce's text.

Thus, *The Wandering I* devised by Anne Enright used eye-tracking software to record the eye movements of those reading the opening of *Ulysses*. Readers afterwards were given a personal record of their reading experience and shown where their eyes lingered, where they skipped around and where they circled back. In response to "Calypso", David Bolger of Coiscéim Dance Theatre created, *Go to Blazes*, an evocative, multisensorial installation performed by three dancers, "Promised Land", Fintan O'Toole's re-imagining of "Aeolus" invited audience members in the GPO (General Post Office) to undertake a journey back in time through donning a virtual reality headset and experiencing Edwardian Dublin, especially the panoramic and vertiginous view from the top of Nelson's Pillar, while "Cripping *Ulysses*" was a podcast created by Sinéad Burke in conversation with Rosaleen McDonagh reflecting on disability in "Nausicaa". Three poets, Nidhi Zak/ Aria Eipe, Molly Twomey, and Harry Clifton, were invited to write poems that interacted with the reflections on nationalism and identity in "Cyclops", Paula Meehan contemplating death in "Hades" wrote poems of mourning about the Dublin dead, some of them members of her own family, *For the Hungry Ghosts*, which she performed to the accompaniment of uileann pipe music played by David Power, while Emilie Pine wrote a site-specific play, *All Hardest of Woman*, performed in Holles Street hospital about different women experiencing the tragedy of child loss or dying in child birth, thus fittingly commemorating the absent Mina Purefoy whose birth throes underwrite "Oxen of the Sun". The series ended in February 2023 with *Old Ghosts*, a modern chamber opera composed by Evangelia Rigaki with a libretto by Marina Carr, in which the "Penelope" episode is reinvented without the presence of Molly Bloom as a series of debates between Joyce, Nora, Penelope and Homer. Youtube recordings of most of these performances that range across culinary experiences, rap music, poetry, dance, and ballad singing may be found on MoLI's website thus giving these fresh re-conceptualizations of *Ulysses* a longevity and afterlife.

From 12-18 June 2022, the XXVIII International James Joyce Symposium was co-hosted by Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. Keynote lectures given by the writers Mark O'Connell and Eimear McBride introduced the audience to the viewpoints of younger generation of artists on Joyce and on Dublin's vexed relationship with a writer that it belittles and cold shoulders but also shamelessly exploits. McBride explained that the experience of reading *Ulysses* comes as an affront or an assault and, even if it can never be emulated, it teaches writers about the "creative monomania" that is necessary for a genuinely

radical literary work to be produced. Completing this set of insights into the stances of signal young Irish authors on Joyce, Sally Rooney gave the annual T.S. Eliot lecture on Joyce in the Abbey Theatre on 23 October 2022. In her talk she explored the challenges of reading *Ulysses* which is at once realist and symbolic and that fences with the tradition of the English novel primarily those by male writers. Rooney's reading of *Ulysses* by contrast posited links with novels by women writers whom it seems to circumvent such as Jane Austen. In response to a forbidding culture of expertise and scholarly rectitude, she provocatively concluded that *Ulysses* is worth misreading and misinterpreting and that every reader constructs their own personal version of the text.

The wager of appropriating and rethinking Joyce was also uppermost in an interview conducted by Anne Fogarty on Bloomsday with the novelists Nuala O'Connor and Mary Morrissy, both of whom have written fictions reconceiving Nora Barnacle and imagining the world from her perspective. O'Connor's *Nora,* which in April 2022 was the One Dublin, One Book text that featured in an array of events and talks in the city's libraries, is an evocative bio-fiction which tracks the experiences of Nora Barnacle as she accompanies Joyce on their lifelong odyssey between different European cities. It defamiliarizes the author and also displaces him to create a feminocentric fiction that allows elbow room for Nora's stance on the world. Mary Morrissy's novel, *Penelope Unbound*, which will be published later in 2023 by Banshee Press, is a speculative fiction that rescues Nora Barnacle from the mythology surrounding Joyce by rewriting her story. In this work, she gets fatefully separated from Joyce shortly after arriving in Trieste and returns ultimately to Dublin to become manager of Finns Hotel. Yet the Dublin of the text is still saturated by Joyce's writing especially the stories of *Dubliners*. As both these writers show, it is crucial to rethink Joyce's legacy and to make good the omissions in biographical accounts of him that create stock roles for the women in his life but rarely tarry long enough to dwell on their contribution and distinctive life experience.

By contrast, many of the academic publications in 2022 were at pains to add nuances to our knowledge of *Ulysses* rather than to topple any myths. The landmark *Annotations to James Joyce's "Ulysses"*, edited by Sam Slote, Marc A. Mamigonian, and John Turner, is a hugely informative volume that updates and adds to the glosses of Don Gifford and Weldon Thornton. Drawing on a host of newly available sources and archives, it augments our knowledge of the geography and history of Dublin, the legions of texts referenced by Joyce, and the specific shadings of the language and locutions of *Ulysses*. *The Cambridge Centenary "Ulysses"*, edited by Catherine Flynn, took a contrary approach and avoided minutiae. Aimed at the undergraduate and novice reader, it provides compact overviews of the episodes that synthesize recent scholarship and furnishes in tandem lively podcasts, informed by student interviewers, that open up the text and debate its themes and techniques.

In sum, the commemorative events of 2022 consolidated recent decades of scholarship on Joyce while also reconfiguring his life and work for new readers and taking on his modernist epic for bold, dissenting artistic re-evocations. Indeed, creative riffs on Joyce that dismantled *Ulysses* or even completely set it aside or contested received views of the author's life were strongly in the ascendant. In particular, challenging re-readings of Joyce and *Ulysses* by women artists, activists, and academics were especially to the fore establishing news ways of connecting with but also of interrogating his work and the notion of the solitary, self-sufficient male genius.

Anne Fogarty is Professor of James Joyce Studies at University College Dublin, Ireland, and co-editor with Luca Crispi of the *Dublin James Joyce Journal*. She is co-editor with Timothy Martin of *Joyce on the Threshold* (University Press of Florida, 2005), with Morris Beja of *Bloomsday 100: Essays on "Ulysses"* (University Press of Florida, 2009), with Éilís Ni

Dhuibhne and Éibhear Walshe of *Imagination in the Classroom: Teaching and Learning Creative Writing in Ireland* (Four Courts Press, 2013), with Fran O'Rourke of *Voices on Joyce* (University College Dublin Press, 2015), and with Marisol Morales-Ladrón of *Deirdre Madden: New Critical Perspectives* (Manchester University Press, 2022). She has published widely on aspects of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Irish writing with a particular focus on women authors.

anne.fogarty@ucd.ie