

A Hundred Bloomsdays Flower : How Writers Have Remade Joyce's Feast Day

A paper written by Philip Harvey for Bloomsday in Melbourne, 16th of June 2023 and read at the annual seminar upstairs at the Imperial Hotel, corner Bourke and Spring Streets in Melbourne, on Sunday the 18th of June.

Foreword

Who killed James Joyce?
I, said the commentator,
I killed James Joyce
For my graduation.

What weapon was used
To slay mighty Ulysses?
The weapon that was used
Was a Harvard thesis.

How did you bury Joyce?
In a broadcast Symposium.
That's how we buried Joyce
To a tuneful encomium.

Who carried the coffin out?
Six Dublin codgers
Led into Langham Place
By W.R. Rodgers.

Who said the burial prayers? —
Please do not hurt me —
Joyce was no Protestant,
Surely not Bertie?

Who killed Finnegans?
I, said a Yale-man,
I was the man who made
The corpse for the wake man.

And did you get high marks,
The Ph.D.?

I got the B.Litt.
And my master's degree.

Did you get money
For your Joycean knowledge?
I got a scholarship
To Trinity College.

I made the pilgrimage
In the Bloomsday swelter
From the Martello Tower
To the cabby's shelter.
(Kavanagh 239)

Patrick Kavanagh's poem "Who Killed James Joyce?" was written in 1951, three years before the famous Bloomsday excursion Kavanagh, Flann O'Brien and their literary friends made from Sandy Cove Martello Tower on the day in question, making it as far as the second pub. The poem encapsulates a view held by Dublin writers of the time, that James Joyce had become a product of American academe, separated from Joyce's proper place in the heart of the Hibernian Metropolis. They were out to reclaim Joyce for Ireland.

The word Bloomsday does not appear in 'Ulysses'. To believe Richard Ellmann and other biographical sources, the word emerged into usage in Parisian literary circles during the 1920s, as the meaning of One Day in the Life of Leopold Bloom, a wordplay on Doomsday. The word took imaginative hold of the readership. June 16 was set aside for parties of the cognoscenti, for celebratory readings and discussion of this amazing new fictional tour de force in the French capital. It was a case of being in-the-know.

Today it is commonplace to describe Bloomsday as a literary secular feast day. The global outbreak of celebrations that began in the 1990s has still not been adequately analysed as a cultural phenomenon. This happened 70 years after publication of 'Ulysses' and coincidentally, or not, with the takeover of the computer and online as universal means of communication. The biblical 70 years represents a whole lifetime of absorbing the shock of the new. Documentation of Bloomsday today has reached extravagant proportions, though not as extravagant as the literature surrounding 'Ulysses' itself.

One creative response to the Bloomsday phenomenon comes in the form of fiction. Today I wish to introduce you to six novels (there are others) in which Bloomsday is a main theme and driving force of narrative. Read in chronological order they describe the changing nature of Bloomsday celebrations in the past sixty years and writers' different ways of responding to 'Ulysses' in creative acts of fiction. They are a subset, too, of Ulysses reception history.

My readings of these books are posted individually on this site under the heading 'Bloomsday Novels'. The posted readings are longer than in the paper itself, which had to be tailored to 30 minutes reading time:

'The James Joyce murder', by Carolyn Gold Heilbrun, writing under the penname Amanda Cross (1967, American)
'Cicada Gambit', by Martin Johnston (1983, Australian)
'The Death of a Joyce Scholar' by Bartholomew Gill (1989, American)
'The Bloomsday Dead', by Adrian McKinty (2006, Irish)
'South of Broad' by Pat Conroy (2009, American)
'Further Adventures of James Joyce' by Colm Herron (2010, Irish) –
unavailable at time of writing
'Dublinesque', by Enrique Vila-Matas (2012, Spanish)
Bloomsday Novels 1967 (American): 'The James Joyce murder', by Carolyn Gold Heilbrun, writing under the penname Amanda Cross

The Prologue to Amanda Cross's 'The James Joyce murder' opens thus:

James Joyce's Ulysses, as almost everybody knows by now, is a long book recounting life in Dublin on a single day: June 16, 1904. It was on June 16, 1966, exactly sixty-two years later, that Kate Fansler set out for a meeting of the James Joyce Society, which annually held a "Bloomsday" celebration.

(Cross 9)

Fansler is a literature professor at a New York university, and also a detective, all fourteen books in the Kate Fansler series (1964-2002) having connections with academe and publishing. This is the third in the series.

Adopting what she hoped was a properly Joycean attitude, Kate reminded herself that she would be approaching the Gotham Book Mart, home of the James Joyce Society, at almost the same hour in which Leopold Bloom, the hero of *Ulysses*, had walked out upon Sandymount Beach. "And had I any sense at all," Kate thought, "I would be on a beach myself." But having become temporary custodian of the Samuel Lingerwell papers, and thus unexpectedly involved in the literary correspondence of James Joyce, Kate thought it only proper that she attend tonight's celebration.

The Gotham Book Mart, on New York's West Forty-seventh Street, welcomes members of the James Joyce Society into a room at the rear of the shop. Kate was somewhat surprised to discover how many men were present – not only prominent Joyce scholars, but young men, the sort one least expected to encounter at the meetings of a literary society. But the reason was not far to seek. Writing their doctoral dissertations on Joyce, they hoped to come upon some secret, still undiscovered clue in the labyrinth of his works, which would make their academic fortune. For Joyce had by now, in the United States, added to all his other magic powers that of being able to bestow an academic reputation.

(Cross 9-10)

There are passing references to Joyce throughout this murder mystery novel, though most of the action centres in the Berkshires County of Massachusetts, where English Literature academics in weekenders meet the world of dairy farmers and the great unread. The chapters use the titles of stories in *Dubliners*, witty allusions being made to these titles in their respective chapters, and most of the action occurs in and around Amanda Cross's resident town of Alford, disguised under the name Araby. Her job is to work with a selected assistant to arrange the Joyce-Lingerwell correspondence stored in a country house. But, being a murder story, there is a murder which she then has to solve.

The Prologue implies that in 1966 Bloomsday is clubbish, a kind of pastime for gentlemen academics and magnet for young male students fishing for a fresh angle for a thesis about *Ulysses*. The plot reinforces Flann O'Brien's jests about Joyce turning into an American university industry, amplified in Patrick Kavanagh's poem. Their 1954 Bloomsday was an all-male show and Kate Fansler makes pointed remarks throughout the novel to the effect that Joyce studies in 1966, and academic life in general, is a man's world. Bloomsday is

a secret meeting for the cognoscenti where men talk to men and women might show up. The nascent feminism animating the whole novel is expressed directly at every turn, as for example when we are told, "Kate [Fansler] was not a member of the James Joyce Society, but the name of Samuel Lingerwell assured her entrance, a welcome, a glass of the Swiss wine Joyce had especially favored." (Cross 10) The reader is led to understand that Joyce is a mine of ideas waiting to be exploited, an object of postgraduate game-playing, brilliant but brittle. It is the monolith of Modernism that can be scaled from any direction. It does not appear that members engage in Joycean festivities beyond the walls of the Society rooms, or university tutorials. It is an event for literary insiders. The ironies of the name of the mythical correspondent Lingerwell, resonate throughout.

Incidentally, the James Joyce Society itself was founded in 1947 and still operates in New York, though not at the Gotham Book Mart, which closed in 2007. It's first member was T. S. Eliot, no less. So this was an established location of Bloomsday and one mode of Joycean enjoyment.

Bloomsday Novels 1983 (Australian): 'Cicada Gambit', by Martin Johnston.

Martin Johnston's novel 'Cicada Gambit' is probably the earliest work of fiction to use Bloomsday itself as an essential element of the story. It is an integral part of the history of Bloomsday in Australia.

In brief, an academic Dr Skogg prepares for his annual solo Bloomsday. Skogg's Dublin is Sydney and his literary celebration of the day is all in his head. He plays all the characters, something different from the social event as it has come to be known worldwide, where group sharing is a primary motive of the festivities. He re-enacts a literary ritual of one. Possibly Skogg is friendless, with no one to share his annual pastime, though Johnston is also making a point about how any novel reader is playing all the characters during the reading of a book, including and not least 'Ulysses'.

Readers of 'Ulysses' instantly recognise why Skogg prepares a breakfast of what is unpoetically described as "offal", in honourable emulation of Bloom's more rhythmic "the inner organs of beast and fowls." (Joyce 48) Skogg's breakfast sounds grossly unappetising, in comic contrast to Bloom's hearty if unkosher start to the day. Later

we find Skogg in the Wessex Hotel, a pub near Circular Quay, where he connects with Vlastos, plying him tipsily and overbearingly with inexplicable questions. Vlastos, the primary narrator, cannot understand why Skogg asks has he read 'Hamlet', for example, and does he want to go to Kings Cross? But Joyceans understand instantly. Skogg wishes to relive the episode in the National Library of Ireland where Stephen Dedalus delivers his theories about Shakespeare, even if the location is a seedy Sydney bar. Skogg wishes to visit a brothel with Vlastos, the main reason being that Vlastos can there play Stephen to his Leopold Bloom and so complete one of Joyce's crucial cyclical themes, the meeting of the lost father with the lost son. Misunderstanding reigns and none of this will happen, due to mutual miscomprehension and Skogg's increasing state of inebriation.

'Cicada Gambit' satirically portrays an academic adrift in his own daydream. It fits into the varying stylistic mode that tells the larger story, heralding Johnston's own absorption of 'Ulysses' and the inspired emulation of several of its features.

Martin Johnston's close friend Nadia Wheatley writes: "Bloomsday (16 June) was always a milestone in Martin Johnston's year. Back in 1972, he had hosted a famous Bloomsday party at which the floor-to-ceiling brick-and-board bookshelves had collapsed onto the assembled guests. And in the novel 'Cicada Gambit', there is a long Bloomsday episode involving the seedy academic Dr Skogg, who gets up that morning knowing (as he always did on Bloomsday) 'that everything was going to go wrong'. Nevertheless, 'he went ahead in the same way every year, obviously expectant that just this once everything would go off perfectly.'" The novel is set in an identifiable present continuous known as the 1970s. Wheatley's memoir confirms the period setting. More importantly, her words reveal Johnston's propensity for self-mockery as, in a very evident way Skogg is doing in outlandish fashion the very thing Martin Johnston did annually for the last eighteen years of his life: he initiates his own Bloomsday celebration. Johnston's self-observation of his own fixation has been applied to a character with very different reasons for reliving Bloomsday.

Wheatley refers to Johnston's negative reactions to the Sydney University English Department and its Leavisite takeover; his experiences were unhappy. In this context, it makes perfect sense to read Dr Skogg as a veiled portrait of Professor Samuel Goldberg,

Australian literary critic of Joyce. This surmise is supported by the character's two presiding areas of academic pursuit, Augustan literature and James Joyce – like Goldberg. This is where the comparison ends for, unlike Goldberg, it is Johnston who mounted personal celebrations of Bloomsday each year with his friends. Yet, Skogg seems to be a composite of two different aspects of his own character: a reader so enthused by 'Ulysses' that he ritualises its contents each year and the deluded professor of English literature that Johnston himself may have become. Such was Johnston's animus towards Sydney University, there is an apocalyptic chapter in 'Cicada Gambit' in which a protest in the streets of Sydney turns into a rampage where the protesters turn towards the university precinct and proceed to burn down the Fisher Library.

Johnston's novel raises the issue of different claims made on Ulysses by academe, bohemia, publishing and reviewing, the common reader, and even the educated and uneducated reader, i.e. the issue of joint sharing of the work. Who owns Joyce? Johnston does not try to answer the question, he simply does what novelists do, he illustrates the dilemma.

Bloomsday Novels 1989 (American): 'The Death of a Joyce Scholar' by Bartholomew Gill

The theme of the death of the author is transfigured in Gill's Peter McGarr detective mystery. The scholar, who is found dead from a knife wound in a laneway at the back of the Glasnevin Cemetery soon after June 16, is described as having an uncanny resemblance to the author himself, as though the best way to get over the anxiety of influence generated by Joyce is to kill off a lookalike of him. This scholar is about to launch a new Joyce study with the pretentious title 'Phon/Antiphon' (the slash denotes its academic provenance) and though a professor at TCD, he lives (or rather, lived) in a reconverted warehouse with his wife and nine children in the Liberties. Comic contrasts abound as a cast of Dublin types, most of them with a motive for murder, populate the pages. Central is McGarr himself, head of the Murder Squad of the Garda at Dublin Castle, a quintessential Dubliner yet who, much to his wife's amusement when she finds out, has never read Ulysses. At one stage, he ponders his investigation of those responsible for the death of the Joyce scholar, Kevin Coyle, as follows:

It was beginning to irk him that so much of what seemed increasingly important in the Coyle case came cloaked in literary obscurity. Could the whole world be divided into those who had read and understood *Ulysses*, the rest of Joyce, the *novels* of Sam Beckett, and the works of Kevin Coyle, and those poor benighted, inconsiderable groundlings who did not?
(Gill 147)

You can see why McGarr is a detective. He asks all the right questions. Dublin itself is thus divided into those who have read at least some of *Ulysses*, and those who have not. Also, importantly if you are a Dubliner, you have to have an opinion about *Ulysses*, at least one if not hundreds.

For our purposes today though, Kevin Coyle, the murder victim, was the invited drawcard of a commercial venture known as Joyce's Ireland and Bloomsday Tours Limited, operating out of Nassau Street. In other words, he was the brains fronting an outfit interested in cashing in quick on the popularity of Bloomsday. Indeed, everyone here is out for some cash in a hurry, just one motive for murder, that in this book includes sexual favours, professional jealousy, academic politics, mistaken identity, familial connivance, business rivalries, pathological violence, insuperable arrogance, drunken stupidity, and simply the opportunity so to do, murder. I will leave you to figure out who did it, and why, at your leisure.

In this book, Bloomsday is a commercial proposition, a means of separating tourists from their dollars, given that by 1989 Joyce is turning into one of the city's main attractions. Initially the investigation is troubled by the thought that the culprit may be a "foreigner ... [who] had come to Ireland specifically for the Bloomsday event [and] might well have already left the country." (Gill 68) The detectives later find that Bloomsday Tours have "all eighty-six names and addresses on disk" (probably a floppy disk) and that a printout could be provided of all "seventy-three who live outside the country." (Gill 94) We can see why the novel itself is a Bloomsday selling device for American visitors.

We are told that "on the day before the morning on which [Coyle] was found, a colleague from Trinity had employed him to act as a kind of narrator/actor in the yearly tour that the professor organized for literati and other interested parties ...they had been wont to

conduct their guests around *Ulyssean* Dublin, frequenting mainly pubs.” (Gill 35) This tour, Gill calls it a “literary holiday”, visits the sites of the book – the Martello Tower, Sandymount Strand, Eccles Street, Davy Byrne’s “moral hotel” – but not by foot. “The bus is a lovely big thing with plenty of windows, soft stuffed seats, air-conditioning,” in which Kevin Coyle recited relevant passages and offered commentary. This went all day, concluding at McGarrity’s Lounge Bar where according to a witness Coyle “removed the Dedalus boater and his glasses and donned a lady’s shift and sleeping bonnet and gave us Molly Bloom’s soliloquy.” (Gill 83) This is not the only book that references Bengal Terrace in Glasnevin, the “murdering ground” where the Childs brothers murder was committed in 1898, a case that is referred to several times in *Ulysses* itself. It is in this vicinity that Coyle’s body is found, with a single knife wound to the heart. The nexus between academe and popular urban life is drawn by the author, the balance of high and low brow that drives every page of the novel. But Bloomsday itself by 1989 is done in comfort. It’s a day in the sun and a night on the tiles.

Bloomsday Novels 2006 (Irish): ‘The Bloomsday Dead’, by Adrian McKinty

The opening line of ‘The Bloomsday Dead’, by Adrian McKinty is a coded message about a secret hotel location that reads “State LY Plum P. Buck Mulligan” and the last word of the novel is “Yes”, but everything in between bears no resemblance to ‘Ulysses’. The book is a “tangled and bloody odyssey through Dublin and Belfast ... [a] well-paced edgy thriller” (McKinty Back cover) about a hitman called “the fucking unkillable Michael Forsythe”; it’s the finale of a series called *The Dead Trilogy*. In essence, Forsythe has come back to Ireland to help mobster boss Bridget Callaghan find her kidnapped daughter Siobhan, his modus operandi being to kill virtually everyone who gets in his way, whether they are police, IRA operatives, petty crooks, or anyone else who is in the wrong place at the wrong time. This mounting list of fatalities amounts to the Bloomsday dead of the title. This is because it so happens Forsythe flies into Dublin on the 16th of June 2004, the centenary of the setting of Joyce’s novel. The hitman is an eyewitness to the celebrations, which is convenient as he has just had to kill a dodgy taxi-driver who may have had a contract out on him.

I turned a corner and found that I was at Trinity College.

Excellent.

I ran in through the gates and chucked myself into a seething mass of students, visitors, and other extras in my little scene.

Total chaos.

Even more chaos than usual, which meant that a big party of tourists had just arrived, or that it was exam time, or graduation.

“What’s the *craic*?” I asked a forlorn girl who was looking everywhere for her friends.

“It’s the parade,” she said and pointed to a corner of the quad where a big disorganised line had formed and was filing out into the street. I saw then that it was part of the Bloom thing. The kids were all dressed in Edwardian gear, some were riding old-fashioned bicycles, and there was even a horse-drawn omnibus pulling drunken members of a rugby team.

As good a place as any.

I joined the procession just as the two peels arrived at the college gates. One of them still had his cigarette in his mouth. Jesus, didn’t they want to catch me? Let go your fag, you cheap Mick flatfoot.

(McKinty 55)

Peels are the police. They are in hot pursuit, or rather lukewarm pursuit. But what we notice is that Bloomsday is a fully organised perambulation of the city open to anyone who is interested. Even an escaping murderer can meld into the crowd, aided by a purloined period costume that he throws over his leather jacket, just for the occasion.

Now I was in a parade of a couple of hundred similarly dressed and high-spirited students heading for O’Connell Street. Like to see them find me now.

We marched merrily away from Trinity and turned north.

I wasn’t that familiar with Ulysses but it was an easy assumption that a lot of the weans were dressed as characters from the book. There were barbers, undertakers, bookies, priests, nuns, all of them in old-timey gear and most so cute you could forgive them for being young, exuberant, and irritating. And besides, they’d saved my hide.

Some of them were drinking and I got passed a can of Guinness, which I took gratefully.

(McKinty 56)

Another detail of interest is when Forsythe goes to the credit exchange and the girl doing the transaction greets him with “Happy

Bloomsday.” He replies, “Thanks, happy Bloom to you, too, love.” This is a greeting that could only happen in modern Dublin. It is certainly not going to happen in Belfast, where the action shifts for the second half of the story. Indeed, Bloomsday goes from being a huge public event in Dublin to entirely absent up north in Belfast, the only reminder of Joyce being the chapter headings, e.g. ‘Scylla and Charybdis’, when Forsythe must visit the Linen Hall Library to investigate the chief of the IRA who is writing his memoirs there. The disappearance of Bloomsday in the second half of the book leaves the reader wondering what the relationship might be between Ireland’s second-largest city and Ireland’s most famous novel.

Bloomsday Novels 2009 (American): ‘South of Broad’ by Pat Conroy

The story of ‘South of Broad’ by Pat Conroy opens on 16th of June 1969 in Charleston, South Carolina. It is the day the narrator, Leopold Bloom King, learns that his brother, Stephen Dedalus King, has inexplicably committed suicide. The reasons for this act are one of the dramatic threads that keep a tight hold on the reader for the next 20 years and 600 plus pages. Here is Leo, Leopold Bloom King’s apologia for his childhood:

Of all the elements of my childhood that rang a false note, I was the only kid in the American South whose mother had received a doctorate by writing a perfectly unreadable dissertation on the religious symbolism in James Joyce’s equally unreadable Ulysses, which I considered the worst book ever written by anyone. June 16 was the endless day when Leopold Bloom makes his nervous Nellie way, stopping at bars and consorting with whores and then returning home to his horny wife, Molly, who has a final soliloquy that goes on for what seemed like six thousand pages when my mother force-fed me the book in tenth grade. Joyce-nuts like my mother consider June 16 to be a consecrated mythical day in the Gregorian calendar. She bristled with uncontrollable fury when I threw the book out the window after I had finished it following an agonizing six months of unpleasurable reading.

(Conroy 342-352 ebook)

Leo is resentful. His exaggerations command rhetorical attention. He is sensitive and messed up. He has no time for his namesake, has a deep resistance to learning, and his learned mother. It comes as no surprise on this evidence that public celebrations of Bloomsday are

not evident high profile in Charleston and certainly were not in 1969. Nothing of that sort is described in 'South of Broad'. Instead, Leo's mother, Lindsey, carries her belief in Ulysses like a one-person crusade in a society that focusses on sport, the star system, and an inerrant faith in the greatness of Charleston's respectable colonial American past. South of Broad Street is that part of the old city first settled by planters on the peninsula in the 17th century. The city is named for King Charles II and you will be reminded of this from time to time.

The novel is a family saga in which Bloomsday serves as the origin day of all the tragedies that befall the family. Leo's mother is an ex-nun. She wrote her Joyce thesis when she was still Sister Norberta in the convent. The 16th of June was the day she entered the convent, also the day each year when her future husband, the admirable Jasper, brought gifts to the community of sisters, pretext for seeing Norberta, his future wife. Her thesis is about Catholic symbolism in Ulysses and, indeed, the Catholic Church is a target of Pat Conroy's social analysis, together with other deeply unresolved areas of conflict in Charleston society, which include racism, feminism, gender relations, the AIDS crisis, money and class, Southern snobbery and exclusion, and the thin veneer of celebrity culture. Curiously, almost everyone seems to know what the book Ulysses is, because it's one of those things right thinking people know about. Few people have read it right through, or know what's in it.

Like characters we have already met, Bloomsday is for Lindsey a private devotion, a hallowed day that cannot be properly shared with those around her. Her dedication is religious, such that she is often found reading her worn-out copy for some new revelation as though it were a book of hours. The planning around the launch of her collected essays on Joyce is delicate, we are led to understand, because such literary exoticism is a specialist preserve of ladies societies; no one else is there to help.

Like Joyce, Conroy sets out to celebrate a city. Like Joyce with Dublin, Conroy's love of Charleston is mixed with a more than honest presentation of its negative and self-absorbed aspects. We see this played out in the lives of Lindsey's sons, with a mixture of pleasure and grief, such that one phrase of Conroy's directs us close to the mood of the whole novel; we find ourselves in "the spectral garden of James Joyce." (Conroy 2162) It is a spectre originating in Bloomsday

itself. When her husband dies, Lindsey returns to live out her last years in the same convent she had left some decades before.

Bloomsday Novels 2010 (Spanish): 'Dublinesque', by Enrique Vila-Matas

Like Martin Johnston, the Spanish novelist Enrique Vila-Matas is concerned as much with the Bloomsday going on in his main character's head, as in any objective account of the day's activities. We reach page 214 of 'Dublinesque' before finding a description of a public reading of Ulysses happening in Meeting House Square in Temple Bar, Dublin. It's being read in sequence by a succession of politicians, celebrities, authors, academics, punters, and chancers, in much the same fashion as readings were made at Collected Works Bookshop in Melbourne, going back at least to the 1980s. The main character, Samuel Riba, is a jaded publisher of experimental fiction. He is writing into his commonplace book a list of attendees in the enthusiastic crowd: "A man dressed as the 'inner landscape of a skull'. A wonderful fat girl who thinks she's Molly Bloom ... A Portuguese man dressed up as David Hockney! 'Full devotion to funerals!' Nietzsche says. He's probably been drinking again ... A man in a raincoat bearing a quite astonishing resemblance to Beckett as a young man." (Vila-Matas 216) And so on for some time, in Joycean mode.

Meanwhile, up on the stage, the reading of Joyce's novel continues. Simon Dedalus, Martin Cunningham and John Power are already sitting in the hearse and chapter six is trotting along at the same pace as the horses towards Prospect Cemetery. ... 'It's really a requiem for my profession and above all for me, as I'm all washed up,' Riba says to Javier as he glances anxiously at Bev, as if wanting to point out to his friend that he's saying all of this because she reminds him that he's old now and mortal and after all he's nearly sixty and seducing her will not be the easy task it might once have been for him.' (Vila-Matas 218)

Javier is one of Riba's stable of authors. He replies to Riba's morbid introspection about writing, publishing, and everything else: 'You don't have to convince me of anything any more ... And even less when we're on the sixth chapter already and I'm feeling imbued with your idea for the requiem. I've even thought about writing a story

about someone who holds funerals all over the world, funerals in the form of works of art. What do you think? It's someone trying to learn to say goodbye to everything ... Saying goodbye to Joyce and the age of print is not enough for him and he starts to turn into a collector of funerals.'

(Vila-Matas 218)

Riba has asked his published friends to Dublin on Bloomsday for this very purpose, to play out a requiem for the print book. They have flown in from different parts of the world, clearly prepared to humour the indulgent melancholy of their publisher and provider. It is the noughties, when myths developed about digital replacing print sometime very soon, with literature under threat from all sorts of technological breakthroughs. A requiem for the age of print seems appropriate to them, now the internet and all its works have taken over. However, not everything is Hispanic doom and gloom on Bloomsday. Meeting at Sandycove Martello Tower at quarter to 4 in the afternoon, Riba's literary coterie agree to become the first members of the Order of the Knights of Finnegans, a madcap idea of Nietzsche's and possibly a way out of their fixation on funerals, or as Joyce once called them, funferalls.

They're alone on the gunrest, but Riba has the feeling that the wind is carrying broken words and that, what's more, there's a ghost hidden on the spiral staircase. Javier, who hates Ulysses, is pretending he's Buck Mulligan and shaving his chin. Nietzsche reads the rules he drew up yesterday: 'The Order of Finnegans has as its sole purpose the veneration of James Joyce's novel Ulysses. The members of this society are obliged to honour the work and to attend Bloomsday every year and, when possible, go to the Martello tower in Sandycove and to feel there that they are part of a now ancient race that began like the sea, without name or horizon, and which today is in danger of dying out ...'

In quite a hurry and after the symbolic inauguration of the knights, it's decided that every year one new member can be admitted, 'only if and when three-quarters of the Knights of the Order agree to it.'

(Vila-Matas 225)

Another stipulation is that each year they will then retire by foot to Finnegans lounge in Dalkey for celebrations, though on this the very first occasion they skip this rule and catch the Dart back to Dublin. This curious male-oriented secret society apparently has taken on its

own life outside the novel, with a new nominations made each year by email. You can follow progress by googling 'knights of finnegan'.

Afterword

I wish to conclude with a second Bloomsday poem, this one written in 2021 by the poet Mary O'Donnell, "My Mother says No on Bloomsday."

It is not easy, it is not easy
to wheel an old woman to the shower

on Bloomsday, when the world
and Molly cry *yes, yes, yes,*

and she is saying *no, no, no,*
because what's left of her life

depends on the freedom of No.
How Joycean of her

to resist the cleaned-up conscience
of filial attention, your need

to fix her taints and odours,
wash hair and teeth,

attend to toes when all she wants
is to float on the lily-leaf of her own

green bedspread, drowsing Molly
in a tangle of snow-white hair.

Now, dreams enclose her
more than talk of showers or meals,

the flowing waters of memory
rise and touch her skin

just where the mattress eases
spine and bones

in that yellow-walled room.
Hello, my darling, she greets

his photograph, flinging kisses
towards mottled frame.

To her then,
the logic of love,

to her, the logic of *No*,
her tongue untameable.

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