



Bloomsday Montréal: Two Highlights From 5-Day Fest

Description

The Bloody Irish: A Musical and Israelites In Erin: An Epic of Two Races

By **Byron Toben**

The entire schedule for the forthcoming Montreal Bloomsday celebration for this year (June 12-16) was posted in WestmountMag.ca on June 9. As in the past, it featured many walks, dinings, recitations, songs, stories and lectures. We were able to attend only two, a film and the closing lecture.

Here are those two highlights. James Joyce's groundbreaking novel, *Ulysses*, is built around the day (June 16, 1904) wherein a fictional Irish Jew, Leopold Bloom, takes a walk around Dublin. It was first published (in serial form) in 1916. Some 60 countries around the world celebrate one-day Bloomsdays, but only Dublin and Montreal feature a week of events.

The Bloody Irish: A Musical

The film commemorates the Easter Rising in Dublin, also in 1916, for the long delayed Irish independence. Evidence of what Joyce thought of that failed effort is sparse but basically unfavourable.

As Cine Gael, our local Irish film festival, showed several films around Easter, it was a valuable addition to the 100th anniversary that Bloomsday Montreal added this wonderful one time showing to the smorgasbord of events. It is difficult to artistically film a stage play, let alone a musical stage play, but the producers did it superbly.

Gus O'Gorman, a mainstay of Cine Gael, led a Q and A afterwards.

G. Bernard Shaw wrote a charming one act based around that period, *O'Flaherty, V.C.*, which I arranged a dramatic reading of back in the day and hope to revive, probably in late September.

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Lecture and book launch of *Israelites In Erin: An Epic of Two Races*



Professor Abby Bender

The Jewish Public library, the Irish Embassy and others cooperated to bring NYU Prof Abby Bender to Montreal to present her latest book, *Israelites In Erin: An Epic of Two Races*. It is further described as Jewish and Irish Memory in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Her fascinating exposition ranged from some British Jews' excavations to find the rumoured ark at Tara to prove that the Irish may be partially descended from the lost ten tribes of Israel to the actual text of *Ulysses* juxtaposed with passages in *Leviticus*. This centred around Rudolph, the fictional father of the fictional Leopold, whom although having converted to Christianity, still maintained a Hagadah book describing the Passover Exodus from slavery in Egypt, which he passed on to Leopold. You have to read the novel to see how this relates to Leopold's connection with Plumtree's Potted Meats and preference for lemon soap.

Pretty exhausting research for a nice Jewish gal. I call her a gal because her youthful appearance led a woman in the audience to question how she had time to do such exhaustive research at a tender age. Her reply was that she is now older than Leopold was on the day of his famous walk. My own research now reveals that to be 38.



Gord Fisch (guitar and vocals), Jessica Gal (fiddle) and Philippe Murphy (Irish flute)

Prof Bender agreed with another audience commentator that *Ulysses* is probably the most popular unread book in the world. It does have its devotees, however, who, like Talmudic scholars analyze each scrap, finding humour and insight in addition to the sensuality. Besides, quipped another, its good practice for Joyce's later *Finnegan's Wake*.

Howard Krosnick of the Jewish Public Library (now in its 102nd year) congratulated David and Judith Schurman's fifth year in making Bloomsday an important event on the local calendar. This was reiterated by Irish Ambassador Ray Bassett, who will shortly be retiring after six years here and returning to Dublin, where his family had resided for seven generations.

Accordingly, the three-piece band of Gord Fisch (guitar and vocals), Jessica Gal (fiddle) and Philippe Murphy (Irish flute), which had played some nice Celtic tunes during the welcoming and later during the reception, played the classic *The Parting Glass* for Mr Bassett's return voyage home.

I cannot resist ending by quoting the wonderful passage from G. Bernard Shaw:

A world bereft of both its Irish and its Jews would soon become a tame dull place indeed.



Bloomsday Montréal 2016 ended on June 16.

For info on future activities and plans, check out Bloomsdaymontreal.com

Images: James St-Laurent

Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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1. Review

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1. Bloomsday Montréal
2. Byron Toben
3. culture
4. film
5. Irish
6. James Joyce
7. littérature
8. Ulysses

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