



Joyce's Ulysses explained
by Michael Kenneally

Description

The Concordia professor delivers a fascinating lecture on the seminal James Joyce novel

By **Byron Toben**

The highlight, for me, of the recent **6th annual Festival Bloomsday Montréal**, amid its readings, music, film and pub events, was the lecture on the seminal James Joyce novel *Ulysses*, which describes a day (June 16, 1904) in the life of a fictional Dublin resident, Leopold Bloom.

Bloom, the child of an Irish mother and a Hungarian Jewish immigrant father is still deemed an outsider in the Ireland of the day. In recent years, his character has evolved into a worldwide excuse for parties and celebrations. Over eighty cities around the world participate, including of course, Dublin, where it was held first in 1956, and now reaching as far as Brazil and China.



Professor Michael Kenneally

The novel itself, published in France in 1922 on Joyce's 40th birthday, had a rough time at first. Although praised by T.S. Elliott and Hemingway, it drew disdain from most writers of the day and was banned in the USA until 1934 and the UK until 1936. Eventually, it morphed from its description as being smut to being considered the greatest novel of the 20th century. Kerouac and others were influenced by its "stream of consciousness" style.

It has given rise to many study groups who try to figure out its meaning, justifying the near blind Joyce's prediction that "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant."

Professor Michael Kenneally of Concordia, head of its Irish Studies program gave it a go at the Jewish Public Library, to a packed house, including the **new Irish ambassador to Canada, Jim Kelly. Howard Krosnick**, vice president of the JPL, and himself a long time Joycean, introduced the speaker.

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James Joyce

Kenneally's wide-ranging speech contained many interesting factlets.

Joyce was an accomplished singer, mentored by great John McCormack. He loved puns and allusions. He appreciated the new art of cinema and was the manager for several years of the first movie theatre in Dublin. Hampered by successive eye operations, he required secretaries to read his dictation back to him. (One was the great playwright Samuel Beckett). He was an exacting researcher of accurate street names and times of day.

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All of these interests and peculiarities were mixed in with his knowledge of Homer and the use of Homer's *Odyssey* format of three parts and eighteen episodes as the structural bones of the novel. (Ulysses is the Latin for the Greek Odysseus.)



Woven into all this was Joyce's own literary stand in for himself, Stephen Dedalus, who had appeared in his earlier work *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man* and passages about masturbation and adultery.

I, for one, would love to get a printed copy of Kenneally's address, Yes, yes oh yes.

Adding some musical background to the evening was **The Bombadils** duo of **Sarah Frank** on violin and **Luke Fraser** on guitar who strummed such tunes as *Cliffs of Moher*, *Inis Oir*, and *Rolling Wave*.

Festival Bloomsday Montréal ran from June 10 to 16.

To see the complete program visit bloomsdaymontreal.com

To keep in touch for 2018 contact bloomsdaymontreal@gmail.com

Images: courtesy Festival Bloomsday Montréal

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



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