

# The Last Word Is Yes

## Bloomsday Centennial Celebration

**H**arry Powell, UCSD professor of pathology, was born in Dublin in 1946 — “only five years after Joyce died,” he said. That’s James Joyce, of course. Powell emigrated to the United States in 1970, the year Ireland finally lifted the ban on Joyce’s *Ulysses*. “I was never able to read it in Ireland; I had to wait until I came here.”

The action of the novel takes place in a single day, June 16, 1904, so this year marks its virtual centennial. Powell is part of the committee organizing a celebration in its honor on the UCSD campus.

“It’s a tough book for anybody,” he

said. “But it’s a little easier if you have lived in Dublin and have a feel for the city and a

love for it. Joyce used the expression ‘street furniture.’ Throughout his writings, he names places very broadly. At one point while writing he had a map of Dublin in front of him and a watch in his hand, and he was timing how long it would take each character to progress from one part of Dublin to another. In the story several different people move through the city simultaneously. That’s a very Joycean situation. He used Dublin’s ‘street furniture’ as a vehicle to drive his narrative.”

Joyce is famously said to have boasted that, if the city were destroyed, it could be rebuilt using his descriptions.

Bloomsday, as June 16 is called, is named for the fictional Leopold Bloom, who walks the Dublin streets, attends a funeral, goes to a pub, killing time while

his wife, Molly, entertains her lover in the Blooms’ flat. Eventually, Bloom meets up with Stephen Dedalus, Joyce’s alter ego.

*Q: Is June 16, 1904, ever explicitly mentioned in Ulysses? A: No.*

“You’ll find several references to the Ascot Gold Cup, a horse race,” said Powell. “The newspaper floats down the River Liffey. It carries the names of all the horses who ran that day. You can clearly put a date on the 24 hours of the novel by that event.”

*Q: What horse won the race on the original, actual Bloomsday? A: Throwaway.*

*The Talking Trees*, southwest of Geisel Library, will be programmed to speak *Ulysses*. Inside the library, there will be a special Bloomsday exhibit, dedicated to Patrick Ledden, UCSD mathematics professor (for 36 years) and a James Joyce scholar, who inaugurated UCSD’s first Bloomsday celebrations in the mid-1980s with live readings at the bookstore. Ledden died in October at age 67.

A lunch at the faculty club will consist of what Bloom ate on Bloomsday: a glass of burgundy and a Gorgonzola sandwich. Live readings will follow; volunteers are welcome. In the evening, there will be a dinner: Irish dishes, washed down with Temecula Sangiovese, relabeled Molly’s Soliloquy. (...and yes I said yes I will Yes.)

A trivia contest will be held and prizes awarded.

*Q: What is the novel’s last word and whose word is it? A: The last word is “Yes” and it’s Molly’s.*

Costumes are encouraged, and



James Joyce



Nora Joyce

prizes will be awarded to the best James or Nora Joyce, best Leopold or Molly Bloom, best minor character. “The gals are more excited about it than the guys,” said Suzanne Smith, committee member. “They’re all going to dress up Edwardian. Several ladies already have their hats. The hats will dictate the rest of the outfit.”

May the *Reader* suggest a couple of ideas for those without their own? Gerty MacDowell’s outfit is described exactly by Joyce on page 350 of the Vintage paperback. Or one could simply wear a hat bearing a red letter H, E, L, Y, or S. Men wearing these hats weave in and out of the novel, advertising stationer Wisdom Hely’s. *He read the scarlet letters on their five tall white hats:*

*H. E. L. Y. S... Y lagging behind drew a chunk of bread from under his foreboard, crammed it into his mouth and munched as he walked.*

Larry Brunton, UCSD professor of pharmacology and medicine, is the Bloomsday committee leader. He’ll wear a straw boater if he can find one to fit his large head, he said.

Why are so many non-English department people involved in this? Brunton was asked. “We, too, have marveled that it’s often scientists who are interested, more than the literary types. I think we’re starved. And we love a piece of good literature. And there’s a lot to puzzle out. Joyce spent over a decade writing it, cramming it full of little puzzles and amusements. I think that appeals to the analytical side of scientists.”

Still, Brunton agreed it’s a novel full of human emotion: “Old Leopold Bloom is a pretty common, misplaced little man. And that’s one of the novel’s lessons, I think. There’s a hero’s worth of life in anyone.”

— Jeanne Schinto

**Bloomsday  
Centennial Celebration 2004  
Wednesday, June 16,  
Faculty Club, UCSD  
9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla  
Lunch (noon–2:00 p.m.), \$16;  
afternoon readings  
(2:00–5:00 p.m.), free;  
dinner (5:30–8:30 p.m.), \$36.  
Parking in faculty club lot:  
\$2/3 hrs.  
Info and reservations:  
858-534-0876 or  
[www.bloomsdaysandiego.com](http://www.bloomsdaysandiego.com)**

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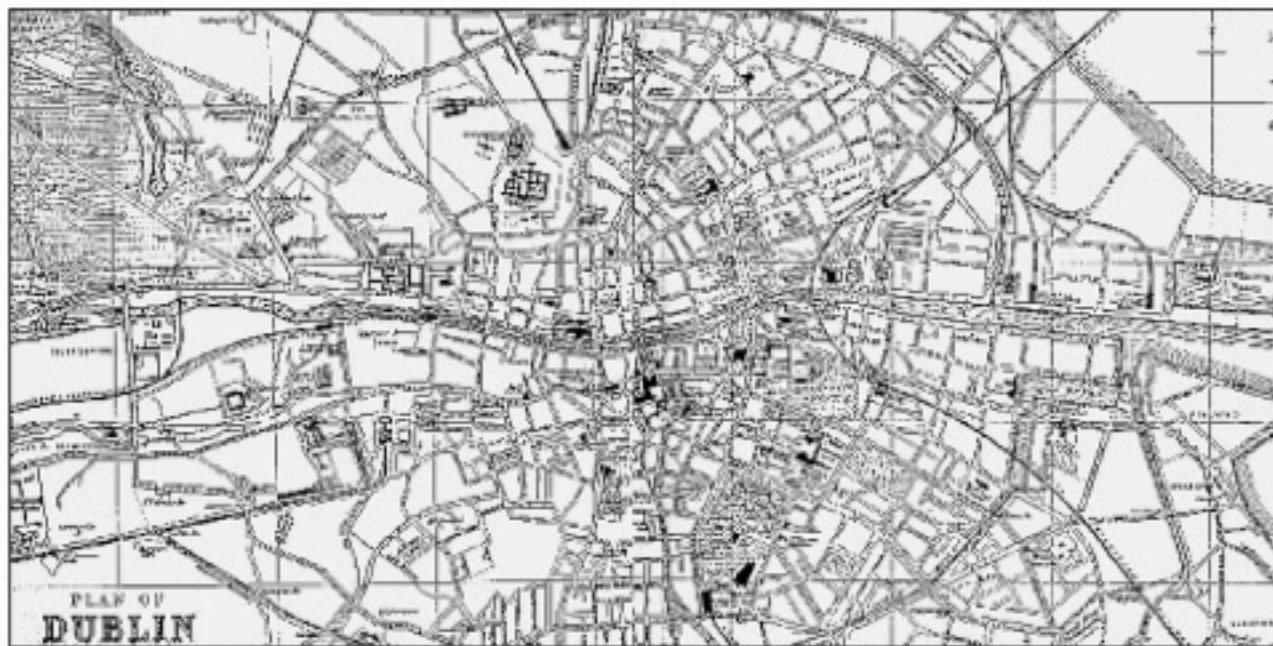
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Dublin, Ireland, c. 1904