



A JOCOSERIOUS EVENT...

This year, the English Seminar hosted its third Bloomsday to commemorate James Joyce's Masterpiece, though it was celebrated on June 14th instead of the traditional June 16th. Though unorthodox, this appeared to have been a good decision in terms of allowing audiences outside of Basel to participate, and there was even a group from the Zurich James Joyce Foundation (8 of them) who came to join in the festivities. In all, we had about 120 people attend Bloomsday, though this figure is inexact as the event started at 4:30pm and finished at midnight, and, much like *Ulysses*,

different hours of the day seemed to garner a different crowd. The rain poured down at 9pm, but luckily this did not affect the culinary odyssey or the performance of the sketches; and the musicians were able to make use of every space of the seminar.

In the wake of the success of last year's culinary odyssey through *Dubliners*, this year's Bloomsday chefs (21 of them!) took on the challenge of demonstrating *Ulysses* from the perspective of the potato and the lemon, two eponymous foods that are mentioned in almost every episode of the novel. The chefs were given a quotation from *Ulysses*, and were asked to create a sweet or savoury dish that incorporated lemons, potatoes, or both – either as an ingredient or in appearance.



The majority of the quotations pertained to the potato talisman that Leopold Bloom keeps in his pocket (about which we learn in the 4th episode, "Calypso," when Bloom is first introduced) or the cake of lemon soap Bloom buys in the 5th episode, "Lotus Eaters," which also accompanies him for the rest of his adventure. Some of the quotations also dealt with potatoes as an emblem of Irishness or the exotic nature of lemons. All of the culinary dishes were extremely impressive!!



Next to each dish, there was a placard detailing the quote, context, and the culinary interpretation. Because of the threat of rain, the odyssey was set up inside the Hörsaal rather than outside.

In addition to a culinary odyssey, I scripted a one-hour performance out of excerpts from the last two episodes of the novel ("Ithaca" and "Penelope"). In "Ithaca," Bloom returns home and the episode is written as a Q&A; in "Penelope," Molly Bloom gives her famous monologue. I shortened the two considerably and, perhaps blasphemously, inserted Molly's monologue as interjections, explanations, and other perspectives to Bloom's responses. The five sketches were staged continuously, and I interpreted the description of "catechetical interrogation" into one of militaristic Grand Inquisition.



1) "Homecoming with a Touch of the Criminal" -- Bloom and Stephen arrive at 7 Eccles Street, only to discover that Bloom has left his key in the pocket of his other trousers. A stratagem ensues, where Bloom endeavours to break into his own house.



This sketch also featured a Fasnacht-style schnitzelbank Helge that condensed some of Bloom's longer answers into "plain English" or provided explanations of Bloom's various stratagems...



2) The second scene, "Hot Cocoa with a Dollop of Anti-Semitism" shows Bloom playing host for Stephen: Bloom treats Stephen to a cup of hot cocoa, and Stephen, in turn, treats Bloom to an anti-Semitic rhyme involving a child whose head is cut off by a jewess.



3) In the third scene, "Bloom's Proposal and the Pissing Contest," Stephen takes his leave of Bloom rather than spending the night. During the leave-taking, Bloom extrapolates about the beauty of the heavens and the moon before

eventually engaging in a literal pissing contest with Stephen.

4) The fourth sketch, "The Trouble with Wives," features Bloom alone with his thoughts. Now, he must confront the events of the day - his wife's flaws (and her rebuttal), the catalogue of his day with all its attendant indignities, the incident in Barney Kiernan's Pub when he had a biscuit tin thrown at his head, the state of the room where his wife has moved all of the furniture, his

marital bed which contains the imprint of another man, providing circumstantial evidence of her adultery. Most importantly, he must decide what to do about his wife and her adultery – does he forgive her and enter the bed? Or is forgiveness or even sleep impossible? Molly in the meantime has been woken by Bloom’s late arrival into their bedroom and, amid thoughts about her recent affair, she is not quite as impervious to the idea that Bloom might also have slept with someone as she wishes us to believe.



5) As in *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom ended the sketches with “Molly’s Last Words.” Here, she remembers Bloom’s proposal, his sensitivity, which she finds attractive, and her ultimate answer of Yes.

Once the sketches were over, the BBQ was in full use and the music began, first with Luas, then The Trøøts, BearHood, and the Human Shields. Lesther Bal-ut (our poster designer and artist) was unfortunately ill so was unable to perform as planned.



I would like to thank the English Seminar for their sponsorship, facilities, and support that makes events like these possible, and I hope to organize another Bloomsday next year!

