

20 Years—Zürich James Joyce Foundation

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Two decades are a long time. Enough for an Odysseus to leave his native Ithaca for Troy and, getting a few obstacles out of the way home, to return and assert himself again.

In May 1985 a comprehensive private Joyce collection was converted into a library and research centre. The former Union Bank of Switzerland made it possible; it had already installed a “James Joyce Pub” whose interior had been transferred from Jury’s Hotel in Dublin’s Dame Street. The initiative made sense, as Joyce can be claimed as a Zürich writer: chance had brought him to the city in 1904 before he was directed to Trieste; in 1915 he resorted to the relative security of the country and stayed until 1919, and about half of the *Ulysses* episodes were composed during that vital period. In 1940 he returned again to Zürich and is now buried in its Fluntern Cemetery. Not to forget that Swiss German also figures in *Finnegans Wake*.

The Zürich James Joyce Foundation started very modestly in an apartment of Augustinergasse, situated in the Old City, just off Bahnhofstrasse, a street reputed for its banks, jewellers and, to the cognoscenti, familiar as the title of one of Joyce’s poems. At first few visitors found their way to the unknown institution. Now, many years later, there is a constant trickle of scholars, students, casual tourists or just anyone interested.

We pride ourselves that we offer the most comprehensive Joyce library in Europe; everything is accessible and within comfortable reach. The Zürich James Joyce Foundation is potentially one of the best places to do research or just to browse. You find most books on Joyce, the standard publications, numerous articles as well as remote offprints. There are a few archives around where you can lay hands on first editions, a *Thom’s Directory* of 1904, a genuine Jacob’s biscuit tin, books that Bloom had in his library, most available facsimiles, original letters and postcards, a moustache cup, caricatures, Joyce T-shirts, conference posters, and photographs of almost two thousand Joyce scholars.

Yet we like to be more than just a library or museum. The

Foundation should less be a stable noun than an active, flexible verb. So very early we started a weekly *Ulysses* reading group, where we go through the book at a leisurely pace, turn up a few stones along the way and discuss whatever seems relevant. Timid readers who were apprehensive to tackle the book on their own have been drawn into its acute and comic humanity and after a few weeks begin to feel at home in it, yet ever on the alert for surprising new turns. At the end of one or more runs they escalate to *Finnegans Wake* and convene on Thursday evening to get lost in its convolutions with perverse enthusiasm. Experience, insights and ignorance are shared. The Foundation, incidentally, does not aim to make converts, but some conversions have in fact occurred.

In what are called “Strauhof Lectures” (after the building we are in), itinerant Joyce scholars talk openly about their expertise, Irish poets have given readings or artists presented their work. Our highlights are the annual international workshops. They occupy one intense week in early August and are conceived as top level, open-ended seminars of up to twenty experts, with generally a sprinkling of promising new talent. We started right away in 1985 and put “Oxen of the Sun” on the first agenda, perhaps the most challenging of all episodes in *Ulysses*. We always focus on one specific theme and approach it from diverse angles in free exchange. The range of topics has reached from Songs to Memory, from Alienation, Homer or Expectation all the way up to Kitsch.

From time to time a special effort was called for to reach a wider public. In 1991 the Foundation assisted in a labyrinthine project, “All Space in a Nutshell”, in the “Strauhof”, the City’s Exhibition Site for Literature, in the same building where we occupy the top floor. Ten years later we ran our own exhibition “James Joyce—‘gedacht durch meine Augen’ / ‘thought through my eyes’”; it was aimed at a visualization of Joyce’s techniques. The latest project so far (entitled “joyce@zürich.zb”) was for the Zürich Zentralbibliothek, where Joyce had consulted books while working on *Ulysses*. Many of our holdings have been exhibited in Barcelona, Feldkirch, Frankfurt, Berlin, Duisburg, or Dublin. Film and television crews have used our archive for documentaries. In 1996 the Foundation took on the 15th International Joyce Symposium. Over the years it has also been instrumental in bringing out a few books.¹

There is no charge, incidentally (except when you bring a whole group along), but some regulars or well-wishers join the “Friends of the Zürich James Joyce Foundation” and pay a modest yearly fee. What accrues in this way is spent on scholarships for promising researchers and projects. It pays to be friendly with the Friends: When you submit a pertinent proposal you might be able to spend two months in the

Foundation to work on your project and take part in our regular activities. Young scholars have come from Ireland, Great Britain, the US, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Poland, Croatia, the Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Israel, and India. This cosmopolitan, all in tune with Joyce's own range, will continue we hope during the next twenty years.

www.joycefoundation.ch

Notes

¹ 1988: Thomas Faerber and Markus Luchsinger, *Joyce in Zürich*; 1992: "Hades", a bilingual edition with notes; 1996: Fritz Senn, *Inductive Scrutinies: Focus on Joyce*, ed. Christine O'Neill; 1998: Ruth Frehner and Ursula Zeller, eds., *A Collideorscape of Joyce: Festschrift for Fritz Senn*; 1999: Fritz Senn, *Nicht nur Nichts gegen Joyce*; 2000: *Joyce's "Penelope"*, trans. Harald Beck; 2000: Ruth Frehner, Ursula Zeller, Hannes Vogel et al, *James Joyce—"gedacht durch meine Augen/thought through my eyes"*.