

NEWS

“Guided Reading” of *Ulysses* in A Coruña.

The interest that Joyce has traditionally sparked in Spain was evident in July 2007 when a “Guided Reading” of *Ulysses* was offered as a summer course in the coastal city of A Coruña (Corunna) by the prestigious *Menéndez Pelayo* International University in conjunction with the “Amergin” University Institute for Irish Studies of the University of A Coruña. The workshops took place in the old library building which houses the Archives of the Kingdom of Galicia and which overlooks the beautiful, if melancholy Gardens of San Carlos where the remains of Sir Thomas Moore, killed while covering the British retreat from Napoleon’s troops in 1809 and celebrated in Charles Woolfe’s well-known poem. The idea of preparing a course based on *Ulysses* in Corunna came from the Director of the “Amergin” Institute, Professor Antonio Raúl De Toro Santos, longstanding Joyce scholar and one of the founding members of the Spanish James Joyce Society. He has written widely on Irish literature and has co-edited a number of volumes on the reception of Joyce and other Irish writers in Spain, and has also organized numerous conferences on Irish Literature (including 2 of the annual Spanish James Joyce Society Conferences). The “Amergin” Institute was inaugurated only four years ago, but has already published eight books, six of which are in the uniform Irish Studies Series. The Institute received its name thanks to a chance idea from a brilliant mind over a glass of Galician wine. Seamus Heaney was in Coruña to receive an Honorary Doctorate, and taking a break from the all the formalities such occasions inevitably entail, he and Antonio de Toro sat down for a glass or two of local wine and a plate of octopus and squid. De Toro, Chair in English Studies at the University, mentioned to the Nobel Prize winner that he was in the process of setting up a multi-disciplinary Research Institute for Irish Studies at the University of A Coruña, the first of its kind in Spain. Heaney was most interested in the idea, and de Toro mentioned the difficulties he was having in coming up with a name. During his stay in Coruña, the County Derry-born poet had shown a great knowledge of, and fascination

with, Galicia, this Iberian "Land's End" which, from time immemorial had claimed a special relationship with her Atlantic "neighbour" Ireland. It was Heaney, then, who suggested that the Institute be named "Amergin" after Ireland's first legendary bard who, according to Irish and Galician myth, had crossed the South-Eastern Atlantic to reach the shores of Ireland from, we are led to believe, the North-West of the Iberian Peninsula, from the country that is now Galicia, a self-governing nation within modern Spain. "Amergin" expressed the links —both perceived and real— which united the two lands, and beautifully summed up de Toro's vision. The "Amergin" University Institute for Irish Studies was to act as a bridge between Ireland and Galicia —and through Galicia to the rest of the Peninsula— and as such was to seek to bring Ireland a little closer to Spain and vice versa.

A first "Guided Reading" took place in 2005 in the historical cathedral town of Mondoñedo, birthplace of the late Galician author Álvaro Cunqueiro, for many one of the forefathers of what would later be known as magic realism, and himself a great admirer of Joyce. The public was varied —ranking from local people to students and teachers spending the summer in the outlying towns— and the atmosphere was enhanced by the magnificent setting of Mondoñedo's 17th century Seminary, which had served as a seat of learning which produced many of the great ecclesiastic figures associated with the Catholic Church in Galicia and, more especially, with various archbishops of Santiago de Compostela.

The success of this first series of workshops led to the Menéndez Pelayo International University approaching Professor de Toro with a view to repeating the experience in its satellite campus in Coruña, where more students would be able to attend. The "Reading" was conducted on a chapter by chapter basis, with specialists from various Spanish universities "leading," as it were, the students through the labyrinth of the novel. As many of the students had little knowledge of English, the translation of the novel by García Tortosa and Venegas Lagüéns was used, and students were asked to have read (or attempted to have read) the chapters to be discussed before the corresponding workshop, Chapters I and II were covered by Amergin's David Clark, while José Antonio Álvarez Amorós, Chair in English at the University of Alicante gave his reading of chapters III and V. Ricardo Navarrete Franco from the University of Seville, himself an accomplished specialist in *Finnegans Wake*, tackled chapters IV and X. Dr Anne MacCarthy from the University of Santiago de Compostela covered chapters VIII and XI, and her colleague Dr Margarita Estévez Súa, another habitual collaborator with "Amergin," led the study of

chapters VII, XIII and XVIII. From the University of Jaén, Carmelo Medina Casado analysed chapters XII and XV with the students. Rafael García León, with his own ironic glimpse at Joyce's oeuvre caused amusement and admiration with his iconoclastic interpretation of chapters IX and XVI. Chapters VI, XIV and XVII were discussed by Professor García Tortosa, the translator of the edition used in the workshops and Spain's most internationally renowned Joyce scholar.

The sessions were received with interest and attention by the students who had been able to register for the course and a series of complementary activities were also well attended. A short film based on Galician writer Vicente Risco's "Dedalus in Compostela," produced by Antonio De Toro, was shown, and the course closed with a fascinating round table chaired by García Tortosa. One of the most salient features of this round table was the active participation of a large number of students who had taken part in the event.

The "Guided Reading" was aimed at a wide public, and the students who attended represented a wide cross-section of society —a cross-section which I think, if I may be so bold, would have pleased Joyce. The interest in Joyce, the interest in exploring one of the landmarks of world literature is not, as we so often tend to assume, limited to the confines of Academe. Joyce is alive, well and flourishing here in the North-West of the Iberian Peninsula where he too, no doubt, would have enjoyed sharing a local wine and a plate of octopus and squid with his Galician admirers.

David Clark