

JAMES JOYCE AND THE 'STAGNANT BAY' OF MARSH'S LIBRARY

Marsh's Library possesses an almost unbroken record of visitors stretching back to 1826. It is sometimes unclear whether these individuals came to read or were merely tourists experiencing the ancient building. James Joyce signed the visitors' book on 22nd and 23rd October 1902 and it is clear that he, unlike many others, came with a single-minded determination to read.

Joyce may well have read in the Library after 23rd October, because there is some evidence that once readers became known to the Librarian they were not necessarily required to sign the register every time they returned to use the collection. Whether or not Joyce did indeed visit on subsequent unrecorded occasions cannot now be determined, but his signature on the 22nd and 23rd records him living at 7 St Peter's Terrace in 'Cabra'. That address would now be considered to be in Phibsborough.

In 1902 the Keeper of the Library was Newport J.D. White, and the Assistant Librarian was E.A. Phelps. These men had spent much of that year working on a catalogue of the books in Marsh's Library published before 1501. These rarities from the very early years of printing are known as 'incunables', from the Latin word for 'cradle'. There were 154 individual visits to the Library in 1902, a figure which includes a number of multiple visits by scholars such as E.R. McClintock-Dix and John J. O'Farrelly. It is safe to say that Marsh's Library was not an inordinately busy place in the first years of the twentieth century.

On the first day that Joyce signed the register, there were three other visitors to Marsh's: Dorothy Gordon of Dublin, Winifred Birch of Berkhamstead in Hertfordshire, and R. Phelps of Monkstown. It is unclear whether these individuals were readers or simply tourist visitors. They may well have been guests of the Assistant Librarian or his family. On the following day, Sir William Thornley Stoker, the eldest brother of the author of *Dracula*, and J.E. Kearney, a Christian Brother from Westland Row, entered their names in the book. It would be interesting to know of Joyce's connection or interaction (if any) with these five individuals on the 22nd and 23rd of October. The coincidence (if it was indeed merely a coincidence) of Joyce's presence in the library on the same day as Bram Stoker's eldest brother is intriguing. When Bram Stoker visited Marsh's Library in 1866 and 1867 the library had

recently experienced a series of thefts which had seen the culprit sentenced to 12 months hard labour. This unfortunate episode had the beneficial effect, for historians, of encouraging the Librarian to record every book issued to readers. We, therefore, have a very clear sense of what the young Bram Stoker read in the Reading Room of Marsh's Library. Unfortunately, by the time the young James Joyce knocked on the front door of the Library the practice of recording books issued to readers had long fallen into disuse.

In trying to recreate aspects of what Joyce consulted in Marsh's Library we must refer to passages in *Ulysses* and *Stephen Hero*. The relevant quotation from *Ulysses* is short, but specifically mentions one text: 'Houses of decay, mine, his and all. You told the Clongowes gentry you had an uncle a judge and an uncle a general in the army. Come out of them, Stephen. Beauty is not there. Nor in the stagnant bay of Marsh's library where you read the fading prophecies of Joachim Abbas.' (U40). The reference to Marsh's Library in Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero* is more substantial (see item two in the exhibition) and confirms Joyce's interest in a text written by the Cistercian abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202). It also mentions his interest in the Franciscan tradition, as well as the 'Trecento', the name given to the flowering of literary and artistic culture manifested in Italy during the 1300s.

This exhibition is an attempt to re-create something of what Joyce may have read during his time at Marsh's Library, and to relate this reading to the intellectual preoccupations evident throughout his writings. Joyce's interest in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, and the distinctive traditions of the 'Spiritual' Franciscans on the continent are discussed. However, particular attention is paid to the Irish Franciscan exiles of the seventeenth century and how they might have contributed to Joyce's self-image as an intellectual forced to live abroad in order to write the defining literature of his nation. *James Joyce: Apocalypse & Medievalism* applies specialist knowledge of medieval and early-modern history, literature and theology to Joyce studies. In doing so, it breaks new ground in our understanding of how firmly Joyce's internationalism was rooted in his detailed familiarity with Ireland's past, and the interaction of that past with the fate of Irish exiles on the continent.

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