

*ULYSSES*. Adapted and directed by Steven Rumbelow. With Carole Pluckrose as Molly Bloom; Michael Willcox as Dr. Mulligan; Julian Richings as Leopold Bloom; Tim Stone as Stephen Dedalus; and Maciej Suszynski as James Joyce. The Triple Action Theatre of England production; presented at Steppenwolf, Chicago by The Remains Theatre, July 13, 15, 17, 21, 23, 25, 1981.

The project of the Triple Action Theatre's and Steven Rumbelow's *Ulysses* is, in Rumbelow's words, "impossibly vast . . . and ours is an alternate route." Nevertheless, the contours of James Joyce's 1922 masterpiece are clearly present in this stunning visual and verbal production. But as the five-actor ensemble races against a relentlessly speeding clock, set at the back of the stage, to portray nearly all of Joyce's characters, Rumbelow's adaptation and direction stretch into a new shape the conventions of the stage and the textures of Joyce's novel.

Rumbelow's *Ulysses* opens with selected scenes from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, adding Stephen's birth from a coffin placed at center stage. What follows wrenches some of Joyce's most naturalistic scenes into a surreal montage of angular body poses and strained articulations of Joyce's words. Moving into *Ulysses* proper, the play's focus remains on Stephen, joined by Dr. Mulligan, leading to an aphoristic expounding of the *Hamlet* theory. Many of the early Bloom episodes, however, seem lost in the rapid shuffle of scenes and feet as every inch of the stage becomes a setting in dear, dirty Dublin.

With "Nausicaa," Bloom emerges contrapuntally to Gerty's display. Here the play shifts away from its angular interpretation of the characters. There could be two reasons for this shift: either the spectator has become desensitized to the experimental presentation, or Rumbelow's June 16th is beginning to wind down. And as the play descends into the nighttown of "Circe," the stark transitions of Joyce's episode develop effortlessly, almost naturally. Indeed, what is strikingly experimental to Joyce's readers seems commonplace to the play's viewers. But Rumbelow still offers some inspired images, particularly when Joyce kneels with Bloom over Stephen and reads aloud from a flaming book.

Joyce extinguishes the flames by closing the book's covers and the book is passed on to Stephen, who goes with Bloom to their Ithaca. After urinating together, Stephen and Bloom exchange identities, and

Bloom-now-Stephen goes to the side of the stage and begins to write while Stephen-now-Bloom curls up at Molly's feet and reads. Throughout the play the actors portray multiple roles; Bloom and Molly also play Simon and May Dedalus in the early scenes from *A Portrait*. Thus Rumbelow creates a subtext as intricate as Stephen's *Hamlet* theory: Simon becomes Bloom becomes Stephen, and Stephen becomes Bloom sleeping with Molly who was his mother.

Stephen-now-Bloom pointedly asks for his breakfast, and Molly, in a visual prop that places the audience's perspective as hovering over her bed, launches into her soliloquy. Here, however, the effect is stiffer than most readers' experiences of Molly. Carole Pluckrose (a Joycean name beyond belief), who plays Molly and nearly all of Joyce's women, is forced by the nature of her part in the production to subsume all the women characters into one. Little room remains for an individuated Molly, yet Pluckrose succeeds in leading a mesmerized audience to her final "Yes." But the finale is yet to come; Bloom-now-Stephen comes forward and reads what he has written in Joyce's burning book: "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl. . . ."

The Triple Action Theatre's production of *Ulysses* is a magnetic experience which lingers in the mind. Steven Rumbelow has succeeded in bringing Joyce's text to life in a challenging and poignant adaptation. As Rumbelow writes in his "Director's Notes": "The story is simple: one day in the life of a middle-aged, urban, Ulysses. The final message is one of unpunctuated hope. The purpose is, perhaps, to raise a looking glass."

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