

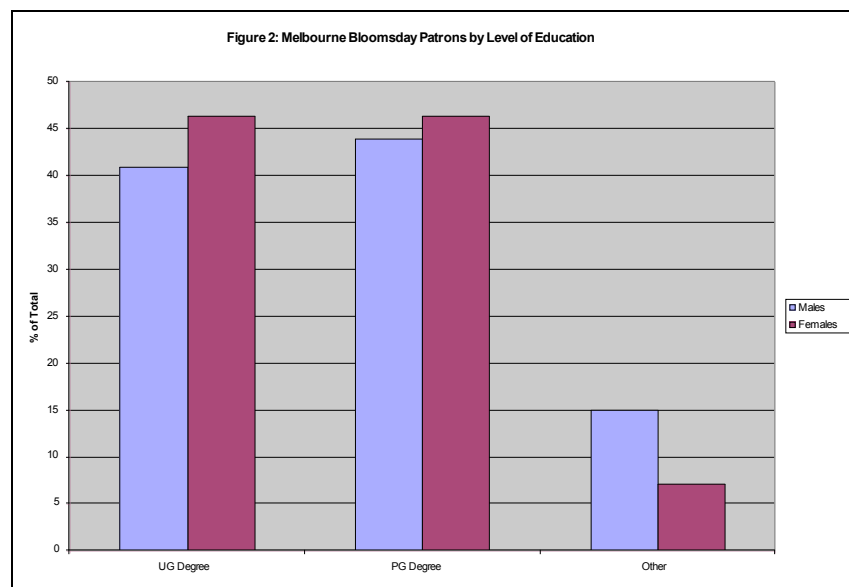
## Who are the Patrons of Bloomsday in Melbourne?

In 2003-4, Frances Devlin-Glass questionaired and interviewed a volunteer group of patrons of Bloomsday in Melbourne. The main questions to which she sought answers were:

- Who were they?
- How literary?
- How much Joyce had they read, and for how long?
- Did they have Irish or Irish-Australian identifications?
- What did they get out of reading Joyce?
- What difficulties/pleasures does reading Joyce yield?
- How do they surmount the reading difficulties if they had them?
- Why do they come to Bloomsday?
- What do they get out of it?

Several papers were derived from the very rich and surprising data collected, and these are being reported in a variety of journals using different aspects of the data. As the articles become available, they will be listed here, but two are forthcoming in 2005-6: the *James Joyce Quarterly* (on how they read Joyce), and in an online journal, Text (<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>) on Bloomsday as a small-scale literary festival. Another article on the Irish identifications of readers is under review.

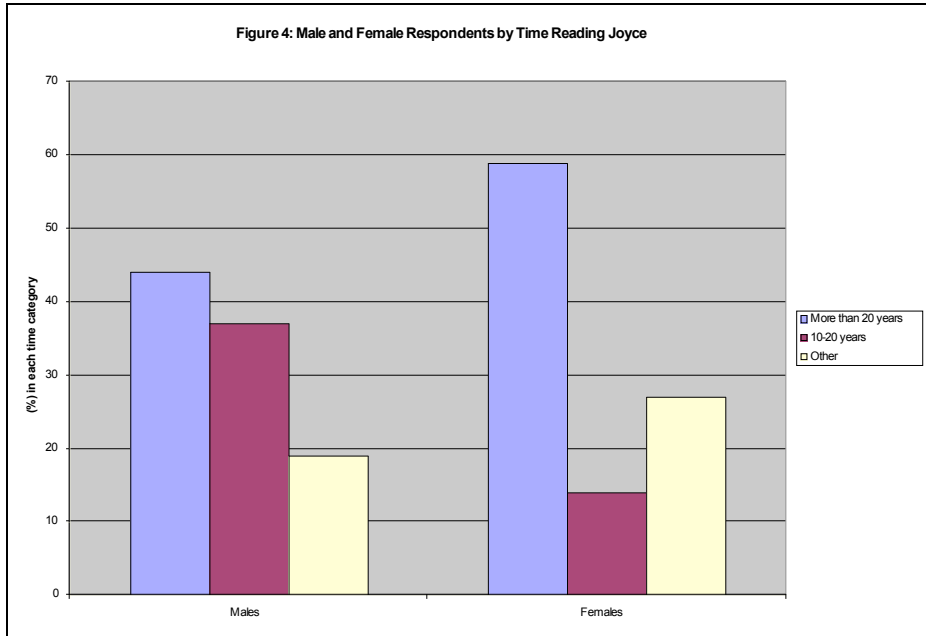
On the basis of the questionnaires, possibly a skewed sample because of length and detail of questionnaire which put some respondents off, our Bloomsday in Melbourne attendees are very well educated, often in fields other than Literature. :



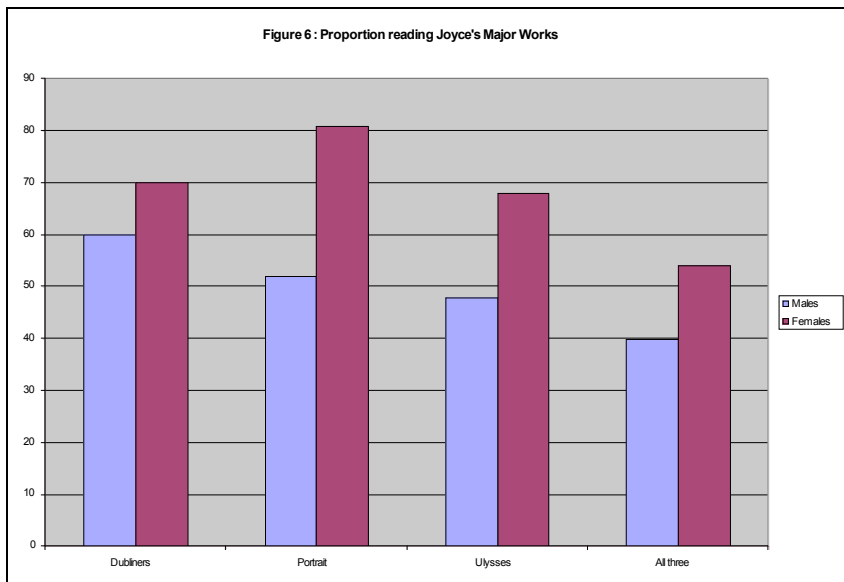
86% with a first degree and an additional 41% with a higher degree (Figure 2). Respondents were engaged in a great diversity of occupations: doctors, nurses and medical professionals, psychologists, a farmer, a winemaker, engineers, IT professionals, many writers from across the spectrum (literary and journalistic), bureaucrats and secretaries, teachers (all but one retired), actors, and academics from non-literary disciplines like Law, Education, Physics and Philosophy. One described

himself as an “engineer wishing to see the other side of the hill”; another began his Joyce reading while studying as a postgraduate medical student.

They have been reading Joyce for a long time, and tend to see it as a long-term commitment:

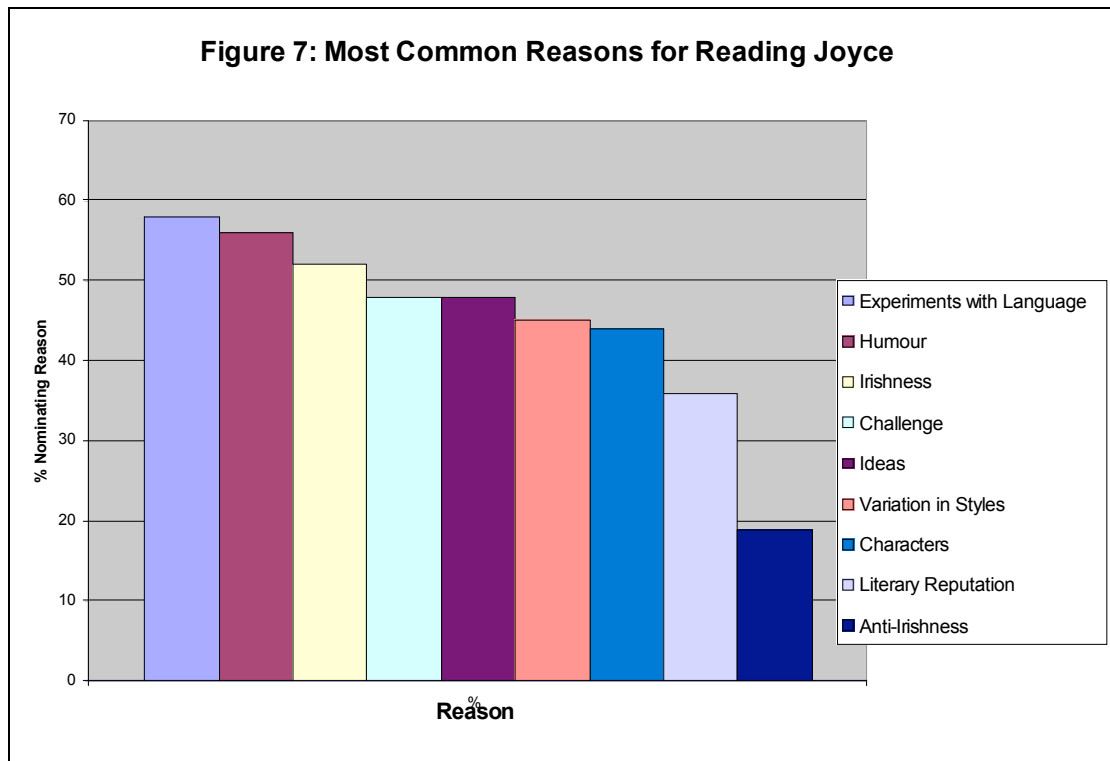


More than 50% claim to have read all three of *Dubliners*, *Portrait* and *Ulysses*:



Several have attempted *Finnegans Wake*, and while some have given up on it, others see it as an ongoing challenge. This is the new Joyce frontier for our members.

The most common reasons given for reading Joyce:



What do they get out of Bloomsday?

Bloomsday is not why they read Joyce or usually how they first began to read Joyce, but it is appreciated as a ‘refresher’, “enhancement,” “enrichment,” an “add-on,” many claiming that it “stimulates the appetite for further reading.” Hearing and seeing the novel enacted are very important adjuncts to understanding. Those who have read most do not see Bloomsday as a substitute for reading the novel. Very few rely on Bloomsday alone for their understandings. In decreasing order of significance, they appreciate

- Oral and theatrical nature of events
- Mining Joyce for its comedy
- The use of unusual spaces
- Thematic focus
- Provision of contextual information
- Drawing out poetry of Joyce
- Making Joyce topical
- Focus on the ‘scandalous’ in Joyce
- Simple, unmediated readings
- Making comparisons with the local.

A number of them particularly value the Bloomsday seminars, the less overtly “entertaining” events of the festival. They are far from being neophyte readers. Some comments:

- “I may not have persisted with *Ulysses* if I had not gone to some of the Bloomsday activities.”

- “The acting of parts of *Ulysses* give an immediacy to the author’s intent, over and above the read word.”
- Bloomsday assists [me in reading Joyce] immeasurably. One improves one’s understanding and understanding is improved by the experience. **It makes me wish more literature could be made available in the same way.**
- Reading Joyce assists Bloomsday.

The findings are reported in detail in the *James Joyce Quarterly*, 41: 3 Spring, pp. 363-380 and another reporting on the festival itself is to be found in Text Special Issue No.4, <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/speciss/issue4/devlinglass.htm>, pp.24. A third article on Irish and Australian-Irish identity among the festival patrons is forthcoming in *New Hibernia* in May 2007.