

## REJOICE

By Ray Vukceвич

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The board members of The Modern Library recently voted Ulysses the most important English-language novel of the Twentieth Century. This new story from Ray Vukceвич makes me wonder what would have won a similar poll taken in 1898? Would Wilkie Collins have won, or perhaps one of Charles Dickens's works? Or would Mary Shelley have copped top honors? Would Victor have wanted the spoils?

THE AIR IS SO COLD AND clear and the sea so calm and there, just there, if you shade the arctic sunlight from your eyes, you can see a flat-topped chip off an old iceberg floating in an otherwise empty expanse of blue water, and on the ice a moocow, a huge dog, and two naked white men engaged in Greco-Roman wrestling. Off to one side, leaning, a red-lettered sign on a stick in the ice like maybe someone got tired of picketing, says Cease Co.

Mister make the passengers take turns, shoo them from the starboard rails, scatter them like chickens squacking squabbling holding onto their flowered hats and fedoras, waving handkerchiefs, stretching up their necks to look; get them back, I tell you, otherwise they'll tip us, and while you're at it, sound the fog horn, blow the whistle, ring the bells, and come about for a rescue.

Before we could pull them from the ice, one of the combatants leaped onto the cow and rode it into the icy ocean. The other, along with what turned out to be an Irish Wolfhound with unusual front limbs, we were able to get aboard. The rescued man, a Genevese of some education who had most recently traveled to these northern latitudes through the Americas, was soon persuaded to tell his ghoulish tale of reckless creation, unbounded pride, unbearable despair, frustrated revenge, and unfinished business.

The dog he introduced as his faithful assistant and companion, Mucho Poocho. All in good time, he said, when we wondered about the dog's long black evening gloves.

Everything depends on the past, I told her, he said, and we said how true how true and smiled encouragement and made sympathetic noises and put out tentative fingers to touch him lightly on the arm, the head, the back of the ear, the knee, the anus, the navel, the left nostril, go on and on, you're safe now, trust us, be calm, talk.

Blessed be the reanimated, I said, he said, and she said what is this sweet cream of consciousness; this woman, ward of my father and my bride to be, dear Elizabeth who would have to get to know her way around the laboratory and quickly

too if we were to have any chance of happiness, especially now on the very eve of my great achievement.

I wanted to show her everything. Witness this I said, yes, give me your hand, touch this machine with all the black knobs and buttons and levers and gauges. Look at all the hoses. Look at the dark hopper. The spark. Watch out! Touch the rough iron crank. Yes, that's it. It hums and hums and pulses. Quite warm, yes. It has taken years of research, years of trial and error, cycle upon cycle of try/fail to bring this machine into existence. So many high hopes dashed.

The immediate ancestor of this machine was a simple reader, a device designed to appreciate Latin utterances which you would enter from a keyboard and which it would display upon a screen. I can see you're wondering how I knew the machine really appreciated the Latin. Well, I would ask it, of course. I would say, for example, so what do you think of ogitocay ergoay umsay? And that most excellent but primitive machine would reply, oh wow that last Classic Latin Utterance was really something Else!

Proving and providing and paving the way for the current work which shows beyond all doubt that this written record, I slapped the revered volume and dust rose and she sneezed, is composed of such exquisite detail, such esoteric imagery, such private symbolism that it is not simply a book by J, dead all these many years, but rather is J himself!

How can that be, Victor?

It's all here, I said, the whole ball of wax, from soup to nuts, liver and lights, every last scrap, the works, his very essence.

I can bring him back.

This book is a symbolic map of his mind and can be reinstalled now that the proper technology is available.

I've only to pop the book into the hopper here and hook up the hoses and crank the crank and the corpse will dance again darling put out your hand and wake the Finn again.

Oh my, yes, she said, and we said what she said, and he said, so encouraged by this realization, this sudden spacklesparkle in dark eyes, you know we know, I swept the sheet from the body.

You can't imagine the trouble I went through to get the parts. Knocked together from boneyard bits and pieces picked up at the sites of auto accidents, I sewed a lot of it together myself.

Ugg, she said.

Oh, we're not done, I said, we're definitely not done. We still have to identify the body, I said. Mucho! Bring me the pearls and the red high heels! I pushed at the cheek of the corpse with my finger but it didn't push back. What would you think of a spot of rouge?

Rouge is nice, she said.

And this, I said, and put a small wrapped package next to the body.

What is it?

A mustache.

I peeled back the waxed paper and she leaned in close to look.

So small, she said, one might even say, prissy.

But just the thing, considering the rest of the getup. If it ever gets here. Mucho! There. Just look at how it seems to anchor the nose.

I think you've got it upside down.

Quite right. Look now, isn't that nice?

My assistant ran in with the pearls and shoes, and Elizabeth grabbed my arm and hissed in my ear, my god that dog has hands!

Mucho Poocho is also an early model, I said, he said and reached out a hand to the Wolfhound who snarled and stepped to the rail and stood gazing out at the gray sea.

It's not like you're born knowing how to put bodies together. Feeling a little defensive, and more than a little put out at the hangdog look on Mucho's face, I snatched the red shoes from his hand and fitted them onto the feet of the corpse. The sudden color chased away my irritation and I pulled the head up off the table and draped the string of pearls around the neck.

Next we hook up the hoses, I said.

So in the name of the bladder and of the bones and of the doily moist upon his head, be quiet, Elizabeth, it is not peeing on you, and hold still, that one goes there yes, push, push! Help her Mucho. Our lad's on the way. Hold this now. And this while I crank out a new song for a new age and a new King of the Yeast.

Oh, look, Elizabeth, can't you see the body becoming more inwardly mobile?

I cranked the crank, and the machine chewed pages, and the body moved like a fleshy sack of puppies. Sparks danced from every silvery surface in the lab and our hair stood on end and Mucho Poocho howled a long low Irish howl of lost green days and lost green places.

The body sat up.

Telegram for Mr. juice!

I knew it, he cried, I knew you couldn't start the melodeum without me, not without me, you wouldn't, you couldn't, not without me. Two thousand and fun! Oh look at all the pretty lights! I explode from the wilderness, your Dudeoronomy daddyo, all dancing shoes and swinging pearls, with a new message to be fluteful and signify! But you want to know about, you say you're just wild about, you say you cannot live without your neither shall, neither shall, neither shall nots. And I say knock it off, cut it out. Cease Co. is talking new rules, a whole new policy. In our winding down, we are winding up. This time the rabbit hole opens into a new century where everyone talks the talk now that Mr. Juice is loose.

He ripped the hoses from his body and swung his legs around to dangle over the edge of the table, and the sun suddenly tossed through the skylight a horseshoe halo around his head, and he pulled at the hoses and dragged the machine to the table and picked it up and threw it across the room where it shattered into twelve in the sink pisces. It'll be better than Dracula's nightout, he said, it'll be wilder than a piece of Mississippi pie from Mr. Chew Chew.

His noodlerumble headnoise, the horrible sound of greaseless wheels turning and turning and turning, shook the walls and made my beakers jitterbug rattled my test tubes my retorts as he rose on jellyjuice legs and spread his arms wide and grinned his fair-weather grin and said what you seize is what you get and said ad albiora alba sanguis agni drink my blood in a cut crystal goblet liberally laced with vodka and stirred with a stalk of fresh celery. He held out a dotted palm and said use this missing period at the very end of things.

He took his first step, then another, monster moving across the scrubbed laboratory floor toward us. Elizabeth took my arm and huddled close. Mucho hid behind us but still peeked around my leg.

He'd seen us at once, but now he seemed to be really looking at us and I could see my error written large on his face. Something had gone terribly wrong.

A certain cruel cunning came alive in his eyes, and he questioned me closely, saying, what is that you've got there, my cold mad faery father? He took Elizabeth's arm between a thumb and first finger, very plump, in her slopery slip, my mouseling,

little frogchen, touch me with your girlick breath.

I put Elizabeth behind me.

Make me one of those, he said. He could look right over the top of my head and I had no doubt what he meant. I want one of those.

It was easy to see that the experiment had failed. Maybe everything necessary had not been in the book after all, or perhaps my machine had simply failed to extract it all. Or maybe you never know what you'll get until you get it. In any case, I had created an abomination, and now he wanted me to make him a bride.

Never, I said.

Maybe I'll take that one if you won't make me one of my own, he said and lowered his chin and looked up at me like a buffalo calculating a charge.

Leave her alone, I said.

Mink you, Pop.

Oh yeah, well you can just read my mind!

He slapped me to my knees, grabbed me by the shoulders and spun me around and got me around the neck in a wrestling hold from which I had little hope of slipping. Help, I shouted to Mucho Poocho. Attack! Kill! Mucho hunkered down on the floor with a whimper and the monster snortled.

Shall we fiddle with fido?

Not fido, I told him.

Tease fido, eh tease fido, eh eh tease fido.

Mucho put his hands over his eyes, he said, and we all looked at the dog who had been looking back at us over his shoulder but who now looked back out to sea.

It not my job to make you feel comfortable, the monster said, and we said maybe he's got a point, lazy poach dogs, the lot of us, and he gave my neck a twist and tossed me to one side.

Perhaps somewhere in his dark semisubconscious he had some feeling for his creator that constrained the twist and left my neck unbroken. Even so I was sorely stunned and quite unable to help Elizabeth who scooted away from the brute in little fits and sneezes.

She avoided him until she reached the wall, then he grabbed her, and she crumbled like a dried flower in his fingers and he looked around in surprise like what happened is that all there is how could she be so fragile this is all so embarrassing.

Birds darkened the skylight and beat the glass with their black wings, thunder sounded, and a cold wind found every crack and stirred my notes, and tossed my hair, and Mr. (call me Cease Co.) Juice blew CEO cigar smoke from his wide nostrils, said we are the Doggymen, and leaped into dance, lifting his knees high happy grape stomping goofy grin, this sad patchwork graveyard doll, celebrating something foul, and dropped to his knees and scrambled bugfast across the room to me, ripping at my clothes, dogcurious nose and doggy lips in the crack of my ass, blew me up just like that with smoke and I floated away, a fat macey man balloon belching smoke rings and drifting upright then drifting upside down.

The skylight shattered and black birds like Brimstoker bats swarmed into the lab and settled everywhere, mostly on Elizabeth.

May you have a million years in hell to think about what you've done, I said.

It's the Count who thinks, he said.

I'll have my revenge.

Eat your selfish, he said, it will be cold comfort.

And then he was gone and I swam down to Elizabeth and shooed away the butcherbirds and read the note written on the bottom of her foot: cheep. When had the monster found time to defile the body?

Struck by a sudden suspicion, I sat down on the floor and pulled off my boots. Yes. Notes on the bottoms of both feet. On my left foot, most significantly, a quote from the book itself: I am speaking to us in the second person. On the right foot: Direct quotes from the book will henceforth, both forward and backward in time, be printed in a holy color that only true believers can see.

So you will agree there was nothing I could have done but hound the monster to the very ends of the Earth, and that is what has brought me to these icy wastelands, he said and put his head down on the deck and died like the easter bunny you've hugged too tightly and we said but hold on a moment, we keep getting the monster and the doctor mixed up. Mucho Poocho spoke then, said, so just who do you think rode the moocow into the sea?