Peter Kuch presents a re-imagined reading of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The book argues that divorce was a realistic option for the principal characters Leopold and Molly Bloom, despite the fact that divorce was *prima facie* outlawed in Ireland in 1904 (where the novel is set). This offers a new insight that has hitherto been disregarded by previous scholars who have accepted without question the impossibility of divorce for the Blooms. Kuch uses legal analysis to provide historical background to the text. The use of this methodology demonstrates that divorce was indeed a possibility for the Blooms. He relies on a wide range of primary sources, such as legal texts, cases, statutes, statistics and newspapers, as well as the litany of secondary Joyce scholarship to reach his original insight. The eight chapters explore *Ulysses* and the theme of divorce in the chronological order of the narrative. Both Joyce scholars and legal historians alike would find the book appealing.

The first chapter introduces the dominant theme of *Ulysses* as ‘a novel of adultery’ (1) – Bloom is tormented by the fact that his wife Molly is having an affair with her manager Blazes Boylan. The book is focused on deconstructing the meaning of two important lines in *Ulysses* (2): Bloom’s ‘Divorce, not now’ and Molly’s ‘suppose I divorced him’. Kuch hypothetically explores the possibility of divorce for the Blooms by examining primary legal sources in conjunction with the references to sex, love and adultery in the novel. By doing so, it provides a new perspective to the actions and motives of the primary characters as protagonists possessing legal agency rather than being in a state of ignorance. Although civil divorce did not exist in Ireland until the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1995 by referendum, Kuch argues that many Irish couples were able to successfully divorce *a vinculo matrimonii* (from the bond of marriage) by taking up domicile in either England, Scotland or France and petitioning in the Courts of those respective jurisdictions. The English Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court was the popular jurisdiction of choice for prospective Irish divorcees. Kuch demonstrates historical acuity by referring to this legal issue in the early twentieth-century terminology ‘comity of nations’ rather than the modern expression ‘conflict of laws’ (17). The Jewish law of divorce is mentioned in regards to the Jewishness of Bloom (51). However, it seems to have been included just to stimulate intellectual curiosity rather than providing an
applicable insight into Irish divorce for the Blooms. Bloom is not a practising Jew and even if he was British law would apply.

Chapters two sets up the idea of an imagined case of ‘Bloom v Bloom and Boylan’ (88). It delves into the legal concepts of the grounds and bars to divorce under the *Matrimonial Causes Act 1857*. Kuch explores the evidentiary challenges that Bloom would face in proving Molly’s adultery in court and how Bloom’s indecisiveness to petition for divorce may be legally interpreted as either conniving or condoning adultery which would bar him from seeking divorce. Chapter three analyses Bloom’s stream of consciousness while making a work related visit to the office of the Freeman’s Journal and National Press. Bloom thinks to himself about ‘obituary notices, pubs’ ads, speeches, divorce suits, found drowned’ (89). Although divorce was not legal in Edwardian Ireland, Kuch argues it was in the mentalité of 1904 Dublin (90). This is well supported in his application of Foucault’s critique of the ‘repressive hypothesis’. The words ‘divorce’ and ‘adultery’ are seldom found in *Ulysses*, but are manifest ‘in the guise of allusion, reference, suggestion, irony, innuendo, and ribaldry’ (92).

Chapter four examines Bloom’s conflicted state of mind while he is in the Ormond Hotel. This is the last opportunity for him to confront Boylan before he sees Molly. The question of why Bloom cannot just simply catch the adulterous relationship *in flagrante delicto* is answered. Sole witness testimony was usually dismissed as unreliable in divorce cases (130–1). Bloom’s resignation to the affair is portrayed in an allusion to *Don Giovanni* (147). Bloom recognises the minuet that Father Cowley plays on the piano is from the scene where Don Giovanni seduces Zerlina with her fiancé Masetto powerless to stop it. Chapter five analyses Bloom’s visit to Barney Kiernan’s pub. Here he gets into an argument with a character known as ‘the Citizen’ over Irish nationalism (163). Kuch identifies the argument from a legal perspective as a debate over citizenship law. Bloom legitimately argues his Irish birthright citizenship based on the legal principle of *jus soli*. On the other hand, the Citizen has a sectarian and anti-semitic view of Irishness, where Jews and non-practising Christians cannot claim *jus soli*. Kuch makes the salient observation that this part of the narrative signals that ‘Bloom finds himself at odds in a boisterous and ribald discussion that randomly invokes aspects of British Law, Irish Law, Canon Law, Jewish Law, Natural Law, and nationalist interpretations of ancient codes such as Brehon Law’ (154). These different legal codes provide a multiperspectivity on how divorce and matrimonial causes could be hypothetically resolved for Bloom. Each challenge his identity and sense of self, but only the nominal law can provide an effective remedy.

Chapter six is focused on the financial issues in a potential divorce suit. This provides an important addition to the field of scholarship, which has not previously been explored in any significant depth (177–9). Kuch provides an economic analysis of Edwardian Ireland by examining newspapers and financial records. These insights overturn the assumption of the Blooms’ financial stability by challenging the inherent value of their financial stocks (178). Kuch argues that money and the sexual empowerment of wealth were inextricably bound in Molly’s ‘suppose I divorced him’. Bloom suspects that Molly is attracted to Boylan because of his wealth and leads to Molly speculating about a life divorced from Bloom. The
economic analysis provides an important insight in framing both the literary text and legal context.

Chapter seven reaches the end of Ulysses, where Bloom is isolated in his own home after failing to convince Stephen Dedalus to stay the night. The paucity of sufficient legal evidence of Molly’s adultery means that Bloom would only likely succeed in proving her socially unacceptable intimacy with Boylan (219). Hence the justification of Bloom’s ‘Divorce, not now’. Nevertheless, Bloom could still attempt to initiate a divorce suit in England or a damages suit for criminal conversation against Boylan and a divorce a mensa et thoro (judicial separation) petition in Ireland (220). The success of such suits would be difficult and the plight of Bloom is emblematic of the truism that ‘hard cases make for bad laws’. Social changes and frustration with the existing law eventually led to the repeal of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 during the Interwar period. Kuch concludes that Joyce’s Dublin reflects the popular culture of Edwardian Ireland in chapter eight (245). A glossary is helpfully attached at the end of the book, which primarily contains a list of legal terminology.

Legal discourse operates as a metatext in Ulysses and can be explained in the context of the real world divorce laws. Kuch presents a well-integrated literary and legal analysis of the divorce law of Edwardian Ireland as depicted in Ulysses. It provides new insights for legal historians examining the social and cultural practices of the history of Irish divorce law. Moreover, it provides a rich legal dimension to Ulysses that has previously been overlooked. Irish Divorce/Joyce’s Ulysses is an important text for anyone interested in the legal history of Irish divorce.

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Masculinity and the Trials of Modern Fiction is a study of what its author Marco Wan terms five ‘literary trials’, that is, prosecutions against the publication of certain novels or their authors on the basis of obscenity. Wan’s method is one of ‘approaching the trials themselves as texts that deserve to be read’ (1), very much in keeping with law and literature methodology. ‘We are told … that the movement is dead … it is busy dying’, wrote Peter Goodrich of law and literature,1 the same scholar

1Peter Goodrich, ‘Screening the Law’ (2009) 21(1) Law and Literature 1, 1.