



PROJECT MUSE®

Dublin Celebrates the *Wake*'s 80th Birthday: "*Finnegans Wake* at 80"; "Lucia Joyce: Perspectives"; "Text/Sound/Performance: Making in Canadian Space"; and "Finnegans Wake-End," 11-13 April, 25-27 April, and 3-5 May, 2019

Derek Pyle

James Joyce Quarterly, Volume 56, Number 1-2, Fall 2018-Winter 2019, pp. 10-17 (Article)

Published by The University of Tulsa  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjq.2019.0029>



James Joyce Quarterly

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/736656>

Sadly, I was unable to attend the *Lucia Joyce: Perspectives* event which took place directly after the symposium; I had to return home to my own daughter. But, from several reports—via word-of-mouth and Lawrence’s continued live tweeting (#LuciaJoycePerspectives)—it seems to have been an excellent event, expertly organized by Genevieve Sartor. It was about time that Lucia had an occasion of her own, rather than being squeezed into events focusing on her father.

“*Finnegans Wake* at 80” was, for me, a resounding success. Although I have not fully switched my allegiance from Team *Ulysses* to Team *Wake*, since the symposium, I have returned to Joyce’s 1939 masterpiece with renewed vigor, inquisitiveness, and conviction.

Cleo Hanaway-Oakley  
*University of Bristol*

Dublin Celebrates the *Wake*’s 80th Birthday: “*Finnegans Wake* at 80”; “*Lucia Joyce: Perspectives*”;  
“Text/Sound/Performance: Making in  
Canadian Space”; and “*Finnegans Wake-End*,”  
11-13 April, 25-27 April, and 3-5 May, 2019

4 May 2019 marked eighty years since the first publication of *Finnegans Wake*, and this spring multiple events in Dublin celebrated the book’s impact, history, and continuing legacy. These events included “*Finnegans Wake* at 80,” an academic conference organized by Sam Slote at Trinity College; “*Lucia Joyce: Perspectives*,” an afternoon event following immediately after “*Finnegans Wake* at 80” and dedicated to Lucia Joyce, organized by Genevieve Sartor; the “Text/Sound/Performance” conference at University College Dublin organized by Gregory Betts; and the James Joyce Centre’s “*Finnegans Wake-End*,” which took place during the 3-5 May bank-holiday weekend. When viewed as a whole, these events represent a significant turn in academic, artistic, and popular interest in and appreciation for Joyce’s final work.

The “*Finnegans Wake* at 80” conference, 11-13 April in the Trinity Long Room Hub at Trinity College, was the third-ever conference dedicated to the *Wake*, and it signaled a significant shift in academic interest and reception of the *Wake*. It was only through the combination of Slote’s organizational prowess and significant dedication to the *Wake* that such an event could occur. The conference offered a series of fascinating discussions and presentations, which, in effect, presented an overview of current *Wake* studies, collectively spanning and encompassing the various subsets of academically minded *Wake*

engagements, including critical and modernist readings; genetic and textual analysis; discussion of the *Wake* in translation; bibliographical and cultural surveys of the *Wake* and its impact; digital-humanities projects; and an audio-visual installation, which I curated, representing the academy's increasing interest in the exegesis of artistic responses.

The genetic and textual analyses came to an apex at the Friday night reading group, held at the James Joyce Centre on North Great Georges Street. Focusing on the conclusion of the Anna Livia chapter, beginning at *FW* 213.11, the group showcased the *Wake* reading style championed by many Joycean academics, wherein the text is treated as a kind of cryptogram that can be decoded through reference to Joyce's manuscripts, and by understanding Joyce's (genetic) process of composition. In this style, there is an emphasis on "plot" and characters, here, the washerwomen, and there are generally right and wrong ways of reading the text. Although this reading style has its limitations, the pleasure of sitting in a room filled with erudite scholars who have spent decades poring over the text and Joyce's manuscripts is a remarkable experience, that reveals not only the genius inherent in Joyce's text but also the undeniably brilliant minds who are the backbone of Joyce studies.

The paper presentations on Thursday concluded with Fuat Sevimay, who discussed translating *Finnegans Wake* into Turkish, followed by a roundtable discussion on translating the *Wake* with Congrong Dai (Chinese), Robbert-Jan Henkes (Dutch), and Enrico Terrinoni (Italian). *Wake* translators are remarkable human beings, and it was fascinating to hear from each translator about his or her various processes, which were infused with astute scholarship, humility, and humor.

I was unable to attend the Thursday plenary featuring Chrissie Van Mierlo, but Peter Chrisp, who maintains the blog "From Swerve of Shore to Bend of Bay," recounted that Van Mierlo "looked, through the character of Shaun, at the fascinating question of what had happened to Joyce's visual imagination by the time he wrote the *Wake*. [Van Mierlo] talked about the many models for Shaun—John McCormack, Wyndham Lewis, images of saints (Patrick and Kevin), Kevin Barry, various priests such as Father Bernard Vaughan, illustrations of Tristan from [Joseph] Bedier's edition and of postmen from *La Poste et les Moyens de Communication* by Eugene Gallois."<sup>1</sup>

Tim Conley's Friday plenary, "Petitions Full of Pieces of Pottery," provided an overview of so-called "crackpot" readings of the *Wake*. Conley suggested that, by studying such "taxonomies of misreading," we might learn something important about the function and cultural impact of *Finnegans Wake*, but this potentially interesting point was lost amid his continually derisive comments about the

authors in question. At a time when the *Wake* is undergoing a renaissance in both academic and popular circles, Conley's sentiments inadvertently provided a warning to emerging writers and researchers: do not depart too far from the intellectual status quo. For early career academics, this is a subtle reminder of the need to blend in intellectually, lest one finds oneself unemployed, and it is a shame to think that such pressures can hamper academic innovation and limit the novel growth and expansion of Joyce studies.

With an eye to the future of *Wake* studies (and applications), the digital-humanities-related presentations included Richard Barlow's commentary on his project entitled "Mapping *Finnegans Wake* Scholarship: Creating an Online Research Platform Linking the Full Text of *Finnegans Wake* to Existing Analysis," a name so detailed as to be self-explanatory. Halila Bayramova—a graduate student of Slote's who also designed the conference logo, website, and program—presented on "The Hermeneutics of the *Wake* Code on the Web," wherein she discussed use of the *Wake* as a kind of test for machine learning, a sort of bug intentionally introduced by programmers to learn where their code needs fixing, by seeing where and how it breaks.

With support from the James Joyce Centre, I was invited to create an audio-visual installation in the Hoey Ideas Space. Among the installation's various offerings, conference attendees were provided with art supplies and encouraged to create a birthday card for the *Wake*, which they could then place in a small coffin at the center of the table. For those wanting pre-made ephemera, Susie Lopez provided a beautiful assortment of *Wake* cards based on her annotated illustrations of the text. In response to the installation, participants frequently asked two questions: "what are you going to do with the cards?" and "are you going to read them?" "The card is just between you and the book," I would reply, and to ensure this eternal privacy, I later buried the cards in Galway, near the ocean.

Following the late-morning conclusion of "*Finnegans Wake* at 80" on 13 April, Sartor organized an afternoon dedicated to Lucia Joyce, which also took place in the Trinity Long Room Hub. "Lucia Joyce: Perspectives," began with a range of academic presentations, followed by talks and performances focused on Lucia and the arts (with implicit linkages to the context and compositional history of the *Wake*). Sartor has made something of a name for herself through controversy and disparaging reviews, but the event itself showcased her keen curatorial sense as "Perspectives" stewarded a significant moment in the current exploration of Lucia and her legacy.

The afternoon began with a presentation from Finn Fordham, who discussed researching Lucia during his graduate studies. But as an early-career academic, Fordham said, he was discouraged from following his interest, because it was not considered a viable path for

professional development and success. Fordham's presence at the "Perspectives" afternoon signaled a shift in the field; here, a respected Joycean authority effectively gave his blessing to a newer generation of academics and artists.

The highlights of the afternoon were artistic performances from Áine Stapleton, Úna Kavanagh, and Caoileann Curry-Thompson. Stapleton showed an excerpt from her film *Medicated Milk*, an experimental piece that weaves readings from Lucia's dream diaries with aspects of Stapleton's own story. Filmed in the Wicklow Mountains and at various European locations where Lucia was formerly institutionalized, *Medicated Milk* is a dreamy piece that moves between poignant beauty and the unsettling territory of nightmares. As Stapleton indicated in her discussion of the study, *Medicated Milk* reflects how the historical figure, as well as the mythological status of Lucia, informs the contemporary explorations of an artist such as Stapleton, who is herself trained as a professional dancer and multi-disciplinary artist.

The actor Kavanagh and playwright Curry-Thompson presented *Rosefrail and Fair*, a one-woman depiction of Lucia Joyce that incorporates prerecorded material and readings from James Joyce's texts (including the *Wake*). It is a powerful exploration of Lucia as a woman and artist. Set in an English mental institution, the piece begins with Lucia reflecting on her father's literary explorations of sexuality, which is painfully contrasted with her own female experience of sexuality, creativity, and agency: "Wonder wild we may be./ But within limits./ Male limits./ And if the wonder wild breaks those limits. . . . My brother knew this. He knew that, without limits, the rosefrail and fair runs wild. Uncontrolled. Wonder wild./ And such a thing is dangerous."

As the piece progresses, Lucia recounts the horrors she suffered in her years of institutionalization and her family's role in suppressing her spirit. She expresses the simultaneous experience of being robbed of herself—"I am an artist without an art./ My movement taken from me"—and yet there is something that can never be taken from her: "They will never have my dance./ They cannot touch my dance—they've never understood that./ They can try to take my thoughts, try to break my body, but they can never touch my dance./ My soul."

The day concluded with a rich roundtable discussion by Stapleton, Kavanagh, and Curry-Thompson, joined by academic presenters Siobhán Purcell and Deirdre Mulrooney. During the question-and-answer period, an interesting engendered dynamic arose between the audience and the presenters, as a number of men in the audience spoke about the need to consider the layers of cultural oppression that affected how Lucia was perceived, diagnosed, and ultimately confined as a "mad woman" during the mid-twentieth century. In

an earlier portion of the afternoon, Raphael Montague, a Lacanian psychoanalyst, also spoke about clinical considerations and the risk of imposing outside interpretations of Lucia's own desire. The presenting women, fully aware of these historical elements, responded in ways that revealed how their responses to Lucia also reflect their personal knowledge of what it means to be women, academics, and artists in contemporary Ireland.

One striking element of "Lucia Joyce: Perspectives" was its emotional tone, which clearly illustrates the deep connection to Lucia and her legacy widely felt by artists and academics alike. I have attended very few academic conferences that were as emotionally evocative as this afternoon's program, and, had the order of events been reversed, it would have been interesting to see how such evocations would have framed and influenced the "*Finnegans Wake* at 80" conference. While exploring the historical legacy of Lucia, the discussions also affirmed her role in the creation of a new form of Irish mythology, one which reflects many deeply personal, yet culturally significant, questions and realities for contemporary artists, academics, and women.

Threads of Joyce and the *Wake* also ran throughout University College Dublin's "Text/Sound/Performance: Making in Canadian Space" conference, 25-27 April. Organized by Gregory Betts, the visiting 2018-2019 Craig Dobbin Professor, the conference explored intersections between Canadian, Indigenous, and Irish literary arts and history. Held at the College of Arts and Humanities, which houses the UCD Centre's Canadian Studies, the conference program borrowed its structure from the concluding/opening passage of *Finnegans Wake*, as each panel session was given a title from the text; for instance, the titles for session A were "a lone—Transcultural Practice"; "a loved—Shares in Pataphysics Are Up-Side-Down"; "a long the—Mapping Feminist Relations and Labour Across Media in Contemporary Canadian Literature"; and "past Eve and Adam's—Trace/Inscription: Poetics in the Anthropocene."

Prior to arriving at the conference, Betts invited all attendees to participate in a "24-Hour Instanthology," responding to page 317 of *Ulysses*, the scene from "Cyclops" asking how to define a nation. The prompt, for which attendees were given only twenty-four hours to respond, read: "Your task, should you choose to accept it, is much simpler: respond in any way imaginable to just one page of *Ulysses*. Poetry and/or prose and/or visual translation and/or song and/or dub and/or plunderverse and/or book art and/or data manipulation and/or conceptualist and/or glossolalic and/or etceterogeneous." Upon arrival at the conference, attendees were greeted with an anthology of the submitted responses. The chapbook, printed by the Semantic Press includes a delightful array of poems and visual responses, including weird love, protest, reflections on discrimina-

tion, tender meditations, cut-up remix, and doodle art.

The conference featured a number of standard-fare academic presentations, and an intriguing highlight was Neil Hennessy's presentation on Joyce, Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Derrida, and Vine Deloria Jr., the prominent Lakota activist and historian. Hennessy interpreted the *Wake's* function as a guilt-ridden history of *homo sapiens* rape and genocide of Neanderthals. While anticolonial readings of the *Wake* are assumed by many readers, such a perspective is rarely emphasized in the academy, and Hennessy is not a traditional academic. His enthusiasm and generosity of spirit, however, were striking; at the conclusion of his paper, he announced that he had brought a copy of every book cited in his presentation, one for each person in the room.

"Text/Sound/Performance" also brought together a remarkable cast of poets and performers, including many of Canadian's leading dub and sound poets and First-Nations performers. Reflecting a diversity of cultures grappling with issues of intersectionality and colonialism, this created an exciting atmosphere of interdisciplinary engagement, uniting academic theory with lively performances. It is due to Betts's guiding vision that such a remarkable gathering occurred, as shown during the Thursday evening program, entitled "Reading Awake," which featured a keynote address from the prominent Canadian poet Christian Bök, a stunning performance from the Inuit throat singers, the Silas Singers, a piece from the Irish composer Barry O'Halpin, and a remarkable "performance" address from the renowned dub poet d'bi.young anitafrika.

Joyce references were woven throughout Bök's presentation, which focused on his \$100,000 attempts to use biogenetic encryption to transmit his poetry into outerspace. Small degrees of Joycean separation were also present in the performance of O'Halpin's piece, which involved transcribing the sounds of a wasp's nest for drums and bass flute. The piece was performed by SlapBang, a duo consisting of Matthew Jacobson and Lina Andonovska, the latter of whom previously performed composer Nick Roth's "A Loved A Long," a solo flute interpretation of the conclusion of *Finnegans Wake*.

At the banquet concluding "Text/Sound/Performance," Gavan Kennedy was invited to film readers for his *Finnegan Wakes—The Film* project. The premise of the project is simple: readers are asked to choose a piece of music that has had an emotional impact on their own life; it then becomes an accompaniment as they read a page of the *Wake*. For this particular film shoot, I introduced Kennedy to Betts, who, in turn, enlisted a roster of remarkable readers, including anitafrika, Bök, and Adeena Karasick.

Since many readers of the *JJQ* have experienced the project firsthand, it is almost expected that Kennedy's *Finnegan Wakes* needs no further introduction—the project has been a prominent part of



Joycean night life at numerous academic gatherings, including the 2018 and 2019 Joyce Symposiums and the 2019 Joyce Summer School in Trieste. The project began as a recording for “Waywords and Meansigns,” wherein Kennedy ventured to Burning Man to create a participatory reading of the “Shem the Penman” chapter. Kennedy has since continued the project independently, traveling internationally to create a filmed version of the *Wake* that will ultimately incorporate thousands of individual readers.

The James Joyce Centre’s “Finnegans Wake-End,” which I helped to produce with Centre manager Jessica Peel-Yates, was a three-night series of events encompassing discussion, performance, and participatory readings. Since Peel-Yates became manager of the Centre in 2018, she has consistently expanded the Centre’s reach and creative boundaries through innovative events and projects that champion experimental yet accessible approaches to Joyce and his works, as shown by the sold-out “Wake-End.”

There was a panel discussion on Friday, 3 May, led by Peel-Yates and featuring Kennedy, Terence Killeen, Sartor, and me. Kennedy charmed the audience with adventurous tales of his time filming *Wake* readers at Burning Man. He described reading the *Wake* as a process of emotional and spiritual surrender, from which one infers similarities to transpersonal modalities such as holotropic breathwork. Elsewhere in the conversation, there were animated remarks about interpretative authority and whether artists are required to reify the academic status quo in their creative expressions. After this, the panel began with the first of three nights of filming for Kennedy’s *Finnegan Wakes—The Film* project.

Saturday night featured performances from Cathal Stephens of the Here Comes Everybody Players, Breda Cannon-Courtney and Bertha Reilly of Wilde Irish Productions, and Darina Gallagher and Sinead Murphy from Songs of Joyce. Stephens led the audience through an enthusiastically participatory performance of the first thunderword, followed by Cannon-Courtney and Reilly’s delightful grandmotherly embodiments of the washerwomen. Gallagher and Murphy’s performance was an incredible tour of the *Wake*’s musical world, including a powerfully tender rendition of “The Ballad of Persse O’Reilly.” These performances were followed by the launch of NearFM’s production “Walks through James Joyce’s Dublin,” which sonically captures the city through a field recording of the Joyce Centre staff member Conor Linnie’s walking tour, interspersed with evocative readings from actors Barry McGovern and Katie O’Kelly, who were also in attendance.

Subsequent to the performances, the Centre was transformed into a looser, more social environment. Attendees were again invited to read for the *Finnegan Wakes* film project or else to avail themselves of wine



and conversation. An epic game of “Wake or Fake” quickly emerged, hosted by the Smyth family. The game goes like this: a person picks a page of *Finnegans Wake* and then begins to “read” it. The other players have to guess whether that person is *actually* reading from the text or whether she or he is improvising a “fake” version. The only rule is that there are no derivatives—either the reader must read the text faithfully, word for word, or improvise the fake “page” completely. It is anticipated that “Wake or Fake” will soon surpass the combined popularity of Monopoly, hurling, and cricket.

Following the revelry of Saturday night, “Finnegans Wake-End” concluded with the equivalent of an acoustic Sunday show at Sweny’s Pharmacy. It was an intimate conclusion to the weekend, with time to share, in a group setting, many personal experiences and impressions of reading *Finnegans Wake*. With good conversation and many cups of tea, the evening reflected a perennial truth of the *Wake*, one that resonated throughout the April and May events—it is a wonderful book for friendship and community.

As one considers the significance of these events at Trinity College, University College Dublin, and the James Joyce Centre, perhaps it is time to re-evaluate the *Wake’s* legacy, since it appears that many of the stereotypes about the book are simply untrue. The book is popular—it appears in a wide variety of academic, artistic, and popular circles—and far from being unreadable, people delight at participatory projects like the *Finnegan Wakes* film project. Moreover, although long neglected in Joyce’s home country, the *Wake* has finally returned to Ireland. As it enters its eighth decade, interest in the book and the myriad of unexpected responses it inspires are undergoing a renaissance and golden era.

Derek Pyle

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> See the following post from the *James Joyce Quarterly’s* Facebook page, <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/16536544943/10151105310579944/>> (accessed July 2019), and see Eugene Gallois, *La Poste et les Moyens de Communication des Peuples à Travers les Siècles* (Paris: Ballière, 1894).

### “Joyce Without Borders”: A Report on the North American James Joyce Symposium, Mexico City, Mexico, 12-16 June 2019

Mexico City may seem the least likely destination for a Joyce conference, but 2019’s “Joyce Without Borders” makes a strong case for situating symposia in new and exciting locales outside