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

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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

¹ 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

the Anglosphere. With its historic Roma backdrop, Mexico City's Universidad Nacional Autónoma offered Joyceans an invigorating conference venue that brought scholars the world over together for five days of performances, panels, and fun. A conference unlike any other, in addition to the serious scholarship on display, this year's events included a *Ulysses*-themed tarot reading by the artist Penelope K. Wade and a *Finnegans Wake* yoga class led by James Shaw, ensuring a delightful and unforgettable experience for all attendees.

The conference kicked off on Wednesday, 12 June, with Carol Wade's "Art of the *Wake*," a witty exploration of *Finnegans Wake* through painting and illustration. In the words of Wade, "I just love it when art causes a conversation"—and that she did! By turns elegant and playful, Wade's art is a visual smorgasbord that set the pace for the conference as an intellectual endeavor, which, however ambitious, illuminated Joyce for a broad audience and beckoned him from the ivory tower and into the dear, dirty streets. Next, composer Neal Kosaly-Meyer's "*Finnegans Wake*, fragment performed from memory" was a tour-de-force feat in which he performed eight pages of the *Wake* entirely from memory. The acute attention to musical detail and quasi-liturgical staging, including his pausing to pour water and whiskey which he then ceremonially drank, was wholly unique. Gavan Kennedy's "*Finnegan Wakes* Film Project" followed, democratizing Joyce's most experimental work by choosing volunteers to read randomly selected passages set to any tune that had impacted them in a meaningful way. The scope of the project is massive, seeking to set all of the *Wake* to film, and Kennedy shot several clips with conference-goers throughout the week's events.

Thursday, 13 June, saw the beginning of panel sessions proper, with veteran and virgin researchers convening to present fresh perspectives on Joyce's *oeuvre*. Chaired by Kiron Ward, the morning session's "Joyce in Africa, Africa in Joyce," was very much in the spirit of the conference theme. Teresa Valentini's "Comparative Modernisms: Olive Schreiner's *African Farm* and Joyce's *A Portrait*," raised issues of identity, gender, and nation. Michael Wood then delivered the first keynote on "Melodies of Underdevelopment," stressing the relationship between music and class in Joyce's work. The Joycean events continued well into lunch with a *Finnegans Wake* reading group led by Rodney Sharkey and Peter Quadrino, showcasing a delicious *prix fixe* menu that highlighted traditional Mexican dishes and made for a crossing of linguistic *and* culinary borders.

The return to the conference marked presentations by my panel, "Nes Yo: Living with the Irresolvable in Joyce's Fiction." For my part, "The He and the She of It': Embracing Indeterminacy in Joyce" attempted to shift the focus from HCE to ALP and interrogate the uncertainty surrounding the Phoenix Park incident, as well as raise

discussions about the contemporary significance of this “crime” in the wake of #metoo. Shifting gears, Tim Conley’s “Don’t you know he’s dead?” offered a Wittgensteinian spin on Joyce’s texts, reminding us that nothing—not even the ostensibly obvious difference between life and death—is ever beyond critique, and that the simplest of premises becomes questionable in the hands of Joyce. Austin Briggs followed this with the Empson-inflected “Seven Types of Joycean Ambiguity and What to Do with Them,” highlighting the multiple and contradictory valences in Joyce’s work from *Dubliners* through *Ulysses*. The afternoon then closed with a panel chaired by conference organizer James Ramey, “Joyce and Posthumanism,” which was one of the day’s most provocative. Given the typical antipathy to theory in Joyce and lack of scholarship by women on the *Wake*, graduate students Maisie Ridgeway’s “Joyce the Technician: Algorithms and Autopoiesis in *Finnegans Wake*” and Brenna MacDougall’s “Posthuman Joyce? The Becomings of *Finnegans Wake*,” offered bold insights into the author and stood as lucid examples of how to apply theory for the purposes of expanding interpretive possibilities. Ramey’s “Posthumanism, Systems Theory, and Joyce’s Man in the Brown Macintosh” also vivified discussion of perennial questions in Joyce through the lens of posthumanism to offer “potent new forms for engaging texts.”

The Joyce marathon continued into Friday, 14 June, with “Joyce’s Idiolecturing” proving to be one of the most thematically relevant Symposium panels. Paige Miller’s outstanding “Languages With(out) Borders: Multilingualism in *Ulysses*” argued for a translingual approach to Joyce, providing deft readings of Molly, Bloom, and Stephen’s multilingualism, while calling attention to the utopian impulse to ignore the political ramifications for multilingual speakers in the real world. Furthering the geopolitical dialogue, Terence Killeen’s superb keynote, “The Boarder Incident Prerepeated Itself: A Study in Conflict,” analyzed journalistic sources for the *Wake* and examined HCE’s status as scapegoat. Noting the “universalizing” ambition of the text, Killeen ended the talk by likening the book to a physicist’s singularity, or black hole, encapsulating the contradictory nature of the *Wake* as impenetrable for some yet infinitely dense. Additional highlights from the day included “He *Glided* Southward Over the Bay: Transfictional Joyce in Argentina and Cuba,” wherein speakers explored the Joycean influence beyond the borders of the English-speaking world and Norman Cheadle discussed “The Argentine Leopold Bloom: José Salas Subirat, from Translator of *Ulysses* to Literary Character.” Finally, the medievalist Frances McCormack’s presentation, “‘Averred with Solemn Emotion’s Fire’: The Affective Contours of *Finnegans Wake*,” stood out as a refreshing and important reading of “performative affectivity,” mapping emotion in the *Wake* with a meticulous data-collection effort and arguing

persuasively for the nose as a measure of truth. Bringing her expertise in historical linguistics and the digital humanities to bear on the *Wake*, McCormack's talk was a model for interdisciplinary border-crossing. After a whirlwind of engaging panels, the day concluded with cocktails at Casa Franca, an intimate jazz bar where Joyceans enjoyed a celebratory drink and continued the conversations sparked at the conference.

With no sign of slowing down, a full day of panels remained on Saturday, 15 June, and included some of the Symposium's finest. "Los clásicos y otras formas de intertextualidad" inaugurated the first Spanish-speaking panel and displayed fascinating work from students Martha Celis Mendoza, José Antonio Martínez Díez, and Karina Flores. Continuing the showcase of stellar graduate papers, Emily Schuck's "Cage'd Joyce: Chance Operations and Mesostics as Method Over Madness" and Zoe Hughes's "Towards a Playful Reading Practice or Gaming *Finnegans Wake*" pointed toward inventive ways of reading the "ludic strain" in Joyce. Of special interest to film scholars, Layne M. Farnen's "'No Dark Sarcasm in the Classroom': James Joyce, Barry Jenkins, and 'Othering' the *Bildungsroman*" made the unexpected move of taking the pop-culture phenomenon *Moonlight* and offering a comparative reading with *A Portrait*. Farnen read the notorious moment where *La La Land*'s production team mistakenly began to give an acceptance speech for the Oscar that Jenkins actually won as indicative of the erasure of racial and colonial traumas also present in Joyce.

An event unto itself, this year's Symposium banquet was held at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, a gem among Mexico City's rich cultural destinations. Joyceans were treated to a private tour by expert guides who led us through the vaulted halls housing numerous artifacts from Mayan and Aztec civilizations. At the dinner that followed, we were served an array of Yucatán dishes with wine aplenty. A banquet tradition, Timothy Martin sang "The Croppy Boy," and Patrick Reilly led Joyceans in a stirring rendition of "Love's Old Sweet Song," but it was McCormack's show-stopping "Finnegans Wake" that brought even the most resistant and unmusical among us to collective foot-stomping.

As is customary in the Joyce community, the conference ended on Sunday, 16 June, with a plenary roundtable, "'Spickspuck! Spoken.' A Roundtable Discussion of TransLatin Joyce: Global Transmissions in Ibero-American Literatures," and an invitation to Bloomsday festivities at the Embassy of Ireland. Guests were treated to ceviche and drinks, with music from the inimitable Shamrock, a Mexican band with a masterful Irish repertoire. More performances followed, with a rousing reading from Killeen and an utterly distinctive pantomime of "Ithaca" by Ricardo Cardoso Renteria and Jorge Olano of the Teatro

Universidad Panamericana, set to audio from a Spanish translation of *Ulysses*.

In closing, the Symposium organizer James Ramey echoed the thoughts of many of us who felt that this was simply one of the best conferences in recent memory:

I'd like to say that I and my collaborators here in Mexico are extremely grateful to the International James Joyce Foundation and the James Joyce community for putting their trust in us to make this conference happen and for supporting us with scholarships for grad students to attend. In these times of stiffening physical borders, we felt a great sense of community with the wide world of Joyce scholars and artists who interpret his work; the boundary-bursting essence of "Joyce Without Borders" was a dream made real by all those who gathered in Mexico, and we are forever in your debt.

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**"A Pineapple Revolution": The North American
James Joyce Symposium "Joyce Without Borders,"
Mexico City, Mexico, 12-16 June 2019**

Emma-Louise Silva: Antwerp-Mexico City

After sixteen hours of sitting in cars and planes, Mexico City beckoned, and although my suitcase had not arrived, each layer of my exquisite bowl of *Sopa Azteca*, from the rich broth to the silky sour cream, smooth avocado, and chile pasilla, swiftly enticed me to forget other chapters of my journey. Reassured by the fact that I had packed my beloved copy of *Ulysses* in my hand luggage, nothing could get in the way of the sun-goldened Casa Universitaria del Libro (CASUL), the nineteenth-century mansion in Colonia Roma Norte where James Ramey, Aurora Piñeiro, Argentina Rodríguez, and Mario Murguía were to host the "first annual gathering of Joyceans in the global south."

Layne Farnen: Tulsa-Mexico City

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