

Joyce Without Borders

By Maisie Ridgway

Hosted by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), the 2019 North American James Joyce Symposium *Joyce Without Borders* was the first held in the Global South and the first to hold panels in both Spanish and English. It therefore seems especially pertinent that this year's conference was dedicated to the many ways that Joyce and Joyce scholarship transcend conventional barriers and divisions. The conference commenced with a showcase of artists' works inspired by Joyce. The Irish artist Carol Wade presented some of the fruits of the past twelve years spent researching and illustrating each page of the *Wake* using oil pastels and watercolour to represent the many textures of Dublin's history: from the disappearing and reappearing stone Anna Livia head that made its way from bridges to buildings across the city, to the 1922 explosion of the public records office in Dublin's Four Courts. Neal Kosaly-Meyer followed Wade with a reading titled "*Finnegans Wake*, fragmented performance from memory," as part of which mesmeric gestures and a glass of Jameson Whiskey gave body to the words of the *Wake*. Featured artist Rita Duffy brought the day's performances to a close with her talk "My Imagined Nation," discussing art she made in response to living on the Irish border and through the Troubles. In her artwork, Duffy incorporates and challenges prevalent narratives such as the concept of irresolvable difference across borders, or the glorification of war heroes in contemporary culture, like the mythological figure Cúchulainn.

The spirit of questioning prevalent narratives continued into Thursday's sessions as part of the panel "Nes Yo: Living with the Irresolvable in Joyce's Fiction," during which Tiffany L. Fajardo gave new perspectives on the alleged sexual harassment at the heart of the *Wake*. For Fajardo, the text is not an unqualified and unapologetic "celebration of all sexual activity" but tells the story of how HCE's purported indecent exposure harmed the girls, his community, his family, and himself. Ultimately Fajardo's argument feeds into wider issues within Joycean scholarship, including the historical tendency to neglect the women of the *Wake*. Another theme of Thursday's sessions came in the form of a familiar joke, as explained by keynote speaker Michael Wood. The joke was one of underdevelopment, culture doing its "imperial work or failing to do it in interesting ways," as demonstrated by some of the best bad jokes from *Ulysses*, Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers*, and others. In between laughs, Wood showed how finely-drawn jokes unpick the characterizations of underdevelopment through parodic retellings by those who are themselves considered underdeveloped, subaltern, or tropic. Thursday

afternoon drew to a close with a panel chaired by conference organiser James Ramey on Joyce and Posthumanism, as part of which Brenna MacDougal outlined a Deleuzian reading of the *Wake*, uniting the posthuman and the human through the constant slippage of the singular into the multiple and nature into culture. Rather than Deleuze, Ramey's paper pursued a line of parasitology inspired by Jacques Derrida and Cary Wolfe. Using the critical works of both writers, Ramey developed a readerly posthuman methodology dubbed "close-observing," which he then used to read the problem of Joyce's man in the brown macintosh.

Friday morning kicked off with the panel "Joyce's Idiolecturing" and a talk by Paige Miller, within which Miller developed the sociolinguistic term "translanguaging" into a tool for reading characters in *Ulysses*. As part of this analysis, Miller explained that characters do not speak different languages but translanguage within their own idiolects; for example, when seen through a lens of multilingualism, the borders between Molly's English and Spanish language usage dissolve, blending to make the idiolect "Mollyese." By rereading the language of *Ulysses* as translanguaging, Miller urged us to move beyond the notion of linguistic borders in our reading praxis and beyond. Terence Killeen took the floor for Friday's keynote, homing in on one phrase in particular: Joyce's revision of "border incident" to "boarder incident" (*FW* 81). For Killeen, this phrase, and perhaps even its transmutation, served as an explanation of sorts for the first four conflict-ridden chapters of the *Wake*. Using archival material, Killeen showed how Joyce derived inspiration for many of these conflicts from newspaper articles reporting petty, often farcical attempts at crime. Returning to the phrase, Killeen concluded that, from the grand scale of countries to the local scale of lodgers, even the smallest contestation could stand for all contests and for all battles. Sticking with *Finnegans Wake* into Friday afternoon, Frances McCormack spoke on the ways in which the olfactory senses receive and code emotions in the text. Using a combination of linguistic analysis and close reading, McCormack showed that while there is a low frequency of words associated with shame throughout the *Wake*, a closer look revealed a recurrent associative motif of words to do with smell, shame, and Shem.

Moving into Saturday morning, Kiron Ward began the day's sessions as part of a panel titled "Joycean Sources." In his talk Ward explored the relationship between encyclopaedic thought and modernism, specifically the way that the *Britannica* shaped modernist thought and practice. As a project, Ward relayed how the *Britannica* was bound up in a "territorialisation of knowledge" that centred Anglo-American ideas of progress. By reading both the "Ithaca" and "Nestor" episodes of *Ulysses* for traces of the *Britannica*, Ward uncovered a Joycean critique of

the encyclopaedia which disrupts the *Britannica's* move towards a “totalised idea of the world.” Saturday afternoon’s sessions took a ludic turn with Zoe Hughes’ paper, “Towards a Playful Reading Practice or Gaming at *Finnegans Wake*.” Hughes put forward a compelling argument for the *Wake* as a game, an apparatus that necessitates play both alone, and, more importantly, together as a collaborative event. For Hughes these events often transpire as reading groups where the *Wake* is not a book but an object from which different stories emerge as a result of an individual’s interactions with it and, perhaps most importantly, the relationships between groupmates. Hughes’ talk was incredibly apt given that reading groups for both *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses* were held each lunchtime throughout the conference. The *Wake* reading group was particularly well attended, with around 30 scholars playing Joyce’s game over meals of chicken mole and drinks of chia fresca.

César Salgado gave the final keynote, focusing on the writer Lezama Lima, the Grupo Orígenes, and the journal Orígenes. Moving between his own journey as a scholar, the political climate in Cuba and the USA, and both Joyce and Lezama’s critical, personal and fictional narratives, Salgado made a case for the significance of Lezama Lima’s textual legacy, highlighting the ways by which Lezama and the Grupo Orígenes potentialized Joyce. Salgado concluded with the note that to bring the critical technologies of Joyce studies to Lezama studies is not an act of academic charity but historical absolutism. The conference came to its climax on Saturday evening with a banquet at the famous National Anthropology Museum, which houses the world’s largest collection of ancient Mexican art along with an abundance of other anthropological and archaeological artefacts from throughout Mexico’s history. At the banquet, Joyce scholars from institutions in Japan, Russia, Berlin, Brazil, and more came together to break bread and reflect on a vivifying four days of borderless intellectual exchange.

--University of Sussex