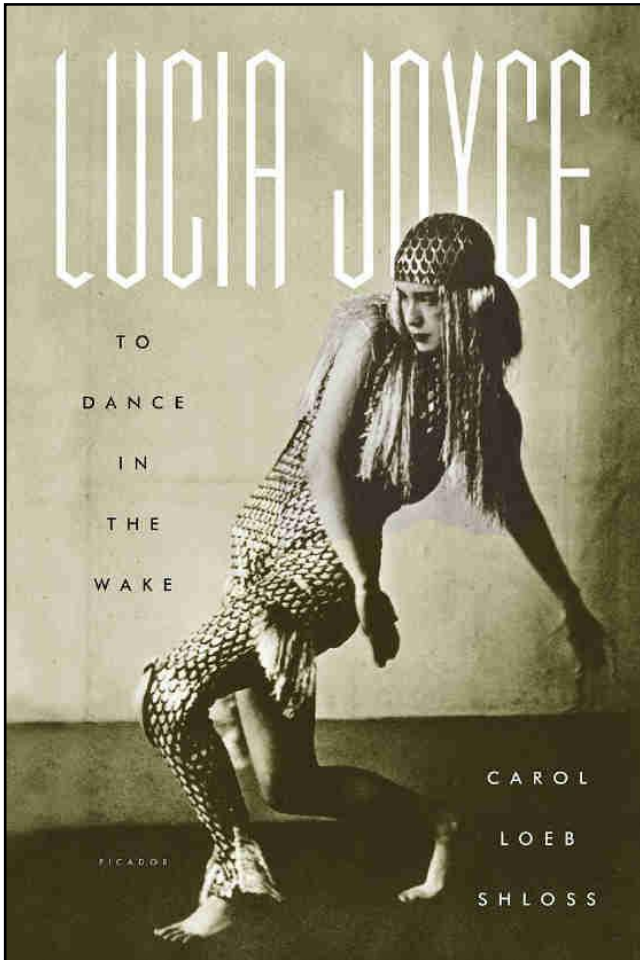


Book Review

Lucia Joyce: To dance in the wake By Carol Loeb Shloss Picador, 2005

Heather Hill



Carol Loeb Shloss, the author of this biography of James Joyce's daughter Lucia, notes in her introduction that the book originated with a photo, and it is indeed the striking photo on the book cover of Lucia Joyce dancing which immediately grabs the attention and draws you into her story...a story "that was not supposed to be told". Both intentionally and from neglect, Lucia Joyce's story until now has been forgotten, and Lucia "dismissed as the mad daughter of a man of genius" (p.4).

As Shloss demonstrates, Lucia (1907-1982) cannot be so summarily dismissed. Indeed Lucia in her early years showed herself to be a talented dancer. At age 15, Lucia studied dance with Isadora Duncan's brother, Raymond, later studying with Jean Borlin, Elizabeth Duncan (Isadora's sister) and Margaret Morris, the latter being a well known dancer and teacher of the time, who went on to champion the use of movement in schools and in

therapeutic contexts. In the 1920s Lucia pursued a dance career, teaching and performing.

Lucia emerges as a free spirit, having been brought up in a very bohemian environment, and a very creative and talented artist, for whom dance was a natural and vital mode of being. However, she was also the daughter of James Joyce, living in the shadow of her father's artistic pursuits. The Joyce household was quite unstable, with numerous money worries in the early years, and living a nomadic existence, moving house and moving countries.

At the end of the 1920s, Lucia suddenly gave up dance – for reasons darkly hinted at but never fully explained – and from that time on became unpredictable and "difficult". She was treated by numerous psychiatrists (Bleuler, Jung among others), and was eventually permanently institutionalised. As I read this part of the book, I couldn't help but wish that she had been able to have dance therapy – she of all people needed a therapist who could meet her on her own ground, which was through her body.

This is an extremely dense book and at times one can get lost in the sheer weight of detail. However, the density also reflects the multiple layers to this story which make it a fascinating and compelling read. The early sections on dance are of course immensely interesting. This was a time when modern dance was freeing itself from the constrictions of classical ballet (Isadora Duncan, Rudolf Laban, Wigman, Dalcroze to name a few) and when the connection between healthy bodies and healthy societies was again being made. Living in Paris in the 20s, Lucia was part of revolutionary times – socially, politically, sexually and culturally. The author's descriptions of the bohemian life in Paris at the time contain names like Samuel Beckett, Josephine Baker, Peggy Guggenheim and so on. It adds yet another perspective to this rich period in history.

The descriptions of Lucia's treatment at the hands of early psychiatry are quite shocking – so much medical certainty in such an uncertain field. For me, a really sad aspect was the impact on Lucia of

the various psychiatric diagnoses, which doomed her ever more to be an object of observation by others too ready to judge her behaviour as deviant. This loss of self and personal and social meaning for Lucia is the tragic subtext of this story.

At the heart of the biography is the relationship of James Joyce and Lucia. While there are suggestions that Lucia was in some way sacrificed by Joyce (unconsciously) and by his friends and family (intentionally – some certainly appeared to actively try to keep the “difficult” daughter from disturbing Joyce’s creative process), the author clearly believes that Joyce was possibly the only person to see beyond the “mad” label to the creative, free spirit of his daughter and worked hard to try to help her keep her life together. The author also suggests that the relationship was not all one way and that the daughter was Joyce’s muse, whose life provided at least some of the material for his work, particularly *Finnegan’s Wake* in which the author believes Lucia can be identified with the central figure, Anna Livia.

It is clear that documented facts were hard to come by for this biography and equally clear that the author has a strong thesis she wished to present. Having little knowledge of the history of the Joyces and therefore no context in which to place this

book, I find it hard to comment on the author’s interpretation of Lucia’s story. I know only that I am left with many questions and a desire to read more.

Lucia Joyce: To dance in the wake is a book which may create controversy among Joyce scholars, but it is a book which I found to be a strong presence in my life over the weeks I was reading it and a book rich, intriguing and at times quite disturbing.

Postscript. It seems that in the 1960s a young American dancer, Jean Erdman (later to dance with Martha Graham’s company), created a dance performance based on *Finnegan’s Wake* called *The Coach with the Six Insides*. It was only years later, when she met the author of this book, that she realised that Lucia Joyce, the probable model for the heroine of the book, had also been a dancer.

Dr Heather Hill, Prof. Member DTAA, B.A., M.Ed., Grad. Dip. Movement and Dance, Grad. Cert. Dance Therapy, author “Invitation to the dance: Dance for people with dementia and their carers”(2001), has specialised in the area of dementia, worked as a dance therapist for 20 years and coordinates the DMT courses at RMIT University.