



Lucia

Alex Pheby

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“Her case is cyclothymia, dating from the age of seven and a half. She is about thirty-three, speaks French fluently... Her character is gay, sweet and ironic, but she has bursts of anger over nothing when she is confined to a straitjacket.”

So wrote James Joyce in 1940, in a letter about his only daughter, Lucia. It is one of the few surviving contemporary portraits of her troubled life. Most other references to her have been lost. An attempt has been made to erase her from the pages of history.

We know she was the daughter of the famous writer. She was the lover of Samuel Beckett. She was a gifted dancer. From her late twenties she was treated for suspected schizophrenia – and repeatedly hospitalised. She spent the last thirty years of her life in an asylum.

And, after her death, her voice was silenced. Her letters were burned. Correspondence concerning her disappeared from the Joyce archive. Her story has been shrouded in mystery, the tomb door slammed behind her.

Alex Pheby’s extraordinary new novel takes us inside that darkness. In sharp, cutting shards of narrative, Lucia evokes the things that may have been done to Lucia Joyce. And while it presents these stories in vivid and heart-breaking detail, it also questions what it means to recreate a life. It is not an attempt to speak for Lucia. Rather, it is an act of empathy and contrition that constantly questions what it means to speak for other people.

Lucia is intellectually uncompromising. Lucia is emotionally devastating. Lucia is unlike anything anyone else has ever written.

Lucia Details

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Author : Alex Pheby

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From Reader Review Lucia for online ebook

Hugh says

Shortlisted for the Republic of Consciousness Prize 2019

This book is quite unlike anything else I have read this year - a speculative fictional story centred on Lucia, the daughter of James Joyce, which is fearless, challenging, allusive and brilliant. I feel hopelessly unqualified to review it, so I will start by recommending this one from Neil:
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

The known facts of Lucia's life are sparse but tantalising, largely because the family destroyed her papers after her death and disowned her once she was confined to mental institutions.

Her story is told or suggested from a wide range of perspectives, in a series of episodic chapters, between each of which there are pages decorated with ancient Egyptian symbols. These tell a fairly linear story of an archaeologist exploring a long-sealed tomb that has been desecrated before being sealed, and describe the funerary rites and some of the associated beliefs of the Egyptians. It gradually becomes apparent that the archaeologist's attempts to piece together the story of the Egyptian girl mirror Pheby's attempts to understand Lucia and the uncertainties involved in such speculations. They also help to give the book a strikingly distinctive look and feel.

The subject matter is not always easy reading - Pheby explores some dark themes including incest and animal cruelty and explores the mindset of the abusers. The research is impressive, as the author's afterword makes clear:

"I also acknowledge my debts to the fields of history, music, medicine (including dentistry), embryology, parasitology, film studies, Asian and Middle Eastern studies, Russian studies, English studies, Joyce studies and Egyptology".

I suspect I have only scratched the surface of what could be discussed in this review. Thanks to Galley Beggar for publishing such an innovative and stimulating book.

I am disappointed but not surprised that this one missed out on the Man Booker longlist.

Jackie Law says

The AI sheet that accompanied my proof copy of Lucia informed me that

“Lucia is intellectually uncompromising. Lucia is emotionally devastating. Lucia is unlike anything anyone else has ever written.”

I concur. This, his second work of creative fiction based on the life of a real person, establishes Alex Pheby as a literary talent deserving close attention.

The eponymous Lucia was the second child of James Joyce and Nora Barnacle. The bare bones of her story are easily verifiable but little else is known. She was born in Trieste, Italy and lived across Europe, her peripatetic parents moving the family from hotels to shabby apartments depending on their financial status. Lucia was a talented dancer. She was Samuel Beckett's lover. She spent the last thirty years of her life in an

asylum. Following her death her remaining family strove to erase her from the public record. They destroyed her letters, removed references to her from the archives. Even her medical records were taken.

In this novel the author does not attempt to create a detailed biography. Rather he presents Lucia's story in fragments and told from a variety of points of view. Between each chapter is a motif detailing the discovery of an ancient Egyptian tomb that is developed to serve as explanation.

The story created is shocking and affecting, presented in a manner that makes it all too believable. The voice throughout remains detached, the needs of the narrators evident even when they presume they are acting in Lucia's best interests. The reader will feel outraged at her treatment.

The tale starts at Lucia's end, in 1982, when undertakers arrive to collect the body of the deceased. Six years later a student is employed to burn the contents of a chest filled with letters, photographs and other effects. The thoughts of these characters offer a first glimpse of Lucia. Mostly though they focus on their subject as they go about the tasks assigned. Lucia is subsidiary, often something of a nuisance. This sets the tone for how she was treated in life.

Lucia is depicted as an object that others must deal with. If she will not comply she must be tamed. Children are expected to behave, denied agency 'for their own good' with resulting complaints dismissed. Troublesome little girls can be threatened to silence them.

Lucia's relationships with various family members, especially her brother, are vividly dealt with. Whatever other's behaviour, it is she who will stand accused of spoiling things for everyone if she protests.

As a young woman Lucia was considered beautiful. She clashed with her mother which led to her being incarcerated. The cutting edge treatments for mental illnesses at the time were experimental and horrifying.

Lucia was moved around as a cure for her behaviour was sought. After the war she was transferred to an asylum in Northampton where she spent her remaining decades. She was buried here, away from her family. Even in death they sought to silence her.

The fragmentary style of writing and the distractions of the narrators are effectively harnessed to portray the instability that was a signature in Lucia's life. The reader is offered glimpses but always at the periphery. There is a sense of detachment, a tacit acceptance that those who will not behave as society requires are a nuisance to be subdued and hidden away.

Yet this is a story that pulses with emotion. Lucia rises inexorably from the page. The author has filled out the gaps in her history with a story that whilst unsettling resonates. That he does so with such flair and aplomb makes this a recommended read.

LindaJ^ says

I've not read any reviews other than my GR friend Hugh's, which is what led me to read the book. I knew it was about James Joyce's daughter Lucia, about whom, though, I knew nothing. The book was published by a small independent publisher. I downloaded the Kindle e-book and started it 8 days ago. It was a very challenging read. The format was creative and unique. Upon finishing it, I wasn't sure what I'd learned about Lucia -- had she been sexually abused by her father, uncle, and brother? had she been locked away in a psychiatric hospital? had she ever been a dancer? did she throw a chair at someone? who was the old man who ordered all her personal papers to be burned? And what were the segments about an Egyptian

tomb/mummy all about?

After finishing, the first thing I did was an Internet search for information about Lucia. After reading a few articles, I found a few answers. Seems she was diagnosed as a schizophrenic and committed in her 20's or early 30's and died while in a mental institution. She had been a dance student in her teens and very early 20's. All her papers, and those of her doctor and best friend, were destroyed or otherwise disposed of. While sexual abuse by her father was not confirmed, it seemed to be implicated, and Lucia was described on occasion as sexually promiscuous.

But what about the Egyptian princess mummy? What was that all about? Were the actions of the archeologist who attempted to clean up clean up the evidence that the mummy had not been loved or properly prepared for the afterlife analogous to those of the author in writing the book? That will be the topic of my next web search.

So what did I think about the book? I cannot say I liked it. At times, I was repelled. But the writing was often brilliant and it was very creative. Hence, I would give it a 2 star rating for my emotional response to it and a 4 star rating for structure and writing. I averaged those to come up with my 3 star rating.

Robyn (FailFish) says

Alex Pheby's writing is fantastic. The imagery this book evokes is vivid and moving - at times shocking, but never graphic for graphic's sake. As a historical account it may be wildly inaccurate, but it is certainly a beautifully written piece of literature.

This is a fictional account of the life of Lucia Joyce - the daughter of Irish author James Joyce - who trained as a dancer but spent 50 years of her life institutionalised, with varying diagnoses of schizophrenia and cyclothymia (a precursor of bipolar disorder). Very little is known about Lucia. The majority of the letters between her and her father were destroyed, or have been kept out of the public domain. After her father's death in 1941, she appears to have had very little contact with the outside world. She became just another mad woman left to rot in silence, forgotten, in an institution.

There have been various attempts to chronicle Lucia's life over the years, although this is the first I have read. It is a very clever book. Some of the claims Pheby makes are shocking, although he takes great care to ensure the reader knows they are merely conjecture. However, this book doesn't try to be an accurate biography of a life. What it does is paint a beautiful picture in the reader's mind of a character, a personality, which may or may not have been Lucia's. It hypothesises events that may have shaped that mind, and the opinions that characters surrounding her may have held about her. The focus is not on facts, but on feelings.

I will be interested to see the opinions of those who have read other 'biographies' of Lucia, or even of her father James. I expect this will compare very favourably.

carissa says

"More unworthy thoughts; he would like as not save these girls from such a fate, if it was within his power."

Jonathan Pool says

Lucia is an excellent work of fiction, bringing structural inventiveness to a subject that has already been much discussed in the years since the events in question. Lucia's life story has been dissected a number of times before Alex Pheby set to work. Much of what Pheby relates, and amplifies, and surmises, has previously been the subject of not dissimilar conjecture. Annabel Abbs **The Joyce Girl** (2016) received some adverse comment due to the assertions of family incest. I read swathes of Carol Loeb Shloss (excellent) **To Dance in the Wake** (2006) as a companion piece, and save for the fact that Pheby's account falls after the seventy year moratorium on access to publicly held information (on the J.Joyce estate), the conclusions are broadly the same.

Poor Lucia Joyce was a victim of the inhuman treatment by society towards assumed mental illness.

A first read delivers plenty of fascinating, and shocking subject matter. It's a second read that brings home Alex Pheby's clever ability to deliver messages that straight biography doesn't manage. Doris Lessing "There's no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth" (quoted by Abbs).

Lucia elicits the obvious, and natural, reader response that James Joyce's beleaguered daughter was treated badly by many people who met her... Alex Pheby himself is quick to anger when discussing his book, and Lucia's life and treatment. It is anger that pervades this clever, impressive book.

Mental illness, was for many years the affliction that dare not be acknowledged- at least by family members. A Google search today "50 famous celebrities that suffer from mental illness" shows there's no shortage of the famous who openly, and without shame, identify themselves. Times, and attitudes, have changed for the better.

The British royal family, no less, were the subject of lurid newspaper headlines in 1987 with the story that *five of Queen Elizabeth's cousins were hidden away in a mental hospital on the same day 46 years ago*. The reports identified the year of incarceration as 1941 (coincidentally the year of James Joyce's death) In the newspapers "leading genealogist" Hugh Peskett was quoted saying

"The great relief is that the genes are obviously in the Clinton family and not in the Royal Family. It is clearly a Clinton family gene which is wrong, rather than that of the Bowes-Lyon family."

Alex Pheby has previous form as a writer of 'medical fiction'. His second novel **Playthings** centred on Daniel Scheber and schizophrenia. Lucia Joyce is the headline subject for Pheby's probing into attitudes towards, and barbaric treatments of "madness". Middle Ages remedies as practiced in the c. 20th century were appalling, and compounded by the misguided cover ups of famous families (as clearly demonstrated by Peskett's comments in 1987).

So what if the specifics of the treatment handed out to Lucia are pure speculation (as the author clearly states)?; there's plenty of documented evidence that society in the twentieth century institutionalised ignorant, cruel, painful, treatments for those deemed to be different, or unruly.

There is a good deal of excellent literary trickery in Lucia, distinguishing the book from what would otherwise be a good if rather technical, clinical, account of asylums.

The juxtaposition of Egyptian mummification and burial rites, with the preparation of Lucia's body following her death is thoughtful, moving, and respectful.

Pheby has looked deeply into the rituals so famously revealed in the tombs of Luxor and drawn subtle parallels to dignify Lucia in the 1980s.

Carter's discovery of the Tutenkamen tomb in 1922 and the subsequent excavations and moralising about

respect for the dead was contemporaneous with James Joyce's own notoriety at the height of his writing (Ulysses also 1922)

There's a much more sinister side to the Egyptian connection and Pheby's implication that the Joyce family were involved in the great taboo, incest, is made both overtly and by reference to Mendelian genetics and the assertion that the Egyptians held different, broadly accepting, views about incest.

The clever and deliberate analysis of both the preparation of the Egyptian body, and then the subsequent discovery and re-interpretation of the events of the preparation can also be read as a facsimile of Pheby's own digging around for a detailed accurate account of the events surrounding Lucia's incarceration and the parties intimately involved.

For those readers who want to probe more deeply into **Lucia** Alex Pheby introduces numerous clever and (for a researcher) satisfying cross references throughout the book. Of those that I picked out, among my favourite were:

- Tapeworm(133) A detailed and rather grisly description of the use of tapeworms (for medicinal purposes) -The Egyptian link it seems to have been known that embalmers ran a certain risk of contracting a tapeworm in the course of their work. In the Ebers Papyrus an incantation apparently intended to protect embalmers is described – this suggests that tapeworms might have been perceived as a curse cast on a person.

- Carl Jung reviews Ulysses “The whole work has the character of a worm cut in half, that can grow a new head or a new tail as required...This singular and uncanny characteristic of the Joycean mind shows that his work pertains to the class of cold-blooded animals and specifically to the worm family. If worms were gifted with literary powers they would write with the sympathetic nervous system for lack of a brain. “ Jung treats Lucia, and there is the suggestion that tapeworms were part of the proposed ‘remedy’

- Samuel Beckett. Pheby is scathing about Beckett. *“It is painful to live within the pages of a book and/or to be recognised only by one's attributes. Would you like it Samuel Beckett?”* (145)

- There's a clear parallel in Beckett's agreement not to publish his first book (**Dream of Fair to Middling Women** (written 1932; published 1992) and the suppression of material by the Joyce estate when/if negative depictions of Lucia were suggested. One of Beckett's characters is Syra-Cusa; (the source of this name being Lucia of Syracuse (283–304), also known as Saint Lucy)

There are many, many, more cross references that will reward a re-reading of Lucia.

I met Alex Pheby a couple of times in 2018.

Pheby has a jovial, wisecracking, nature. I was amused at his declaration that he was angry to have his persona stripped of humour in Paul Ewen's (mostly) spoof novel (**Francis Plug: Writer in Residence**) about the literary circuit, and university campus life- a portrayal in which Alex Pheby appears... as Dr. Alex Pheby.

And Alex Pheby is certainly jocular and teasing; he is a good knockabout speaker kicking off events (the Bookblast in Norwich, October 2018), and one that the interlocutor is drawn to in multiple author group discussions. There's another side to Alex Pheby too. That's the widely read, technically knowledgeable academic, harbouring a genuine anger (quite different to the mock anger at the Francis Plug image). Alex Pheby is angry about the treatment dished out to Lucia Joyce. He does not duck overt criticism of the many people who ruined her life (Samuel Beckett in particular is not excused by virtue of some small kindnesses). Alex Pheby is firm in his disapproval of mysogyny in general, and in literature (as attested by his distaste for a particular neo-liberal male writer (not Joyce).)

- Surprised there has not been more comment antagonistic to his portrayal of Lucia
- Asked on radio if disrespectful of James Joyce

- Pheby has a fascination with asylums
- Important to not suppress, but to discuss
- Carol Loeb Shloss- clearly constrained in what she was able to say.

My own view on Shloss is that despite the many battles she had with the James Joyce estate, who kept a very tight lid on Joyce's material, limiting its use by academics; her book succeeds in opening Pandora's box - some Goodreads comments on Shloss are not entirely complimentary.

Loeb Shloss, however, disturbs the story with irrelevant hypotheticals and speculation, imagines scenarios that didn't actually happen in attempts at thought experiments, and generally butchers a story interesting enough on its own. <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

At the time of posting this review (December 2018), Lucia has not yet received widespread notice (just 45 ratings on Goodreads, seven months after publication). It really is a well written work of fiction, innovative, and passionate. I hope it gets some further momentum and comes to the attention of a wider reading public in 2019.

Paul Fulcher says

Now shortlisted for the 2019 Republic of Consciousness Prize

The judges' citation:

In his review for the Guardian, Ian Sansom wrote "Pheby is a writer possessed of unusual – indeed, extraordinary – powers". Lucia Joyce, the daughter of James, is not a new subject for fiction. What is new here, and startlingly so, is how Pheby decides to tell her story. Psychological cruelty has rarely been rendered by such a cool hand. In this novel nothing is real; everything is real. Biographical fiction at its most honest.

"There are times when beauty trumps truth, but these are very few, for truth is beauty and even in the fantastic there are forms of truth - fabular truths, allegorical truths, wider human truths - that are beautiful in an universal manner. In this, a dancing puppet can exceed any philosophy in approaching both universal truth and perfect beauty - who could say otherwise after a visit to the Louvre, or the Musee d'Orsay, or the ballet, or the countryside, or the, or the, or, all the others.

The dancer Lucia Joyce, daughter of the famous writer James Joyce, performed for the famous director Jean Renoir at Les Ateliers du Vieux Colombier, Paris, France in the summer of 1927, and her performance was filmed. She had been commissioned to perform for a role in Renoir's *La Petite Marchande d'allumettes*, based on Hans Christian Andersen's *La Petite Fille aux allumettes*, but her dance was cut from the final edit. She was removed.

This is apt.

Truth and beauty, perhaps they are inseparable, and so lies and ugliness."

Lucia is another excellent novel from the wonderful Galley Beggar Press, publishers (astonishingly for such a small operation) of, among other books, *We That Are Young*, *Forbidden Line*, *A Girl is a Half Formed Thing*, *Feeding Time*, *Tinderbox*, and, also by Alex Pheby, *Playthings*.

There are already excellent reviews on Goodreads from Gumble's Yard, Hugh, Jackie Law and Neil which I would strongly commend for their insights and there is a brilliant review by David Collard in the TLS review

where he describes Lucia as "an ambitious and daring investigation of consciousness, agency, selfhood, mental disorder, medical callousness and misogyny," which sums it up perfectly.

So rather than cover the same ground I will focus on what I saw as the development of Lucia from Pheby's previous novel *Playthings* (my review <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>).

Playthings was based on the real-life case of Daniel Paul Schreber (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danie...>). Schreber was diagnosed with what was to be later known paranoid schizophrenia and described one of his periods of mental illness in a memoir *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*.

The memoir became famous mainly because Freud drew on it heavily in his work giving Schreber's condition a, well, very Freudian interpretation. But for Schreber, a distinguished jurist, the book was actually intended to answer the moral and legal question: "In what circumstance can a person deemed insane be detained in an asylum against his declared will?"

Playthings although written in the 3rd person, is told from the perspective of Schreber and draws on his work and on the considerable volume of analysis of his case and Freud's interpretation. Indeed the one drawback of an impressive novel was that I felt it perhaps required, for a full appreciation, much more prior knowledge of the case than I had (which was precisely zero).

Lucia by contrast feels a much more accessible novel, at least to this reader. And Lucia herself is the absent centre of the novel, which is largely written from the perspective of those who encountered her during her life

And far from having a wealth of documentary evidence to draw upon, very little is known about Lucia. A surviving 1936 letter from James Joyce one of the few mentions that remains in his correspondence:

"Her case is cyclothymia, dating from the age of seven and a half. She is about thirty-three, speaks French fluently ... Her character is gay, sweet and ironic, but has had bursts of anger over nothing when she has been confined to a straitjacket."

This requires, but also enables, Pheby as a novelist to fill the gaps. As he explains after one particular anecdote where the novel has Lucia's brother Giorgio torture her pet rabbit to ensure her silence as to his incestuous relations with her:

"If there are those of you reading this who know Giorgio, you might say this never happened. But how do you know? How does one ever know what it is that occurs outside the range of one's experience? You may not know that it did happen, but this is not the same as knowing that it did not happen. Perhaps if there were documentary evidence; but who keeps such records? Is it even possible to keep evidence of things that might happen that someone wishes to keep secret? If one has secrets, and then burns the evidence on a pure, one invites speculation, and speculation is infinite in a way that the truth is not. Speculation is limited only by the sick imaginations of those who speculate, where truth is not. Why shouldn't Giorgio have tortured Lucia's rabbit to prevent her from speaking? All things that are possible are, in the absence of facts that have been destroyed that might have proved them incorrect, equally correct.

The moral of this story is: do not destroy documentary evidence of the truth, since it will come back and bit you in the arse.

This last a reference to the Joyce estate and their destruction of much of the relevant material including Lucia's own letters. In 2003 Carole Schloss wrote a biography "*Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake*", stating that "this is a story that was not supposed to be told," and found herself in a legal battle with the Joyce estate, which initially forced her publishers to redact significant parts of the book (in turn leading to early reviewer's

arguing some of her claims were unsubstantiated) but which she eventually won:
<https://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/s...>

This article <https://pictorial.jezebel.com/the-dis...> provides both a good summary of Lucia's life, but also suggests the need for an appropriate fictional treatment. Pheby's wonderful new novel rises to the challenge he sets himself:

"This woman had gone into the afterlife friendless and I resolved to address that lack."

Declan says

My review is here: <http://www.drb.ie/essays/a-fire-in-th...>

Marcus Hobson says

Well, what to make of this book?

I think we deserved some explanation of the **Ba**, the **Ib** and **Shuyet**. To know what these mean, early on, would have helped to make some sense of what was going on in the whole book. In ancient Egypt the soul was said to consist of five parts:

- Ren – the name given to a person at birth
- Shuyet – the person's shadow or silhouette
- Ib – the metaphysical heart containing emotion and thought, key to the afterlife and essential to surviving death.
- Ba – personality, all that makes you unique, the soul in other words, that lives on after death.
- Ka – the vital spark or life, that distinguishes the living from the dead.

So, where a chapter is headed 'The Ba of Lucia Joyce', that might be about the part of her somehow survives after her death.

Under one of these headings, the discussion is all about the posthumous record and about being written into a book, even if the character is supposed to be anonymous. Also, if books are not published, there will still be lots of readers, manuscripts will be handed around the group of close friends. A story can never remain hidden. And then we contrast this with the fate of the Egyptian mummies. Their tombs were supposed to be their resting places for all eternity, their lives shown in paintings on the walls. But what has happened; bodies exhumed, objects scattered across museums around the world, mummies' bindings split open, display cases surrounded by 'gawping wax-faced idiots who drag themselves past your body because they think it is the thing to do on a Sunday afternoon, or because they read about you in the paper...'

From time to time the character of Lucia emerges, but gradually she is lost in the scenes of what happened to her, in the long life spent in mental institutions where all manner of treatments and indignities were inflicted on her. She is more animated earlier on, for example when she works in a bookshop where "she enjoys...being the sensible one among so many deliberately impractical protagonists of their own melodramas."

In the end I am disappointed by this book, because I feel that I have to know a good deal about Lucia Joyce that is not contained in the book, in order to make any sense of it. Without looking things up and finding more, I would have been completely lost. I didn't want a stiff, lifeless history, but I did need more than I was

given. To have to hunt elsewhere for information seems to undermine the fact you have the book in your hand.

My lasting impression is that there is nothing in Lucia's voice. She is missing from this novel, just as she now is missing in real life, written out by her family. Perhaps that is the whole point, but I'm not satisfied.

Katia N says

It is a very angry, fierce and disturbing book. Occasionally reading it hurts almost physically. But it is a beautiful book nevertheless.

Lucia Joyce, the daughter of James Joyce was extremely talented girl struck with mental illness in her twenties, committed to different mental institutions soon after that. She ended up spending the largest part of her life incarcerated in one asylum or another without her family ever visiting her, including her mother. Moreover, after her death the majority of her letters and papers were destroyed on the request of Stephen Joyce, the only living direct descent of James Joyce. If there is anything left, the access to it remains sealed. And Stephen Joyce has got the reputation of being terribly litigious. So Lucia remains largely untouchable for any serious scholarship, deliberately erased from public memory, not understood and not known even after her death. Is the destruction of the papers, alleged withdrawal of information from the archives the protection of privacy or the act of vandalism?

Many people disappear from this Earth without leaving a trace; or more often, they continue to leave in the memories of their loved ones, but not in the memories of a broader society. But some people have the right to be remembered more widely due to their exceptional talent, exceptional life or exceptional misfortune. Is it moral to deprive these people this right even after their death?

I think, this issue motivated Alex Pheby to go on crusade in writing this book. The another reason, it seems was the act of revenge to all the people alive or dead who might harm Lucia in her life and who prevent any justice after her death. And he did not spare anyone in his writing.

The book is brilliantly structured. It is a series of thought experiments - vignettes, focusing on what might have been done to Lucia. Each of them contain a real person, the closed to her, family member or a doctor. And those thought experiments imagine the proper extreme of cruelty. Lucia exist there only as an empty space, she could be identified only through the actions done to her by the others. Each action drop by drop is adding to the burden she is not capable to carry. Everyone gets blamed: father, brother, uncle, mother, Beckett... Incest, domestic violence, abortion, medical torture and abuse in love - all is in here in the proportions which may be considered unlikely. But Pheby argument is that in the absence of the facts available, any speculation is fair: "the truth will come back and bite your arse".

However the book is not simply a speculative rant. It is a beautiful work of literature with striking, even if disturbing, imaginary, full or literary allusions. I was hypnotised how he created a link between snow and fire, matches, incendiary acts and burning the documents. Snow plays a big role in Joyce's *The Dead*. Here, Pheby reimagines the story of *The Little Match Girl* who is trying to burn the matches while looking at the falling snow before dying on the street. Lucia creates a fire in the one of mental institutions which almost cost her life; she seems to possess the matches constantly and chew on them. The fire burns all evidence of her existence; her nephew would order this destruction. But while being a boy, he is mesmerised by the terrible beauty of burning papers flying in the space after an air raid in 1941: "*When he looked up into the sky, his mouth full of pastry and custard, and raspberry seeds sticking in his back teeth, he was amazed to*

see snow falling burning to land at his feet. The snow turned to infinitely thin curled black crisps of nothing which became smudges when touched with the toe of his shoe but he did not question his eyes."

The separate allusions in each of the vignette is not difficult to relate to the actual events or relevant speculations. Be it failed treatment of Lucia by Jung and his essay on Ulysses; the Lucia's role in Renoir's film adaptation of "The Little Match Girl" or failed love story with Beckett and his Dream of Fair to Middling Women, depicting her unfavourably, unpublished in his life time.

There is only one part which totally puzzled me. There is a bit about The Lady with the Little Dog, the one of Chekhov's most famous story. But the story has been turned upside down to make the main heroine a vengeful creature to the point of being inhuman and making the dog into the rapist (!) of the male character involved. I did not get what he is referring to either in Joyce's life or in Chekhov's story. And it left me with a slightly unpleasant aftertaste - what Chekhov has to do with all of this? Maybe someone could explain. However, I guess if one reads "Lucia", one should be prepared to adjust to the author's hyperbolic lenses.

It is a well known fact that Joyce knew Egyptology and incorporated "The Book of Dead" into the imaginary and philosophy created in Finnegans Wake (FW). Joyce even suggested to Frank Budgen that he write an article about FW, entitling it James Joyce's Book of the Dead. Another critic draws the attention to "the splendidly magical atmosphere created by this rich association of gods, insects and Elysian Fields". There is an agreement between Joyce's scholars that Lucia was an inspiration for some characters in FW or for its language. There is also a more extreme opinion that Joyce agreed to get Lucia committed in order to finish the book.

Pheby uses all these facts to incorporate an Egyptian theme into his book. We meet a lot of insects here as well: persistent gnats, disturbing tapeworms who allegedly manage to penetrate one's brain and create a work of literature. (I think it is a reference not only to Jung's Essay on "Ulysses", but also to Joyce's suspected syphilis). And the main key metaphor of the book is conveyed through Egyptology as well. In parallel to the main vignettes, we are following the story of two archaeologists discovering a tomb containing a mummy of a girl. However, it is evident that the tomb and the mummy were vandalised, evidently, during the burial rites to stop the girl to get into the other life. So even in death she would be lonely and stuck. The narrating archeologist decides to put the things right for her: *"There I made to repair the damage that had been done to the best of my abilities"*.

I think Alex Pheby certainly did good job in his "repair". The book has made me to research what is factually known about Lucia. It is not a lot. But I think I know a big part of it now. There is a wonderful book attempting the biography of Lucia by Carol Shloss Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake. It is mainly based on the textual analysis of FW and Joyce's notebooks. But Carol Shloss had to delete a lot of references to her source material from the book and some of her conjectures on the request of infamous Joyce's estate (Stephen). She lately has won a lawsuit against the estate. And her supplementary text containing the original research could be viewed in the US on-line. But sadly not in Europe. And that made me angry. I only could imagine how it would feel to research a proper book about Lucia.

Alex Pheby's book is also important as it deals with the barbaric methods of treating the mental illness in 20th century. For some reason, this often affected women living in a shadow of famous men. He details some horrific experiments which, I am afraid, not totally fictitious.

In the recent years, the interest in Lucia's life has sparked quite a few works of fiction. Alex Pheby's stands out as the most conceptual and inventive one. There is also The Joyce Girl devoted to Lucia's years in Paris and Lucia, and "The girl who danced in Shadows" by Joyce Garvey, The Irish academic dealing with her time in Northampton asylum. There was also a play "Calico" about her relationship with Beckett. And Carol Shloss's biography is wonderful research into her creativity and relationship with Joyce. However, I hope that soon the scholars would be allowed to research freely whatever documents are left about her life, and we

would have a scholarly, documentary based biography, which would do her justice.

It is an uncanny coincidence that I've read this book shortly after finishing *The End* by Knausgaard (the final instalment of his *Mein Kampf* project). Both books are dealing with the issues of privacy; what is the truth about a concrete individual and where are the limits between the public and the private sphere. In the case of Knausgaard, he puts his family under public eye almost in real time. Especially it affects his wife who has got a bipolar and struggles with her mental health. Now the public image of her created by the project would accompany her life whether she wants it or not. In the case of Lucia, it is the opposite extreme: she is dead since 1982. She was silenced and abandoned for the last 40 years of her life. She was extremely talented person. If she would have a different life, she might achieve a lot of creative success notwithstanding her illness. Or she might not. We would never know. But she is certainly not an ordinary person. And even now we are not allowed to know the whole truth about her. The part of her legacy was physically destroyed. And all of that for the sake of privacy. Whose privacy is that? Hers? Her nephew? Joyce's who is dead since 1941? The border between the private and the public is getting blurrier in our time. It is not always a good thing. But in the case of the talented woman, silenced by her family and her condition, we have the right to know more. I am sure she was not alone in the 20th century. And all of these silenced voices should be able to be heard now.

Therefore this brutal, angry book is so powerful and timely.

Appendix

Some articles about Lucia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucia_J... - Wiki

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/28/bo...> - Hermione Lee's review of Carol Shloss book. Not very positive, but gives you a flavour of Lucia's creative life and Carol's struggle to reveal her source

<https://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/s...> - Carol Shloss gets 6-figure settlement from Joyce estate for damaging her book and reputation; There is also a link to her supplementary electronic material to her book. It is not available outside the US. I clicked on it and was redirected to some Chinese website which is extremely irritating. But it should be available for the US readers.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/201...> - About the visit to Lucia's Northampton asylum in 1977 by Helen McTaggart, Joyce enthusiast. I've read somewhere else that she took the photo of Lucia from that time and it was published. But it has disappeared from public domain. Lucia was at that place together with Violet Gibson who shot Mussolini. The article refers to her biography which might contain some info about Lucia as well.

Neil says

And there I made to repair the damage that had been done, to the best of my abilities. In the space where her face had been scored away, I painted it, using her death mask as a reference. In the places where the spells of protection should have been, I copied scenes from other tombs, overwriting what had been there and making palimpsests of the originals. Amongst the rags of her bindings I placed amulets from my own

collection, particularly - my pride - the heart scarab, onto which I carved the name I had chosen for her. I even added scenes of a happier life, so that she might at least have these as memories.

A re-read (see original review below), so just a few additional notes, starting with the quote above which stood out to me. It is the culmination of the story of two archaeologists, but also an explanation of the author's ambition in the longer narrative about Lucia Joyce. I found this the most moving sentence of the book on this second reading (although it does beg the question, if Pheby is the "good" archaeologist, who is the bad guy? Some possible answers spring to mind.)

As a book of speculative fiction about the life and death of Lucia Joyce, this is a disturbing book to read. I found it even more disturbing on my second reading than I did first time through. Perhaps the book should have some trigger warnings associated with it as several chapters are uncomfortable to read because of their distasteful subject matter. But all of them contribute to the unfolding picture of Lucia Joyce's sad life. All speculation, of course, as the documentation of her life was nearly all destroyed by the family meaning very little is known for fact.

It is impossible to read this book without weeping for Lucia at one or more points.

I am left with a number of questions about some of the details (e.g. "little bats don't tell" and "green apples" on pages 44 and 45), but they don't detract from the book at all for me.

Other stuff is in my first review below. It's an incredibly powerful book although not for the faint-hearted.

ORIGINAL REVIEW

Lucia Joyce was the second child of James Joyce and Nora Barnacle. Whilst the basic facts of her life are known and easily verifiable, very little else is known: following her death, the family made efforts to erase her from history, destroying her letters and photographs, removing her details from archives and even getting her medical records erased. This is not a book about why all this might have happened. It is a book that looks at the void created by these actions and creates a work of speculative fiction about what Lucia's life might have been. At the same time, it is a book that turns a spotlight on both itself and wider society and asks us to face questions about what it means when we speculate and about male appropriation.

The structure of the book is one of the key ways it asks these questions. It does not directly ask us to question ourselves. Instead, the main narrative of Lucia's life is interleaved with short passages describing firstly the discovery of an ancient Egyptian tomb and the the associated discovery and dissection of a female body and secondly the funeral rites of an ancient Egyptian burial. These short passages between chapters of the main narrative act as commentary on the main narrative and cause the reader to ask the questions that the book is raising without the book asking those questions specifically.

The main narrative about Lucia Joyce is told in a fragmentary, non-linear fashion. There are threads of story that weave their way between one another to create something in the mind of the reader (how I love books that work like this!). We start with Lucia's death and the destruction of records - facts that are well-known - and then we move backwards and forwards in time to follow threads of Lucia's life. Some of the book is uncomfortable to read: as an example, there have been suggestions of incest in the Joyce family and these are included. There were several points in the book where I have to acknowledge that I felt a bit dirty as I read it.

The whole book is, in truth, a work that does its job by suggestion and guidance. It relies on the reader to allow it to build an impression rather than specifically telling the reader what it is about.

It would be a heartless person who is not moved by Lucia's story. If you really want your heart to be broken as you read, watch this first:

<https://archive.org/details/theLittle...>

This is a film of Lucia Joyce playing the part of the Little Match Girl (as pointed out in the comments below, this is a mistake on my part - Lucia is one of the soldiers, not the match girl, but the point is the same as the book uses the film heavily to reflect on Lucia's life). One of the threads of the story conflates this film with events in Lucia's life drawing parallels and seeing darker connotations in parts of the film. I'm not sure if it is best to watch the move before or after reading the book. Perhaps, like me, you might watch parts of it as you progress through the book, but I have the feeling watching it in full at one end of the book might be better.

You have to stand back and admire the research that has gone into this book. For example, there is a chapter about tapeworms that I won't spoil by giving details, but it is written from the point of view of Carl Jung who treated Lucia and who wrote an essay about James Joyce's *Ulysses* that includes the following:

"You can read any of the conversations just as pleurably backwards, for you don't miss the point of the gags. Every sentence is a gag, but taken together they make no point. You can also stop in the middle of a sentence-the first half still makes sense enough to live by itself, or at least seems to. The whole work has the character of a worm cut in half, that can grow a new head or a new tail as required.

This singular and uncanny characteristic of the Joycean mind shows that his work pertains to the class of cold-blooded animals and specifically to the worm family. If worms were gifted with literary powers they would write with the sympathetic nervous system for lack of a brain. I suspect that something of this kind has happened to Joyce..."

The relevant chapter in the novel riffs on this idea and is perhaps one of the standout chapters of the book from a writing point of view.

This book will challenge you intellectually. It will make you ask yourself questions. It will make you uncomfortable. It will move you emotionally.

You should read it.

Tommi says

In *Lucia*, Alex Pheby is angry. The novel presents a hypothetical history of Lucia Joyce, James Joyce's daughter, who was institutionalized in a psychic ward in 1951 until her death three decades later in 1982. All her correspondence was destroyed, so relatively little is known of her today, but the question remains: why was her voice silenced by the Joyce estate? Pheby offers a literary middle finger to the responsible parties, knowingly playing with fire, no pun intended, as he introduces various pernicious persons and scenes into Lucia's life in order to play with the idea that Lucia's letters contained material too harmful for her father's reputation. After a disturbing scene where Lucia's brother Giorgio torments a pet in order to silence Lucia from revealing the siblings' incestual relations, the narrator – a snarky puppeteer commenting on what's happening onstage in a rather cold, analytical manner – remarks:

If there are those of you reading this who know Giorgio, you might say that this never happened. But how do you know? How does one ever know what it is that occurs outside the range of one's experience? You may not know that it did happen, but that is not the same as knowing that it did not happen. Perhaps if there were

documentary evidence; but who keeps such records? Is it even possible to keep evidence of things that might happen that someone wishes to keep secret? If one has secrets, and then burns the evidence of those secrets on a pyre, one invites speculation, and speculation is infinite in a way that the truth is not. Speculation is limited only by the sick imaginations of those who speculate, where truth is not. Why shouldn't Giorgio have tortured Lucia's rabbit to prevent her from speaking? All things that are possible are, in the absence of facts that have been destroyed that might have proved them incorrect, equally correct.

A series of uncomfortable events follow, as Pheby fills the gaps of Lucia's personal history. For instance, in the psychic ward, she is forced into and kept in near-boiling water. (Could be true, since hydrotherapy is a historical treatment.) Interspersed with this narrative, which already incorporates multiple characters from Lucia's life in different times periods, Pheby presents the novel's quirkiest feature: a spread with hieroglyphics running in the bottom of both pages, and, on the left-hand page, a story is told of two archeologists discovering a tomb, and on the right-hand page appears excerpts from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, depicting the ritualistic process of mummification. These obviously confuse the reader in the beginning, but, as these pages recur in even intervals and the story of the archeologists develops, it is easier to see their connection to the main narrative.

So much is packed into *Lucia* that going through it all would entail an academic paper or two. (That would probably kill much of the fun of simply immersing yourself in the story, too.) I can only recommend reading other people's comprehensive reviews of the novel, and I proceed by mentioning some of the elements that caught my attention in this hugely allusive novel. For example, there are intrusive gnats, tapeworms, cocoons, and spiders on the boundaries of humans and non-human animals:

If one's dreams were affected by the residence in the part of the brain responsible for the generation of dreamscapes of a tapeworm, or a culture of tapeworms, then would one dream of tapeworms, or dream as a tapeworm dreams? Or would the tapeworm dream as a man dreams?

Further, there are any scenes and details that resonate with the father's oeuvre in one way or another, most explicitly in the references to the *Book of the Dead*, to which he alludes in *Finnegans Wake* over a hundred times. Then, there's the snow falling upon the living and the dead, evoking the famous ending of his short story "The Dead" which is also set during Christmas time:

Once outside she is cold, but there is still a beauty in the falling of snow. She appreciates the way it lies on the streets and covers up the shite that covers up the mud that covers up the shite that she usually walks over. She has seen biscuit tins in the past, like we all have, and she has seen Father Christmas and his elves, like we all have, and she knows how closely this kind of precipitation is related to the giving of gifts and the being of good cheer, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way. Even if she has rarely experienced it, there is in her no less, probably more, appreciation of the wonder of it all.

One could also argue that Pheby's matter-of-fact prose is a nod toward the Ithaca episode of *Ulysses*, which is built around the idea of factual accuracy: interrogative sentences followed by detailed answers. This theory might be a stretch, especially since I have no previous experience of Pheby's writing, but, considering all the other allusions to the author, it wouldn't surprise if the style was deliberately put to use.

Above all, *Lucia* deals with the titular character's limited agency, the pain of which is put into metaphoric use throughout the novel. Let's look at one more passage to demonstrate it, or just to appreciate the language, which takes some time to get used to. It can at times be a bit disjointed, but it has its rough beauty:

Move like a wooden soldier, articulate like wood, drill like the others. Not so far from the orders given to living soldiers: be as nothing except what you are ordered to be. Do not exercise judgement in anything. Train in the manners and modes of your trade and execute them by reflex when prompted. Spasm as muscle spasms when an electrical impulse is received. Wear the uniform, exercise the frame into its correct shape.

Place your face behind your mask, your head beneath the helmet, hoist the bayonet to your shoulder and learn to relish the abandonment of individuality as a pack wolf bitch learns subservience from the most vicious dog. Invisible the self, cover those brittle hands with white gloves, relineate that jaw with the face straps, cover the gradual erosion of the teeth.

Grisly in subject matter, gorgeous in language, and distinctive in execution, Lucia is arguably among the best of this year's experimental novels, sharing traits with *Murmur* by Will Eaves and *The Cemetery in Barnes* by Gabriel Josipovici. A challenging but ultimately rewarding read.

Lark Benobi says

Here is one of a string of books I've read lately that exquisitely accomplish what they set out to do, and yet leave me feeling dissatisfied and troubled.

I'm wondering why this novel was something Pheby felt compelled to write in the first place. Over and over again I read about horrific abuses being done to Lucia Joyce, written from the point of view of a man who is abusing her, including her brother and her father and her passing-lovers and her caregivers at the institution. It's a disturbing experience.

And I'm not sure how I feel about the absolute requirement put on the reader to research and to understand the swirl of fact and rumor surrounding Lucia Joyce, if you want to make any sense at all of what is written here. For instance, at the beginning there is a scene of a man burning letters. I get the idea of someone being erased, but it's all very oblique without the context, without knowing that Lucia Joyce's letters and papers were destroyed by the Joyce estate.

Most of all I'm troubled that Lucia Joyce is silenced in this book just as surely as she was in life. Pheby has talked in interviews about his moral choice to not act as a "ventriloquist" for Lucia--he felt that would be disrespectful to her, especially since he is a man. But the result of his moral choice is the sense that Lucia Joyce has no inner life or agency at all.

So I fully admire the exquisite craft of this novel, while at the same time wondering if I should have let the novel into my head at all.

Ang says

Disturbing, brutal.

Gumble's Yard says

I re-read this book in advance of a Book group dinner with a group of other Goodreaders, as well as in honour of its anticipated but still welcome longlisting for the 2019 Republic of Consciousness Prize, which has now turned into a shortlisting.

On a re-read, further aspects of this outstanding book struck me:

Firstly the way in which the opening chapter of the archaeologist describes Pheby's own intentions and motivations in writing the book - which I think also shows his own very clear awareness that even by writing this book he can be accused of being the literary equivalent of a graverobber:

"we were taken to a place that had already been excavated" - Pheby consciously acknowledges that he is not the first to write a biography of Lucia Joyce, and he is joining in that invasive excavation of the Joyce family history.

"I noticed a right angle" - but Pheby has seen a new direction in which to approach a story of Lucia's life

There were large rocks purposely piled to block the passage" - there are those who have tried to block her story being told, not least of course Stephen Joyce, who (see the first quote above) in a rare public communication about his efforts to use copyright infringement to reduce this excavation wrote to the New York Times Book Review in 1989: *"The Joyce family's privacy has been invaded more than that of any other writer in this century"*

A theme which then reappears at the end of the novel as the archaeologist starts to intervene in the case of the buried female - first proclaiming he will not let her go to the grave friendless (see the quote that ends my review) and then saying *"I made to repair the damage that had been done, to the best of my abilities I even added scenes of a happier life, so that she might at least have these as memories"*

Both of these taking on a meta-fictional aspect as in two late chapters, Pheby first invents (I believe) a friend for Lucia's last days - a fellow inmate of the Northampton institution - and then in the closing chapter reimagines her birth and early days, with perhaps the idea of reinventing an alternative course for her life, while her father was still poor and unknown and her own talent was subsumed into his.

Secondly I found some interesting thematic links to Joyce's famous descriptions of Lucia.

Once Joyce said *"Whatever spark or gift I possess has been transmitted to Lucia and it has kindled a fire in her brain."* - and the image of fire (via as set out below the cinematic reproduction of "The Little Matchstick Girl") is threaded through the book. Even in a very late chapter, told by the friend Pheby has imagined for Lucia in her final years in mental hospital in Northampton (see above), has the friend remarking on Lucia's habit of chewing matchsticks

Joyce also asked his famous psychiatrist friend *"Doctor Jung, have you noticed that my daughter seems to be submerged in the same waters as me?"* to which Jung is said to have answered: *"Yes, but where you swim, she drowns."* - and the images of submersion and fear of drowning are a recurrent part of Lucia's early treatment in mental hospitals (the efficacy of which is clearly caused into question by a regime of hot water later replaced by one of cold water on equally spurious medical grounds).

Thirdly, and prompted by comments by other readers on Goodreads forums I have reflected on the issue of this book being by a male author and being read by me as a male reader - what is my interest in this story - I am only really interested in Lucia as a way to approach Joyce himself - am I therefore effectively guilty of the doing what the book effectively accuses Samuel Beckett of doing?

How should I feel about this really being a book, not about Lucia at all, but dominated, frequently uncomfortably so by a series of male characters who exploit Lucia (and almost all either carry out and/or fantasise violent acts on her person); something I think Pheby is very aware of, based on the chapter on Stephen's childhood where the inhabitants of an air raid shelter are the book's cast:

First came the men who were not chefs but attendants in a clinic for nerve cases, then came

some non-descript men of middle-age and middle-class with nothing to distinguish them from any other men of their type, then came the man who was burned on the left side, but who smelled of lemons and flowers, and then the doctor, clutching his bag to his chest in which was vials of serum derived from the organs of foetal calves, and then the maker of delicate mobiles, and the man who loved another woman. an the man who was raped by a dog in a fantasy, and the dentist who removed the teeth of old women, and the men who bear down on one at Christmas, amongst the discarded wrapping paper of one's presents, and the intern who burns one's letters and photographs on the lawn in the hope of impressing his employer.

*When they were all out, like the animals who left Noah's ark, Stephen said:
- Nonno where are all the girls*

ORIGINAL REVIEW

If there are those of you reading this who know Giorgio, you might say that this never happened. But how do you know? How does one ever know what it is that occurs outside the range of one's experience? You may not know that it did happen, but that is not the same as knowing that it did not happen. Perhaps if there were documentary evidence; but who keeps such records? Is it even possible to keep evidence of things that might happen that someone wishes to keep secret? If one has secrets, and then burns the evidence of those secrets on a pyre, one invites speculation, and speculation is infinite in a way that the truth is not. Speculation is limited only by the sick imaginations of those who speculate, where truth is not. Why shouldn't Giorgio have tortured Lucia's rabbit to prevent her from speaking? All things that are possible are, in the absence of facts that have been destroyed that might have proved them incorrect, equally correct.

Galley Beggar Press is a small Norfolk based publisher responsible which aims to “produce and support beautiful books and a vibrant, eclectic, risk-taking range of literature” and which declares an aim to publish books that are “hardcore literary fiction and gorgeous prose”.

This description has been taken as the criteria for the Republic Of Consciousness prize for small presses (<http://www.republicofconsciousness.co...>) for which fittingly it has been shortlisted in 2017 (with Forbidden Line) and in 2018 with We That Are Young – which recently went on to win the prestigious Desmond Elliott prize for debut fiction, which David-like managed to defeat the bestselling and accolade-winning Goliath of Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine. Galley also famously was prepared to publish A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing which had taken 9 years to find a publisher and of course went on to win the Bailey's Prize and inaugural Goldsmith Prize.

Its fitting therefore that despite being inexplicably overlooked for the 2018 Booker (and unfortunately ineligible for the 2018 Goldsmith on which surely it would have featured) this outstanding book has been longlisted for the 2019 Republic of Consciousness Prize.

The novel is a form of literary biography –of Lucia, daughter of James Joyce, lover of Samuel Beckett, talented dancer but who spent the last 30 years of her life (and much time before that) in an asylum, finally dying in Northampton in 1982 at the age of 75 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucia_J...)

Her family seem to have systematically erased most of the documentary traces of her life – and what Alex Pheby attempts here is an form of biography of a vacuum, using literary licence and drawing on the fields of “*history, music, medicine (including dentistry), embryology, parasitology, film studies, Asian and Middle Eastern studies, Russian studies, English studies, Joyce studies and Egyptology*” to imagine Lucia’s life in the absence of contrary hard facts (as the opening quote implies).

The idea of the biography being written around a vacuum of facts carries over to the form of the biography – with a series of chapters which progress non-linearly over her life, which feature not Lucia but instead a group of characters around her: the lead undertaker preparing her for burial; a young man asked to burn her papers; her brother (with whom an incestuous relationship – covered up by torture of her pets - is claimed); a Doctor who first fails to treat her with a hocus calf-foetus serum and later oversees her final hospitalisation 30 years before her death; the manufacturer of ; the staff of two institutes administering forced water treatment; a fellow inmate; a dentist who removes her teeth; the manufacture of a curette which is used in one of (at least) two implied abortions and so on.

A striking aspect of the book is the way that the chapters are interleaved with two page, hieroglyphically illustrated spreads relating to Egyptian burial rights: the right hand page of each set describes the actual rites, the left hand page recounts a tale of an archaeologist who finds a tomb of a female only to be mystified when it seems that having placed her in the tomb, her family systematically set out to undermine and reverse all of the rites designed to ease her passage into the underworld: the link to the Joyce family treatment of Lucia is clear and in fact as the novel progresses elements of this tale explicitly starts to mirror those set out in the novel (for example: the Joyce family’s committal of Lucia to the medical staff in her final institution coinciding with the family of the deceased handing over the desecration of the funeral rites to the priesthood; forced medical treatments; sealing of the bodies mouth being conflated with the forced dental treatment of Lucia).

The book reminded me in some aspects of Kevin Davey’s Goldsmith shortlisted *Playing Possum* – with its heavy use of allusions both to literature and other art forms (in Davey’s case related to the work and interests of TS Eliot).

Despite my almost complete ignorance of Joyce I was able to follow some of the allusions in this book – for example: the central role played in the book by Lucia’s acting and dancing in cut scenes from Jean Renoir’s silent film adaption of Andersen’s “*Little Match Girl*” – scenes which are re-interpreted by Pheby biographically in a series of emotionally devastating chapters; Jung (who treated Lucia)’s description of Joyce’s work (particularly “*Ulysses*”) as having the qualities of a worm <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7749...> – which inspires in this book a surreal literary riff on the potential influence of tapeworms on literature and the literary mind (as well as an implication that tapeworms may have been used to induce an abortion).

Others I found a little harder to follow – for example the bizarre, bestiality ending substituted into Checkov’s *The Lady With the Dog* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lad... .

Overall I found this a hugely intellectual stimulating and very unusual if uncomfortable book – one which I think is far deeper than I was fully able to appreciate and certainly far deeper than this review was able to do justice.

The book already seems to have caused some upset among Joyceans – I read an unnecessary censorious review in the *Spectator* (and another on a literary blog) which imply the book is disrespectful to Lucia and/or her family.

This seems to me to misinterpret the novel whose intent is set out I believe in one of the archaeologist chapters:

This woman had gone into the afterlife friendless and I resolved to address that lack.
