James Joyce

A Portrait of the Man Who is, at Present, One of the More Significant Figures in Literature

By DIANA BARNES

THERE are men in Dublin who will tell you that the sweet voice has gone; and there are a few women, lost to youth, who will add: "One night he was singing and the next he wasn't, and there's been no future like the if of it?" For the singing voice of James Joyce, author of The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and of Ulysses is said to have been second to none.

For those that Joyce was once singer may not come as a revelation to the casual reader of his books; one must perhaps have spent one of those strangely aloof evenings when there was no record, at all, of his singing, as it appeared in The Little Review to have realized the singing quality of his words. For tradition has it that a singer must have a touch of barda, a joyous spring forth of first the right leg and then the left, and a sigh or two this side of the cloister, and Joyce has none of these.

I had read Dubliners over my coffee during the war, I had been on one or two theatrical committees just long enough to suggest the production of Exiles, his one play. The Portrait had been consumed turning from one slow to the other, but it was not until I came upon his last work that I sensed the singer. Lines like: "So stood they both awhile in wan hope trembling, and both feared the worst," an extremity large veins bring fusions of the fields, spherical potatoes and iridescent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, russet, sweet, big bitter ripe pomolised apples and e pears and pears and pears and pears from their canes," or still better the singing humour in that delicious execution scene in which the "learned prelate knelt in a most Christian spirit in a pool of rainwater." Yes, then I realized Joyce must indeed have lived a life as a singer, a very tender singer, and occasionally no voice can hold out over the brutalities of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could arrange, in the end, to be a writer, the abundant inadequacies of life, as a laying out of jewels—jewels with a will to decay.

Joyce, the Man

YET of Joyce, the man, one has heard very little. I had seen a photograph of him, the collar up over the narrow throat, the beard, heavy in those days, descending into the line of one's face a long tussof. I had been told that he was going blind, and we in America learned from Ezra Pound that "Joyce is the only man on the continent who continues to produce, in spite of poverty and sickness, working from eight to sixteen hours a day."

I had heard that for a number of years Joyce taught English in a school in Trieste, and this is almost all of his habitis, of his likes and his dislikes, nothing, unless one dared come to some conclusion about them from the number of facts hidden within an equal number of imponderables in his living Ulysses.

And then, one day, I came to Paris. Sitting in the cafe of the Deux Magots, that faces the little church of St. Germain des Pres, I saw apples, coffee stains on the wall, and a man, with head slightly lifted and slightly
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turned, giving to the wind an orderly dismember of red and black hair, which discarded sharp- nes into a kind of syrupy liquid. He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gatherings behind him, and partly because he had not been noticed for some time. It had clas- sed it, lay two full inches above the hips.
At the moment of seeing him, a remark made to me by a mystic flashed through my mind: "A man who has been more crucified on his sensibilities than any writer of our age," and I said to myself—"this is a strange way to recognize a man I never held my eye on.

Because he had heard of the suppression of The Little Review on account of Ulgyres and of the subsequent trial, he sat down opposite me, who was familiar with the whole story, ordering a white wine. He began to talk at once.
"Is the pity," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt- ness, "there I haven't denuded, so to speak, a man in my book—or worse they may take it in some more serious way, and on the honour of a gentleman, there is not one single line in it for me.

For a moment there was silence. His hands, peculiarly limp in the introductory shake and peculiarly pulpy, running into a thickness that the base gave no hint of, lay, one on the stem of the glass, the other, forgotten, palm out, on the most delightful requisites it has ever been my happiness to see. Purple with alternate doe and dog heads. The does, tiny scarlet tongues hanging out, matted over lower lips, drowned in a light wool, and the dogs so more ferocious, running as if no animal who adheres to his master through the seven cycles of the world.

I saw my admiration and he smiled.
"Made by the hand of my grandmother for the first hunt of the season," and there was an- other silence in which he arranged and lit a cigar.
"All great talkers," he said softly, "have spoken in the language of Sterne, Swift or the Restorers, the last, the greatest, Defoe.

The Restoration through a microscope in the morning, it repeated it through a telescope in the evening."

"And in Ulgyres?" I asked.

"They say there are, great talkers," he answered, "them and the things they forget. In Ulgyres, for instance, what a man says, sees, thinks, and what such thinking, saying does, to what you Freudists call the unconscious, and not so psychoanalysis" he broke off, "it's neither more nor less than a blackman."

He raised his eyes. There is something un- focused in them, the same pale seen in plants long hidden from the sun—and sometimes a little leer that goes with a lift and rounding of the eyebrows. His Appearance

PEOPLE say of him that he looks both sad and tired. He does look sad and he does look tired.

A little grimly he sits beside me, the man who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and in no place; the weari- ness of one self-subjected to the creation of an over abundance in our age. If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he craved bread; turned farther away than disgust and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure is not the same as death, yet the only thing at all like it, is the look of a stricken animal. When this additional—

stick in his head as if a man a little yet this, drink- ing a thin cool wine with lips almost hidden in his high narrow face, or lying, avoiding the eur- nal cigar, held slightly above shoulder-level, and never moved until consumed, the mouth brought to and taken away from it to the eject the sharp juts of yellow smoke.

Because you are not sure he questions one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris. He talked of rivers and of re-

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ligion, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice without "overtones"—the voice of the unlearned. We have talked of women, about women he seems a little disinterested. Were I vain I should say he is afraid of them, but I am certain he is only a little skeptical of their existence. We have talked of IIran, of Strind- berg, Shakespeare. "Hamelot is a great play, written in his youth, full of passion and of the heart," and of Strindberg, "No drama behind the hysterical raving."

We have talked of death, of rats, of horses, the sea; languages; climates and offerings. Of artists and of Ireland.

"The Irish are people who will never have leaders, for at the great moment they always desert them." They have produced one skeleton—Parnell—never a man.

Sometimes his wife, Nora, and his two children have been with him. Large children, almost as tall as he is himself, and Nora walks under fine red hair, speaking with a brogue that carries the dread of Ireland in it; Ireland as a place where poverty has become the art of scarcity. A brogue a little more "defiant than Joyce's which is tamed by preoccupation.

Joyce has few friends, yet he is al-
ways willing to let his writing table and his white coat of an evening, to go to some quiet near-by cafe, there to discuss anything that is not "artistic" or "flamboyant."

Calvinist. He often found him writing into the night, or drinking. Nora. He himself once came upon him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a valise full of notes of his own for "Ulysses."—for as Nora says, "It's the great fanta-
ticism on him, and it is coming to no end." Once he was reading out of the book of saints (he is never without it) and muttering to himself that this particular day's saint was "A devil of a fellow for bringing on the rain, and we want to go out for a stroll."

However he is at home, he will come away for the evening, for he is simple, a scholar, and sees nothing objectionable in human beings if they will only remain in place.

Yet he has been called eccentric, mad, incoherent, unintelligible, yes and futur-

istic. One wonders why, thinking what a fine lyric beginning that great Kabe-
laisian, "Musing on the Everlasting," some one of imperat

or addenda for foliage,—the thin sweet lyricism of Chamber Music; the casual inevitability of Dubliners, the passion and prayer of Stephen Dedalus, who said that he would go alone through the world.

"As I am not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen Dedalus, reasons to have none. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe, whether it be your home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in my art as freely as I can. So I can, unless for the defense only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning."

This is somehow Joyce, and one won-

ders if, at last Ireland has created her man.
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A sketch made by Miss Loy in Paris of Joyce, who, in exile from his native Ireland, has continued, in spite of months of severe illness and the very real cost to his health, to write. Though for the moment his career has been temporarily insignificant, there can be little doubt. "Chamber Music," his first volume of verse, contains Joyce, subdued in tone, but of irreproachable loveliness. "Dubliners," his volume of short sketches, was compared with the best of de Maupassant. "The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," on whose perfection he laboured ten years, brought to the novel an interest in form, selection and style, more French than English. "Ulysses," which during its suppression in America was compared to the "Oedipus" of Sophocles, will appear in the near future. In this new volume, Joyce has pursued his theory too far for coherence and common understanding.