James Joyce

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

By DIJIA 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 sign of the like 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. That it is no more, and that Joyce will, in future, never again sing himself is a fact that has come as a new revelation to the casual reader of his books; one must perhaps have been one of those strangely aloof evenings on which the dining hall of the University College, 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 bohemia, a joyous piercing spirit 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 to another, without the sense of assurance, as if 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 bohemia, a joyous piercing spirit 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.

Yet, though we have had 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 to another, without the sense of assurance, as if 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 bohemia, a joyous piercing spirit 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.

Joyce, the Man

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.

And then, one day, I came to Paris. Sitting in the café of the Deux Magots, that faces the little church of St. Germain des Prés, I saw appearing out of the mist a tall, thin man, with head slightly lifted and slightly
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turned, giving to the wind an orderly disinterm of red and black hair, which descended sharp- ly into a white and powdered ruff. He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gather behind his ears, and partly because he had raised it, revealing 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 cruelized 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 upon." Because he had heard of the suppression of The Little Review on account of Ulysses 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.
"The pity is," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt- ness, "there has been smothered, sinuously 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 soul line in it."
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 delicious wishfist it has ever been my happiness to see. Purple with alternate doe and dog heads. The does, tiny scarlet tongues hanging out below lower lips, drowned in a low white, and the dogs no more forecibly the allegorical beasts of the animal who adheres to his master through the seven cakes of joy.
He saw my admiration and he smiled.
"Made by the hand of my grandmother for the first hunt of the season," and there was another 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 Restoration. I have been the Chap Stoker's, Oscar Wilde. He studied the Restoration through a microscope in the morning, repeated it through a telescope in the evening."
"And in Ulysses?" I asked.
"They are all, great talkers he answered, "and the things they forgot. In Ulysses," he added, "the way a man says, sons, thinks, and what such testing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freudists call unconscious psychoanalysis" he broke off, "it's neither more nor less blackballing."
He raised his eyes. There is something un- focused in them—the same pallid seeing in plants long hidden from the sun—and sometimes a little jew that goes with a lift and rounding of the eye lip.
His Appearance
PEOPLE say of him that he looks both sad and I tried. He does look sad and he does look tired. He is a small, and a small sad. He is the small, and the small sad. He is the sinewy man who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and in no place; the weariness of one subject to the creation of an ever larger absolution. If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he was pretty; turned farther away than distasteful and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure is a sort of death. Yet, the only thing at all like it, is the look of the stricken animal. When this I added—think of him as a heavy man yet this, drinking a thin cool wine with lips almost hidden in his high narrow mouth, and the no smoking, the eternal 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 ruts of yellow smoke...
Because I did not ask him questions one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris, beside the quays of the Seine, the banks of rivers and of... OldMagazineArticles.com
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legen, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice without "overtones"—the voice of the ouestach. We have talked of women, about women he seems a lit deisinterested. Were I vain I should say he is a far thinker. But I am certain he is only a little skeptical of their existence. We have talked of Iles, of Stringd, 

"Hamlet is a great play, written with the great phraseology of the time," 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 brouge that car-

ries the dread of Ireland in it; Ireland as a place where poverty has become the art of scarcity. A brouge a little more "defiant than Joyce's which is tamed by preoccupation. Joyce has few friends, yet he is al-

ways willing to leave 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 "philosophical." Caliban, who often found him writing into the night, or drinking with Nora. Norwich, the place where he came upon him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a full value of notes in his youth for the "Hawaiian," for as Nora says, "It's the great fana-
ticism in 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 wanted him to go for a stroll."

However he is, he will be him away for the evening, for he is simple, a scholar, and sees nothing objectionable in human beings if they will only remain in philosophy.

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

istic. One wonders why, thinking what a fine lyric beginning that great Kebel-

liatus. However, it is not a part of an imper-

Un valuable 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.

"And, not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen Dedalus, why not also do. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe in, where I no longer stay home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in my art as freely as I can, with no defense for the only arms I have 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 his foreign sojourn, to develop and maintain his great talent. The creation of a portable and permanent significance there can be little doubt. "Chamber Music," his first volume of verse, contains Joyce, subdued in tone, but of irreproachable loneliness. "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 perfecting he laboured ten years, brought to the novel an interest in form, selection and style, more French than English. "Ulysses," which caused his name to become a byword and his position in literature an acknowledged fact, is about to be published in Paris. It represents, in form, a following and elaboration of that method which Joyce first made apparent in the "Portrait." It is a question in many minds whether Joyce, in this new volume, has not pursued his theory too far for coherence and common understanding.