James Joyce

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

By DIUNA 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 if 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.

Though that Joyce we once knew, the 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 in his presence, or listened to the record of one of his concerts, 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 bard, a joyous pouring forth of first the right leg and then the left, and a sigh or two this side of the clavichord, 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 show 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 receiving for the water o'er the brow. The extremity large wains bring fairon 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 pears fit for princes and raspberries 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 been a singer, a very tender singer, and convincing 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 name of Joyce, the abundant inaccuracies 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 around the narrow throat, the head, heavier in those days, descending into the loose; a lost soul, 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, the "Trianon," and this is almost all his habits, of his likes and his dislikes, nothing, unless one dared come to some conclusion about them from the number of facts hidden under an equal number of im- provisings in his being 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 Prés, I saw among the porters a tall, spare, small man, with head slightly lifted and slightly

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turned, giving to the wind an orderly dis Temper of red and black hair, which descended sharp-
ly into a straight line at the back of his neck.
He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust its gathers behind his coat buttons. On the" undercoat" he wore clut-
ced 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 sensi-
tivities 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 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 I have dined, sit down, see myself 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 it in." 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 a Justin it has ever been my happiness to see. Purple with alternate doe and dog heads. The does, tiny scarlet tongues hanging out blood, lower lips, frozen in a cold smile, the dogs no more fierce, just as one might expect of an animal who adheres to his master through the seven cycles of the moon.
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 Restoration, and the best of them, Sir Benjamin White. 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 the words, "great talkers" he answered, "them and the things they forgot. In Ulysses it is not so much what a man says, sons, thinks, and what such testing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freudians call 'abnormal' psychoanalysis he broke off, "it's neither more nor less the text of the play." He raised his eyes. There is something un-
focused in them, the same pallid rains in plants long hidden from the sun—and sometimes a little j eer that goes with a lift and rounding of the eyebrows of the lip.
His Appearance
The people of say that he looks both sad and tired. He does look sad and he does look tired. He looks sad the way a man looks sad who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and is no place; the wearis-
omeness of one self-subjected to the creation of an over absurd. If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he is a man; turned far away with this and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure appear in it or anything else, the only thing at all like it, is the look of a stricken animal. Because I have not asked him questions one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris. I asked him the 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 hymn, the voice of the poet—"the voice of the croustich. We have talked of women, about whom women seem a little disinterested. Were I wise, 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 Ilian, of Strind-berg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written in宜ues, with all the passion of the poet," 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 car- ries the dread of Ireland in it; Ireland as a place where poverty has become the art of scarcity. A brogue is 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 "pubilc." Callan, who has often found him writing into the night, or drinking at a connected table. Nora, of course, came upon him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a valise full of notes in his year for the "New York Times," for as Nora says, "It's the great fana- ticism is 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 wanted to go out for a stroll."

However he is, 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 Karel- laisk poem "Requiem" was. An imper- fect 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.

"All, not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen Dedalus, he said and did. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe, where I no longer live, my home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in my art as freely as I can and as far as I can, using for my defense the 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 persecution and poverty, to compose in a style of great complexity and obscurity. "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 caused his exclusion from the United States, is a vast, complex work in which originality is shown by its suppression, 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 "Praetorian." 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.