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 sign as to 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.

The fact that Joyce we 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 in the company of his circle of friends, 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 bardic, a joyous piping forth of 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 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 harking to the dim sound of footsteps on an extremity large wains bring foning of the fields, spherical potatoes and iridescent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, russet, sweet, big bitter rape pompadored apples, and ginger, fit for princes and raspberries from their canes," or still better the singing humour in that delicious execution scene in which the "learned prelate kneel in a most Christian spirit in a pool of rainwater."

Yes, then I realized Joyce must indeed have begun life as a singer, and he is still a tender singer. And no voice will ever sustain itself in the brutality of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could arrange, in the form of sound, the abundant inadaptable bits 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 about the narrow throat, the head, heavier in those days, descending into the aisle of a very heavy nose. 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 that is almost all of 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 impracticability in his luminous Ulysses.

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 appallingly in the glass of a plain-walled man, with head slightly lifted and slightly
James Joyce
turned, giving to the wind an orderly disiterper of red and black hair, which descended sharp-
ly into a large and fringed mustache.
He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gathers behind his tail button, partly because it had been un-
clothed, 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-
tilities 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.
"Then the pity is," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt-
ness, "the man has been crucified by the animal who adheres to his master through the seven cycles of the cinema.
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. This, dear Mrs. Wible, was the Chatsworth Restoration through a microscope in the morning, repeated it through a telescope in the evening."
"And in Ulysses?" I asked.
"They don't talk, they talk," he answered, "them and the things they forgot. In Ulysses, it is not a symbol, it is almost literally what a man says, sees, thinks, and what he feels, thinking, saying does, to what you Freidians call conscious, what a psychoanalyst be he broke off, 'it's neither more nor less than that.'"
He raised his eyes. There is something un-
focused in them, the same paleness seen in plants long hidden from the sun—and sometimes a little leer that goes with a lift and rounding of the upper lip.
His Appearance
PEOPLE say of him that he looks both sad and tired. He does look sad and he does look tired, but the sadness is the sadness of a man who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and in no place; the weari-
lessness of one self-subjected to the creation of an over all abdication of the human.
If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he seemed turned further away than disdain and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure is not so much an attack, yet the only thing at all like it, is the look in the throat of a stricken animal. And this is what I said—-think of him as a heavy man yet thisness, drink-
ing a thin cool wine with lips almost hidden in his high narrow face, or, even, the answering of the en-
crnal cigar, held slightly above shoulder-level, and never moved until consumed, the mouth brought to and taken away from it to the effect that the sharp juts of yellow smoke... 
Because if he is not he questions one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris and I must say that he talked of rivers and of re-

OldMagazineArticles.com
James Joyce

ligion, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice without "overtones," the voice of the creaker. We have talked of women, about women he seems a bit disinterested. Whereas I want I should say he is after them but I am certain he is only a little skeptical of their existence. We have talked of this, of Strindberg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written in Denmark, with a question to the King," and of Strindberg, "No drama behind the hysterical raving."

We have talked of death, of rats, of horses, of 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 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 "stylistic." Call it a popular turn, if you will, but I often found him writing into the night, or drinking a pint of beer. Nora, as I have said, comes upon him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a valve full of notes of his wife, or, in his words, "for..." 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 to go for a stroll."

However he is, he will be. He comes 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 Kafe- las made, "Evening, with 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 in his own words, I would go alone through the world.

"Ah, no, not separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen's friend, and he tells his own story: "I will not serve that which I no longer believe, to either 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.
James Joyce

A sketch made by Miss Loy in Paris of Joyce, who, in exile from his native Ireland, has continued, in spite of his protracted creative failures and personal misfortunes, to maintain his position as a literary rebel. His work, for all its apparent obscurity and complexity, has a permanent significance; there can be little doubt. "Cham-
ber Music," his first volume of verse, contains Joyce, subdued in tone, but of irreplaceable loveliness. "Dub-
liners," 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
begun in 1917, was published posthumously in 1922, show-
ing its suppression, is about to be published in Paris. It represents, in form, a following and elabora-
tion of that method which Joyce first made apparent in the "Pictorial." 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.