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

BY DIJNA 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 more like the old croon 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 blarney, a joyous pecking 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 slumber to another, but it was not until I came upon his last work that I sensed the singer. Lines like: "So they stood there and I saw him standing over the grave," is extreme. Large wains could bring up to the fields, spherical potatoes and iridescent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, red, sweet, big bitter ripe pomelated apples, and cherries like gold in their pears," or still better the singing humour in which that delicious execution scene in the "learned prelate kneels in a most Christian spirit in a pool of rainwater." Yes, then I realized Joyce must indeed have begun life as a singer, and they are tender singer, and occasionally no voice can hold out upon the brutalities of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could arrange, in the life of violence, 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 collars up about the narrow throat, the head, heavier in those days, descending into the above of his face was lost. 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 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 improprieties in his literature.

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, the face of whom I had no knowledge at all, 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 descended sharp- ly into a heap on his breast.

He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gathers behind his ears; but it had been over a year since he had cut 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 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 aptness, "there I have stinted, sir, disconcertingly 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.

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 wish that it ever has been my happiness to see. Purple with alternate doe and dog heads. The does, tiny scarlet tongues hanging out over yellow lower lips, downed in a light wool, and the dogs no more ferocious than some childlike animal who adheres to his master through the seven cycles of the sun.

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 Restaurateurs, either way," he added.

He studied the Restaurateur through a microscope in the morning, and repeated it through a telescope in the evening.

"And in Ulysses?" I asked.

"They are," he said, "great talkers" he answered, "them and the things they forgot.

In Ulysses, sir, it is a situation which, what a man says, sons, thinks, and what such society, thinking, says do, to what you Freudians call a subconscious or psychoanalysis be broke off, "it's neither more nor less for our benefit to-night."" he added.

He raised his eyes. There is something un- focused in them—the same painedness 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, "sad" is the adjective of his friend who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and in no place; the weariness of one self-subjected to the creation of an over abundant self.

If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that is hunched; turned further away than discreet and not so far as death, for the turn of displease eyes is an attitude, yet the only thing at all like it, is the breast of a stricken animal. When this I added—"think of him as a heavy man yet this, drink- ing a thin cool wine with lips almost hidden in his high narrow face, making the eter- nal cigar, held slightly above shoulder-level, and never moved until consumed, the mouth brought to and taken away from it to eject the sharp jots of yellow smoke.

Because I am not one to question one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris, and here walk of rivers and of re- OldMagazineArticles.com
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ligion, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice without "opposition"—the voice of the eunuch. 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 Ieuen, of Strindberg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written in the teeth of the opposition of the stage," 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 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 "barbaric." He has often found him writing into the night, or drinking and smoking. Nora one day, in a fit of great anger, came upon him as he lay full length on his stomach peering over a valve full of notes of Ireland and the Ghetto,—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 for a stroll."

However in him, 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 Kaledi-
sian poem "The Waste Land" is, and an imper-
ial 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.

"After 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, said that he would do.

"I will not serve that which I no longer believe in, either my own home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in my art as freely as I can." As far as I can see, he is doing this.

This is somehow Joyce, and one won-
ders if, at last Ireland has created her man.
A sketch made by Miss Lou in Paris of Joyce, who, in exile from his native Ireland, has continued, in spite of the almost universal hostility of his contemporaries, to create permanent significances there can be little doubt. "Cham-
ber Music," his first volume of verse, contains Joyce, subdued in tone, but of irreproachable levellness. "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 perfecting he laboured ten
years, brought to the novel an interest in form, selection
and style, more French than English. "Ulysses," which
has caused such excitement, is at last going to appear, after
pausing 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 "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.