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 sense 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 you say we once notice may not come as a revelation to the casual reader of his books; one must perhaps have spent one of those strange aloof evenings among the few who know something about him, 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 pouring 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 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 harkening for something, the rain pouring in extremity large waters bring fission of the fields, spherical potatoes and iridescent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, rasset, sweet, big bitter ripe pomelated 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 kneels 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 brutulities of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could arrange, in the little reviewing, 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 against the narrow throat, the beard, heavier in those days, descending into the plane of his 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 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 im-proos in his telling 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 appealing to me in the young Frenchman, a man, with head slightly lifted and slightly
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turned, giving to the wind an orderly disorder of red and black hair, which descended sharp-
ly in a shining cascade over her shoulders.
He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gatherings behind his ears, partly because it seemed to have been pitch-
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-
tibilities than any writer of our age," 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.
"I pity it," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt-
ness. "There I have staked, six times over, 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 one line in it for.
For a moment there was silence. His hands, peculiarly limp in the introductory shake and peculiarly puffy, 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 reassurance 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, drowned in a light wool, and the dogs no more ferocious than a peacock calling his animal who adheres to his master through the seven cycles of a year.
I saw his admiration and his 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 wit of Dryden, though there was something, I think, of the Dr. Johnson, in the quarter of the evening when I was talking with a friend about psychoanalysis he broke off, "it's neither more nor less a blackmailer."
He raised his eyes. There is something un-
focused in them—the same pained arms in plants long hidden from the sun—and sometimes a little jeer that goes with a lift and rounding of the lips.
His Appearance
PEOPLE say of him that he looks both sad and
tired. He does look sad and he does look tired. I have seen him a week or two after a siege, who has procured some medieval permission to sour out of time and in no place; the wear-
inness of one self-subjected to the creation of an over all structure.
If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he is sad; turned further away than disgust and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure in the face as not too much, yet the only thing at all like it, is the look in the throat of a stricken animal. When this I add said—thinking of him as a man yet this, drinking a thin cool wine with lips almost hidden in his high narrow curl, or speaking, 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 juts of yellow smoke. .
Because I do 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. We have talked over rivers and of re- OldMagazineArticles.com
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digion, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice of the monks. We have talked of women, about women he seems a bit disinterested. Were I van 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 Ilse, of Strindberg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written with the edification of the young," and of Strindberg, "No drama behind the hysterical raving."

We have talked of death, of rats, of horses, of 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 tainted by preoccupation.

Joyce has few friends, yet he is always 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 "happy". Callahan, the Irishman, often found him writing into the night, or drinking in Nora. "His eyes", writes Nora, "I myself once saw him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a valve full of notes for a new story for the Daily Nation," 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 him to go for a stroll."

However he is, he will be gone 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 Kole-
laistan, however true, is, and what an imper-
ial addenda for folklore,—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.

"Always, not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be "Stephen Dedalus," has said. He will do. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe in. Where I live is not 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, for use of the defense I only assure myself to use, silence, exile and cunning."

This is somehow Joyce, and one won-
ders if, at last Ireland has created her man.
A sketch made by Miss Loy in Paris of Joyce, who, in exile from his native Ireland, has continued, in spite of permanent insignificance there can be little doubt. "Cham-
ber Music," his first volume of stories, contains Joyce, 
subdued in tone, but of irreproachable 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 
failed to find a publisher in Paris, is in process of pub-
cating 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.