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 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.

Though that Joyce we once sang may not come as a revelation to the casual reader of his books; one must perhaps have spent one of those strangely aloof evenings broken only byimaconcert, 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 the bard, a joyous pounding 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 concerning the rest of things," had come to me, and I had thought of a room; an extremity large windows bring fable of the fields, spherical potatoes and iridescent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, russet, sweet, big bitter ripe pomegranate 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 kneel in a most Christian spirit in a pool of rain-water."

Yet, then I realized Joyce must indeed have begun life as a singer. He was a very tender singer, and perhaps no voice can hold out over the brutality of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could arrange, in the lisp of a woman, the abundant inequalities of life, as a laying out of jews—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 beard, heavier in those days, descending into the alcove of his nose and chins. 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 improvements in his teaching Ulysses.

And then, one day, I came to Paris. Sitting in the cafè du Meagats, that faces the little church of St. Germain des Prés, I saw apparatused a man, dressed in the last three suits, with head slightly lifted and slightly
James Joyce
turned, giving to the wind an orderly disintermper of red and black hair, which descended sharp-
ly into a wave that fell to his shoulders. He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust its gathers behind his neck, for his chins were too short. He clas-
ed 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," 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 of it," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt-
ness, "there I have stumbled, sin-susceptible 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 so fine 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 wristlet it has ever been my happiness to see. Purple with alternate doe and dog heads. The does, tiny scarlet tongues hanging out under lonely liars, drowned in a light wool, and the dogs so no more ferocious than the dogs of that animal who adheres to his master through the seven cycles of the moon.
I saw his 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; He is the most modern, the deadest 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 say, 'great talkers' he answered, "them and the things they forgot. In Ulysses, I suppose, exactly what a man says, sees, thinks, and what such seeing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freidlards call the neurotic and psychoanalysis he broke off, 'it's neither more nor less blackmailed.'"
He raised his eyes. There is something un-
focused in them, the same paleness seen in plants long hidden from the sun,—and some-
times 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 I tried. He does look sad and he does look tired, I think. The sad, I think, is the sad of a man who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and in no place; the weari-
ness of one self-subjected to the creation of an over abounding world.
If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that his eyes; turned further away than disgust and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure in his eyes was so strange, yet the only thing at all like it, is the look in the throat of a stricken animal. Because I think that to him questions one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris. We talked of rivers and of re-
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James Joyce

lijon, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice without "outness"—the voice of the ears. We have talked of women, about women he seems a lot disinterested. Were I vain I should say he is after them but I am certain he is only a little skeptical of their existence. We have talked of Ilusion, of Strind- berg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written in a corner, his mind in the corner," 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 oneSKUDE—Parnell—never a man."

Sometimes his wife, Norah, and his two children have been with him. Large children, almost as tall as he is himself, and Norah 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 is 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 "fairy tale". Catholics often found him writing into the night, or drinking with Norah. Norah, in a voice that came upon him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a valse full of notes in his young face for "Clarinets", for as Noras say, "It's the great fana- timist 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 it to go for a stroll."

However it 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, inaccessible, unintellegible, yes and futur- istic. One wonders why, thinking what a fine lyric beginning that great Karel- laski poem has, and putting an imper- tral addenda for foliage,—the thin sweet lyricism of Chamber Music; the casual inevitability of Dublinesque, the passion and prayer of Stephen Dedalus, who said that he would go alone through the world. "America, not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen Dedalus' brother, he has to do. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe in in any ways, in any place, in any home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in my art as freely as I can and as well as I can. If I can, using for the defense my only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning." This is somehow Joyce, and one won- ders if, as last Ireland has created her man.

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A sketch made by Mina Loy in Paris of Joyce, who, in exile from his native Ireland, has continued, in spite of temporary setbacks, to achieve permanent significances there can be little doubt. "Cham-
ber Music," his first volume of verse, 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 
has not yet found a publisher in America, has created a 
crisis among its admirers. The suppression, if any, 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 "Portrai-
t." 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.