James Joyce

A Portrait of the Man Who is, at Present, One of the Most Significant Figures in Literature

By DIJUA BARNES

THERE are men in Dublin who will tell you 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 none to reverence 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. Those who knew 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 presence of those bright eyes, 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 perching 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 Excles, 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 hope3 morning, having but a few rounds of the ex- tremely large wains bring foun4 of the fields, spherical potatoes and iriscent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, russet, sweet, big bitter ripe pomized apples and hisparagus, fit for princes and raspberries from their cores," or still bet- ter the singing humour in that delicious execution scene in which the "learned prelate knelt in a most Christian spirit in a pool of rain-water."

Yes, then I realized Joyce must indeed have had a life as a singer. He was a very tender sing- er, and occasionally no voice can hold out over the brutalities of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could ar- range, in the manner of Joyce, 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 angle of the jaw, and fast losing. I had been told that he was going blind, and we in Amer- ica 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. When Tristres, 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- provisations in his talking 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 approaching, tall, out-of-the-way, the tall man, with head slightly lifted and slightly
turned, giving to the wind an orderly disluster of red and black hair, which descended sharp- 
ly into a dancing wreath of golden curls. He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gathering behind his ears. His face was far less composed, on the con- 
cid it, lay two full inches above the line.
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 upon."
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 you," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt- 
ness. "There I have stammered, sir, accidentally 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 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 none of, lay, one on the stem of the glass, the other, forgotten, palm out, on the most delightful assistanc it has ever been my happiness to see. Purple with alternate doe and dog heads. The does, tiny scarlet tongues hanging out over blood lower lips, lowered in a light wool, and the dogs so more ferociously grinning, were 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 Restoratian English, before the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. 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, as I understand, great talkers he answered, "them and the things they forgot. In Ulysses, I am informed, somewhat what a man says, sons thinks, and what such thinking, saying does, to what you Freidolics call the conscious and the psychoanalyst" he broke off, "it's neither more nor less blackballism.
He raised his eyes. There is something un- focused in them, the same pains seen in plants long hidden from the sun,—and sometimes a little leer that goes with a lift and rounding of the eyes like.
His Appearance
P E O P L E say of him that he looks both sad and tired. He does look sad and he does look tired. He is the saddest, the sadder of men, 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 abundant life.
If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he is dressed; turned further away than disgusted and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure is almost as far as death; yet; the only thing at all like it, is the loot of a stricken animal. When I cut this I said--
think of him as a heavy man yet this, drinking a thin cool wine with lips almost hidden in his high narrow nose, or smoking the etern- al cigar, held slightly above shoulder-level, and never moved until consumed, the mouth brought to and taken away from it the eject the sharp jets of yellow smoke.
Because he does not ask you questions one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris, along the seashore, the walk of rivers and of re-
ligion, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voices without "overtones"—the voice of the esouch. We have talked of women, about women he seems a bit disinterested. Were I vain I should say he is attracted by them, but I am certain he is only a little skeptical of their existence. We have talked of Blaes, of Strindberg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written with the most exquisite of reasons," 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 brouge that carries the dread of Ireland in it; Ireland as a place where poverty has become the art of scarcity. A brouge is a little more "dreadful than Joyce's which is tamed 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 "phallic." Callahan has often found him writing into the night, or drinking at the bar. Nora has sat, with her mouth open and a little nose, upon his lap as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a valve full of notes of "The。"

As for Nora says, "It's the great fanaticalism 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 muttered 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 it is, he will be 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, incomherent, unintelligible, yes and futureistic. One wonders why, thinking a fine lyric beginning that great Karelaisan. However, I put an imperational 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.

"Art is not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and be has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen Dedalus, he has said he will do. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe in; my 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."

This is somehow Joyce, and one wonders 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 trials and difficulties, to make the lode of his life. "In the midst of the chaos and confusion of modern life," says the poet, "there is a permanent significance that can be little doubted." "Chamber Music," his first volume of verse, contains Joyce, subdued in tone, but of irreproachable loveliness. "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, none French, sans English. "Ulysses," which was suppressed in publication in the United States, is in process of being published in Paris. It represents, in form, a following and elaboration of that method which Joyce first made apparent in the "Picturist." 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.