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 none here like 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 singed 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 old coffee-rooms, 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 peculiar touch 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 borrow’d out,ﷺ and then said: ‘Ah, for that extreemely large wains bring founsin of the fields, spherical potatoes and iridescent kale and onions, pearls of the earth, and red, green, yellow, brown, russet, sweet, big bitter riper pomolated apples and parsley 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.”

Yes, then I realized Joyce must indeed have lived like a singer, that in very tender singer, and, unless no voice can hold out over the brutality of life without breaking—he turned to quill and paper, for so he could range, in the word, the word, 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 over the narrow throat, the beard, heavier in those days, descending into the loose neck of his coat. 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-properly gotten in his leaving 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 applying for a signature the tall, thin, bald man, with head slightly lifted and slightly
James Joyce turned, giving to the wind an orderly distemper of red and black hair, which descended sharp- ly into a white beard. He wore a blue grey coat, too young it seemed, partly because he had thrust his gatherings behind his ears, partly because his coat had been cut so low as to clut- 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- bilities 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." For 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," he said, seeming to choose his words for their age rather than their apt- nesses, "there I have stammered, sir, all sorts of 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 Restoration, but no one knows better than I do of the Charleston. He studied the Restoration through a microscope in the morning, repeated it through a telescope in the evening.

"And in Ulysses?" I asked.

"They were all great talkers," he answered, "them and the things they forgot. In Ulysses I must admit, sir, what a man says, sees, thinks, and what seeing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freudians call 'the unconscious', or psychoanalysis" he broke off, "it's neither more nor less than that.

He raised his eyes. There is something un- focused in them, the same pallid bloom in plants long hidden from the sun, and sometimes a little jeer which goes with a lift and rounding of the eyebrows.

His Appearance

PEOPLE say of him that he looks both sad and I stared. He does look sad and he does look tired. At the side of the table sat a young man who has procured some medieval permission to sorrow out of time and in no place; the wearis- less of one self-subjected to the creation of an over-abundance of life.

If I were asked what seemed to be the most characteristic pose of James Joyce I should say that he staid; turned far away from dignit and not so far as death, for the turn of displeasure and the white of the eyes, yet the only thing at all like it, is the look of the stricken animal. Because this I thought, he questioned one must know him. It has been my pleasure to talk to him many times during my four months in Paris, and walked the pages of rivers and of re-

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ligion, of the instinctive genius of the church which chose, for the singing of its hymns, the voice without "overtones"—the voice of the unstrain. We have talked of women, about women he seems a bit 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 Ilean, of Strind- berg, Shakespeare. "Hamlet is a great play, written in Danish, and he is the only one," and of Strindberg, "No drama behind the hysterical rave."

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 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 "Buffy." Callahan, an Irishman, often found him writing into the night, or drinking into the day. Nora at last came upon him as he lay full length on his stomach poring over a value full of notes in his young face. Nora—saw, 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 it to go for a stroll."

However, it is he, he will come away for the evening, for he is simple, a scholar, and sees nothing objectionable in human beings if they only will remain in place.

Yet he has been called eccentric, mad, incoherent, unintelligible, yes and fur- ther-istic. One wonders why, thinking what a fine lyric beginning that great Kale- lasian has made, and 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 that he would go alone through the world.

"After, not only separate from all others, but to have not even one friend," and he has, if we admit Joyce to be Stephen Dedalus, why not do so. "I will not serve that which I no longer believe in, whether it be your home, my fatherland, or my church; and I will try to express myself in my art as freely as I can and as I feel I can, untried for the defense my 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.
A sketch made by Miss Loy in Paris of Joyce, who, in exile from his native Ireland, has continued, in spite of permanent significance there can be little doubt. "Cham-
ber Music," his first volume of verse, contains Joyce, subdued in tone, but of irreproachable liveliness. "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
bore the title of Joyce's novel, was refused in England.
posing 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.