CHAPTER ONE

One afternoon in the early summer of 1918 I was sitting at my work table in the commercial department of the British Consulate in Zürich. Taylor stood by the window. He had just come in.

"I met James Joyce to-day," he said.

I looked past the dark blue silhouette and profile of King George V at the yellow, white and blue sky, green lime trees, trickling Sihl and dark railway sheds.

"Yes," I said.

"Yes. It was in the Stadttheater. Kerridge is chorus master there, you know. Joyce came in to ask Kerridge something and then he sat at the piano and sang to us."

Taylor stretched out hands to a keyboard and turned his head to an audience.

"He has a fine tenor voice and he knows it."

Taylor sings and is a judge of singing.

"But who is James Joyce?" I asked.


He waved his hand in the direction of the office newspaper files.

"Very little," I said. "And that little not English. What do you expect? I haven't even time to paint."

"It doesn't matter," said Taylor. "I want you to meet Joyce."

"Why?"

"Because I think you'd get on well together. Of
course he’s Irish. You can tell that by his name. And somehow he hasn’t hit it off with the C.G.”

I tried without much success to make some sort of shape out of the material Taylor had given me: well-known writer, tenor singer, Irishman who couldn’t get on with the Consulate-General. Still, there was friend Blaise Cendrars, also a well-known writer. August Suter and I stood godfathers to his son Odilon in the Mairie of the 14th arrondissement. His polychrome Transsibérien. Now he has lost an arm in the war. One mustn’t label people in advance. Taylor must have read something negative in the pause. He broke in on my image building.

“Don’t be lazy and standoffish,” he said. “Joyce, is dining with me at my pension the day after tomorrow. You can manage that, can’t you?”

“I don’t see what I have to do with well-known writers,” I said, “or they with me. Still, I’m free, and if you think. . . .”

“I do,” said Taylor. “Half past seven, if we don’t go up together.”

Taylor was in Zürich on a cultural mission. Enemy countries were being bombarded with shot and shell, neutral countries with propaganda of all sorts designed to prove that it was both interesting and agreeable to be friends with the triple entente and its allies. A collection of modern British pictures had been got together for exhibition in the principal towns in Switzerland and Taylor was in charge of it. The show was good enough of its kind, but in the matter of painting the French and Germans had already queered the pitch. The French had shown some of the dazzling best of their nineteenth century masters, and the Germans had sent a less brilliant, but vastly interesting collection, covering the efforts of a century. On account of
transport dangers and difficulties, the British collection was limited to the work of living painters, so that those who expected to see Constables and Turners were disappointed. Both Taylor and myself were painters and both of us were working for the Ministry of Information. My own job was to survey the Swiss press, translate letters and make myself generally useful.

Taylor's pension was high up on the Zürichberg beyond the Fluntern tram terminus. That his guest was delayed was of no consequence. We sat in the gravelled garden under a tree, drinking our aperitif and occasionally striking too short at wasps. The daylight began to fail. In the restaurant they switched on the lights. Taylor broke off a sentence with: "Ah, here's Joyce."

Following Taylor's look I saw a tall slender man come into the garden through the restaurant. Swinging a thin cane he walked deliberately down the steps to the gravelled garden path. He was a dark mass against the orange light of the restaurant glass door, but he carried his head with the chin uptilted so that his face collected cool light from the sky. His walk as he came slowly across to us suggested that of a wading heron. The studied deliberateness of a latecomer, I thought at first. But then as he came nearer I saw his heavily glassed eyes and realised that the transition from light interior to darkening garden had made him unsure of a space beset with iron chairs and tables and other obstacles.

Joyce's greeting to us is of elaborate European politeness, but his manner I think is distant, his handshake cool. Close up he looks not so tall though he is well above average height. The deception is due to his slender build, his buttoned coat and narrow cut trousers. Then he listens to, not looks at,
his man. The form of his head is the long oval of heads of the Norman race. His hair is dark enough to look black in this light. His beard is much lighter, orangey-brown and cut to a point—Elizabethan. Behind the powerful lenses of his spectacles his eyes are a clear, strong blue, but uncertain in shape and masked in expression. I notice later that in a moment of suspicion or apprehension they become a skyblue glare. The colour of his face is a bricky red, evenly distributed. The high forehead has a forward thrust as it issues from under the front rank of hair. His jaw is firm and square, his lips thin and tight, set in a straight line. Something in Joyce's head suggests to me an alchemist. It is easy to imagine him moving around in a room full of furnaces, retorts and books full of diagrams. And something in his poise suggests a tall marshfowl, watchful, preoccupied. But I feel reassured. What I had imagined under a well-known writer is not there. He might easily be a painter.

At dinner Joyce told us of his departure from the Habsburg Empire after Italy's entrance into the war and praised the generosity of the Austrian authorities, who had allowed him to leave the country and who had even taken his word for the contents of his luggage. The war itself and its progress were left alone by common consent, but war literature was mentioned, and in this connection Joyce said that the only poem on the subject that at all interested him was one by the Viennese poet, Felix Beran, a friend of his in Zürich.

Und nun ist kommen der Krieg der Krieg
Und nun ist kommen der Krieg der Krieg
Und nun ist kommen der Krieg
Krieg
Nun sind sie alle Soldaten
Nun sind sie alle Soldaten
Nun sind sie alle Soldaten
Soldaten
Soldaten müssen sterben
Soldaten müssen sterben
Soldaten müssen sterben
Sterben müssen sie
Wer wird nun küssen
Wer wird nun küssen
Wer wird nun küssen
Meinen weissen Leib

The word "Leib" (body) moved him to enthusiasm. It was a sound that created the image of a body in one unbroken mass. From liquid beginning it passes over the rich shining double vowel till the lips close on the final consonant with nothing to break its blond unity. He spoke of the plastic monosyllable as a sculptor speaks about a stone.

He asked us if we knew the painting of Wyndham Lewis. He had read some of Lewis's writings and seen some of his drawings. Neither Taylor nor myself knew Lewis's work sufficiently well to talk about it with assurance. Joyce said he had read a story of Lewis's that had pleased him. It was the story Cantelman's Spring Mate. One of us, it must have been myself, referred to Shelley's Prometheus Unbouind.

"That seems to me to be the Schwärmerei of a young Jew," Joyce declared bluntly.

And when I, apropos of some love affair or other, used the conventional word, heart, he said in the same tone:

"The seat of the affections lies lower down, I think."

His meaning, I thought, was clear. He objected to the sentimental convenient cliché. The allusion that prompted his remark I learned only some time later when, at his instance, I read Phineas Fletcher's
JAMES JOYCE

Purple Island or the Isle of Man. The Norfolk Rector in describing the provinces of the human body says the following:

The sixth and last town in this region,
With largest stretcht precincts, and compass wide,
Is that where Venus and her wanton sonne
(Her wanton Cupid) will in youth reside.
For though his arrows and his golden bow
On other hills he friendly doth bestow,
Yet here he hides the fire with which each heart doth glow.

So far, in spite of all politeness and conventional amiability, I had felt aware of something watchful and defensive in Joyce's attitude. But on leaving our host we walked down the hill together to the Universitätstrasse where Joyce lived, and I experienced a sense of relief, due I feel sure to a sudden expansiveness and cordiality on Joyce's part. He asked about my work, my stay in Zürich, and suggested future meetings. Some time afterwards he said to me:

"You remember that evening at Taylor's pension on the Zürichberg?"

"Yes," I said, "of course I do."

"Well, I went up to Taylor's to dinner with a mind completely made up that you were to be a spy sent by the British Consulate to report on me in connection with my dispute with them."

Joyce laughed a clear long laugh of full enjoyment at his mistake. A laugh is a significant gesture. Joyce's laughter is free and spontaneous. It is the kind of laughter called forth by the solemn incongruities, the monkeyish trickeries and odd mistakes of social life, but there was no malice in it or real Schadenfreude. His is the kind of laugh one would expect to hear if the president of the republic took the wrong hat, but not if an old man's hat blew off into the gutter.
And what good reason had you," I asked, "for coming to the conclusion that I wasn't a spy?"

"Because," said Joyce, "you looked like an English cricketer out of the W. G. Grace period. Yes, Arthur Shrewsbury. He was a great bat, but an awkward-looking tradesman at the wicket."

It was shortly after our meeting at Taylor's pension that I again met Joyce, by chance this time, and we strolled through the double avenue of trees on the Utoquai from Bellevue towards Zürich Horn. To the left of us were the solid houses of Zürich burgesses, on our right the lake and on the far shore of the lake the green slopes and elegant contours of the Uetliberg ridge.

"I am now writing a book," said Joyce, "based on the wanderings of Ulysses. The Odyssey, that is to say, serves me as a ground plan. Only my time is recent time and all my hero's wanderings take no more than eighteen hours."

A train of vague thoughts arose in my mind, but failed to take shape definite enough for any comment. I drew with them in silence the shape of the Uetliberg-Albis line of hills. The Odyssey for me was just a long poem that might at any moment be illustrated by some Royal Academician. I could see his water-colour Greek heroes, book-opened, in an Oxford Street bookshop window.

Joyce spoke again more briskly:
"You seem to have read a lot, Mr. Budgen. Do you know of any complete all-round character presented by any writer?"

With quick interest I summoned up a whole population of invented persons. Of the fiction writers Balzac, perhaps, might supply him? No. Flaubert? No. Dostoevsky or Tolstoy then? Their people are exciting, wonderful, but not complete. Shakespeare surely. But no, again. The foot-
lights, the proscenium arch, the fatal curtain are all there to present to us not complete, all-round beings, but only three hours of passionate conflict. I came to rest on Goethe.

"What about Faust?" I said. And then, as a second shot "Or Hamlet?"

"Faust!" said Joyce. "Far from being a complete man, he isn’t a man at all. Is he an old man or a young man? Where are his home and family? We don’t know. And he can’t be complete because he’s never alone. Mephistopheles is always hanging round him at his side or heels.* We see a lot of him, that’s all."

It was easy to see the answer in Joyce’s mind to his own question.

"Your complete man in literature is, I suppose, Ulysses?"

"Yes," said Joyce. "No-age Faust isn’t a man. But you mentioned Hamlet. Hamlet is a human being, but he is a son only. Ulysses is son to Laertes, but he is father to Telemachus, husband to Penelope, lover of Calypso, companion in arms of the Greek warriors around Troy and King of Ithaca. He was subjected to many trials, but with wisdom and courage came through them all. Don’t forget that he was a war dodger who tried to evade military service by simulating madness. He might never have taken up arms and gone to Troy, but the Greek recruiting sergeant was too clever for him and, while he was ploughing the sands, placed young Telemachus in front of his plough. But once at the war the conscientious objector became a

* This sentiment is apparently shared on the other side of the footlights. Many years afterwards I asked Joyce why his friend Sullivan, the Paris-Kerry tenor, was so loth to sing in an opera that has become the standby of the Académie Nationale, and he replied: "That Samson of the land of Dan has told me that what bothers him is not so much the damnation of Faust as the domination of Mephistopheles."
JAMES JOYCE

jusqu’auboutist. When the others wanted to abandon the siege he insisted on staying till Troy should fall."

I laughed at Ulysses as a leadswinger and Joyce continued:

"Another thing, the history of Ulysses did not come to an end when the Trojan war was over. It began just when the other Greek heroes went back to live the rest of their lives in peace. And then"—Joyce laughed—"he was the first gentleman in Europe. When he advanced, naked, to meet the young princess he hid from her maidenly eyes the parts that mattered of his brine-soaked, barnacle-encrusted body. He was an inventor too. The tank is his creation. Wooden horse or iron box—it doesn’t matter. They are both shells containing armed warriors."

History repeats itself. The inventor of the tank also found his Ajax at the War Office in the shape of Lord Kitchener.

It seems to me to be significant that Joyce should talk to me first of the principal character in his book and only later of the manifold devices through which he presented him. If the two elements of character and material can be separated this is the order in which he would put them. On the home stretch back to Bellevue a question grew in my mind.

“What do you mean,” I said, “by a complete man? For example, if a sculptor makes a figure of a man then that man is all-round, three-dimensional, but not necessarily complete in the sense of being ideal. All human bodies are imperfect, limited in some way, human beings too. Now your Ulysses . . .”

“He is both,” said Joyce. “I see him from all sides, and therefore he is all-round in the sense of
your sculptor’s figure. But he is a complete man as well—a good man. At any rate, that is what I intend that he shall be.”

The talk turned on music, and I mentioned that Taylor had heard him singing in the Stadttheater.

“Yes, I remember,” said Joyce. “I went there to ask Kerridge something about the disposition of the instruments in the orchestra, and to put him up to some of the commoner mistakes his chorus was likely to make in singing Italian. What I sang was the tenor Romanza ‘Amor Ti Vieta’ from Giordano’s Fedora. I wanted to show the vocal necessity for putting an atonic vowel between two consonants. Listen.”

And he began to sing:

“Amor ti vieta di non amar la mantua lieve che mi respinge.”

He turned to me again:

“You hear,” he said. “It would be impossible to sing that ‘respinge’ without interpolating a vowel breath between the ‘n’ and the ‘g’.”

When I first called on Joyce and his family they were living at No. 38 Universitätsstrasse. There were two guests besides myself. It was after these had gone and Joyce had asked me to stay for a final half-hour’s chat that we fell to talking about religion. Being an orthodox agnostic I saw nothing illogical in admitting that what are called miracles might occur. I had no satisfactory evidence that any ever had occurred, but on my limited experience I felt I couldn’t rule them out. Perhaps I didn’t succeed in defining my position too well, for when I rose to go Joyce laughed and said:

“You are really more a believer than is many a good Catholic.”

The next day I found a packet and a letter
JAMES JOYCE

awaiting me in my little room in the Schipfe. The packet contained a copy of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and the letter extracts from press notices of A Portrait of the Artist, Dubliners and Exiles. I read the book and then the praises of Ezra Pound, H. G. Wells and others, quoted on the manycoloured leaflets. H. G. Wells wrote: "Its claim to be literature is as good as the claim of the last book of Gulliver's Travels. . . . Like Swift and another living Irish writer, Mr. Joyce has a cloacal obsession. . . . Like some of the best novels in the world, it is the story of an education. . . . One conversation in this book is a superb success. I write with all due deliberation that Sterne himself could not have done it better." And Ezra Pound and a dozen others to the same purpose, each in his own way. I remember very well my own impression. The affirmative young man, the terror-stricken and suffering adolescent were but timebound phases of a personality the essence of which was revealed in the boy Stephen Dedalus. He is like a young inquisitive cat taking stock of the world and of himself: climbing, hiding, testing his claws. This bold, sensitive, tenacious, clearseeing boy is the essential artist. There comes a moment when hostile forces—cramping poverty and the tyrannies of Church, nation and family—threaten him with loss of freedom, with extinction as an artist, and he must mobilise all his forces of defence and attack to save himself. "Silence, exile and cunning," says Stephen himself, and he uses those arms and more besides before the battle is won.

A cold wind was blowing when I met Joyce one evening on the Bahnhofstrasse. The brown overcoat buttoned up to his chin lent him a somewhat military appearance.
"I'm glad you liked the 'Portrait,'" said Joyce. I had returned the book with a letter recording some of my impressions of it.

"That simile of yours, 'a young cat sharpening his claws on the tree of life,' seems to me to be very just applied to young Stephen."

I enquired about Ulysses. Was it progressing?

"I have been working hard on it all day," said Joyce.

"Does that mean that you have written a great deal?" I said.

"Two sentences," said Joyce.

I looked sideways but Joyce was not smiling. I thought of Flaubert.

"You have been seeking the mot juste?" I said.

"No," said Joyce. "I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the sentence. There is an order in every way appropriate. I think I have it."

"What are the words?" I asked.

"I believe I told you," said Joyce, "that my book is a modern Odyssey. Every episode in it corresponds to an adventure of Ulysses. I am now writing the Lestrygonians episode, which corresponds to the adventure of Ulysses with the cannibals. My hero is going to lunch. But there is a seduction motive in the Odyssey, the cannibal king's daughter. Seduction appears in my book as women's silk petticoats hanging in a shop window. The words through which I express the effect of it on my hungry hero are: 'Perfume of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh obscurely, he mutely craved to adore.' You can see for yourself in how many different ways they might be arranged."

A painter is, perhaps, more originality proof than any other artist, seeing that all recent experimental innovations in the arts have first been tried out on
his own. And many a painter can labour for a day or for many days on one or two square inches of canvas so that labour expended on achieving precious material is not likely to surprise him. What impressed me, I remember, when Joyce repeated the words of Bloom’s hungrily abject amorousness to me, was neither the originality of the words themselves nor the labour expended on composing them. It was the sense they gave me that a new province of material had been found. Where that province lay I could not guess, but as our talk proceeded Joyce spoke of it himself without question of mine. We were by this time sitting in the Astoria Café.

“Among other things,” he said, “my book is the epic of the human body. The only man I know who has attempted the same thing is Phineas Fletcher. But then his Purple Island is purely descriptive, a kind of coloured anatomical chart of the human body. In my book the body lives in and moves through space and is the home of a full human personality. The words I write are adapted to express first one of its functions then another. In Lestrygonians the stomach dominates and the rhythm of the episode is that of the peristaltic movement.”

“But the minds, the thoughts of the characters,” I began.

“If they had no body they would have no mind,” said Joyce. “It’s all one. Walking towards his lunch my hero, Leopold Bloom, thinks of his wife, and says to himself, ‘Molly’s legs are out of plumb.’ At another time of day he might have expressed the same thought without any underthought of food. But I want the reader to understand always through suggestion rather than direct statement.”

“That’s the painter’s form of leverage,” I said.
We talked of words again, and I mentioned one that had always pleased me in its shape and colour. It was Chatterton's "acale" for freeze.

"It is a good word," said Joyce. "I shall probably use it."

He does use it. The word occurs in The Oxen of the Sun episode of Ulysses in a passage written in early English, describing the death and burial of Bloom's son Rudolph: "... and as he was minded of his good lady Marion that had borne him an only manchild which on his eleventh day on live had died and no man of art could save so dark is destiny. And she was wondrous stricken of heart for that evil hap and for his burial did him on a fair corselet of lamb's wool, the flower of the flock, lest he might perish utterly and lie akeled..."

In leaving the café I asked Joyce how long he had been working on Ulysses.

"About five years," he said. "But in a sense all my life."

"Some of your contemporaries," I said, "think two books a year an average output."

"Yes," said Joyce. "But how do they do it? They talk them into a typewriter. I feel quite capable of doing that if I wanted to do it. But what's the use? It isn't worth doing."