

## JAMES JOYCE

And so James Joyce has been laid to rest in Zürich. Of the many habitations of the self-exiled Dubliner none is better fitted to receive his mortal remains. He passed through Zürich as a young man on his way to Trieste. He returned there in the early days of the Great (1914-18) War. It was there that the greater part of *Ulysses* took shape—there, too, that the seeds were sown which grew into *Finnegans Wake*. I met Joyce for the first time in a café garden on the slopes of the Zürichberg. He was then composing the *Lestrygonians*, the seventh episode of *Ulysses*. I saw him for the last time in the spring of 1939 at his flat in Passy. A copy of *Finnegans Wake*, hot from the press, lay on the table. The third of his lifetime lay between. I read the news of his death as I was about to go on duty for the night. As usual, the threat of death was in the air, but I felt sad for the loss of a friend.

When I met him in Zürich he was, but for his eyes, a healthy though not a robust man, thin and tallish like a boy who has shot up too quickly. His face was a bricky red, his hair near black, his beard orange brown, his eyes clear blue, his lips thin and set in a straight line, his forehead high and domed but full of crisp, clean shape. He gave a limp hand and spoke with care, but he unbent as the evening wore on. He explained his defensive attitude to me later. He was at loggerheads with the British Consulate, and he had heard that I was a consulate employee, so, putting two and two together, he thought I might be told off to spy upon his views and movements. What reassured him, it appears, was that I looked like Arthur Shrewsbury, the Notts and England cricketer, a good bat in his day.

We ought to know a lot about Joyce, seeing that he was at great pains to tell us all he could. He put himself in all his books. He is the unnamed boy in *Dubliners*, Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, Richard in *Exiles*, and Shem the Penman in *Finnegans Wake*, and, if Joyce painted them himself, who

shall say that any of them is a bad likeness? However, when the sitter has left his chair and the artist has packed up his colour box, the friends and relations may give their opinion. Mine is that the best likenesses are the sensitive watchful boy in *Dubliners* and the over-life-size caricature of Shem the Penman in *Finnegans Wake*. Stephen persisted in the shape of attitudes, mannerisms, learned in a Jesuit school, used for defensive purposes, and by usage become habit.

Behind this defensive barrier there was a shrewd counselor, a consistent and helpful friend, a good companion—talker and listener—and (what never appears in any of the self-portraits) a self-forgetting, impish humour expressed in fantastic antics and drolleries, songs, and dances.

Joyce was a self-centred man. How can an artist take his cargo to port without concentrating on the sailing of his ship? But he was a man with a need for friends and a capacity for friendship with its egalitarian laws and constitution. After an estrangement of a couple of years Joyce, hearing I was in Paris, asked me to call, which I did. When he saw me to the door he said: 'I hope you'll always believe that I'm a good friend, Budgen.' There is nothing Stephenesque in that except the use of the surname. Joyce was afraid of Christian names, and the *Portrait of the Artist* gives the clue. He always addressed his letters to me as Francis Budgen, Esq. I told him I was christened Frank, but it made no difference. He just couldn't bring himself to write the more intimate-sounding monosyllable, even prefaced with Mr. or adorned with Esq. It is worth noting that in all Joyce's work the relations between man and woman are of a monumental simplicity, and that complications and the subtler shades arise only in the relations between man and man.

He preferred the more formal manners of most continental countries. English formlessness—such, for example, as a publisher's addressing him as plain Joyce while sitting on a table and dangling his legs—gave him a shock. But he liked the English. I once praised French manners and advanced the theory that the people had taken them from the nobles at the same time that they took their lands. Joyce stopped for a moment in the street as a peasant comes to a standstill when he wants to say something important. 'Yes,' he said, 'the French are polite, but if you want civility you must go to England. The English have more civic sense than any people I know.'

He thought French women the cleverest in the world and the most womanly. He liked Italy and the Italians, but he could never forgive the Italian university (it was Padua, I think) that failed him in an examination in English. The examining professor was an old woman looking like Sairey Gamp, black bag and all complete, and no knowledge of English at all.

Joyce was afraid of thunder and all explosive noises, of dogs, nuns, and many other things, but he was less afraid of pain and sickness than most men. He bore the affliction of his eyes and his series of eye operations with remarkable fortitude. He was not afraid of human beings of whatever degree. And least of all was he afraid of failure. His confidence in himself was as unbounded as it appeared to be. Now we know that *Ulysses* was a best-seller; but all the years of its composition Joyce laboured on it, reckless of time, not knowing how or by whom it would be published, aware that he was writing a masterpiece, and just as aware that masterpieces may be the death of their creators.

Joyce took no part in politics and but rarely, and unwillingly, in political discussion. He was quite likely to yawn through a discussion on, say, Karl Marx's theories and only prick up his ears if Marx's birthday was mentioned, the reason being that his mythology had room for birthdays and no room for theories. As I wrote in *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'*:

An occasional vague reference to the pacific American anarchist, Tucker, was the only indication I ever heard of a political outlook. His view seemed to be that government is work for the specialist; and the artist, another specialist, had better leave it alone. And then government is in the last resort the use of force, whereas the artist's method is persuasion. True, the artist, like the rest of the world, is also a citizen, and laws are made for him to obey and taxes are levied for him to pay. Actively or passively he is a member of the social organization. 'Then let it be passively' would express roughly Joyce's attitude.

However, being nonpolitical is easier said than done. The passive attitude has its active implications, which may at times imperatively demand expression. Given the choice, most poets would prefer to make the ballads and let others make the laws, but what if those who make the laws decide to dictate what ballads shall be made? In the present conflict there is no doubt where Joyce's sympathies would lie.

He did his best during the 1914-18 war to further the Allied cause by cultural propaganda in the shape of his work for the English Players. In my opinion, he would have been still more hostile to the Germany of today, with its threat of disaster to his artist's freedom. Religion and politics are nets by which the free soul can fly only if there is no Inquisition in the one and no Gestapo in the other. But one thing is certain: Not all the dictators and Gauleiters of Europe would ever have made him write a line of which his conscience as man or artist disapproved. Writing was to him a religion, and the word a sacred material.

Like most of his countrymen he was a born *débrouillard* and humorously proud of it. I well remember his triumph when, on one occasion in Zürich, we started level in an effort to raise the wind, and he passed the post ahead of me with lengths to spare. He willed the end and was not afraid of the means. Whatever arts of seamanship were necessary to bring his precious cargo safely to port he would and did master.

Joyce flew by the nets of religion and Irish oppressed nation politics, and parties and classes meant nothing to him, but there was one social institution that for him was quasi-sacred: the family. Jews irritated him at times and at others bored him, but he admired the Jew as a family man. 'I sometimes think', he said to me once in Paris, 'that it was a heroic sacrifice on their part when they refused to accept the Christian revelation. Look at them. They are better husbands than we are, better fathers, and better sons.' This was further to his assertion that he had put the Jew on the map of European literature. What he thought of them as one oppressed and chosen race against another is best seen in his confrontation of the two-eyed reasonable Jew with the one-eyed Fenian gasbag in Barney Kiernan's saloon. (The *Cyclops* episode in *Ulysses*.) The last time I saw him in Paris he told me that he had already made it possible for sixteen Jews to find asylum from Nazi persecution in Britain. It has often occurred to me that Joyce's nervous avoidance of all discussion on the government of the city was due to his greater care for the solidarity of the family. How many families have been scattered by the explosive or dissolved by the acid of politics! How much political dispute is but a family quarrel writ large!

Sayings of Joyce that stick do so like sayings of Lincoln—for their

horse sense. In my hearing he answered (perhaps for the hundredth time) the question: 'Aren't there enough words for you in the five hundred thousand of the English language?' 'Yes, there are enough of them, but they are not the right ones.' Rebutting the charge of vulgarity against the use of the pun, he said: 'The Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church was built on a pun. It ought to be good enough for me.' And a studied ripost: 'Yes. Some of the means I use are trivial—and some are quadrivial.' August Suter, the Swiss sculptor, met Joyce as he was beginning to write *Finnegans Wake*, and Joyce's description of his enterprise was: 'I am boring into a mountain from two sides. The question is, how to meet in the middle.' There spoke the 'great artificer'.

As a craftsman Joyce was exclusive and stuck to his last, but his appreciations were wide. He had his own contacts with all the arts and a forthright, natural judgement of the products of them uninfluenced by the cant of any aesthetic doctrine. He told me in Zürich that of all artists painters were the freest intelligences; and he didn't say it because he was talking to a painter but because he found it refreshing to talk to people whose job it is to look at things and not through them. Music was the art that lay nearest his own—vocal music in particular. All his friends will remember his Sullivan period. Sullivan (a Parisian Irishman with the massive shoulders and lion muzzle of Jim Larkin, the labour leader) was the greatest tenor since Tamagno, and the world should know it and confess it. The Académie Nationale de la Musique must have blessed Joyce, for he bought tickets for *Guillaume Tell* and gave them to everybody he knew. The least musical of his friends got one. The next day he asked me what I thought of the voice. I told him it reminded me of the Forth Bridge. He took a quick breath, leaned back, and disappeared behind his glasses. (He could do this in moments of sudden concentration.) He reappeared and said decisively: 'That's very good, Budgen. But it isn't right. That is not the voice of iron. It is the voice of stone. Stonehenge is the comparison—not the Forth Bridge.'

Guessing at the last months of Joyce's life begets melancholy reflections. War in the Low Countries, the invasion of France, the pitiful torrent of refugees (also exiles), the entry of the Germans into the city he loved, the move southward, sickness, the hurried departure for Zürich. How we feared the worst when we read the word

'Urgent!' But I was thankful it was Zürich. I know how many devoted friends were there to comfort and sustain Mrs. Joyce. No wonder Joyce could so well dispense with contact with his native land. Ireland herself was ever present at his side.

Soon the snow will be melting on the Zürichberg and Uetliberg and falling from dark branches by drip, by drip. The Limmat will quicken her pace to meet her sister Aar. The Föhn wind will blow and the Glarus mountains light up. 'Sechseläuten' is coming. They will soon burn the winter 'Bögg' in the Beltane fire at the lakeside. I shall go to Zürich, if I am alive when this war is over, and I shall take the No. 5 tram up the Züri'berg, and I shall stand before a mound of earth, but I shall not look for Joyce there. I shall hail him across the Bahnhofstrasse as jauntily, short-sightedly, he saunters lakeward. I shall bump into him as with coat collar turned up and coat belt tight he turns a windy corner in Niederdorf. I shall hail him: 'Hullo, there,' as he comes into the Pfauen Café, spectacles gaily glittering and a wisp of *Ulysses* sticking out of his breast pocket, to take his place on the other side of a litre of Fendant.

We sat in Joyce's flat in Passy. Review strips of *Finnegans Wake* lay around. I said I thought we had had enough of the story of his rudeness to Yeats. ('You are too old for me to help you.') Joyce affirmed that the story was untrue and went on to instance the many occasions on which he had shown his respect and admiration for Ireland's greatest poet. In Dr. Gogarty's review of his book he thought he could espy admiration for his great feat of endurance. 'Gogarty is an athlete,' he said, 'a cyclist and a swimmer. He should know what staying power is.'

We left the flat together and walked over the bridge to the Left Bank. Joyce tapped the pavement repeatedly with his new snake-wood stick, a prized acquisition. I told him the only stick I possessed was an olive branch. A suitable companion, he thought. He suggested that I should write an article on *Finnegans Wake* and entitle it *James Joyce's Book of the Dead*. We dawdled cityward. I had a rendezvous at the Dôme, and Joyce one with Paul Léon. All dawdling in Paris ends in taxis. Joyce set me down at the Dôme and waved out of the traffic jam, 'Lots of fun.' Newly initiated, I gave the response, 'At *Finnegans Wake*'.