

The book cover features a solid blue background with large, overlapping, abstract red shapes that resemble thick, curved lines or partial circles. The text is centered and rendered in white. The title is split into three lines: 'Conversations' in a cursive font, 'with James' in a smaller serif font, and 'Joyce' in a large serif font.

*Conversations*  
*with* James  
Joyce

ARTHUR POWER

*foreword by* David Norris

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# Conversations with James Joyce

Arthur Power

*Foreword by David Norris*

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## Foreword

Arthur Power (1891–1984) was by any standards an extraordinary if somewhat self-effacing man: painter, a writer, sometime art critic with *The Irish Times* and member of an international cultural world that included friendship with James Joyce, Modigliani, Ernest Hemingway, Paul Henry and Samuel Beckett. He was still painting actively until shortly before his death and I have in front of me as I write a review by Brian Fallon of an exhibition held in the Taylor Galleries in Dublin when Power was ninety. Fallon says, ‘Arthur Power is a minor genius. An original who is not like anybody else and is in competition with nobody.’

The password to Joyce’s flat in Paris in the twenties was simply to say that you were from Dublin but few of those who called became real friends and fewer still, with the exception of Thomas Pugh who shared his eye problems, Samuel Beckett, a fellow exile, and Constantine Curran, uniquely a survivor from Joyce’s school and university days, left any lasting trace. It is therefore a considerable pleasure to renew acquaintance, thanks to the reissuing of this little book, with one of Joyce’s genuine Irish intimates in Paris.

Despite the steady thud of trendy academics jumping on board, the Joycean bandwagon shows no immediate sign of subsiding under their weight. There was, however, a special excitement in the old days caused by the presence at international literary gatherings of those who had been fortunate enough to be friends of the Irish writer. And what a fascinating group of people they were. If the old cliché, ‘by your friends shall you be known’, is taken as true, then the evidence suggests that in addition to being a writer of global significance Joyce was a remarkable human being.

I never had the opportunity to meet Joyce, who died three years before I was born, or his wife Nora Barnacle, who died when I was seven, but I was privileged to know a number of the survivors of the Joycean circle from the days of Zurich, Trieste and Paris—figures such as Carola Giedion-Welcke, the Swiss art critic, Frank Budgen, the sculptor and painter, and Maria Jolas, who with her husband Eugene published instalments of *Finnegans Wake* in their magazine *transition* in Paris in the 1930s and also indeed Arthur Power, author of the present memoir. In 1977 I organized the International James Joyce Symposium in Dublin and as part of the festivities we arranged a banquet in the dining hall of Trinity College. Among the special guests on that occasion were Maria Jolas, Lennie Collinge who acted as projectionist in Dublin’s first permanent cinema, The Volta in Mary Street, opened by Joyce in 1909, and Arthur Power, then well over eighty years old. Hungry for recollections of Joyce from those who knew him, I asked Lennie Collinge for his opinion. ‘Ah poor Mr Joyce,’ replied Lennie, ‘he was a gentleman. But he wasn’t able for them Italian electricians. They ran rings round him.’ Apparently the canny Triestine sponsors of the cinema project had insisted on local Italian back-up, perhaps with a view to keeping an eye on their investment.

I was seated at the banquet between Maria Jolas and Arthur Power. At the coffee stage we had arranged for Bill Golding and Ann Makower to regale the symposiasts with music from Joyce’s works, including selections from Balfe and Wallace and some of the Victorian drawing-room ballads with which Joyce was familiar and to which there are constant references in his writings. They performed beautifully and created an atmosphere of magical nostalgia fitting for that time of the evening, but when they began to sing ‘Love’s Old Sweet Song’—‘Just a song at twilight when the lamps are low ...’—some among the assorted academics thought themselves superior to this music

diet.

They began to snigger, giggle and make derogatory comments about Joyce's musical taste. This was too much for Mme Jolas, a southern lady from Louisville, Kentucky. She shot to her feet, belted to the table with her stick, and said in a voice trembling with emotion: 'You will not insult the beautiful music which Mr Joyce and I sang in Paris so many times together in the 1930s with affection and pleasure. You will sing it again and this time you will treat it with the respect it is due.' She then led the assembled scholars into 'Once in the Dear Dead Days beyond Recall'. She still had a wonderfully rich contralto voice. It was a remarkable occasion and a remarkable victory. With typical pusillanimity the very same scholars promptly did an aesthetic somersault and adopted the song as a kind of Joycean national anthem.

On my other side Arthur Power was greatly entertained. I have no doubt it reminded him of space within the Joycean circle forty or fifty years earlier in Paris. He was a small stout man, quite bald and I think with a little moustache. He certainly also had the proverbial twinkling eyes and they found plenty to twinkle about on that occasion. I had previously known of his existence as he lived not far from me in St John's Road in Sandymount with his wife, and was a well-known if discreet character round the village of Sandymount. But the week of that symposium was the only time I had an opportunity to get in any sense close to him.

I did not keep any notes (nor have I ever) of meetings such as that with Arthur Power. I can remember very little from our dinner conversation. I had to keep my eyes peeled for any difficulties that might arise among the delegates, and there were plenty of them. Two things I do recall, however. The first was his still keen interest in painting, and the second the memory of his quarrel with Joyce which revolved round a refusal to accord with Joyce's view that the arrival of his grandson Stephen was an occasion of messianic proportions. There is something absurd and almost touching about Joyce's family 'notions' and it is amusing to reflect that the distorted echo of genius that was the catalyst of this row between friends still enjoys an infinite capacity for sowing discord in the Joycean world.

Arthur Power, luckily unlike myself, does seem to have kept copious notes of his conversation with Joyce. This enables him to give a sharp picture of Joyce, surprised at work, looking like a dentist with his white coat, a fact confirmed by well-known photographs of the period. We get a nice atmospheric description of the first meeting between Joyce and Power at the Bal Bullier in Paris. There is something wonderfully Joycean about the fact the Power went there in hopes of a romantic assignation with a skivvy and was disappointed to be roped in instead to the company of Joyce, definitely a second best.

He attempted to introduce Joyce to the bohemian world of Paris's expatriate painters and sculptors but without success. There is a highly entertaining description of Joyce's son Giorgio guarding Joyce from the temptations of alcohol as represented by Power (a comparatively abstemious man). The pathetic irony of this in the light of Giorgio's own subsequent colourful career as an alcoholic will not be lost on Joyceans. The occasional snobbery into which the author of *Ulysses* allowed himself to descend is reflected in his comment about J.M. Synge being 'bourgeois'. But then there was considerable rivalry between the two. Joyce, having been pleased to discover that *Riders to the Sea* disappointed his criteria for great classical tragedy, subsequently embarked on a marvellous parody of Synge's style in the Scylla and Charybdis episode of *Ulysses*:

It's what I'm telling you, Mr Honey, it's queer and sick we were, Haines and myself, the time himself brought it in. 'Twas murmur we did for a gallus potion would rouse a friar, I'm

thinking, and he limp with leching. And we one hour and two hours and three hours in Connery's sitting civil waiting for pints apiece. And we to be there, mavrone, and you to be unbeknownst sending us your conglomerations the way we to have our tongues out a yard long like the drouthy clerics do be fainting for a pussful.

Although Joyce disdained the bohemian parties patronized by Arthur Power, he did invite Power to social occasions in his own apartment. There he met the intimates of the Joycean circle, including the remarkable Sylvia Beach, who was to publish *Ulysses* from her bookshop Shakespeare & Company, 21 the rue de l'Odeon in 1922. Miss Beach, whose 1962 visit to Ireland I recall well, was a spritely bird-like little thing who gave the impression of being prim, as befitted the descendant of several generations of Presbyterian New England clergymen. However, prim she certainly was not, or she could not have either published *Ulysses* or conducted a life-long lesbian relationship with Adrienne Monnier. Joyce undoubtedly manipulated her as he did Harriet Weaver, but at least he gave her in return a lasting celebrity. Sadly, however, her end was rather lonely. She was found dead in her Paris flat after a bank holiday in the middle sixties when returning neighbours heard her transistor set playing, its batteries almost worn out.

Even after her death I am glad to say Sylvia Beach could cause controversy. At a fashionable wedding recently an inebriated solicitor, whose name I forget, overhearing me confirm to an enquiring literary friend that Sylvia Beach had had a lesbian relationship with Mlle Monnier, stood up and shouted, 'Too much, too much, bad enough to sit near such a person but to be expected to listen to the filth ...!' However, his appetite for champagne prevailed over the refinements of his moral sensibilities and having been ignored by the company he sat down once more to the trough. A satisfying posthumous triumph for Ms Beach.

Joyce himself of course had suffered in his own life from the restrictions of conservative social mores. He was cut dead in the street by Dublin acquaintances when he returned in 1909 because of his elopement with Nora. Arthur Power records a telling incident from his days in Trieste which Joyce recounted to him with some bitterness. He had just finished a private lesson in English with a teenage student. He started to gather his papers up and was about to leave the room when the young Miss M tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the clock above his head. It showed five minutes to the hour. She demanded her pound of flesh. There are always those who think they can buy genius like a pound of sausages.

There is no doubt that this treatment rankled with Joyce but especially in his early career he frequently encountered such attitudes. Even his friend Ettore Schmitz (Italo Svevo) could adopt a haughty tone. On one occasion, having in a spirit of bonhomie invited Joyce to dinner, he expressed shock that Joyce should have had the temerity actually to accept an invitation of which he was deemed socially unworthy.

Nora Joyce was regarded as beyond the social pale by middle-class Trieste because she took washing to supplement her husband's meagre income and desperate borrowings. When James Joyce acknowledged that in the portrayal of Anna Livia Plurabelle in *Finnegans Wake* he had been inspired by the flowing locks of Svevo's wife, she was horrified to discover that her much-admired tresses had been transmogrified into the muddy water of the river Liffey, in which a pair of washerwomen were raddling out Earwicker's undergarments. Perhaps, however, the world of the bourgeoisie was right to suspect Joyce. There is a sharply perceptive description of Joyce by Power which would support the hesitation:

... for who would think that this slight and delicately built man with his smooth clerkly face, small pointed beard, with those strong spectacles glassing his weak eyes, was the most revolutionary character in this age of artistic revolutions? Indeed I realized that there was much of the Fenian about him—his dark suiting, his wide hat, his light carriage, and his intense expression—a literary conspirator, who was determined to destroy the oppressive and respectable cultural structures under which we had been reared, and which were then crumbling.

One of the most curious things about this memoir is the extent to which Joyce seems to have discoursed on literary topics with Power. This is surprising in view of Joyce's comment about the literary conversation of Paris salons in the twenties: 'I wish to God they'd talk about turnips.' The ironic treatment of Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist* when he expatiates at some length about his aesthetic theories only to be undermined by Lynch—'that has the true scholastic stink'—suggests that Joyce was not unaware that such conversations could lead to unsupportable longuette. Joyce's advocacy of André Gide is also certainly unexpected, but there are wonderful flashes of the steel of Joycean wit. It was apparently to Power that Joyce made the remark (recorded also in Ellmann's magisterial biography), on being asked what he thought of the next life, that he didn't think much of this one. It was his way of avoiding a subject he didn't wish to discuss conversationally. I have no doubt whatever that the question of the possibility of the human personality surviving death in some form preoccupied him increasingly in his later years and forms one of the central themes of *Finnegans Wake*. Academic critics of course tend to avoid speculation about the spiritual. I remember well when Joyce's old friend Frank Budgen posed this very question to a panel during a discussion at one of the early symposia, in the Moyne institute in Trinity. The psychic panic induced among the scholars was similar to the consternation occasioned by a thunderous crepitation during a Sunday sermon.

Joyce's wit occasionally led him to be unfair to other artists. He was seduced by sound in dismissing the great Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson as 'Lawn Tennyson'. He is quite simply wrong here. Tennyson is a great and sadly undervalued poet, even though he is wildly out of fashion nowadays. Similarly cruel is Joyce's retort on hearing that the temperamental painter Patrick Tuohy, who created the superbly bilious portrait of his father John Stanislaus Joyce, but irritated Joyce with his artistic pretensions, had gassed himself in New York. When Budgen told Joyce the news he said, 'I am not surprised. He nearly made me commit suicide too.'

The whole volume is like a series of platonic dialogues interspersed with vignettes of Joyce and the painter Modigliani. We are lucky to have this book not just for the personal recollections of Joyce it contains, which are always of biographical interest, but also for the insight into his working methods and aesthetic ideas. Joyce's statements are caught with exactitude. It is fascinating to be permitted to listen in on the words of the master:

When I was writing *Ulysses* I tried to give the colour and tone of Dublin with my words; the drab, yet glistening atmosphere of Dublin, its hallucinatory vapours, its tattered confusion, the atmosphere of its bars, its social immobility.

Who better than Joyce to give this description? And thank God we have here the statement from Joyce, recorded directly from his conversations with Arthur Power, that above all

*Ulysses* is fundamentally a humorous work, and when all this present critical confusion

about it has died down, people will see it for what it is.

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When they were putting up quotations from Joyce in pink neon lights all over Dublin as part of public art project recently it is a pity they left this one out. It should be permanently up in lights for scholars everywhere to see.

SENATOR DAVID NORRIS  
*Dublin, November 1993*

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## Foreword to the 1974 Edition

While patient research has clarified many of the more recondite sources on which Joyce drew for the composition of his books, it has always been far from easy to determine how much of the main stream of European literature he had absorbed or what his literary tastes and opinions were. After his earlier adult years he wrote virtually no criticism, nor was he inclined to speak openly to the journalists and casual acquaintances who repeatedly sought to discover his views. Only a few friends were privileged to know anything of the real personality behind the courteous façade, friends who, with rare exceptions (like Hemingway), were not themselves literary men. Stuart Gilbert had been a judge; Frank Budgen was a painter; Arthur Power, a man of general culture and an art critic more or less by accident, was one of the even smaller number who succeeded in engaging Joyce in repeated and sustained conversation about literature and literary values.

Except for his sporadic and always highly specialized research into works of reference and comparatively rare books (much of it, in any case, carried out for him by willing amanuenses), Joyce was not often a great reader, and it is wise to be guarded in one's assumptions about the depth of his literary background. Arthur Power's conversations with Joyce reveal facets of that background which were previously either veiled or almost unknown. Joyce's interest in, and knowledge of, the great tradition of Russian prose writing can be seen to be more profound than one might have suspected, while his high opinion of Eliot (sometimes disputed) is now shown to be beyond question. Joyce's comments on literary theory are less than exciting, and as always he seems to have avoided prolonged discussion of his own books. Special interest is nevertheless to be found in one or two remarks about *Ulysses* and 'Work in Progress', such as his response to Power's question about what happened between Bloom and Gerty MacDowell: 'Nothing happened between them.... It all took place in Bloom's imagination,' a remark which may help, by slightly altering the status of the first half of the 'Nausikaa' chapter, to explain the rather different roles played by the girls three hours later, in the nighttown scenes.

Joyce and Power had a number of things in common. Both had left the Church at an early age; both had escaped from Ireland, in which they found much to dislike. In the first chapter of this book, Arthur Power presents a refreshingly honest portrait of himself as a young man of direct and open character, eager, like Joyce, to immerse himself in a culture more exciting than anything his native country seemed able to offer. Although less disturbed by his own developing personality than Joyce had been, Power was vividly aware of comparable tensions, and his account of the important moment of his First Communion, in which waning religious conviction confronted a growing sexual interest, presents some analogies with the adolescent experience of Stephen Dedalus. There were nevertheless strong temperamental differences which, as Power reports, occasionally led Joyce to mild displays of courteous exasperation at his young friend's insistence on the worth of the literature which he had undertaken to defend. After a slightly insecure start (an experience shared by many of Joyce's acquaintances), the friendship between Power and the Joyce family flourished in the twenties, for apart from his personal attractiveness, Power had the important virtue, in Joyce's eyes, of being not only Irish but also loquacious. The days of the composition of *Ulysses* were over, and Joyce no longer needed Irish friends to confirm or modify his recollection of the topography of Dublin, but during the period of 'Work in Progress' he took every opportunity to listen to users of his native speech rhythm.

In this Power served him well, and it seems that Joyce offered oblique thanks for his frequent friend conversation by allowing him to double, in *Finnegans Wake*, with Frank le Poer ('Ghazi') Power under the pseudonym 'gaspower'.

It is not only about literary topics that Power has something of value to say. He offers us many small insights into Joyce's daily habits and tastes in more mundane matters. Joyce's intense interest in the notorious Bywaters and Thompson case of 1922 provides hints for the possibility of further meanings in parts of *Finnegans Wake*, while the small vignettes which Power provides of Joyce and his family both at work and in more convivial circumstances are among the freshest to have been recorded. Very few of Joyce's Irish friends have been content to give us any extended account of the Joyce they knew; we are most fortunate that Arthur Power has now chosen to join their company.

CLIVE HARRIS

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## Preface

In these conversations I have tried to reconstruct some of the talks I had with Joyce at different times from notes taken when I returned home after spending an evening with him.

I realize how inadequate much of it is, for much that was said has been forgotten or is inadequately expressed, while to give an impression of a man of such talent one would have to have talent equal to his own, as deep a consciousness of the social and psychological changes of his time as he had, and the same almost agonized gift for expressing it.

Also I see that being of a different temperament and opinion I have been too occupied with expressing my own point of view. All I can say is that that is how it was, since I was very talkative while Joyce was naturally silent.

At the time these conversations took place I was a romantically inclined young man. My point of view has changed and coincides more with his, but such was it then, and as such I have left it. In order to give the reader a clearer notion of my youthful personality and interests, I have prefaced the book with a brief account of my early life in Ireland, London and Paris.

A.

## Prelude

An early love of France must have been instinctive, for when I was only fourteen I remember persuading my mother that we should spend our Christmas holidays at Boulogne, arguing that it would be a great opportunity to improve our French. Crossing the Channel in a paddle steamer, we stayed at a grumbling old hotel full of long passages, halfway up a wide cobbled street on a steep hill. Opposite was the huge gothic pile of the church where we went for Mass on Sundays, and where I was immediately fascinated by the difference between the ceremony I had known in England and Ireland and that in France. Inside the church a woman in a black knitted shawl and a scarf on her head hired out wooden chairs to the congregation, high-backed, narrow and very uncomfortable, which made kneeling a penance, and which scraped noisily on the stone floor when turned around to be sat on for the sermon. Then there were the small pieces of bread which were handed around in a basket before the Communion; and that round black silk bag on the end of the long stick, pushed along in front of the worshippers to collect the sous; and finally the magnificent beadle in his three-cornered hat and gold-tipped staff, breeches and silk stockings, who strode with such an authoritative air in contrast to the shuffling old man in his ordinary black suit who used to function in the church in Hampstead which my school had been taken on Sundays.

In my afternoons I used to wander about this foreign town delighted to sit in the cafés listening to the babble of a foreign tongue of which I already understood something, and enjoying the different smells and tastes—much better smells and tastes than I had ever known before. I used to murmur to myself contentedly: ‘This is what pleases me.’ For I felt more at home here than I did in my own country, or in London.

At school in Hampstead I had only known the brutality of a horde of rough boys herded together, a violent and cruel world which I hated and in which I in turn was hated, so that my life was a wilderness from which there seemed to be no escape. I must have been unusually sensitive, which is a matter of regret since it gave others a great opportunity to prey on me, but some of my unhappiness was relieved one day when a young and attractive French mistress arrived. I immediately recognized her difference from the prim-faced, raw-boned women who generally taught us. During the school walks I used to be allowed to walk beside her, while on her other side—and it seems to have been my fate all my life—was a tall blond boy called Rusborne who was the one she was really interested in, a silent and self-possessed youth who, in contrast to my ardent feelings, appeared to be quite indifferent to the affection she showed him.

Time has blurred my impressions, and now I only see my youth in a dim haze in which certain things stand out in cameo, while others have been lost. But my memory of Mademoiselle is one of the clearest, and she must have been attractive for I remember that young men, as we approached on our walks, used to lean against a brick wall as we passed, and say to her, ‘Miss, can we join your school?’

On these walks she would talk about Paris, and I remember her descriptions of that gay and wonderful world seemed to me entrancing. ‘Ah, Paris,’ she used to exclaim, ‘that is something! Here it is nothing but fog and rain,’ and she would go on to describe the Opéra where her father was a member of the orchestra—‘*une scène superbe—les loges...*’ filled with ‘*des gens chics*’ for an opera by Verdi or Rossini. Then she would go on to describe the boulevards outside, a blaze of lights, the cafés crowded

with people. She told me once, in a moment of bubbling youth and confidence, how when her young admirer came to the house she used to amuse herself curling his moustaches.

Her descriptions of Parisian life haunted my youthful imagination, stemming from a source I do not know, though it has since occurred to me that she must have stirred up some latent atavism since I am a Power, the Irish corruption of Poer—or Poher—the name of a family of Norman extraction who came over to Ireland centuries ago with Strongbow to settle around Waterford. Our family arms are of French origin—a stag bearing a cross between its antlers, taken from the legend of St Hubert, with the device underneath: *Per Crucem ad Coronam*.

The French origin of my family had been accentuated by my grandmother, a Miss Kane, who had been brought up in France and married my grandfather at the British Embassy in Paris. When she came to Waterford as a bride, the first thing she did was to break up the massive square Georgian front of the family mansion with a hexagonal two-tiered balcony of granite which jugged out in the semblance of a French château. She filled the hall and library with tapestries from Lyons and Courtray, 'The Descent of Persephone into Hades' being one, 'The Meeting of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba' another. In the library she placed a very large tapestry of Neptune driving his sea horses through a torrent of foam. The drawing-room she furnished with gilt-and-marble console table and a suite of Louis XVI chairs and settees upholstered with bergère prints of elegant shepherdesses in amorous conversation with equally amorous and well-dressed shepherds, all belonging to a world which is now much past, the aristocratic one.

My visit there when very young must have imprinted itself on my imagination in that period of life when all is surmise and dream: that old Georgian house with its tapestries, gilt furniture, mirrors, and the powder-blue bergère drawing-room suite, surrounded by lawns and shrubs, the river sparkling through the trees at the bottom of the field in front, trees which my grandmother had planted to hide the turbulent and ever-restless river Suir which, being tidal, was always in violent flood either up to Waterford city or racing down between its widely-spread mud banks as it foamed around the shipping buoys. I, who never knew her, was told that she had tried to shut it out.

It was to the French Mademoiselle that I gave my youthful and ardent affection. Twice in the week we used to be sent to the small Roman Catholic church in Hampstead for instruction by an Irish priest, a handsome and saintly old man with a skin like parchment. We boys used to sit on a bench in the sacristy surrounded by the odour of incense, flowers and vestments. Even then I remember that I was not much impressed by his religious arguments, a fact which he noticed, sensing, as he must have done, a future rebel. I remember his stopping in the middle of his instruction, looking at me and saying, 'I know what is going to happen to you', words which I still remember even though I did not then understand their meaning. I think he must have meant that I would not remain a believing member of the Roman Catholic community. I nevertheless looked forward to the great day with some excitement, hoping that, in the manner of a miracle, a sudden and mystical event would change my world, and bring me happiness.

At the ceremony Mademoiselle, the daughter of a musician, was to play the organ, and I remember my delight when she told me that she had chosen me to work the organ pump, offering the gallant excuse that I was a strong boy! My anticipated pleasure at being alone with her in the music loft before my First Communion was much reduced when I found I had to stand in a dark cobwebbed hole working an old-fashioned wooden handle up and down. Indeed, I was so bored and tired by it that I stopped several times so that the organ produced only a faint squeak, when she cried out, '*Qu'est-qui se passe, alors?*' More from love than from duty, I started to pump again, but this was certainly not my idea of preparation for the reception of the Holy Sacrament.

When the supreme moment arrived she called me out and we knelt together against the railing the choir-loft looking down into the church, and then—a moment which I have remembered with great clarity over the years—as I rose to go down she kissed me on the mouth. I descended those narrow twisting stairs into the church to receive divine love with the imprint of human love on my lips—something which I have tried to repeat all my life.

I do not believe that any Englishwoman, or Irishwoman either (though that is more possible) would have acted as she did. But with the Latins, love is given a mystical quality. It is the outcome of generations of Roman Catholicism. When I was in Spain I used to be fascinated by the photographs of the young Spanish bridal couples I saw in the glass cases outside the photographers' shops: those dark-skinned, smooth-cheeked, serious-looking brides in their white lace mantillas surmounted with tortoise-shell comb, and the bridegroom equally serious in his white shirt front and dress suit, so that one felt that there should be something sacramental in the consummation.

French marriages are more material, perhaps, but one feels nevertheless something of the same sanctity, and no doubt it was that which made Mademoiselle arrange for me to be with her in the music loft, and which led her to kiss me before I went down to communion—a finesse and intrigue which were particularly French.

Needless to say, I passed a day of supreme happiness for my hope that my world would be transformed had come true, although in a way which was more surprising than I had foreseen. I took care to remain alone as much as possible for the rest of that day in case some rough contact should disturb my feeling of sanctity. All this now seems a long way off, but these memories occur to me in retrospect to explain why I always had a vision of France, and above all of Paris, in the back of my mind.

It was not until the end of the First World War when, after innumerable medical boards, I was released from the Army, that I was able to realize my ambition. First I went to Italy, stopping in Florence where I enjoyed the parties in the old palaces, the turbulent Arno flowing past their walls, and the famous house-bearing Jeweller's Bridge some hundred yards further down. The modern Florentines seemed as gay and amusing as their lively forebears.

Then I went on to Rome, where I visited museum after museum, but in the end these massive collections from the past depressed me, I, who wanted art to be a living thing, and to visit the studios where it was being created and meet the men who were creating it, with the paint still wet on the canvases, or in the case of a writer, to see his written corrections on the page. In other words, Paris was my objective.

So it was after this journey through Italy that at last I arrived in the French capital, worn out by this troublesome journey, for at that time everything in Italy was on strike. I had taken one of the rare overfilled trains in which officials spent their time going up and down the corridors abusing the passengers and kicking their luggage out of the way, piled as it was in the corridors. At last I tumbled out, thankful to have reached journey's end, and entered the Hôtel Terminus attached to the Gare St. Lazare, a noisy bustling place rather like the station itself with its continual comings and goings, and the masses of luggage piled in the hall.

After exploring the city for a couple of days I decided to move out to the Latin Quarter where the students and, as I believed, the artists, lived. I was delighted to find an hotel in the Place de Sorbonne facing the brilliantly lit Café d'Harcourt. The Hôtel Moderne, as it was called, was nothing much in itself except that in contrast to its name it was very old, with walls over a yard thick and small low-ceilinged rooms.

Not knowing a soul in the city, I used to wander about, walking everywhere, for Paris is too interesting to be hurried through in a bus or in the Metro. My evenings I spent on the Boulevard Michel sauntering past the students' cafés. I looked around for artists, and though I saw an occasional black hat and flowing tie, they were few and scattered, and so eventually tiring of the brash energy of the students I would go for long walks up to the heights of Montmartre, where I knew that many great Impressionists had lived and had their studios. But the district of Montmartre had undergone great changes since their day, and the Boulevard Clichy was now full of sleazy joints, and expensive nightclubs, where all America and Europe came to debauch themselves. It was only up on the heights around the Church of the Sacré-Coeur that it was quieter, and from that height, leaning over a timber-blackened wall, I could see all Paris lying below me bathed in light.

For some ill-defined reason I felt that the present-day artists had migrated elsewhere, for the people one saw sitting on the café terraces were obviously everyday folk or foreign and provincial pleasure seekers. I set off in search again, when one evening, travelling by chance past the tree-enclosed darkness at the top end of the Luxembourg Gardens, I entered a boulevard. Halfway along it I came to a café with lively-looking young men sitting on the terrace. As I sat down I overheard them, to my delight, discussing art, invoking the names of Degas, Renoir, and other artists. After a while I got into conversation with a lively and witty young man sitting at the next table who, as it turned out, was the sculptor Zadkine.

Perhaps because he had been brought up in England he was more sympathetic to the casual Englishman or Irishman than were the others, and one day he invited me around to his studio to see his work.

It was in an alley-way off the rue de Sèvres, and one entered through a wicket-gate across a vine-trellised courtyard. To the right was the entrance, and going up some steps one was enclosed for a moment in complete darkness before emerging on a landing to be faced with the door of his studio. A very large room, one corner of it was filled with a big window made up of innumerable panes, which always reminded me of the window in Rembrandt's picture of 'The Philosopher'. The wide floor was covered with Zadkine's sculptures. At the entrance stood a life-sized figure in wood, 'St John the Baptist'—hollow-cheeked and spare-ribbed, the man of locusts and honey; beside it was the figure of a nude girl in white marble enveloped in a shimmering wing—'Leda and the Swan'; in a corner against the right wall he showed me a group of insect-like figures on a wood base bowed down with tribulation around a single recumbent figure—'Job and his Comforters'.

At the far end was a partition curtained off around a stove, its black pipe winding in snake-like contortions up the wall and finally disappearing out of the window. Set in this alcove were a table, some chairs, and a bookcase filled with books.

Zadkine was an amusing and voluble conversationalist, who when he mentioned the word 'sculpture' gave it a peculiarly sensual inflection. Imprisoned in every piece of wood or stone, so he explained, he saw a recumbent form waiting to be released. In the neglected trunk of a tree he had seen this 'John the Baptist', and had released him; in that piece of white marble had been imprisoned his 'Leda and the Swan'. And, showing me the heavy chunk of wood he was then working on: 'In that', he declared, 'lives the most exciting deer you ever imagined, all the way from the steppes of Russia, now to be released by me in my Paris studio.' Taking me to the window, he pointed into the courtyard where I could see two tall trunks of yellow wood carved into archaic figures, which had been stacked there because they were too large to fit into the studio. 'Gog and Magog,' he declared, 'taken from the forest of Vincennes, and now enjoying the amenities of my beautiful courtyard. Sculpture should be a living thing. In the early morning it lies in sleep, then as the light strengthens it awakes, changing ho

by hour until at midday it reaches its zenith like a rose, or like a woman in the moment of love. And then in the evening it closes up again like a flower, to be reborn in the first light.' While he talked he made me coffee in a Bedouin coffee-pot with a hammered brass base and a decorated spout.

I suppose that in spite of my desire to consort with artists and bohemians I had, perhaps owing to my army training, remained conventionally dressed, even carrying an umbrella at times.

'You are too heavily dressed,' Zadkine told me with disapproval. 'Remember Nina,' he continued referring to a mutual friend of ours, an Englishwoman, 'every time I go out I see her wagging the nasty tail of hers up and down the boulevard. When we come to Paris we should lose our tails. They only get in the way.'

As I sat at the table beside the stove listening to him I noticed that he had a number of English books on his shelves, including Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and his brilliant, personal *Directions to Servants*.

'I brought them from London,' he told me, 'for my books are my conscience; they must go where I go. It is all of my English life which is left for I am a Parisian now, or rather an international. We must lose our nationality, like our tails.'

Some days later, meeting me on the boulevard, he told me that he was going for a holiday down in Savoy where, he said, there were some old men 'who do marvellous things with snakes, and whom I wish to sculpt'. He asked me if I would like to rent his studio while he was away. Living as I was then in that hotel room in the Place de la Sorbonne I much preferred the attractions of his studio, one of the most bizarre and original in Paris. Shortly afterwards I moved in to take my place among that wonderful population, a silent and fantastic company which in my imagination seemed always to be awaiting my return from the café at night. I used to spend my mornings in the curtained alcove reading Zadkine's books and experimenting with my own writing, while in the evening I used to frequent the Café Rotonde, and the Dôme, at the corner of the Boulevard Raspail and the Boulevard Montparnasse.

At that time there was a great stir in the artistic world, with the young men who had returned from the war showing their determination to create a new art to express modern life, for already Marinetti's famous Futurist Manifesto was having considerable influence. He had declared that artists must create an art never conceived before, in which all truths learned in classes and studios must be abolished. 'The classical does not concern us. We are at the beginning of a new epoch'—a view which in fact had a greater influence on the Left Bank intellectuals in Paris than it had in Marinetti's own museum-cluttered Rome where it was first issued. There was considerable confusion, as at the beginning of a new adventure, with innumerable false starts led by false leaders. Everybody was experimenting wildly with novelty at a premium; every avenue and device was explored for ideas. One musician, a friend of Joyce's, composed a piece to be played by a hundred mechanical pianos as well as numerous other mechanical noise-making devices.

At that time the two chief artistic cafés were the Rotonde and the Dôme. The Rotonde was where the Latins and other Continentals used to congregate, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Russians and other Slavics. It consisted chiefly of a long, low-ceilinged room with the usual square marble-topped tables, and the walls hung with innumerable pictures. Through a passage was the traditional zinc-topped *comptoir* where one drank one's morning coffee and ate a *brioche* standing before the row of aluminium geysers in the din and clatter as the waiters called out their orders. Outside, the café terrace faced the Boulevard Montparnasse with the entrance to the Nord Sud Underground station exactly opposite. The travellers who passed used to gaze curiously and cynically at the arguing intellectuals sitting on the terrace. In winter the terrace was enclosed in a glass screen and charcoal stoves were placed at intervals, but in spite of this protection one was soon glad enough to go inside and sit in the main café.

Here a continual stream of people entered and left: artists, models, viveurs and political revolutionaries.

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Immediately opposite, on the other side of the boulevard, was the Café du Dôme, the chief haunt of the English-speaking element: English, Irish, Americans, with a sprinkling of Danes, Swedes and Norwegians. Inside, the Dôme was more restricted than the Rotonde, for a large semi-circular *comptoir* took up most of its left side. The rooms at the back were dull and unimaginative, with high windows looking out on to the gloomy non-committal houses of the rue de Lambre, a street as depressing as the famous rue Morgue, consisting of a long line of dull houses which ended with the wall of the Montparnasse cemetery. The Dôme's wide and well-appointed terrace made up for its rather depressing interior, and here, as well as on the terrace of the Rotonde, the intellectuals used to collect in their crowds in the evening, so that as one approached this café from the distance at night under the haze of lights, it looked as though it were a huge hive with innumerable swarming bees. Even in the afternoon there were always a number seated there, recognizable by their coloured shirts, sandals, and variegated headgear, and they would remain for hours contemplating the busy boulevard before them. Indeed, in the hot and temperamental Paris afternoon their apparent indolence and detachment would sometimes so annoy passing van drivers and others, their nerves already frayed by the city traffic, that I have seen them pull up on the curb and pour abuse upon the half-conscious and immobile intellectuals. There was one man who used to drive up every evening and park his van with relish in front of the café terrace. On it was written, 'Extermination of Rats Undertaken'—that was evidently his business—for if the intellectual hates and despises the bourgeois, the latter in turn hates and despises the intellectual.

I cannot say that when I originally went to France I intended to get a job, in fact such an idea was repugnant to me. But although I preferred to frequent the cafés, *flâner* the boulevards, meet my friends and generally improve my mind, I suddenly found myself a sort of freelance art critic on the *New York Herald*.

In London, during the war, I had met the American sculptor Jo Davidson. He and I used to frequent the Café Royal in Piccadilly, which had a kind of fevered brilliance. Having lived my life with soldiers I knew nothing about artists, but now I decided that if I survived I would become one of them for it was the only life, and they were the only people who interested me.

Jo Davidson was the first international artist I had met. I was fascinated by his wit, his vitality, and his freedom from all the shibboleths I had been brought up to revere but which in secret I used to make fun of, a thing which the conventionally minded sensed and made me pay for in the surreptitious way. Calling for him in the evening at the bookshop of Dan Rider, another jovial and pleasant person, I would walk with him to the Café Royal, and from there to some restaurant, often finishing up at a night club in the early hours of the morning, surrounded by a covey of belles attracted by Davidson's personality.

Now, the war over, he had established himself in Paris, where he was engaged in sculpting a huge 'Doughboy' to be erected in the American Cemetery. It was then that he suggested that he could give me a job on the *New York Herald*, for which I was to write a weekly article entitled 'Around the Studios'. As he said, there was tremendous activity going on about which the public knew nothing.—Exhibitions are all right, he pointed out, they are well advertised and people know about them, but there is no account of the daily work taking place in the numerous studios all around Paris.

So, undertaking this mission—for so I regarded it—I used to make visits to the different artists' studios, which in itself was an adventure, since they often lived in strange and inaccessible places, u

crazy broken stairways and along perilous creaking balconies. If I thought a man had talent I would arrange to pay him a visit, and it was in this way that I first met Sola, the Spanish artist, who was later to be my friend, and it was from him I acquired my first Modigliani, a piece of sculpture.

One day, Davidson, who knew him, showed me some of Sola's drawings. Interested, I decided to make a call. He lived beside the Gare Montparnasse in a plain-faced rambling red-brick building with a long, straight, narrow stair running like a ladder up to his studio, a big and bare high-walled room which was always plunged in obscurity. Indeed, with its stark walls and perpetual gloom, it reminded me of the cathedrals of Spain with their creeping lights, their stillness, and their detachment from the outside world.

Sola himself had that mixture of fire and melancholy which seems to be characteristic of his race. He was married to a French girl, a quiet and gentle creature who spent most of her day sitting by the iron stove knitting and taking an occasional drink of cabbage water to relieve her delicate digestion—the cure for all such ills according to her—and I still have a drawing of them sitting opposite one another portraying that grave and intimate austerity which seems to be an essential part of the Spanish character. The occasional exuberances of their famous fiestas and ferias have always seemed to me but temporary flashes of high tension bursting through their cast-iron conventionalism.

When I called on him it was already late in the evening, and as I sat talking to him my eyes continually wandered to the far end of the studio where there was an old-fashioned and massively built Breton cupboard, the kind that has been passed on through several generations of respectability. It had a lot of things piled in confusion on top of it, but what emerged from this penumbra of shadow and light, and constantly attracted my attention, was a stone head. Egyptian in style, the face was oval in shape and set on a long neck with a straight nose and a very small and full-lipped mouth. The eyes were elongated and smooth like pebbles, and full, soft cheeks had evidently been cut with a sequence of single hammer strokes which gave them a jewel-like quality. I asked Sola if he had done it.—No, he said, that is by Modigliani. During the war I used to stand him meals. We were both hard up at the time but my parents used to send me money from Spain and so I had a little; enough, that is, for myself both to eat, anyway. So one day he climbed up here carrying this head, and gave it to me as a present in return, I suppose.

For days afterwards that piece of sculpture haunted me, as the passion for a particular woman can haunt one, a constant obsession from which it is difficult to rid oneself. No doubt the casualness of its setting on top of the cupboard in the penumbra had originally stirred my imagination. Whatever the reason, I was determined to possess it.

At first Sola refused. It was a present from a friend and as such had sentimental associations. But as his financial circumstances were rather difficult he finally agreed, with reluctance, and after considerable bargaining the head was mine. When I came to carry it away to Zadkine's studio I found it so heavy that I wondered how Modigliani had ever managed to carry it up those stairs by himself. Between us it took all our strength to carry it down and into a taxi.

Some days later Sola called round to see me, and began to regret his sale, so that I had to soothe him as best I could. Forgetting his regrets, he walked around the studio looking at Zadkine's work and talking about Modigliani's theories on sculpture, telling me how Modigliani had hated Rodin's work—*un mouleur en plâtre*, he had called him—for in Modigliani's opinion the essence of sculpture was that it should be hard, like a precious stone, 'emotion crystallized', as he had said.

—Was it not Brancusi who first persuaded him to take up sculpture? I asked him.  
—That is so, Sola replied, though actually he did not care for Brancusi's own work. He thought that though he had a feeling for textures, for wood, stone and metal, he had no real creative power. Indeed

his abstractions, for which he was best known, often touched on the absurd, as for example his 'Torso', which consisted of two short cylinders serving as two cut-off legs fitted into a larger cylinder. He also disliked the tombstone Brancusi carved in the Montparnasse cemetery, 'The Kiss', those two seated figures with their arms wrapped around each other 'like ropes', as Modigliani expressed it.

In Sola's opinion Brancusi's success was chiefly due to the fact that he was a good-looking man with an attractive personality which had helped him to become fashionable.

As he walked around the studio among Zadkine's forest-like figures, with that peculiar flat and square Spanish walk of his—a walk which was not unlike that of Picasso—he turned, as if some sudden resentment had struck him, and said to me:

—You are a critic, aren't you? But, after all, a critic's point of view is a personal one like anybody else's; the only difference is that you have the means of expressing it through the press. But that does not make it more valid than anybody else's opinion.

—It is a fate, I told him, like another fate. I have always been very interested in art, but I did not particularly want to be a critic. I have found out since that it is not satisfactory to translate into words what is fundamentally an expression of line, colour, and form.

Then, as we were talking, he stopped before some Goya reproductions that I had pinned up on the wall by the door, among which were the famous 'La Maja Vestida' and 'La Maja Nuda'.

—I do not admire those as you do, he said. To me they represent all that is most vile in man and woman. As we say in Spain, 'all men are on the point of entering a bawdy house', and I cannot look on them as works of art—that woman lying on a couch with her arms behind her head the better to show off her body.

—That she is sensual I admit, in the direct Spanish sense, I said. She does not belong, as the French women do, to the daughters of light; nor is she as the Italian women are, a daughter of the moon. She is the daughter of darkness. But as a nude you must admit that she is superb. Some nudes have been painted too hard, and some again too fleshy, as Rubens', but she is neither, for Goya laid stress on the texture of her skin, which is fine, uniform, and delicate. Also on that of her hair. The Egyptians believed that love lay in the hair, and in the eyes. In 'La Maja Nuda' they are in both.

—It is her eyes I object to, said Sola. They are the eyes of a houri.

Then, seeing that I was boring him,

—What do you think of Modigliani's nudes? I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

—They are very sensual. I came into his studio one evening as he was finishing what is now known as 'The Great Nude', and he asked me what I thought of it. 'It is a map of a naked woman,' I told him. 'That's what it is for,' he replied moodily, 'to enable me to find my way around'; and, disappointed at my criticism, he picked it up and turned it to the wall. But really, that model stretched out for love, or copulation rather, did not seem to me a work of art.

—I think you were wrong, I said, for she is very beautiful, and that is all that matters. Only if she were ugly, in my opinion, would it have been wrong to paint her like that.

The first time I met James Joyce was at the Bal Bullier. I had gone there one Saturday evening to meet Annette, the young blanchisseuse who used to call for my washing every week, a handsome self-willed girl who later became a model, and whose life ended in tragedy.

It was the fact, I think, that I lived in a studio that interested her in my lonely bachelordom, for while I talked with her she used to amuse herself by kicking the odd pieces of coal which lay in front of the stove across the floor, a subtle intimation that she did not think much of my domestic arrangements. She told me she used to go dancing every Saturday so I asked her to meet me at the Bal Bullier, a popular dancehall of the Montparnasse district which, like much of old Paris, has since disappeared, but then it stood at the top of the Boulevard St Michel in the Avenue de l'Observatoire opposite the Luxembourg Gardens.

The Bal itself was a large building and one entered down a flight of stairs, for the foundations were below street level. Inside it consisted of a wide dance-floor surrounded by a balcony supported on iron pillars, and underneath this balcony were placed rows of marble-topped tables and iron chairs. It had two orchestras, a brass one and a string one which played alternately at opposite ends of the floor, neither, as can be imagined, of a very high order, for it was chiefly frequented by the local shop-boys and girls, with a sprinkling of intellectuals who, tiring of the cafés, entered to find distraction and were pleased by its old-fashioned atmosphere and low prices. In its day it had been a fashionable resort, but being outmoded it had gradually declined except for one or two occasions during the winter when the big artistic balls organized by the different studios were held there. On these occasions it used to be completely transformed when the students from the studios erected small stages on the floor and gave burlesque performances during the intervals of the dance. The now deserted balcony was then crowded with supper tables, with all bohemian Paris packed on to its floor. But this night was one of its ordinary nights with only about thirty couples dancing.

As I entered I saw a party seated at one of the tables, one of whom I knew, a lady who was a friend of Jo Davidson. I took care to avoid them, for I had come there to meet Annette and not to pass my evening with intellectuals (my constant and recurring fate). I was excited at the idea of an evening with this handsome girl with whom, as a lonely man, I was already half in love, and would, if fate were kind, be fully in love before the night was out. As time went on Annette did not appear, though I searched and re-searched that vast hall for her, so that in the end I despaired that she would keep her rendezvous. Anxious for some company to help me forget my disappointment, towards the end of the evening I passed by the table where the party was seated. A lady called me over and introduced me to a slightly built, finely featured man with a small pointed beard who wore thick lensed glasses—'Mr James Joyce', she said. The introduction came as a surprise for I did not know that he was in Paris. The last time I had heard about him he was living in Switzerland.

While living in Dublin I had read *Dubliners*, and later I had read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but being at that time chiefly interested in romantic literature I had not been greatly impressed by his books. I was nevertheless intrigued to meet one of our most important authors, and I liked the man himself, his quiet sensitive manner and his old-fashioned courtliness, and I soon found myself sitting next to him. He asked if I came from Dublin, seemed pleased when I told him that I did, and asked how long had I left it and whom I had known there. These questions did not altogether please me, for I had gone to Paris to forget Ireland as a whole, and my native Dublin in particular.

Our conversation was interrupted by a young American woman at the table, Miss Sylvia Beach who proposed that we should all fill our glasses and drink a toast to the success of James Joyce's new book, *Ulysses*. Towards midnight the party broke up, but as we stood on the boulevard outside, Joyce suggested that I should cross over with him to the Closerie des Lilas opposite for a final drink before we parted. There he told me of the difficulty he had had in finding a publisher for this new book which had taken him eight years to write.

After that night I did not see him again for some time until I received a message through a mutual friend suggesting that I should call on him at an address in the rue de Rennes. So a couple of evenings later as I happened to be passing his flat on my way to a studio party I called in to see if he would accompany me. I believed then that an artist should be something of a bohemian, especially in the exciting circumstances which a city like Paris offered, and it had seemed to me, in the short time that I had met Joyce, that he led a very restricted and bourgeois life. I wanted to persuade him to come to this party, which was to be held in the studio of a Russian painter called Feder, whose place was out in the Montrouge district in a garden behind a block of flats. It looked more like a booth in a fair than an artist's studio, and had about five different entrances which in turn had been blocked up by each of the tenants in an effort to keep out the draughts. One side of it had been torn badly, and the story was that a painter of animal subjects who had lived in it had had a lioness brought in. She had torn it down, it was said, in protest against 'having to pose in her skin'. In this studio Feder had a magnificent assembly of negro sculpture, one piece of which, a representation of the sun in yellow wood, displayed its pointed rays running down the whole length of the wall. He had also collected numerous dance masks, exotic and macabre, and some musical instruments. A Russian Jew, he had escaped from the pogroms in Odessa to become a painter in Paris. A kindly and urbane soul with a gentle, cynical wit, he was an excellent host.

I thought that in such an atmosphere Joyce would relax, have a drink, and talk with the girls, but he was badly received by the family, as I had arrived at his flat with my pockets full of bottles. Since Joyce's eyes were very weak at that time, he had been forbidden to drink, and they looked on me as the proverbial drunken Irishman inviting him out on a Celtic bash. Giorgio, his son, stood over me in a chair with his legs apart as much as to say, 'When are you going to leave?' It was an awkward situation, and I decided to make out as best I could. Joyce, bending to the storm with a rueful smile, refused my invitation, while I, feeling the atmosphere so charged, was glad to make my escape. As I went down the passage Joyce accompanied me to the door and, as I passed out, standing with his back against the wall he said to me in a plaintive, but amused voice:

—You know I am an intelligent man, but I have to put up with this sort of thing—however, he commented with a smile, we will meet again soon.

At the time I thought he was a much bullied man, but when I got to know him and the family better and to understand the serious threat to his sight, I changed my point of view. Shortly afterwards I met him again in the rue du Bac and he invited me back to his gloomy, iron-shuttered flat. I immediately became great friends with his family, and particularly with Nora, who realized that I had no wish to lead her husband into drinking bouts, that in fact I disliked drinking to excess.

Joyce, a restless man, was continually changing his abode, partly through circumstances no doubt, but also on account of his nature, and shortly afterwards he moved to a pleasant, airy apartment opposite the Eiffel Tower, where I used to visit him frequently.

I always took care not to call at his flat until the late afternoon, when he used to come into the room from his study wearing that short white working-coat of his, not unlike a dentist's, and collapse in the armchair with his usual long, heartfelt sigh. As often as not Mrs Joyce would say to him,

—For God’s sake, Jim, take that coat off you!

But the only answer she got was his Gioconda smile, and he would gaze back humorously at me through his thick glasses. Later in the evening it was his normal habit to dine at Les Trianons, a smart restaurant opposite the Gare Montparnasse. Once I met Marie Laurencin there when she stopped on her way out to speak to Joyce. A great admirer of her work, I was fascinated by those delicate and supersensitive young girls of hers. But to my surprise, I, who had imagined her to be like them, found her heavily built and rather masculine-looking—a woman who, according to gossip, preferred *hommes de sport* for her companions, footballers and racing cyclists.

—Monsieur Joyce, she told him, I want to do a portrait of your daughter. Tell her to come on Thursday next, at eleven o’clock.

I believe that when Lucia did turn up, Marie Laurencin was lying in a darkened room complaining of a headache from the previous night’s *bombe*. She put off the meeting to a later date, and so I never saw the portrait, which is a pity, since Lucia, with her sensitive bearing and that squint of hers, would have been Marie Laurencin’s typical subject.

After returning to his flat in the Square Robiac, Joyce would settle down in a sympathetic and social mood. Here in the evening, with his favourite bottle of white wine, ‘St Patrice’, at his elbow, and wine he discovered while on holiday in the south of France, we used to discuss many things, but the main subject of our conversation was naturally our common interest in literature. In the ordinary sense Joyce was not a conversationalist. In fact he was remarkably taciturn, ‘silence, exile and cunning’ being his three vaunted weapons, though I must say I never saw any evidence of the third quality, for he was singularly open-hearted and devoid of guile, except perhaps that all silent men seem more cunning than do talkative ones. In our discussions I spoke much more than he, and I think it was my argumentativeness which strangely enough cemented the friendship between us.

Joyce had lent me the manuscript of *Ulysses*, which I carried in a bulky parcel tied up in brown paper, across the taxi-ridden streets back to my studio in constant fear that I should be run over and the manuscript lost. But when I sat down to read it I found myself confused by its novelty and lost in the fantasia of its complicated prose, not knowing if a thing had really happened or was just a Celtic whorl. In fact I later irritated Joyce by enquiring into the details of what actually occurred during Bloom’s encounter with Gerty MacDowell on the beach.

—Nothing happened between them, he replied. It all took place in Bloom’s imagination.

It is said that when H.G. Wells put down the loosely bound first edition, with pages falling all over the place, he felt that he had suppressed a revolution; but I knew that one had been launched. Taking for his subject his native city, which once he had evidently hated, but which now he had re-founded and cherish, Joyce had created a new realism, in an atmosphere that was at the same time half factual and half dream.

In regard to its well-known analogy with Homer’s *Odyssey*, an analogy which at the time was questioned, I remember Joyce choosing as an example the ‘Sirens’ episode, which takes place in the Ormond Bar on the quays. He compared the barmaids with Homer’s Sirens, pointing out that the barmaids, with careful hair-do, make-up, and smart blouses, looked well only to the waist, and that below the waist they wore old stained skirts, broken and comfortable shoes, and mended stockings. Again, when I once admired the phrase ‘*Thalatta! Thalatta!* She is our great sweet mother’, he looked across at me and said ‘Read what I have written above: “The snotgreen sea. The scrotumtightening sea.”’

Whereas Homer’s *Odyssey* describes prancing horses, handsome men and fair women, gods and goddesses, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, as we know, is laid in tattered streets among blowsy women and

jostling bars, culminating in the 'Nighttown' episode. I remember the brothel area faintly from my youth, a fly-blown district including a number of thatched cottages in which every trick was practised with a number of oldish women in black shifts running about. If you got up to talk to somebody, by means of some miracle only known to them you found when you returned to your seat that your whiskey had been changed to water—while in a back room there lay a peasant Venus with a religious lamp burning over the nuptial bed. Despite these sordid memories, it meant something to me that an Irishman from Zürich had arrived in Paris with a huge masterpiece, in the modern idiom, based on my native city. Indeed, it was perhaps pride in this achievement, rather than a reaction against Joyce's bourgeois life, that had really prompted me to try to bring him to studio parties, in order to show him off to my friends.

One evening we had an argument about the merits of Synge. Joyce had known him when he was living in the rue d'Assas but found him very difficult to get on with.

—He was so excitable, Joyce told me. I remember once going around to him and suggesting that we should spend the 14th July in the Parc de St Cloud. But Synge objected violently to the idea of spending the holiday, as he expressed it, 'like any bourgeois picnicking on the grass', and he refused to go. In fact there were such heated arguments between us that in the end I had to give up seeing him.

—And what do you think of his work? I asked.

—I do not care for it, for I think that he wrote a kind of fabricated language as unreal as his characters were unreal. Also in my experience the peasants in Ireland are a very different people from what he made them to be, a hard, crafty and matter-of-fact lot, and I never heard any of them using the language which Synge puts into their mouths.

—But he must have got it from somewhere, I said. I know that in the west of Ireland I used to hear marvellous phrases. I remember once asking a peasant on Costelloe Bay if there were many seals in 'Seals,' he exclaimed, 'sure they do be lying out there as thick as the fingers of my hand, and they sunning themselves on the rocks'—a phrase which seemed to me to be pure Synge. And do you remember the speeches of Mary Byrne in *The Tinker's Wedding* when she talks about the great queen and they making matches from the start to the end, 'and they with shiny silks on them the length of the day, and white shifts for the night'?

—Now who ever heard talk like that? protested Joyce.

—The question is, I said, is literature to be fact or is it to be an art?

—It should be life, Joyce replied, and one of the things I could never get accustomed to in my youth was the difference I found between life and literature. I remember a friend of mine going down to stay in the west, who, when he came back, was bitterly disappointed—'I did not hear one phrase of Synge all the time I was down there,' he told me. Those characters only exist on the Abbey stage. But take a man like Ibsen—there is a fine playwright for you. He wrote serious plays about the problems which concern our generation.

—Ibsen, I exclaimed in surprise. I would not compare Ibsen with Synge, for to me there is something essentially ugly about those suburban dramas of his, about those boring people who live in mean surroundings, while Synge's are magnificent creatures in my opinion, living in communion with Nature, 'with the Spring coming up into the trees'; and 'a dry moon in the sky'; and 'a drink-house on the way to the fair', grand and devil-may-care bodies in contrast to Ibsen's who pass their lives in consulting rooms, or attending board meetings; those frustrated bores who are the official and professional strata in any town.

—What about Dr Stockman in *An Enemy of Society*? Surely you admit that he was a fine character

remarked Joyce.

—He was brave, I suppose, in his own fashion, a fine man even, but what a lamentable lack of poet in the whole play; all that business about infected drains, leaking water-pipes, and the ‘Hygienic Baths’ and ‘lots of invalids’.

—You have not understood the play, for the infected water supply and the leaking pipes you mention are all symbolical of what Dr Stockman was protesting against, ‘that all our spiritual sources are poisoned’. Surely you must agree that Dr Stockman is a far finer character than any of Synge’s and that a man fighting against the corrupt politics of his town is a finer theme than brawling tinkers, and half-crazy ‘playboys’.

—I wonder, and wonder very much, I replied. Indeed if I remember rightly Synge disliked the plays of Ibsen. He dealt with what Synge calls ‘seedy problems’ in joyless and pallid words but, as Synge says ‘in a good play every speech tastes of nuts or apples’.

Joyce shook his head.

—You have not understood him, he said, neither his purpose nor his psychological depth, as opposed to Synge’s romantic fantasy; his brilliant research into modern life when he plumbed new psychological depths which have influenced a whole generation of writers. But whom has Synge influenced? Nobody but a few playwrights also trying to work for the Abbey, writing about provincial comedies, characters from whom they hope to raise a laugh.

—Is it so wrong to be humorous? I said. In fact it is Ibsen’s deadly seriousness which repels me and the fact that he saw life only as a battlefield for those dreary ideas of his.

—As I say, repeated Joyce, you do not understand him. You ignore the spirit which animated him. The purpose of *A Doll’s House*, for instance, was the emancipation of women, which has caused the greatest revolution in our time in the most important relationship there is—that between men and women; the revolt of women against the idea that they are the mere instruments of men.

—And the more the pity, I replied, for the relationship between the sexes has now been ruined; and intellectualism has been allowed to supersede a biological fact, and the result is that neither is happy.

—The relationship between the two sexes is now on a different basis, but I do not know whether they are happier or unhappier than they were before; I suppose it depends on the individuals. But I do know that Ibsen has been the greatest influence on the present generation; in fact you can say that he formed it to a great extent. His ideas have become part of our lives even though we may not be aware of it.

—You are probably right, I said, in fact you are right. But I still dislike his dried-up personality so much, and the plays he wrote, that I cannot agree with you about him. For me language is so important, and that is why I admire Synge: for his splendid language.

—It is his language that I object to, replied Joyce, those long overweighted sentences, through which the actors have to stumble painfully, wondering, as they seem to do, if they will ever get to the end of them—long flowery speeches which hold up the action. It is a misuse of the stage. Take a dramatist like Sheridan. Look at his quick short sentences, primed and witty. There is no drooling about him.

—That is the actors’ fault, I said, if they cannot manage them. In the case of Synge, they seem to manage to run naturally if they are taken in the accent and mood of the people they are supposed to represent. They have dignity, passion, colour and personality. I hate the back-chat type of play. It can be very wearisome indeed.

—Drama is the art of significant action and except you are a Shakespeare you should not attempt to smother it in language as Synge does. In contrast, Ibsen’s dialogue is always slim and purposeful. It must be Synge’s romanticism which appeals to you.

—Maybe you are right, I replied, for the question is, has there ever been any worthwhile art produced

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