

James Joyce at 71, Rue Du Cardinal Lemoine

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(and the Pope's manners were so like Mr. Joyce's, got that way in the Vatican, weren't like that before)

Ezra Pound, Canto XXXVIII.

It was Ezra Pound who finally succeeded in bringing James Joyce back to Paris to complete *Ulysses*. After a meeting in Desenzano, Italy, in June of 1920, Joyce consented and moved his family from Trieste to Paris, where with the help of Pound he found a small partly furnished flat in which he and his family could live. Pound was a seemingly untiring supporter of the Irish writer, and, like many others, he felt that in Paris Joyce was in his own element. It is curious to think of the two poets together, each a Homerean, but schooled in opposite extremes of the Greek spirit: Pound patterning his *Cantos* after an esoteric thread of meaning he had raveled from the *Odyssey*, and Joyce trying to faithfully recreate the myth block by block, each artist piously questing in the world of his craft.

Pound gave help in money, moral uplift, and valuable introductions. The following selection from one of Pound's unique and humorous letters is a testament of his interest:

Hope to forward a few base sheckles in a few days time. Wall, Mr. Joice, I recon' your a damn fine writer, that's what I recon'. An I recon' this here work o' yourn is some carncarned litterchure. You can take it from me, an' I'm a jedge.¹

Pound set out to promote James Joyce in Paris. He introduced him to anyone of literary significance or influence with whom he could obtain audience. One happy meeting

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¹Patricia Hutchings, *James Joyce's World* (London: Hethuen and Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 118.

was with the French writer and translator Valery Larbaud, who had by that time rendered Butler, Grey, and Whitman into French. Through this meeting and a subsequent reading of Joyce's work, Larbaud became one of his most ardent admirers.

Valery Larbaud had read what had been printed of *Ulysses* in *The Little Review* and Joyce lent him part of the book not yet in print. Miss Beach transmitted Larbaud's enthusiastic comment. '*C'est Marveilleux! Aussi grand que Rabelais. Mr. Bloom est immortal comme Falstaff.*'²

Joyce's association with the Frenchman made it possible for him to obtain the use of his rez de chaussée flat at 71, rue du Cardinal Lemoine. And the period he spent there, from June to September of 1921, was one of the most turbulent he had experienced to that time. He had come to think that everything had finally turned against him. Only a few copies of his books had ever found sale, he had constantly to struggle for enough money to continue writing, and his vision was greatly impaired by what he termed "syncopic" attacks. And in addition, Joyce suffered from the criticism that had grown out of some of his personal peculiarities. At the beginning of his occupancy at 71, rue du Cardinal Lemoine, he wrote to Miss Harriet Shaw Weaver, recounting bits of hearsay that had circulated about him:

. . . My family in Dublin believe that I enriched myself in Switzerland during the war by espionage work for one or both combatants. . . . The general rumour in Dublin was (until the prospectus of *Ulysses* stopped it) that I could write no more, had broken down and was dying in New York. . . . In America there appear to be or have been two versions: one that I was an austere mixture of the Dalai Lama and sir Rabindranath Tagore. Mr. Pound described me as a dour Aberdeen minister. Mr Lewis told me he was told that I was a crazy fellow who always carried four watches and rarely spoke except to ask my neighbor what o'clock it was. . . . One woman here originated the rumour that I am extremely lazy and will never do or finish anything. (I calculate that I must have spent nearly 20,000 hours in writing *Ulysses*.) A batch of people in Zurich

²*Ibid.*, p. 131.

persuaded themselves that I was gradually going mad and actually endeavoured to induce me to enter a sanatorium where a certain Doctor Jung (the Swiss Tweedledum who is not to be confused with the Viennese Tweedledee, Dr Freud) amuses himself at the expense (in every sense of the word) of ladies and gentlemen troubled with bees in their bonnets.³

It had been seven years since the publication of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. *Ulysses* had by this time become an exorbitant undertaking which somehow seemed to tax his entire system, and, with the sudden and prolonged eye attacks (Joyce's letter to Robert McAlmon reads: "The attack lasted about an hour."⁴ And a letter three days later to Miss Weaver reads: "The attack lasted about two hours."⁵), his health was gradually slipping away. Near the conclusion of the letter to Miss Weaver, dated 24 June 1921, Joyce reveals to her how complex and formidable the composition of *Ulysses* had been:

The task I set myself technically in writing a book from eighteen different points of view and in as many styles, all apparently unknown or undiscovered by my fellow tradesmen, that and the nature of the legend chosen would be enough to upset anyone's mental balance. I want to finish the book and try to settle my entangled material affairs definitely one way or the other (somebody here said to me: 'They call him a poet. He appears to be interested chiefly in mattresses'). And, in fact, I was. After that I want a good long rest in which to forget *Ulysses* completely.⁶

With so much work being done on Joyce at the present time, with so many interpretive studies showing the different influences of phases of his life on his work, it seems odd that there would be a paucity of material concerning his life at Larbaud's flat. I would suggest that it was during these last weeks of work that Joyce really subjected himself to the full burden of his novel; it was during this time that the pains of creation were the greatest. He was still writing, rewriting,

³Stuart Gilbert, *The Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 166.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 167.

and correcting the long, intricate work he had taken up seven years earlier. The prospect of bringing *Ulysses* to its conclusion had possessed him. He was working under this pressure, with the additional irritation brought on by his eye attacks. On the seventh of August, he wrote to Miss Weaver a letter in which he seems resigned that in *Ulysses* his only fruition would come from a sense of accomplishment:

I am now advised to go to Aix-les-Bains but am in Ithaca instead. I write and revise and correct with one or two eyes about twelve hours a day I should say, stopping for intervals of about five minutes or so when I can't see any more. My brain reels after it but that is nothing compared with the reeling of my readers' brains. I have not yet recovered and I am doing the worst thing possible but can't help it. It's folly because the book will probably not repay a tithe of such labour. The subscriptions have been rather slow and poor and now seem to have come or be coming to an end.⁷

Joyce not only demanded a lot of himself, as the above passage reveals, but of his friends and associates as well. His ubiquitous mind sought material from various, seemingly unrelated sources. In his letters he invariably requested copies of books or some other information, which he somehow managed to mold into the texture of *Ulysses*. One example of his utilization of this ruck is found in the *Ithaca* episode under the heading: "Catalogue these books."⁸ It was his peculiar genius to compile the objects and incidents of the common man's life, and all of the trivia that he amassed fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle with a multiplicity of pictures possible, providing one was willing and patient enough to work them out. Anything seemed to have some place. In a previously uncollected letter to the American writer Robert McAlmon, he wrote:

If you ever find anything relating to what I am doing throw it into an envelope and perhaps it will go into the stew.⁹

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁸James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1946), p. 693.

⁹Letter to McAlmon, Paris, September 3, 1921 (Brigham Young University Library).

Miss Sylvia Beach had introduced McAlmon to Joyce that summer. And Joyce described him to Frank Budgen as, "I found him very simple and decent. He admires *Ulysses* very much so that can set you off."¹⁰ It was for Joyce a lucrative friendship. "He [McAlmon] generously advanced Joyce about \$150 a month during 1921 to tide him over until *Ulysses* appeared, and he did not care whether repayment occurred or not."¹¹

Valery Larbaud continued his interest in Joyce's writing. Later in the summer, he wrote requesting that the remaining part of the novel be sent on to him. He must have understood Joyce's shortage of money (and who didn't?), for he also sent along his own stamped return envelopes. Joyce's reply to his letter, undated (but probably late in July or early in August), follows:

*Cher Larbaud: J'ai bien reçu les enveloppes mais je n'ai jusqu'ici rien à y mettre. Mlle Monnier m'a parlé de votre impatience de lire le dernier épisode. Mais il y en a deux, Ithaque et Pénélope. . . . Ithaque est très étrange. Pénélope le dernier cri. Vous m'avez demandé une fois quelle serait la dernière parole d'Ulysse. La voilà: yes. Autour de cette parole et trois autres également femelles l'épisode tourne sur axe. Il n'y a que huit phrases dont la première contient 2500 paroles.*¹²

As if an ominous shadow had begun to move across the finished manuscript of *Ulysses*, Joyce's eyes and nerves got increasingly worse.

On my way back from the Gare du Nord a filthy rat ran by me. I was on the lookout for unpleasant news but it happened otherwise. . . . I have given up the 16 hours a day work on *Ulysses*.¹³

The reason for cutting his working time, which he mentions in the above letter, was a collapse that he suffered at the Alhambra Music Hall, where he had gone with his son, Giorgio, and Robert McAlmon. Some days later, he wrote McAlmon:

¹⁰Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

¹¹Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford Press, 1959), p. 528.

¹²Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 170.

Since that collapse I have knocked off about 10 hours a day, work 6 and 4 walking. I feel much better now.¹⁴

On two instances at the end of his occupancy at 71, rue du Cardinal Lemoine, he mentions that he is hunting a place along the bank of the Seine from which to cast the body of Bloom. He seemed to realize that *Ulysses* had not presented all of its problems in the writing, but it is almost certain that he never comprehended then all of the trouble that was to come.

Meanwhile walking along the Seine I look for some spot where I might catch hold of Bloom and throw him into the bloody lea (pron. 'lay').¹⁵

And the same despondent statement, somewhat more embellished, appears in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver:

Since then I have been training for a Marathon race by walking 12 or 14 kilometres every day and looking carefully in the Seine to see if there is any place where I could throw Bloom with a 50-lb. weight tied to his feet.¹⁶

Contrast the above two passages with the following, which Joyce wrote to Frank Budgen on Michaelmas of the previous year:

Are you strong on costume? I want to make *Circe* a costume episode also. Bloom for instance appears in five or six different suits. What a book!

I hope you are working well. Got notice to quit this matchbox and am running about looking for a flat. Hell! I must get *Circe* finished and Eumeus underway before I move anywhere. Mind those Yahoos!¹⁷

But even during his period at rue du Cardinal Lemoine, Joyce could thrust himself above his difficulties and write of them in the same cogent manner that he wrote fiction. His letters are carelessly molded miniatures of *Dubliners*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*; they are at once brilliantly conceived, sparkling from beginning to end with that particular kind of

¹⁴Brigham Young University Library, to McAlmon.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 148.

Joycean movement, while they mirror deeply his most poignant feelings. He wrote them hurriedly but with a sort of uncanny ability to shift from one frame of mind to another. In them we detect that his private artistic censor, which was never too exacting, was in full operation.

Larbaud returned to Paris some time in the forepart of October and Joyce moved his family to 9, rue de l'Université. And before he was fully settled, he wrote Miss Weaver that *Ulysses* would be completed in three weeks. Difficulties altered the date of publication until his birthday, February 2, 1922. And as he had in part foreseen, the hardships of writing were only preliminary. Ten years and two months later he wrote to Mr Bennett Cerf:

It is therefore with the greatest sincerity that I wish you all possible success in your courageous venture both as regards the legalisation of *Ulysses* as well as its publication and I willingly certify hereby that not only will your edition be the only authentic one in the United States but also the only one there on which I will be receiving royalties.¹⁸

¹⁸James Joyce, *Ulysses* ("The Modern Library"; New York: Random House, 1934), p. xvii.