

Extraits de *James Joyce and Paul Léon. The story of a friendship* de Lucie Noël

Après la mort de James Joyce en Suisse, Paul Léon tente coûte que coûte de sauvegarder les affaires que l'écrivain avait laissé à Paris, en particulier sa correspondance et ses livres. Il réussira à racheter une grande partie de ces possessions lors de leur vente aux enchères, salle Drouot.

Paul was so shattered that for days he could not bring himself to speak of Joyce. Jean Paulhan, then publisher of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, approached him for an article, which would appear in the Free Zone, but he refused to write anything. We all tried in vain for two weeks to persuade him to write *something*, and then suddenly he told me he had decided to write just a letter to Paulhan, in which he would "speak of Joyce." But he would just sign it with three asterisks, for he felt the Germans might hear about it and pry into our lives. He wrote the letter and took it to Paulhan. The next day we heard that Paulhan had been arrested by the Germans along with other French intellectuals.

Meanwhile the sad work of winding up Joyce's affairs had to be undertaken. The owner of the Joyce flat in the Rue des Vignes in Passy was demanding the rent, which of course had been overdue for several months. Paul pleaded with him to wait until the end of the war, but the only reply was a threat to seize everything in the apartment, which was just about everything the Joyces had left in Paris.

The climax was the announcement that an auction was to take place. My brother Alec arrived in Paris at about this time on a clandestine trip from the Free Zone, and since he was the only one of us who could help financially, Paul told him about the danger hanging over the Joyce possessions. Alec returned to Free France and that week sent us a message asking us to buy back the best things and explaining that he could place at our disposal twenty or twenty-five thousand francs, which at the time meant about six or seven hundred dollars.

Early on the morning of March 7, 1941, Paul and I, with heavy hearts, went over to the Salle Drouot, where the auction was to take place. We looked over the "lots" which were arranged pell-mell in large baskets, and then at the other people in the room. Their faces seemed to me to be as sharp as battle-axes, but it soon became apparent that they were more interested in household articles than in such things as first editions, and Paul had the advantage of knowing the value of every book important enough to bid for with the funds Alec has supplied.

He was able to buy back all that he considered worthwhile with the exception of one book. This was a copy of *Pomes Penyeach* with original lettrines by Lucia Joyce. A Rue de Seine bookseller went up to five thousand francs and made it clear that he was ready to go higher. Paul was very distressed. He knew who the man was, and told me his name. But I have forgotten it, and I do not think that after all these years I would recognize the man—all I can remember is that he was blond and fat.

It was most painful to me to see the Joyce family belongings go under the hammer, and I bought back a whole trunkful of linen and odds and ends which I thought Mrs. Joyce might want to keep. Paul for once was more business-like than I was, and warned me against being sentimental and wasting our money on trifles. But among other things I got Joyce's tooled leather writing pad and his paper knife, and I sent Mrs. Joyce what I could via Alec and the Free Zone.

Paul also rescued many things from the Joyce apartment, at great risk to himself. At that time during German occupation, one was at the mercy of a chance informer or of the least indiscretion. The danger lay first in the concierge, but he gave her two hundred francs and told her he was getting some of his own things he had left there and would be back again, since if the proprietor had found out he was after Joyce's things

there would have been the devil to pay. The second danger was that of being caught by a German patrol, who were always suspicious of anyone in the street with a pushcart.

Paul and a handy-man we sometimes employed made two trips with a pushcart, and it was only later that I realized how distasteful entering some one else's home and rummaging through private possessions had been to my husband. He told me he hoped he had saved everything of importance, and I suggested that he go once more and make sure. Paul looked at me steadily and said very gently, "Do you realize what you are saying?"

Many of the Joyce belongings we put in the care of a lawyer, and some of the more personal things we left with a friend. We made a complete, detailed list of everything, and by various channels Mrs. Joyce eventually got everything back after the war was over.

In 1942 there was still the suitcase with important Joyce papers in our apartment. I knew I would have to get rid of that and quickly too. Prior to my husband's arrest we had had the Gestapo three times. If they ever came again, they might find the papers, contracts, etc., and seize them. For some queer reason, though, we had had two thorough searches and they had not found them. We had hardly given those papers a thought.

By that time they were beginning to pick up wives and dependents of arrested men. I might have to go underground any minute, or more likely be arrested and disappear.

At that time the Swiss Legation right nearby were protecting British interests. Mr. Joyce carried a British passport. I called there and begged them to place the suitcase in storage until the family or I would claim it at the end of the war. I even suggested their placing it in the cellars if they had no room elsewhere. They assured me politely enough that all was filled, that they had no room anywhere, and that they absolutely could not take it. So in despair I finally took it over to Maître Gervais, the lawyers, where, due to his kindness, everything else was stored. As far as possible I felt it might have been better to store these papers and contracts separately from the rest, in case the Germans ever discovered the bulk of the books. (But happily after all these years everything was recovered intact. Mrs. Joyce and her son, Mrs. Jolas and myself have been over and through all the things. The papers too were intact, but I must have brought the suitcase home again at this time. Today the books are all listed, sorted, covered in blue paper wrappings, and catalogued. This work took two librarians over five weeks, which may give the reader some idea of the quantity and detail involved in the rescued property.

(Noël, 1950, pp. 38-40)

Paul Léon est arrêté et interné à Compiègne puis Drancy. Durant son absence, Lucie reçoit la visite de deux agents de la Gestapo à la recherche des premières éditions de l'œuvre de Joyce.

My husband was arrested by the Gestapo on August 21, 1941, and the last incident in the story of his rescue of Joyce's books took place six months later.

One morning in February, 1942, I was dusting the books in our living room—even in times of stress such everyday gestures persist. At that moment Paul was being starved and frozen in a camp near Compiègne. In my desperate efforts to save him I had entered the Relief Section of the French Red Cross and was doing clandestine work at the same time.

There was a ring at the door and two men came in, both civilians. One was French, tall and swarthy. He wore a Basque beret, and produced the tricolor-barred card of the Vichy militia. The other, shorter and wearing brown civilian clothes, turned up his lapel to show me his Gestapo insignia and said "Polizei."

"Well," I thought, "this is it." But no, they wanted to see my husband. I exploded:

"Don't you know that you arrested him six months ago? Don't you know they are starving him to death in Compiegne?"

"No, we did not know. In that case we must see his wife."

"I am his wife. Please come in." They came on into the living room.

"How can you *not know* my husband was arrested?" I repeated, beginning to feel that this couple were not going to be so bad as the ones I had dealt with previously.

"Because we come from a different section," replied the German, and he started to question me.

"What did your husband do?" I can still hear his persuasive tone— "Was tat Ihr Mann Denn eigentlich?"

"My husband was a scholar, a philosopher, an homme de lettres. He was *never* interested in politics of any kind."

"For whom did he work?"

"For no one. He worked for himself. At home. On Rousseau, on Benjamin Constant. On his philosophy. And for the Archives of Philosophy before the war."

"But he worked for some one else too." "Jemanden andern auch" still rings in my memory.

The Frenchman was prowling around the room, examining family photographs on the walls. Suddenly he cried:

"This uniform. What is it? A Russian officer? The medals?"

"That," I answered, "is a Russian uniform from before the Revolution. My mother's youngest brother. He was a hero in the first world war. Those medals are St. George's Crosses. He was shot by the Bolsheviks in 1918 . . ."

"The other one, over there?"

"My eldest uncles. A diplomat. In Washington."

He pounced: "And *that*? Is that your husband?"

"That" was Joyce's photograph, which always hung and still hangs on our living room wall.

"No, no, that is the Irish poet and writer James Joyce."

"Where is he?" they both cried.

"He has been *dead* for over a year. Have you never heard of him?"

"Where did he die?"

"In Zurich."

"That is what I mean," the German cried triumphantly. "That is the man your husband worked for."

My nerves were giving way. "It's a lie," I shouted. "He never worked for him, he worked *with* him. He was his *friend*

My nerves were giving way. "It's a lie," I shouted. "He never worked for him, he worked *with* him. He was his *friend*—can't you see the difference?"

There was a moment's silence, and then the Gestapo man said quietly: "That is why we have come (Darum sind wir hier gekommen.) For first editions. We know you must have some. Nicht war?"

I was ready to laugh, I was so relieved. "But of course we must have some. But why? Are you interested in Joyce, in *Ulysses*?"

"Aber nein. Weil das Wert hat. Because they are of value." He spoke patiently, as if he were explaining something to a child. Suddenly it all became ludicrously simple. They were starving men, but they *wanted first editions*.

I got down on my knees and began going through the bottom shelf of books. Then my heart almost stopped. We had no books left by Joyce; Paul had distributed them around to friends for the duration. The Germans must not find them. I grabbed Frank Budgen's "Making of *Ulysses*."

"Hear you are. Voilà." I produced a couple more books on Joyce. "A wonderful critique. It explains everything . . ."

"By Joyce. Not on Joyce. Verstanden?"

"Oh," I said, "my husband must have sold the other book by Joyce. You see we had to live when we returned. I did not understand."

"Where can we find them?"

"At the Salle Drouot. There has been an auction." and I told them that Joyce's landlord had sold everything—alles, alles—for the rent. They took down everything, including the address of the Salle Drouot, and departed satisfied on what I hoped was a wild goose chase.

The Gestapo man also took down the details of Paul's case and said he would look into it and help to get him freed. I promised to find some Joyce first editions for him if he were successful, but I never heard from him again and never saw him again, though I tried to find him.

(Noël, 1950, pp. 41-43)

* Voir le témoignage de Sylvia Beach sur l'officier allemand voulant l'obliger à lui vendre sa dernière copie de *Finnigans Wake* (Beach, 1991, pp215-217)