



## IRELAND'S ODYSSEUS IN BUFFALO

### *Following James Joyce: Dublin to Buffalo*

review by George Sax

At the beginning of *Following James Joyce: Dublin to Buffalo*, Irish-born narrator Laurence Shine notes that he came to Buffalo decades ago because of Joyce, the author of *Ulysses*, *Finnegan's Wake* and other still-towering masterworks of twentieth-century English fiction.

Stacey Herbert and Patrick Martin's new documentary film doesn't identify just what Shine is alluding to, but it's amply clear: The Joyce Archive at the University of Buffalo. "Hardly anyone in the area is aware of it," Shine, an instructor of Joyce courses at Buffalo State College and elsewhere, says during an interview in a tone that combines amazement and rue. This lack of awareness, and more importantly, the actual and potential importance of this collection of Joyce materials, occasioned the movie. It received substantial financial support from such sources as the local Baird Foundation and the Constance W. Stafford Charitable Trust, as well as the Republic of Croatia. (Joyce spent a number of years in Trieste, now in the republic, which has a smaller Joyce collection.)

That UB's Joyce Archive merits this attention, and a great deal more, is easily demonstrated. It's the world's largest collection of material from or about this radically important author, and the 55-minute film's most important section may be its summary of how this unequaled collection came to be lodged about a half-century ago in a (then) small, private, urban school in a factory town of declining fortunes. It's a story of a rare confluence of opportunity, foresight and literary and civic intelligence. The collection was assembled in the '50s, in two stages, first from a Paris foundation which held materials Joyce left in that city when he decamped to Zurich ahead of the German army's advance at the beginning of the Second World War. (Joyce died during the war.) Another collection was later obtained from Sylvia Beach, the publisher of *Ulysses* in 1922 and a friend of Joyce.

The result is an archive whose contents rival—perhaps surpass—the importance of the local Mark Twain collection.

None, as Shine points out, is the only sub-

ject of "a global literary festival," held each year on his birthdate in June, and organized around readings from his epochally important novel, *Ulysses*. Shine has been among the organizers of Buffalo's contribution to the international commemoration. And he and others are intent on remedying the strange ignorance and neglect of this cultural storehouse, which has been valued at \$500 million, although in a larger sense, of course, it's priceless. They hope the film will contribute to establishing Buffalo and the university as centers of Joyce studies. UB president John B. Simpson and Victor Rice, University Council member, are featured in the film discussing the collection's importance, which Shine and others find at least a trifle ironic in view of the university's long-time neglect of this potentially magnificent resource. So they've mounted an effort outside UB to turn things around. Shine hopes that in three years, local students and devotees of the great author will be able to host an international Joyce symposium in Buffalo. He mentions the gratifying international regard for and interest in the Joyce archive, while admitting the discouraging lack of interest and regard locally. And, he says, "Interests that funded the purchase of the materials have been unhappy with conditions in Buffalo. We've missed out on literally hundreds of visits by scholars and a lot of enrollments by students" interested in studying Joyce's work and life.

*Following James Joyce* tracks the novelist on his European travels throughout the first 35 years or so of the twentieth century. Joyce, who left Dublin in 1904, and never returned, set *Ulysses* in that city, but, as the film's narration puts it, the novel "embraces all of Europe," linking a Western port, Dublin, with an eastern port, Trieste. And "... it encompasses everywhere in between."

In the midst of some handsome scenes caught in Dublin, Zurich, Paris and Trieste, talking-head experts speak of Joyce, his wanderings, his life and his work's development. Eventually, we get to the surprising Buffalo connection.

Shine, who also wrote the script, is heard saying, "Joyce made a vessel of the English language and launched it into the unknown." Another local admirer of *Ulysses*, Vincent Gugino, a lawyer and former English literature instructor, puts it another way: "Its stylistic range is incredible, tremendous. It criticizes, in depth, the ideologies of the late nineteenth century. It has an invigorating strangeness."

(*Following James Joyce* will be shown at the Market Arcade Cinema on September 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 at 3, 5, 7 and 9 pm. On the first three nights, performers from the Irish Classical Theatre will perform scenes from *Ulysses* prior to the 7 pm showing.)