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Prelude

Who are you indeed who would talk or sing to America?
- Walt Whitman

A Dublin poet (now living in Ireland after several years residence in the U.S.A.) interpreting America to itself. Arrogant? Or valid and fruitful?

Hopefully, the latter. But what I sing, what I urge, is not simply an opening of eye and ear to the fabric and rhythms of contemporary America.

True, the rhythms and fabric are American in essence and tone. A poet does not choose them. They choose him. All real poetry is a response to rhythm, a response to environment.

To ignore one's living environment is to ignore one's experience. Poetry must be a revitalisation of experience, a revitalisation of truth.

Prejudice may, of course, arise from assumptions about form and manner. But, in fact, what is finally and decisively distinct in poetry is not the eye alone. Not the ear alone. But the fusion of eye and ear to auditory perception. It is the least analysable element in a poem: the invisible quality with which the poet pulsates.

My poetry, in many ways, is both American and Irish poetry, in that a poet cannot, and indeed must not, repudiate his native cultural heritage. But, equally, he must be open to the experience, the language and the rhythm of his newly-chosen environment. In other ways, I am neither an American poet nor an Irish poet, in that a poet must strive for universal relevance, however rooted he may be either in place or time. His awareness of the cultural heritage of his native land, its people and their speech, will enrich both the content and technique of his verse. But his new environment will act as a crucible in which both past and present crystallise in, hopefully, exciting fusion. Also, hopefully in universal relevance.

So, perhaps it is best to describe myself as a Dublin poet who happens to have lived for some years in America. Insofar as my poetry refracts *American* tensions, isolation, tragedy, comedy, waste, it refracts *World* tensions, isolation, tragedy, comedy, waste.

But my paramount concern is our capacity to survive, our capacity to grow, our capacity to laugh, in the face of our common vulnerability to the heart's treacheries, and our common vulnerability to cosmic annihilation.

Our capacity to laugh? Yes. The great malaise of contemporary life (and hence, often, of contemporary literature) is the tendency to take ourselves too seriously. To fail to see that only an awareness of the comic absurdity can make the tragic intensity bearable. And, conversely, that only awareness of this tragic intensity can make the comic absurdity utterable.

James Joyce knew and practised this in his great work *Ulysses*. As will be found, I have dedicated the final Section of this Work to "re-incarnate" Mr Leopold Bloom in New York City. Bloom. Everyman. And No man. You. Me. All of us.

Viva all Voyagers.

B.P.