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James Joyce Slept Here

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JAMES JOYCE SLEPT HERE

Railway station, Ljubljana

How you try to see back through the half-open window,
through the thick fabric of the curtain, hanging there since your student
days, Venice and Viennese mansions slip past, as on a wire,
halfway to school, how you painfully spell the names, inscriptions

on town villas and country train stations, mercury
rises, death's sister. You cannot judge the state of things by
broken panes, and it is not good to eat memories with your mouth open,
but you glowed, dangerously beautiful as you rode the line

between the university and a better room in student town, with a lover
and a two-way ticket. I know now that a cuckoo doesn't build
a nest, it visits foreign cities: it marries one of the natives,
immediately banishes the others to the Hebrides.

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I am not coming back like you, I am staying here. So I deserved it,
though it was outside the plan, I lost my sense of direction when I didn't
see you again. You got off at another track. The green island
is your new home now, and you sentenced me to visions.