CHAPTER 1

Paris Encountered
1902/03 Writings

A photograph of Joyce taken in Dublin in 1904 has become the dominant image of the author; handsome, cocky, on two well-planted feet, he looks confidently into the lens, seemingly aware of the magnitude of his future achievements and coolly wondering if Constantine Curran "would lend me five shillings." A very different Joyce appears in a photograph he had taken of himself two years before. At this moment, the twenty-year-old Joyce was living in the center of the Parisian Latin Quarter, in a cheap hotel on the Rue Corneille. For the photograph, which he had printed on postcards that he sent home to Dublin, he poses uncertainly in borrowed Rive Gauche clothes, turned slightly away and on the back foot. Joyce spent about four months in Paris: from December 3, 1902 to April 11, 1903, when he returned to Dublin at the news that his mother was dying. In retrospect, the brevity of this period makes it easy to overlook the seriousness of Joyce's intentions in moving to Paris and the fundamental importance of his writing there for his work as a whole. Joyce subsequently pushed this time in Paris offstage: the site of Stephen Dedalus's future in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and of his past in *Ulysses*, the city barely appears in these works. Yet Paris forced the young Joyce to embark on a struggle with a question that would motivate all of his subsequent innovations: in an environment of sensory stimulation so intense that it overwhelms the intellect, what is art?

This chapter shows that Joyce's writing undergoes a massive evolution in this short period as he struggles with the problem of overwhelming sensory experience; in doing so, it initiates the methodology of this book, one of revealing the dialectical development of Joyce's literary strategies in response to that sensory experience, itself the basic condition of urban modernity. That Joyce reworks this period in the evolving figure of Stephen Dedalus is well known. But a closer reading of his writings from this period along with an attention to Joyce's physical presence in the Paris of 1902 and 1903 reveals that the work he does there is seminal to his

Figure 1.1 Joyce in Dublin, 1904
Irish National Archives

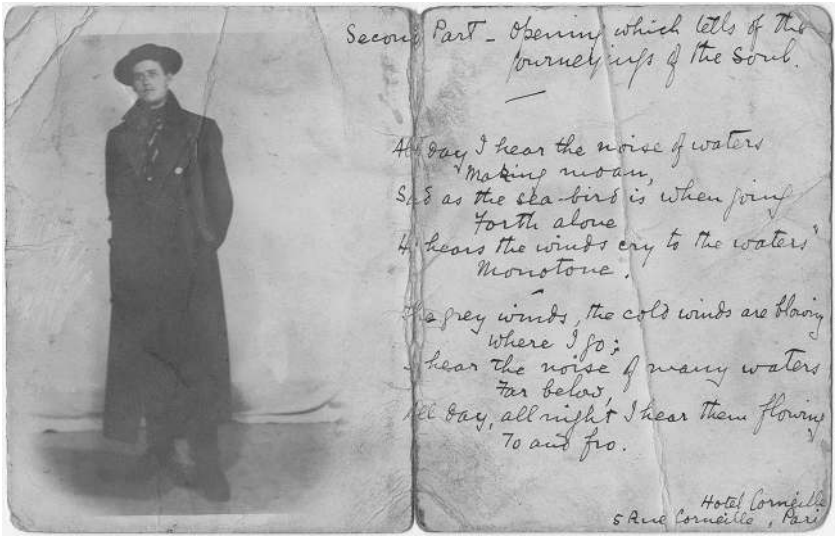

Figure 1.2 Photopostcard of Joyce in Paris, December 1902
Yale Beinecke Library

future writing. Over these months, Joyce's aesthetics change radically: from an art that would assert the autonomy of perceiving consciousness to an art that identifies with the powerful physical sensations of the modern urban environment.

Nineteenth-century French writers formed a literary context so attractive to Joyce that he moved to Paris at the age of twenty.[1] His flimsy plans to study medicine there were the pretext for a life lived on the Left Bank, the locale of the *poètes maudits* and the center of the most vibrant contemporary literary innovation. The "accursed poets," young, contrarian, and antibourgeois, provide a model for Joyce as he dismisses the Dublin literary establishment and resists all political factions. The rejection of community, socially accepted mores, and popular success animates Joyce's dramatically contrarian 1901 essay, "The Day of the Rabblement," which opens: "No man, said the Nolan, can be a lover of the true or the good unless he abhors the multitude, and the artist, though he may

[1] *JJ* 515. Verlaine was such a lastingly alluring figure for Joyce that he was recorded as reciting his poetry as late as 1918.

employ the crowd, is very careful to isolate himself."[2] Proponents of a rebellious lifestyle and artistic practice, they offer a precedent for his ongoing rejection of the comforts of home, of professional security, and of writing in service of a literary tradition and conventional values.[3] Baudelaire, another *poète maudit*, provides a powerful template for a Joycean artistic independence in the sparse dialogue of the first prose poem of *Le Spleen de Paris*, "L'Étranger": the "Stranger" declares that he has no family, no friends, no native land, and that he would love beauty, were she not "an immortal goddess."[4]

French writers led Joyce to Paris; Paris led him to dig deeper into these writers to adapt the technical resources they were developing to meet, register, and absorb the material pressures of the multisensory onslaught of the city. From Verlaine, Joyce took a poetic persona that melts into the material world; from Baudelaire, he took a prose form that mobilized fleeting syntactic patterns to express the motions of consciousness in the metropolis and, from Zola, a descriptive commitment to the most sordid physical details of the city. Radically different in other respects, what each of these sources offered was a fascination with the sensory impact of contemporary Paris and a commitment to devising new literary forms to address it. It was this same fascination that pushed Joyce in Paris to draw on the aesthetic theories of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and G. W. F. Hegel to consider in philosophical terms the relation of sensation to thought and to devise a series of theoretical conceptions of what art is.

This chapter has three sections. The first looks at the three photopostcards Joyce sent shortly after his arrival in Paris, arguing that they constitute radically divergent efforts to respond to the sensuous appeal of the city. The poem on the postcard pictured in Figure 1.2, now known as Poem XXXV of *Chamber Music*, both figures and withdraws from the

[2] James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (World's Classics; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 50. Hence cited in abbreviated form as *OCPW*. The "Nolan" is Giordano Bruno, a sixteenth-century philosopher and cosmological theorist; as we will see in Chapter 6, he will recur both as an influential figure and a mask for more recent influences in Joyce's writing.

[3] The contradictory twenty-year-old Joyce bears a striking resemblance to Verlaine's portrait of himself as "Pauvre Lelian" in *Les Poètes maudits*, whose contrasting aspects of sentimentality and worldly debauch offer a precedent for Joyce's contradictions. Joyce's own trajectory in Paris is anticipated in Verlaine's progression from boarding school daydreaming to "draught beer drunk in the dive bars of this epoch [in which he] completed his melancholy study of the classics, all to a sketchy backdrop of brasseries and fast women." Paul Verlaine, *The Cursed Poets*, trans. Chase Madar (Copenhagen: Green Integer, 2003), 137.

[4] Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen,* trans. MacKenzie, 5.

invasive sensations of the city while a postcard in schoolboy Latin represents its streetwalkers in obscene terms. The second section traces, in the aesthetic essay and notes in the Paris section of "The Paris and Pola Commonplace Book," a striking progression in Joyce's theoretical account of the relation of art to sensation and to the involuntary processes of the body, a shift from an assertion of mastery to one of identification. The third section reads the short prose piece known as Epiphany 33, Joyce's representation of the movements of women on a Parisian boulevard, as setting against one another the opposing modes of cognitive mastery and passive sensuality in order to register and respond to the commercialization of sensory experience and desire. Having struggled to assert the autonomy of a perceiving consciousness, Joyce embarks on an art that identifies with the sensual, heralding his post-Parisian experiments.

The Photopostcards

On December 15, 1902, Joyce sent three copies of the photopostcard to Dublin. To John Francis Byrne, his friend from Belvedere College and the model for Cranly in *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait*, Joyce sent the postcard pictured in Figure 1.2, with a poem that he also sent to W. B. Yeats.

Second part – Opening which tells of the journeyings of the soul

All day I hear the noise of waters
Making moan,
Sad as the sea-bird is when going
Forth alone
He hears the winds cry to the waters'
Monotone.

The grey winds, the cold winds are blowing
Where I go;
I hear the noise of many waters
Far below,
All day, all night I hear them flowing
To and fro.

The blunt reader might remark that this isn't a very good poem. Yeats was not impressed: "I think it is not one of the best of your lyrics as a whole. I think that the thought is a little thin" (*Letters II* 23).[5] As a speaker's account of moving, like a bird, over a noisy seascape the poem indeed

[5] James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking, 1966); vols. II and III, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1966) are cited as *Letters I*, *II*, and *III*.

seems flimsy and even nonsensical. Yet, the poem is better understood as staging an encounter with sensation. Its "thought" is audition. As its speaker struggles with an environment of plangent sound, the poem presents this chaotic sound with emphatically metrical statements. As the sound becomes constant, increasing from "All day I hear" to "All day, all night I hear," the speaker's achievement is to be an unchanged auditor.

The poem and the photopostcard on which it is written mark Joyce's complex relation to Paris and to Parisian writing. Standing beside the poem in Latin Quarter clothing, Joyce identifies himself as a contemporary Parisian writer. The poem too cites a *poète maudit*, evoking Verlaine's famous "Chanson d'automne" from the collection *Poèmes saturniens* (1866) with its striking single line "Monotone," with its depiction of aimless motion "to and fro" like Verlaine's "Deçà, delà" and, above all, with its topic of solitary wandering.

Before he left Dublin, Joyce had translated Verlaine's "Chanson d'automne" as a poem of poetic vocation. To the right of Joyce's rendition is Symons' more literal translation:

Les sanglots longs	A voice that sings	When a sighing begins
Des violons	Like viol strings	In the violins
De l'automne	Through the wane	Of the autumn-song,
Blessent mon coeur	Of the pale year	My heart is drowned
D'une langueur	Lulleth me here	In the slow sound
Monotone.	With its strain.	Languorous and long.
Tout suffocant	My soul is faint	Pale as with pain,
Et blême, quand	At the bell's plaint	Breath fails me when
Sonne l'heure,	Ringing deep;	The hour tolls deep.
Je me souviens	I think upon	My thoughts recover
Des jours anciens	A day bygone	The days that are over,
Et je pleure;	And I weep.	And I weep.
Et je m'en vais	Away! Away!	And I go
Au vent mauvais	I must obey	Where the winds know,
Qui m'emporte	This drear wind,	Broken and brief,
Deçà, delà,	Like a dead leaf	To and fro,
Pareil à la	In aimless grief	As the winds blow
Feuille morte.[6]	Drifting blind.[7]	A dead leaf.[8]

[6] *Œuvres complètes de Paul Verlaine*, Vol. 1, *Poèmes saturniens* (Paris: Vanier, 1902), 33–34.
[7] Joyce, *Poems and Exiles*, eds. J. C. C. Mays and Seamus Deane (London: Penguin, 1992), 69.
[8] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: Dutton, 1919), 403.

In Verlaine's poem, the human speaker loses distinction as the poem blurs sensation and expression. Verlaine's stanzas move from the invasive effects of the season, "Des violons/De l'automne," to the overflowing of memory prompted by a more abstract temporal marker – "quand sonne l'heure" – to the transformation of the speaker into matter in motion, "pareil à la/ Feuille morte," a preposition that stretches semantically from "like" to "the same as." The emphatic assonance performs the merging of the speaker with this powerfully sensuous environment. As the intricate sonic intertwining in the third stanza of "Et je m'en vais/Au vent mauvais" unifies the speaker with the wind, "Chanson d'automne" becomes increasingly attenuated; a single sentence stretches over the first six-line stanza, and the second stanza continues into the third as the speaker loses distinct identity. The single-word line, "Monotone," along with the repeated vowel sounds, indicates the abandonment of differentiated speech and the ceding of individual boundaries. The sonic intertwining of persona and environment presents an abdication of cognitive separation, albeit in superbly turned language that belies such a collapse.

Paul de Man understands Symbolism, despite the vagueness of the term, as a movement divided by alternative attitudes toward the relationship of consciousness to the object world. According to de Man, both Baudelaire and Yeats seek the unity of self and non-self and use the symbol as a vehicle for the unification of consciousness and the material world, although they court death in doing so as in this unification consciousness assumes the material world's inanimacy.[9] Mallarmé, contrastingly, holds that the poet must use the symbol to mediate between mind and "natural being," even if that attempt must fail because of the split nature of language itself.[10] We can see Verlaine's poetry, within this schema, miming an enthusiastic submission to immersion in the object world.

Joyce's translation of Verlaine's poem signals his fascination with this poetics of sensory transformation. Commenting on the translation, Marie-Dominique Garnier reads Verlaine's subject as "free of purpose and direction – an early variation on the modern Ulyssean wandering subject adrift"[11] and sees Joyce's insertions of "voice," rhyming with Joyce, and "drifting blind" as a prophetic "crypto-autobiography of a wandering, yet

[9] Paul de Man, "The Double Aspect of Symbolism," *Yale French Studies* 74 (1988), 3–16, at 9.
[10] Ibid., 12.
[11] Marie-Dominique Garnier, "Verse after Verlaine, Rime after Rimbaud: Joyce and the 'poisondart' of *Chamber Music*," in *The Poetry of James Joyce Reconsidered*, ed. Marc C. Conner (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 95.

sure-footed blind-to-be."[12] Joyce's translation is indeed "a narrative of literary exile," as Garnier suggests, yet it is better understood not as a divination of his life decades in the future but as an expression of Joyce's contemporary fascination with Verlaine, which is associated with his immediate ambition to move to Paris.[13]

Joyce's translation, crucially, asserts agency within this vagabond condition. He rewrites the poem as an aesthetic vocation, presenting not a vulnerable center of emotion and sensation, a heart wounded by "violins/Of the autumn-song" in Symons's translation (2/3), but an artistic sensibility responding to a human call: "A voice that sings/Like viol strings/Through the wane/Of the pale year/Lulleth me here" (1–5). Joyce's version resists the flow of the original with the emphatic interruption of the speaker's repeated exclamation, "Away! Away!"/"I must obey this drear wind" (13–15), announcing a consciousness of compulsion, a dutiful response to this lonely vocation. Instead of concluding with the speaker's identification with decomposing matter, the "Feuille morte" (16), Joyce's translation concludes with human attributes, "aimless grief/Drifting blind" (15–16), which the syntax prompts us to attribute to the dead leaf, rather than to the speaker, suggesting instead of a subjectivity submerged in matter a reassuringly anthropomorphized material world.[14]

In the Paris poem, entitled "Opening which tells of the journeyings of the soul," Joyce further questions Verlaine's aesthetic. The "soul" in this poem's title might seem an antiquated, self-ennobling gesture but it announces allegiance to an ordering *consciousness*, signaling a commitment to art as staging the conscious mastery of sensation. In contrast to the sensuous dissolution of Verlaine's persona, Joyce's speaker struggles to remain separate from the world around him. "Drifting blind" becomes the ongoing threat that Joyce's speaker faces, as the conclusion of Verlaine's poem – being carried randomly and passively by the wind – is expanded into a ceaseless threat posed by "the grey winds, the cold winds are blowing" and the "noise of many waters . . . flowing to and fro." Yeats' criticism of the poem as rote and passionless – "the poetry of a young man, of a young man who is practicing his instrument, taking pleasure in the

[12] Ibid., 96. [13] Ibid.

[14] This reserve is visible in Joyce's "Drama and Life," in which he presents himself as an animating presence in this contemporary French scene: "Many feel like the Frenchman that they have been born too late in a world too old, and their wanhope and nerveless unheroism point on ever sternly to a last nothing, a vast futility and meanwhile – a bearing of fardels [. . .] Still I think out of the dreary sameness of existence, a measure of dramatic life may be drawn. Even the most commonplace, the deadest among the living, may play a part in a great drama" (*OCPW* 28).

mere handling of the stops" (*Letters II*, 23) – responds to a composition that draws heavily upon precedents yet refuses to identify with the full extent of their agenda.

Yeats recommends that Joyce write about Paris – "Impressions of books, or better still, of artistic events about you in Paris, bringing your own point of view in as much as possible, but taking your text from some existing interest or current event" (*Letters II*, 23). Yeats does so, however, in response to a poem that deliberately attempts not to address Paris or, more precisely, that figures an attempted refusal of the city. If in Dublin Joyce already resisted the full extent of Verlaine's poetics of sensual dissolution, the intense sensory concentration of Paris forced him to grapple with it in a new way. Despite its abstraction, the poem represents a salient feature of contemporary Paris: its discordant and plangently appealing soundscape. As recent sensory studies tell us, Paris was noisy, particularly for newcomers. Tracing the sonic cityscape of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris in guide books, ethnographies, and literary works, Aimée Boutin shows that Paris was a city filled with not just the noise of traffic but also with the cries of hucksters. Exploring how foreign visitors and provincial migrants were struck by the endless noise of nineteenth-century Paris, a din that was less audible to natives of the city, she focuses on the perception of the "shrillness, the incongruity, the discordance of peddlers' voices."[15] These hucksters were still in operation after the turn of the century, while the rest of the turmoil had only further intensified.[16] She opens her book with a nineteenth-century account of street noise by the American writer, John Sanderson:

> this unceasing racket – this rattling of the cabs and other vehicles over the rough stones, this rumbling of the omnibuses. For the street cries – one might have relief from them by a file and handsaw. – First the prima donna of the fish-market opens the morning: *Carpes toutes fraîches; voilà des carpes*! And then stand out of the way for the glazier: *Au vitriere*! Quavering down the chromatic to the lowest flat upon the scale. Next the iron-monger with his rasps, and files and augers [. . .] Beings set loose all at the same time, tuned to different keys. All things of this earth seek, at one time or another, repose – all but the noise of Paris. The waves of the sea are

[15] Aimee Boutin, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 4.

[16] Ibid., 2. A feature of an earlier, mercantile stage of capitalism, peddlers' increasing distance from modern forms of commerce was accompanied by their increasing insecurity: "Peddling was a precarious cover for begging; in other words, not commerce but charity. Peddling and pauperism were indissociable in nineteenth-century regulatory discourse" (8).

> sometimes still, but the chaos of these streets is perpetual from generation to generation; it is the noise that never dies.[17]

This Paris finds figural representation in the plangent, endlessly unsettled seascape of Joyce's poem. The insistent noise of "making moan," "sad [. . .] cry" conveys an environment of skillful and plaintive supplication from which the speaker holds himself apart. Joyce's waterscape is endowed with all of the characteristics of the city: the ceaseless noise, the boundless matter, the endless motion, the inhospitality, the constant appeals.

Paris as a seascape and the Parisian street as a river of noise are common tropes in nineteenth-century literature. Prendergast notes that in the 1830s "Balzac mobilizes the routine comparison of Paris with the sea and the ocean, [. . .] in order to focus on his sense of its 'unfathomability.'"[18] William Paulson notes the impingement of city noise upon Frédéric's consciousness in Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869): "'. . . all the noises of the night melted into a single murmur' (SE 60); '. . . the crowds made him dizzy . . . in the midst of clouds of dust and a continuous din' (SE 75); '. . .distant sounds arose, mingling with the buzzing in his head' (SE 86); '. . . all those voices, through back by the houses, made a noise like the never-ending sound of the waves in a harbor' (SE 316)."[19] The noisy street, and indeed the street as a river of noise, features prominently in Baudelaire's poetry and prose poems. Ross Chambers writes of the Baudelairean "equivalence of streets and rivers": "Baudelaire's noise-filled streets are displaced rivers"; they take the "guise of 'fallen' rivers."[20] Chambers points to the "chaos mouvant," the moving chaos, of the street of "Perte d'auréole," "la rue assourdissante," the deafening street, of "Une Passante,"[21] and the street as a "rivière accrue," a flooded river, in "Les septs vieillards."[22] If in Flaubert's narrative, noise features as a realistic element of the city and an emblem of the incomprehensibility of its social world to its protagonist, Chambers argues for Baudelaire's "awakening to noise as the specific indicator of urban modernity and the crucial component of the city's atmosphere"; this awareness drives Baudelaire's development of a new poetics that "makes reading itself a direct experience of noise, and thus a directly disalienating (or consciousness-raising) encounter with an actual experience of alienation."[23]

[17] Ibid., 1. [18] Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*, 11.
[19] William Paulson, "Flaubert's Sentimental Educations," in *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Suzanne Nash (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 94.
[20] Ross Chambers, *An Atmospherics of the City: Baudelaire and the Poetics of Noise* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 11, 15, 16.
[21] Ibid., 7. [22] Ibid., 15. [23] Ibid., 9, 22.