Chapter 1

Life

Dublin, 1882–1904

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was born at six in the morning on February 2, 1882. The exact time of Joyce's birth was one of the last things uttered by his father, John Stanislaus Joyce, before dying in December 1931. His son needed the information back in Paris so that an astrologer could properly read his horoscope. Joyce assigned a mystical significance to birthdays for his entire life. He pushed a printer in Dijon so hard to have a copy of *Ulysses* published on his fortieth birthday that Joyce scholars have spent the past eighty years arguing over what the final edition should look like. After slipping into a deep bout of depression while writing *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce considered handing the project over to another Irish writer because they shared the same birthday. Joyce originally planned to publish *Finnegans Wake* on his father's birthday as a token of filial affection. He missed the deadline. An advance copy was delivered to his own doorstep on February 2, 1939: Joyce was fifty-seven years old.

Although born and raised in Cork, John Joyce inherited some money from his father's properties and ended up in Dublin, where he met Joyce's future mother, Mary (May) Jane Murray. Together they had ten children (four sons, six daughters, and three miscarriages), and John Joyce supported his family for the first decade or so with a position as a tax collector. In the early years of the 1880s, the Joyce clan lived comfortably, and John managed to provide for the family. After losing this position and eking out a meager pension that May procured for them, the Joyces went into a long and steady decline, moving dozens of times in and around Dublin, often during the night so that they could avoid paying any back rent.

For the first ten years of Joyce's life, he was given an education, vacations, and a series of comfortable suburban addresses in Rathgar and Bray. Joyce, the eldest son, was a handsome and clever boy with pale blue eyes, and his parents showered him with love and affection. He began attending the Jesuit boarding school Clongowes Wood College, some forty miles away from home, in 1888 at the age of six. Within a short time he was at the head of his class. In 1891, Joyce was forced to drop out of the school because his family could no longer afford to pay the tuition. He temporarily attended a Christian Brothers school in 1893 until a stroke of good fortune presented itself. After bumping into Father Conmee, who had given up his position as rector of Clongowes Wood College to become prefect of studies at Belvedere College, John Joyce explained why his eldest son had had to give up on the Jesuits. He walked away from this chance encounter with a promise from Father Conmee that Joyce and his brothers could attend Belvedere free of charge. Joyce was brought back to the Jesuits, and for the next five years he distinguished himself as a diligent student and an independent thinker.

After attending a weekend retreat, Joyce experienced a burst of religious fervor (fictionalized in Chapter 3 of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) and even considered entering the priesthood for a short time. This flash of religiosity was followed by an even more powerful rejection, which coincided with his sexual awakening. At about the time he was appointed prefect of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary (a Jesuit association that performed charitable works) in 1896, he also had his first sexual experience with a prostitute on the way home from the theater one evening. Thus began his more frequent visits with the prostitutes on Montgomery Street. He did not make his renunciation of Catholicism public, but he was in the process of storing up a list of grievances that would eventually find a suitable vent in his fiction. Joyce could not reconcile the Catholic doctrine of bodily repression and guilt with his own emerging physical desires. Having enjoyed the religious and the secular virtues of life, the choice had become clear to him: live a life of guilt and repentance or experience the many pleasures that life has to offer.

At Belvedere, Joyce honed his skills at essay writing and received two prizes for English composition, one for the best essay in Ireland in his grade. He also had a knack for foreign languages, and in addition to studying Latin and French he chose to learn Italian. He worked hard to perfect his essay-writing skills, and he would often ask his brother Stanislaus to throw out a topic on the spot so that he could practice. In his early teens Joyce was a voracious reader. At the age of fourteen, he broke free of any systematic study and began to read whatever he wanted. It was during this time that Joyce also

began toying with poetry and drama. He attended the theater regularly and voluntarily wrote up reviews that he would compare with those printed in the newspapers the following day. He wrote a series of prose sketches called *Silhouettes* and sixty or so lyric poems collected under the simple title *Moods*. Several years later, he followed this group of poems with another called *Shine and Dark*. Joyce is not much known for his poetry, largely because it is dwarfed by his monumental achievements in fiction. But it was a necessary step in his development as a writer. He published his first collection of poems, entitled *Chamber Music* in 1907, and a second collection in 1929 entitled *Pomes Pennyeach*. Joyce liked the practice of poetry, though he was unsure whether or not he was seriously cut out for it.

In his final year at Belvedere, Joyce discovered the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. This discovery cannot be underestimated in Joyce's evolution as an artist. In Ibsen he found a kindred spirit, even if the playwright was more than sixty years his senior and living in Norway. He represented the fierce individualism and artistic integrity that Joyce admired. Ibsen's plays were famously controversial because they reacted against the strict moralism and parochialism that Joyce identified with his own native country. Instead of looking to Irish folklore and legend like William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge and others involved in the Irish Literary Revival, he was interested in a more cosmopolitan vision for Irish literature that looked outward to European models for its inspiration.

At the age of eighteen, he wrote a piece on Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* for the *Fortnightly Review*, one of the most prestigious literary reviews in England. In "Ibsen's New Drama" he celebrated Ibsen's ability to represent the drama of everyday life with a stark, unbending realism. Like Ibsen, he believed that art was a confrontation with, not an escape from, reality. "Life," he boldly asserted, "is not to be criticized, but to be faced and lived" (*CW*, 67). His classmates and peers were impressed by and envious of this rare achievement. Ibsen himself even took the time to thank his young admirer for a "benevolent review" through his English translator, William Archer. With his confidence bolstered by a review and a warm letter from his hero, Joyce decided to try his own hand at writing a play. In the summer of 1900, he wrote a four-act play, *A Brilliant Career*, which he dedicated to his own soul. Looking for some critical advice, he sent the play to Archer, who acknowledged Joyce's talent but thought that the canvas was "too large for the subject" (quoted in *JJ*, 79). Joyce agreed and destroyed the play two years later.

After Belvedere College, Joyce attended University College, Dublin, (1898 and 1902) and graduated with a degree in modern languages (English,

French, and Italian). By this time, his love of foreign authors was well known, as was his penchant for rebelling against the received ideas of his classmates. In 1899, when his friends and peers protested against the production of Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen* at the Abbey Theater for its anti-Irishness, Joyce refused to sign the petition on the grounds that the artist needs his independence from public opinion. Two years later, he wrote an article entitled "The Day of the Rabblement" condemning the Abbey Theater for producing plays in Irish and restricting itself to Irish subjects. Instead of opening itself up to the world, the Abbey Theater, he believed, was further isolating itself. Even worse, for Joyce, this parochialism was a way of kowtowing to the public taste: "the Irish Literary Theatre must now be considered the property of the rabblement of the most belated race in Europe" (*CW*, 70). When the university magazine rejected his article, he joined forces with another student, who had written an essay on equal status for women at the university. They had their articles printed together in a single pamphlet, which they distributed themselves.

During his university years Joyce was less interested in academic honors than he was in life experience. He was intent on conducting "an experiment in living," as Stanislaus called it, one that drew him further away from the Catholic Church.[1] By this time his faith was seriously in crisis, and he found it increasingly difficult to reconcile his intellectual and spiritual freedom with the control of priests and prelates. Moreover, he refused to repress his physical desires and continued to frequent the brothels in Montgomery Street. By rejecting the Church, he was free to develop a spirituality that was entirely his own making. For the rest of his life, he was fascinated by the rituals of the Church and believed that the artist could transform the experience of everyday life into a spiritual essence through art.

Joyce expressed his more combative views about art and aesthetics in front of the Literary and Historical Society in 1900 and 1902. In these public appearances, he deliberately thumbed his nose at the status quo and chose to discuss topics and writers that he knew would incite arguments. In his first paper, "Drama and Life," Joyce challenged the popular notion that art should have any ethical or moral significance and made matters worse by referencing free-thinking atheists like Ibsen. After delivering his paper, he was roundly attacked by his classmates, who refused to believe that art was above ethics. In an impromptu response he replied to each of their charges. From then on, Joyce's lecture was referred to grandly as his "Ibsen night."[2]

For his second lecture Joyce spoke about the nineteenth-century Irish poet James Clarence Mangan. His brother Stanislaus noted that it was a continuation of his first paper and could easily have been called "Poetry and Life."[3]

To the Irish nationalists, Mangan was a tragic hero, who died young during the Irish famine in the 1840s. Mangan's popularity at the turn of the century was due in large part to Yeats and other Irish revivalists. To an audience comprised largely of Irish nationalists, Joyce discussed the Irish neglect and betrayal of its literary heroes. He downplayed Mangan's role as an Irish patriot and cast him instead as an exile scorned by an ignorant and hostile public.

Joyce graduated from University College, Dublin in 1902 and needed to find a career quickly. By this time, he had become familiar with many of Dublin's literati and managed to marshal the support of Yeats, George Russell, and Lady Gregory. Russell acknowledged that the young man was "as proud as Lucifer," and Yeats noticed his "colossal self-conceit" (*JJ*, 100–01). After reading some of Joyce's epiphanies and poems, Yeats was convinced that he had a "delicate talent" but was not sure whether it was "for prose or verse" (*JJ*, 104). Although Joyce's new literary connections could not land him a stable job, they did help him to get some of his poems published. After enrolling in the University Medical School in Dublin, he involved them in a new and completely illogical career choice: medical school in Paris.

Intending to pursue a medical degree and a writing career, Joyce enrolled in the Faculté de Médecine in Paris. After borrowing left, right, and center, he left Dublin on December 1, 1902. In addition to entertaining and feeding Joyce during his layover in London, Yeats provided him with valuable contacts and Lady Gregory secured him a position as an occasional book reviewer for the *Daily Express*, a pro-English newspaper. William Archer recognized the folly of Joyce's decision and was candid enough to tell him: "It's hard enough by giving lessons all day to keep body and soul together in Paris; and how you can expect to do that, and at the same time qualify as a doctor, passes my comprehension."[4] Joyce nevertheless went ahead with his plans, but he soon realized that his first experiment in living was a failure: he was homesick and poor. To make matters worse, he discovered that he could not even afford the matriculation fees for enrollment, and he was forced to abandon his less than brilliant career as a doctor.

This disappointment did not send him back to Dublin. Instead, he decided to stay on in Paris as long as possible and live off the meager payments he received for book reviews, occasional private English lessons, and sporadic loans from home. He managed to write poems and began compiling a notebook on aesthetics, which would serve as the basis for Stephen Dedalus's monologue on aesthetic theory in *Portrait*. Even with family donations (one of them made possible by selling the rug at home), he could hardly keep himself afloat. During this brief period in Paris, Joyce experienced the

bohemian lifestyle, living in the Latin Quarter and reading at the library. It was an experience that allowed him to taste the fruit of independence and made him hungry for a life of exile.

On April 10, 1903 Joyce received a telegram that took him back to Dublin immediately: "Mother dying come home father." He arrived back home with long hair, a small beard, and a Latin Quarter hat and did what he could to help his mother through her illness. Nothing could save May Joyce from her battle with cancer. She died on August 13 at the age of forty-four. Because of their break with the Catholic Church, James and Stanislaus refused to kneel down and pray with her. With her death, the rest of the family came rapidly undone. Joyce acted as though he was impervious to the penury and misery of his home life, but it dramatically conditioned how he would define his relationship to Ireland. Joyce never forgot this image of his victimized mother, and he later "cursed the system" responsible for it (*LII*, 48).

After her death, Joyce was even more listless than before and began drinking heavily. During this period, he befriended Oliver St. John Gogarty (who would later appear in *Ulysses* as the bawdy medical student) and lived with him for a short time in the Martello Tower in Sandycove. But it was also during this period that he began to imagine his future career as a writer seriously. He wrote an essay entitled "A Portrait of the Artist" for a Dublin literary review, *Dana*, which gave him the idea for writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and continued to write poems, many of which would later be collected in *Chamber Music*. With Russell's help he also managed to publish his first short story, "The Sisters," in the *Evening Telegraph*. It would eventually serve as the opening story in his *Dubliners* collection.

After spotting a reddish-brown-haired girl walking down Nassau Street on June 10, 1904, Joyce's life quickly changed. Nora Barnacle had come to Dublin from Galway City to work as a chambermaid in Finn's Hotel. Joyce was immediately smitten. They met on June 16 and took a walk from Dublin to Ringsend where she "made him a man" (*SL*, 159). At this point in his life, Joyce found what he was looking for: a companion who understood him, someone he could give himself to fully. Within two months of their romance, he wanted something more than tender caresses, and he believed that Nora could fill the absence created by the death of his mother and the break with his best friend, J. F. Byrne, who grew increasingly critical of Joyce's licentious and reckless behavior. In many ways, Nora might not seem like the perfect match for the aspiring artist. She did not share his passion for literature and he quickly realized that she "cared nothing" for his art (*LII*, 73). But whatever she lacked in formal education and refinement, she made up for in beauty, wit, courage, and daring.

Their relationship reached a crisis point after only four months. Because Joyce fiercely rejected the institution of marriage, it would be impossible for them to live together. Instead of letting Ireland come between them, Joyce and Nora decided to leave it behind. They boarded a boat on October 8, separately so as not to arouse suspicion, with only enough money to get to Paris, where they planned to borrow again before moving on to Zurich. After finding out that the position he had been promised at the Berlitz school in Zurich had been filled, Joyce and Nora stopped in Trieste for ten days before moving on to Pola (then under Austro-Hungarian rule), where another Berlitz school had just opened. After only five months, they returned to Trieste in March 1905, and it was here that Signore and Signora "Zois," as they were known to the Triestines, spent the next ten years of their life. During this Triestine decade, Joyce made three return trips to Ireland (two in 1909 and one in 1912), but with each visit it became increasingly clear to him that a life of voluntary exile was a necessary precondition for his becoming an artist.

Trieste, 1904–1915

Situated at the northern tip of the Adriatic Sea, Trieste was a major port for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was a bustling cosmopolitan center comprised of Slavs, Italians, Greeks, Austrians, and Hungarians. Despite this diverse collection of nationalities and tongues, everyone spoke Triestino. It was a polyglot dialect made up of Italian, German, Slovenian, Croatian, Czech, Greek, Sicilian, Turkish, and Spanish. Joyce quickly updated the archaic thirteenth-century Italian he had learned when studying Dante with a living language that he would continue to speak with his two children, Giorgio and Lucia, for the rest of his life.

Shortly after arriving in Trieste, Joyce needed to figure out his new role as a family man. He had convinced Nora to follow him on the condition that he could provide for her. Their months in Pola were pleasant enough, but the arrival of their son Giorgio on July 27, 1905 was a powerful reminder of Joyce's family responsibilities. He needed to find a way to support them and write. It was a particularly difficult time for Nora because she did not know Italian or German, and her husband spent a lot of time out drinking.

In July 1906 the family moved to Rome so that Joyce could work in a bank copying out letters. The pay was good enough, but the long hours made it impossible for him to get any writing done. Not long after they returned to

Trieste, their second child, Lucia, was born on July 26, 1907. Throughout the summer, they were seriously poverty-stricken but somehow they managed to get by. During these early years, Joyce's role as a father and husband was constantly clashing with his dreams as a writer. Like the disillusioned Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud," he began to worry that with a wife, children, and a meager salary, "He was a prisoner for life" (*D*, 80).

To support his family Joyce gave English lessons at the Berlitz School. Yet he soon found that his daily expenses far exceeded his earnings. In need partly of financial help and partly of a companion with whom he could discuss his writing, he convinced Stanislaus to come to Trieste. After his arrival in October 1905, Joyce unloaded many of the financial and familial obligations onto his brother. For the next ten years, Stanislaus was counted on at various points to pay for rent, clothing, and food. He was also put in charge of finding the family apartments, rescuing them from sporadic evictions, paying his brother's debts, taking on his brother's English lessons, and monitoring his brother's drinking. It was a role he begrudgingly accepted.

After leaving the Berlitz school, Joyce continued to give private English lessons over the years, but he also came up with more inventive schemes to make a buck. In 1907 he approached Italian newspapers in Trieste and around Italy about writing articles on Irish subjects and approached Italian editors about doing translations of Irish writers. In 1909 he began importing Irish Foxford Tweed from Dublin and sold it to his friends and students. In 1910 he opened the first movie theater in Dublin, the Volta cinema, after putting together an array of investors and lawyers to support his venture. After six months, the project was deemed a "fiasco": sales were low, investors pulled out, and he was never paid for his services. In 1912 he applied for a teaching position at the University of Padua. After taking the oral and written exams, in which he scored very highly, his candidacy was revoked because the university refused to recognize his Bachelor's degree from University College, Dublin. In July 1913 he finally landed a well-paid job at the Scuola Superiore di Commercio "Revoltella" for six hours of teaching a week. The work was not too demanding and Joyce finally received a steady income. For the next two years, the Joyces enjoyed more stability than they had ever had before in Trieste and even remained in the same one apartment (which rarely happened).

When Joyce had first arrived in Trieste, he had published three stories in the *Irish Homestead*, a weekly publication for the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, and book reviews in the *Daily Express*. In these early years he often wondered whether he was really cut out for the literary life. When he

received the proofs for *Chamber Music*, he was less than pleased with the results: "I don't like the book but wish it were published and be damned to it. However, it is a young man's book. I felt like that. It is not a book of love verses at all, I perceive" (*LII*, 219). He was more certain of his talents for writing fiction. During the first few years in Trieste, he continued to write stories for *Dubliners* but because of a series of failed negotiations with publishers, who wanted him to alter various passages, it was not published until 1914 (the trials and tribulations of *Dubliners* are discussed more fully in Chapter 3). At the same time, Joyce also continued to work on an autobiographical novel, *Stephen Hero*, which he would rewrite and publish as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Like *Dubliners*, the publication was delayed. *Portrait* appeared in serial form and was published in 1916. He wrote *Exiles* between 1914 and 1915 (published in 1918), and began to work on the first three episodes of *Ulysses* (published in 1922). Although he was, for the most part, unpublished during the Trieste years, he completed a number of projects and amassed ideas for the future. The Trieste decade was, his friend Philippe Soupault later observed, "the most important in all his life."[5]

In Trieste, Joyce was not known as a writer of fiction except among a small coterie of devoted students. Among the Triestines he was the language teacher, Irish journalist, occasional lecturer, and translator. His public persona was best defined in *Il Piccolo*, Trieste's daily newspaper, when, after a series of twelve lectures he delivered on *Hamlet* in 1912 and 1913, he was cast as "a thinker, man of letters, and occasional journalist." Between 1907 and 1912 he occasionally wrote newspaper articles in Italian for *Il Piccolo della Sera* on Irish politics, literature, and culture and delivered lectures in Italian on Ireland, Daniel Defoe, and William Blake (I talk about these more extensively in Chapter 2). Although he was antagonistic to Irish nationalist movements when he was in Ireland, in Trieste he was the self-appointed mouthpiece for the Irish, and he used these public performances to introduce and defend his native country. He also capitalized on the fact that his grievances against the British Empire would find a sympathetic ear with the Italian irredentists, who were waging their own anticolonial struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Journalism came easy to him, and after writing his first three articles, he confided to Stanislaus, "I may not be the Jesus Christ I once fondly imagined myself, but I think I must have a talent for journalism. I could scarcely have written for the papers my articles have appeared in, if I hadn't artistic talent but in Dublin I could do nothing."[6] Between 1909 and 1912 Joyce wrote other articles on the victimization of Oscar Wilde (1909), the preachiness of George Bernard Shaw (1909), the defeat of the second (1910) and eventual

passing of the third (1912) Home Rule Bill in Ireland, and two lyrical travel pieces on Galway and the Aran Islands (1912).

In December 1913 Joyce's luck began to change. The American poet Ezra Pound, who was then living in London, contacted him at Yeats's behest to see if he wanted to publish any poems or short stories in British and American journals. The pay was modest but the publications would get Joyce's name in circulation. Pound agreed to publish "I hear an army" in his collection *Des Imagistes*. In addition, he thought that *Portrait* was "damn fine stuff" and quickly arranged to have it published serially in *The Egoist*.[7] He also managed to get a few stories from *Dubliners* published in *The Smart Set* and encouraged everyone he knew to read and promote Joyce's work. Over the next decade, Pound was an invaluable supporter. His encouragement, generosity, connections, selflessness, foresight, and dedication were responsible for bringing Joyce out of a publishing rut and into the world.

Just when his life as an artist was starting to look promising, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia in July 1914. Life in Trieste became increasingly difficult, and he had no choice but to attend to his more pressing personal circumstances. The Scuola Superiore di Commercio where he was teaching closed in 1915, and many of its students were drafted into the army. That same year, the Austro-Hungarian government interned Stanislaus for supporting the Italian irredentists. Joyce made plans to leave with his family. With the assistance of his most influential friends and pupils, the Joyce clan received travel passes to Zurich. Leaving their furniture and books behind, they boarded a train for Switzerland on June 27, 1915. No one could predict how long the war would last, but Joyce was glad that they would be spending it in a neutral country. "Now that everyone in Trieste knows English," he remarked before leaving, "I will have to move on."[8]

Zurich, 1915–1919; Trieste, 1919–1920

While the war raged across Europe, life in Zurich was quiet but costly. Their financial burden was relieved at first by two grants engineered by Yeats and Pound. Joyce's monetary worries were also allayed by the regular stipends he received from Edith McCormick Rockefeller, who lived in Zurich, and Harriet Shaw Weaver, who chose to remain anonymous back in London. Both women supported his literary endeavors for the duration of the war, and it was through their patronage that Joyce was able to devote all his attention to writing *Ulysses*.