

*THE MOST  
DANGEROUS  
BOOK*

THE BATTLE FOR  
JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

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## *INTRODUCTION*

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When you open a book, you are already at the end of a long journey. It began with an author whose first challenge was to imagine the readers who would turn the unwritten pages. The author wanted to meet the audience's expectations and draw the reader in. The book would have a voice, a perspective and a consistent style. It would be accessible. If the book has characters—be they simple or complex, sympathetic or repugnant—the author would make them believable. They would stay in character and speak in a consistent idiom. The spoken words would be in quotation marks. The characters' thoughts and the story's action would be clearly distinguishable, and when the author began writing, the story's elements were sharpened. Clear boundaries staked out the pathways for the journey.

A publisher signed a contract with the author. The publisher researched the marketplace and weighed costs and risks against potential profits and demand. The publisher knew the trade. The publisher had published books before. The book had an editor who pruned and revised, who offered perspective and who sometimes said no. The book was probably advertised in various markets. The first copies were printed and bound months before publication day, and they were delivered without incident by the post office or private carriers. They were displayed openly in stores.

Whether the book is careless or thoughtful, disposable or durable, chances are the sales will dwindle. The printers will stop printing it, and the remain-

ing copies will be sold off at a steep discount and left to languish in used bookstores. It will not change the way books are written, nor will it change the way you see yourself or the world around you. It will be swept up by the rising tide of culture and washed away. It will probably be forgotten.

If it is not forgotten—if it does change the way people see the world—reviewers and critics will be able to quote from its pages freely. Radio hosts will be able to mention the title on the air. Students will be able to check the book out of a library. Professors will be able to assign the book and deliver lectures on it without the fear of being demoted or dismissed. If you purchase the book, you will not be afraid to travel with it. No one will be arrested for printing it. No one will be monitored for distributing it. No one will go to prison for selling it. Wherever you live, your government probably protects this book against piracy. Your government has never issued a warrant for this book. Your government has never confiscated this book. Your government has never burned this book.

When you open James Joyce's *Ulysses*, none of these things are true.

SO MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about what's exceptional within the pages of Joyce's epic that we have lost sight of what happened to *Ulysses* itself. Scholars have examined the novel's dense network of allusions, its museum of styles and its insight into the human mind so thoroughly that the scholarship buries what made *Ulysses* so scandalous: nothing, in *Ulysses*, is unspeakable. The book that many regard as the greatest novel in the English language—and possibly any language—was banned as obscene, officially or unofficially, throughout most of the English-speaking world for over a decade. Being forbidden is part of what made Joyce's novel so transformative. *Ulysses* changed not only the course of literature in the century that followed, but the very definition of literature in the eyes of the law.

This is the biography of a book. It charts the development of *Ulysses* from the first tug of inspiration in 1906, when it was just an idea for a short story—a Homeric name appended to someone Joyce met in Dublin one drunken night—to the novel's astounding growth during and after World War I as Joyce

wrote out its 732 pages in notebooks, on loose-leaf sheets and on scraps of paper in more than a dozen apartments in Trieste, Zurich and Paris. And yet the years that Joyce spent writing his novel are just a portion of its story. *Ulysses* was serialized in a New York magazine, monitored as it passed through the mails and censored even by its most vocal advocate, modernism's unstinting ringleader, Ezra Pound.

The transgressions of *Ulysses* were the first thing most people knew about it. A portion was burned in Paris while it was still only a manuscript draft, and it was convicted of obscenity in New York before it was even a book. Joyce's woes inspired Sylvia Beach, an American expatriate running a small bookstore in Paris, to publish *Ulysses* when everyone else (including Virginia Woolf) refused. When it appeared in 1922, dozens of critics praised and vilified Joyce's long-anticipated novel in unambiguous terms. Government authorities on both sides of the Atlantic confiscated and burned more than a thousand copies of *Ulysses* (the exact number will never be known) because Joyce's big blue book was banned on British and American shores almost immediately. Other countries soon followed. Over the course of a decade, *Ulysses* became an underground sensation. It was literary contraband, a novel you could read only if you found a copy counterfeited by literary pirates or if you smuggled it past customs agents. Most copies came from Shakespeare and Company, Sylvia Beach's Paris bookstore, where, as one writer remembered, "*Ulysses* lay stacked like dynamite in a revolutionary cellar." It was the archetype of a modernist revolution—it is, in fact, the primary reason why we think of modernism as revolutionary at all.

Modernism's discordant, contrarian and sometimes violent aspects weren't entirely new. What was new was that this cultural discord became a sustained movement, and it was Joyce who had taken modernism's assorted experiments and turned them into a masterpiece. After *Ulysses*, modernist experimentation was no longer marginal. It was essential. Turmoil became the substance of beauty rather than the seed of chaos, and this peculiar aesthetic emerging from a more versatile sense of order seemed to usher in a new era. For what modernism rebelled against was entrenched empiricism, a century of all-too-confident belief in perpetual technocratic progress, in the ever-

expanding limits of power and commerce, and in the order of things as tidy, sanitized and always available for public examination.

The enemy of the empirical is not the illogical. The enemy of the empirical is the secretive. All of the things empirical culture couldn't utilize, didn't want or refused to acknowledge were sequestered from the public sphere and classified as hazardous categories: the hidden, the uselessly subjective, the unspoken and the unspeakable. The apex of the secretive is the obscene. Obscenity is deeply, uselessly private—a category of thoughts, words and images so private, in fact, that to make it public is illegal. To claim that obscenity had some empirical, public value would have been absurd. It would have violated the confidence that supposedly built civilization. *Ulysses* was dangerous because it accepted no hierarchy between the empirical and the obscene, between our exterior and interior lives. It was dangerous because it demonstrated how a book could abolish secrecy's power. It showed us that secrecy is the tool of doomed regimes and that secrets themselves are, as Joyce wrote, "tyrants, willing to be dethroned." *Ulysses* dethroned them all.

For modernist writers, literature was a battle against an obsolete civilization, and nothing illustrated the stakes of modernism's battle more clearly than the fact that its masterpiece was being burned. Censorship was the tyranny of established cultural standards. In the United States and Britain, the censorship regime was a diffuse enforcement network empowered by mid-nineteenth-century moral statutes. Laws against vices like obscenity were designed to control urban populations, and the primary enforcers of those laws were quasi-official vigilante organizations that flourished because urban centers were growing faster than governments could handle. Cities like London and New York maintained their tenuous order largely through societies for the "suppression" of various blights: beggars, prostitutes, vagrants, opium and cruelty to children and animals.

One of the most successful organizations was the London Society for the Suppression of Vice, which helped write the anti-obscenity laws it enforced. The problem with volunteer-based censorship regimes, however, was that their power would ebb and flow with moral fads. Fluctuations in vice-society membership and finances ensured that they were never as effective as they

wanted to be—pornographers simply adapted to a boom-and-bust business cycle. British vice societies were spearheaded by aristocrats who funded legal proceedings and publicity campaigns that were orchestrated by a revolving door of volunteers who weren't willing to do the unseemly work that stopping an illicit business required. They weren't on the streets nabbing pornographers. They didn't entrap suspects. They didn't carry guns. They didn't threaten or hound or rough anyone up.

Things were different in the United States, where the fight against obscenity could be brutal. From 1872 until his death in 1915, the single most important arbiter of what was and was not obscene was a man named Anthony Comstock. His forty-year dominance over artistic standards made him an icon, the personification of a cultural order that rejected the base impulses threatening both our salvation and our civilization. And lust, as Comstock explained, was the most destructive impulse.

Lust defiles the body, debauches the imagination, corrupts the mind, deadens the will, destroys the memory, sears the conscience, hardens the heart, and damns the soul. It unnerves the arm, and steals away the elastic step. It robs the soul of manly virtues and imprints upon the mind of the youth visions that throughout life curse the man or woman.

Comstock saw human nature as a withering thing, a form of purity corrupted by the fallen world. His mechanism for rolling back the tide of lust was the United States Post Office, and his authority over the content of the letters, newspapers and magazines sent through the mail derived from a law that bears his name.

The 1873 Comstock Act made the distribution or advertisement of any "obscene, lewd, or lascivious book, pamphlet, picture, paper, print or other publication of an indecent character" through the U.S. mail punishable by up to ten years in prison and a ten-thousand-dollar fine, and state laws throughout the country—"little Comstock Acts"—extended the ban to obscenity's publication and sale. Armed with the power of the law, sworn in as a special agent of the Post Office and named the head of the New York Society for the

Suppression of Vice (NYSSV), Comstock destroyed books by the ton and imprisoned thousands of pornographers. By the 1910s, his bushy muttonchops served a dual purpose: they hearkened back to the values of an older era, and they concealed the scar left by a pornographer's knife. "You must hunt these men as you hunt rats," Comstock said, "without mercy."

Comstock was an instrument of God and the State, a guardian protecting vulnerable citizens from exotic influences, a defender of rigid principles over base impulses, of resolve over experimentation. He and his Society, in other words, represented much of what modernism opposed. By the time Comstock's successor, John Sumner, took over the NYSSV in 1915, publishers big and small were voluntarily submitting manuscripts for the Society's approval. Its power was so well established by World War I that Sumner was compelled to file criminal charges only in exceptional cases. *Ulysses* was one of them.

Joyce and his literary allies had to wage a battle against vigilantes, moralists, literary pirates, protective fathers, outraged husbands and a host of law enforcement officials—postal inspectors, customs agents, district attorneys, detectives, constables and crown prosecutors. The fight against charges of obscenity (which is still a crime) was about more than the right to publish sexually explicit material. It was a dimension of the larger struggle between state power and individual freedom that intensified in the early twentieth century, when more people began to challenge governmental control over whatever speech the state considered harmful. State control and moral control reinforced each other. Comstock's era of moral surveillance contributed to the rise of the federal government (the Post Office was its cornerstone), and the government's crackdown on subversive speech during and after World War I in turn helped the NYSSV expand its campaign against obscenity in the 1920s. Joyce, whether he liked it or not, was affiliated with anarchists, high-brows and the Irish—all suspect populations after 1917.

For the outspoken writers of the era, the battle lines were not drawn on the margins of art. They were central to it. When Joyce's unseemly candor left him unable to find anyone willing to publish or print his first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Ezra Pound ranted in *The Egoist*, "If we can't write plays, novels, poems or any other conceivable form of literature with the

scientist's freedom and privilege, with at least the chance of at least the scientist's verity, then where in the world have we got to, and what is the use of anything, *anything?*"

Pound was still railing against the Comstock Act in the late 1920s, when he wrote to Supreme Court Chief Justice Taft to ask for help overturning a statute enacted, he insisted, by "an assembly of baboons and imbeciles." Part of what made the Comstock Act so loathsome was that it underscored the fact that renegades and iconoclasts like Pound depended on the Post Office for their survival. For while modernism drew upon the turbulence surrounding World War I, when empires crumbled and millions moved across borders to exchange new ideas and radical styles, it was precisely its iconoclastic nature that made modernism beholden to the largest, most mundane government bureaucracy there was.

Modernists used mass cultural resources and marketing strategies even as they shunned the large audiences that inhibited controversy and experimentation. Rather than writing a novel for a million readers, Joyce said, he preferred to write novels that one person would read a million times. Modernists courted small numbers of avid, idiosyncratic readers scattered across countries and time zones, and one way to foster such a dedicated community was through boisterous magazines that could generate an ongoing creative exchange among far-flung readers and writers. But because modernist magazine readerships were too small for most bookshops and newsstands to carry, artists like Joyce needed an extensive, government-subsidized distribution system to bring subscribers together. It was the Post Office that made it possible for avant-garde texts to circulate cheaply and openly to wherever their kindred readers lived. The Post Office was also the institution that could inspect, seize and burn those texts.

THE DISPUTES OVER the astonishing content of Joyce's writing began years before *Ulysses* was published. We think of *Ulysses* as a mighty tome, but its public life began as a series of installments in a New York modernist magazine called *The Little Review*, the unlikely product of Wall Street money and

Greenwich Village bohemia. *The Little Review* was the brainchild of an extravagant Chicagoan named Margaret Anderson who moved with her partner, Jane Heap, to Greenwich Village and cultivated a magazine devoted to art and anarchism, ecstasy and rebellion. Their taste for conflict and publicity, however, infuriated their principal patron, Ezra Pound's friend John Quinn. Quinn was an irascible Wall Street lawyer, a resolute bachelor and probably the most important American collector of modern art during the 1910s and early twenties. He bankrolled *The Little Review* and became its overworked legal counsel despite his misgivings about the magazine's "editrixes." Quinn initially pegged Anderson and Heap as "willful women" before deciding that they were, even worse, typical Washington Squareites ("stupid charlatans and silly fakers"), and his opinion only deteriorated from there.

While this uneasy partnership of money and willfulness lasted, *The Little Review* managed to serialize about half of *Ulysses* from the spring of 1918 to the end of 1920. Installments of Joyce's book (sometimes less than ten pages) appeared alongside Sherwood Anderson stories, squabbles with other magazines, drawings and woodcuts of varying skill, Dadaist poetry ("skoom / vi so boo / rlez") and advertisements for chocolates and typewriters. Serialization exposed Joyce to strident responses from the magazine's readers. One subscriber praised him as "beyond doubt the most sensitive stylist writing in English" while another claimed he was helping to turn *The Little Review* into a "freak magazine" by "throwing chunks of filth into the midst of incoherent maunderings." Some readers found the filth powerful. The way Joyce "slings 'obscenities'" at readers inspired one Dadaist poet's rapturous praise ("vulgar!"), which probably didn't help when that particular issue of the magazine landed in court. The most ominous and influential reactions to *Ulysses* came from U.S. state and federal governments. The Post Office repeatedly banned *The Little Review* from mail circulation because of its chunks of Joycean filth, and in 1920 the New York district attorney—spurred by John Sumner and the NYSSV—brought obscenity charges against Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap.

"There is hell in New York about 'Nausikaa,'" Joyce wrote to a friend after hearing about the trial against his indicted episode. And yet in the aftermath

of the New York troubles, he decided to make the episode filthier—and two subsequent episodes were filthier still. To casual readers, the long evolution of *Ulysses* made Joyce seem like either an uncompromising artist or a petulant provocateur stoking outrage by freighting his work with difficulty and offensiveness. "Each month he's worse than the last," one *Little Review* reader complained, to which Jane Heap aptly replied: Joyce "has no concern with audiences and their demands."

It was Joyce's independence from everyone's demands but his own that drew many people to *Ulysses*. Simone de Beauvoir remembered not only her "utter amazement" when she read the novel but also the auspicious moment when she actually saw James Joyce, "the most remote and inaccessible" of writers, "materialize before me in flesh and blood" at a bookshop in Paris. Since 1918, when *Ulysses* began to appear, Joyce had become an icon of individuality for the new century. He was a stateless wanderer living in self-imposed exile from Ireland. He had spent over a decade writing in obscurity and near poverty. He refused to yield to the demands of burgeoning governments and markets, to the laws that restricted the circulation of literature and to the readers that made literature a professional option in the first place.

And yet he was also an icon of individuality because he was so palpably a man of "flesh and blood." The body was central to Joyce's work because he was a captive of both its erotic pleasures and its intense pains. From as early as 1907 and into the 1930s, Joyce suffered from an illness that caused bouts of iritis (a swelling of his iris), which in turn brought about episodes of acute glaucoma and other complications that withered his eyesight almost to the point of blindness. He collapsed on city streets and rolled on the floor in pain during years of recurrent "eye attacks," and the agony of his illness was as traumatizing as the eye surgeries he underwent to save his vision—all of them performed without general anesthetic. When Joyce was not bracing himself before having his eye "slit open," as he described it, he endured a battery of injections, narcotics, disinfectants and dental extractions (seventeen, in fact, just in case his teeth were the cause) as well as applications of tonics, electrodes and leeches. From 1917 onward, Joyce had to wonder if the next attack—or the next surgery—would end his career.

Joyce's grievous health and feeble eyesight made him heroic and pitiable, inaccessible and deeply human. The images of Joyce wearing eye patches and postsurgical bandages or reading with thick spectacles and a magnifying glass gave him the aura of a blind seer, a twentieth-century Homer or Milton. Illness was taking away the visible world only to give him an experience whose intensity was too deep for others to fathom. Ernest Hemingway once wrote to Joyce after his son's fingernail lightly scratched his eye. It "hurt like hell," Hemingway said. "For ten days I had a very little taste of how things might be with you."

Joyce's life would become every bit as ravaged as Anthony Comstock would have expected, and yet Joyce's resilience encouraged even those unfamiliar with his work to see modern individuality as a sort of durable ruin persevering against uncontrollable forces. *Ulysses* turned that resilience into art. It reads like a desperate, beloved labor, a work of uncanny insight behind thick spectacles, a procession of desires and memories interspersed with spells of suffering and boredom. It is a work of ardor and arduousness, something fragile and yet indomitable. It is the book of a man who, even in a hospital bed—even with both eyes bandaged—would reach for a notebook under his pillow and trace phrases blindly with his pencil so that he could insert them into his manuscript when he could see again. It's no wonder that Joyce's fiction explored the interior world. Beyond his family, it was all he had.

Over time, Joyce's unstinting devotion to his craft established him as modernism's consummate artist rather than a mere provocateur—one does not write through so much suffering only to provoke. But the provocations were inevitable. Something about James Joyce and *Ulysses* inspired irrational hostility. Just before *Ulysses* was published, a man brushed past him as he was walking in Paris and muttered—in Latin no less—"You are an abominable writer!" The bile did not subside. In 1931, the French ambassador to the United States, the poet Paul Claudel, refused to help stop the piracy of *Ulysses* and declared Joyce's novel "full of the filthiest blasphemies where one senses all the hatred of an apostate—also afflicted with a truly diabolical lack of talent." Rebecca West complained that "the excrementitious and sexual passages

have a non-aesthetic gusto about them," and the surest sign of their inadequacy was the "spurt of satisfaction" one got while reading them. Yet Joyce's writing wreaked havoc on the opinions of careful readers. West was "overcome by fury at Mr. James Joyce's extraordinary incompetence" though she was nevertheless convinced that he was "a writer of majestic genius."

The fury *Ulysses* provoked was a part of Joyce's majesty. His fight against censorship shaped the novel's public reception and enhanced the devotion of kindred spirits (especially those who thought of themselves as besieged individualists), but it did much more than that. The legal battles surrounding *Ulysses*—in a New York City Police Court in 1921, in a U.S. District Court in 1933 and in a U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 1934—effectively turned the standard bearer of an avant-garde movement into a representative of art as a whole, a symbol of creativity fighting against the authority that would constrain it. *Ulysses* removed all of the barriers to art. It demanded unfettered freedom of artistic form, style and content—literary freedoms that were as political as any speech protected by the First Amendment. Freedom, after all, can have no real meaning if it is taken away as soon as we tell the stories about who we are. If we can't publish and read *Ulysses*, then what is the use of *anything*?

Joyce's demand for absolute freedom gave him a special place in the arts community, even among those who had torn opinions about his work. When Sylvia Beach launched an official protest against the piracy of *Ulysses* in 1927, 167 writers from around the world signed it. W. B. Yeats helped Joyce obtain grants during the war. T. S. Eliot promoted him throughout literary London. Hemingway helped Sylvia Beach smuggle copies of *Ulysses* into the United States. Samuel Beckett took dictation from Joyce when he couldn't see, and F. Scott Fitzgerald offered to fling himself out of a window for him (the offer, thankfully, was declined).

Several donors, including a Rockefeller, helped Joyce when times were bleak. John Quinn purchased Joyce's manuscripts, and his devotion tethered him to *The Little Review* and its legal misadventures long after he swore to abandon its Washington Squareite editors. Joyce's most important patron was

a prim London spinster named Harriet Shaw Weaver, whose dedication to Joyce puzzled Londoners as well as her devout family. Miss Weaver, as she was known to everyone, subsidized Joyce during the years he wrote *Ulysses* and continued to support him until he died. And Sylvia Beach, as Joyce belatedly acknowledged, devoted the best years of her life to Joyce and his novel. One of the ironies of *Ulysses* is that while it was banned to protect the delicate sensibilities of female readers, the book owes its existence to several women. It was inspired, in part, by one woman, funded by another, serialized by two more and published by yet another.

Sylvia Beach's eleven printings of *Ulysses* throughout the 1920s helped make Shakespeare and Company a nexus for Lost Generation expatriates, and it was only a matter of time before the book's enduring appeal enticed larger U.S. publishers to mount a legal battle. In 1931, an ambitious New York publisher named Bennett Cerf became eager to acquire a risky, high-profile book that could jump-start his young company, Random House. Cerf teamed up with an idealistic lawyer named Morris Ernst, a founder of the ACLU, to defend *Ulysses* in front of patrician federal judges like Learned Hand, who reshaped modern law, and John Woolsey, who reshaped obscenity law.

It took a transformation of all of this—artists, readers, patrons, the publishing industry and the law—to make modernism mainstream. Publishers like Random House marketed modernism as a collection of treasures accessible to everyone, regardless of educational background—affordable books were supposed to be a democratic form of acculturation. But the marketing strategy for *Ulysses* was a federal court case. Its accessibility became secondary to its legality, and that was the impression of modernism that stuck: Joyce's novel represented not a finished monument of high culture but an ongoing fight for freedom. When the *Ulysses* case came before Judge Woolsey in the fall of 1933, Nazi book burnings had taken place only four months earlier, which is why owning *Ulysses* without ever reading it was not an idle gesture. In the ominous climate of the 1930s, Woolsey's decision did more than legalize a book. It turned a cultural insurgency into a civic virtue of a free and open society. The renovation of *Ulysses* from literary dynamite to a "modern classic" is a micro-history of the way modernism was Americanized.

THE PUBLICATION HISTORY of *Ulysses* reminds us that what makes Joyce's book difficult is a facet of what makes it liberating. *Ulysses* declared its ascendancy over stylistic conventions and government censors alike—the freedom of form was the counterpart to the freedom of content. The way people actually spoke and what people actually thought and did during a typical day became the stuff of art. This seems unremarkable until we remember that a full account of our lives had been illegal to put on paper for distribution. Novelists before Joyce took it for granted that a veil of decorum separated the fictional world from the actual world. To write was to accept that entire categories of human experience were unspeakable. Joyce left nothing unspoken, and by the time *Ulysses* was legalized and published in the United States in 1934, it seemed as if art had no limitations. It seemed as if the dynamite stacked in Shakespeare and Company exploded unspeakability itself.

The story of the fight to publish *Ulysses* has never been told in its entirety, though several scholars (including Jackson Bryer, Rachel Potter, David Weir, Carmelo Casado and Marisa Anne Pagnattaro) have examined some of the more infamous moments, and I am indebted to their important work. Joseph Kelly, for example, includes an illuminating chapter on the *Ulysses* trials in *Our Joyce*. Paul Vanderham's *James Joyce and Censorship* is the only full-length study of the subject, though Vanderham's book is an argument rather than a history—the events surrounding *Ulysses*, and the people shaping those events, are secondary to Vanderham's theory about Joyce's late revisions of the text and the critical strategies that followed. Several scholarly articles and book chapters examine the role of the *Ulysses* censorship within Joyce's career, the history of obscenity and the development of modernism, but the remarkable story about the book itself has always come to us in sidelong glances.

Four important biographies cover portions of Joyce's censorship saga from differing perspectives. Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicholson wrote the definitive biography of Harriet Weaver, *Dear Miss Weaver*, which chronicles Weaver's involvement in Joyce's censorship troubles in London. Noël Riley Fitch's *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation* recounts Beach's arduous task of pub-

lishing *Ulysses* and her efforts to deal with its exacting author. B. L. Reid's biography of John Quinn, *The Man from New York*, documents Joyce's legal troubles in New York as well as Quinn's struggle to find a publisher for Joyce's book. Detailed as these biographies are, they necessarily offer limited insight into the story of Joyce's book. Quinn and Beach, for example, had little or nothing to do with the second trial, and Weaver had little to do with the first. The elaborate publication history gets lost even in Richard Ellmann's celebrated biography, *James Joyce*, which discusses the trials only in passing—Ellmann devotes two pages to the New York trial and only one page to the federal trial.

The disputes surrounding *Ulysses* encapsulated the dual rise of print culture and modern governmental power. They involved the history of censorship law, the pervasive fears of radicals, and the turbulent mixture of the smugglers, the vice societies, the artists and the cultures of some remarkable modern cities: Dublin, Trieste, London, Paris, Zurich and New York. If we want to see how a culture changes, we must examine how localities reimagine themselves through the creation and reception of their most enduring works. The biography of *Ulysses* gives us insight into the lives of all books, into the roots of our contemporary culture, into modernism and its most talked-about novelist.

There are at least eight Joyce biographies of varying seriousness. The first was published in 1924, when Joyce was only forty-two years old, and the most recent in 2012. One of the hallmarks of Joyce's genius was his ability to fold his hardships into elaborate designs, and yet nine decades of biographies have failed to capture the degree to which adversity (and persecution) inspired Joyce—it was probably not a coincidence that the idea for *Ulysses* came to him immediately after he received Grant Richards's rejection letter for *Dubliners*. Joyce wrote *Ulysses* through a world war, financial uncertainty, the threat of censorship and a serious, recurrent illness. A life in pain shaped the novel that Joyce called "the epic of the human body," and the nature of that pain has never been fully explored.

This book is the result of years of research involving hundreds of books, articles and newspaper accounts. It incorporates unpublished material in

twenty-five archives housed in seventeen different institutions from London to New York to Milwaukee. The archives contain troves of manuscripts, legal documents, unpublished memoirs, official reports and countless letters. Several Woolsey family documents, photographs and home movies reveal a portrait of Judge Woolsey that we have never before seen, and his library in Petersham, Massachusetts, remains nearly unchanged since 1933.

The biography of *Ulysses* is more than the story of a defiant genius. Joyce's persistence and sacrifice, his talent and painstaking work, inspired the devotion of those around him, and he needed that devotion desperately—even the most individualist endeavor requires a community. Of all the people who made *Ulysses* possible, the most important is Nora Barnacle, the woman who fled Ireland with Joyce when he decided to become an artist, the woman whose letters inspired some of his most beautiful and obscene writing and the woman whose first evening with Joyce in 1904 hovers over everything that happens in *Ulysses*. The story surrounding the novel shows us how high modernism emerged from the low regions of the body and the mind. It shows us how artworks containing the extremities of experience—rapture and pain—went from being contraband to being canonical. It's a snapshot of a cultural revolution.

The battles over *Ulysses* didn't end literary censorship. They didn't usher in an era of untrammelled freedom or pervasive avant-garde aesthetics. But they did force us to recognize that beauty is deeper than pleasure and that art is larger than beauty. The biography of *Ulysses* revisits a time when novelists tested the limits of the law and when novels were dangerous enough to be burned. You do not worry about your words being banned partly because of what happened to *Ulysses*. The freedom it won shapes more than our idea of art. It shapes the way we make it.