

CHAPTER I

Dublin

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Dublin-born Bernard Shaw lived his first nineteen years and nine months in Ireland's capital city. Emigrating to London in 1876, he would not return for over thirty years to a Dublin changed from the city he had known as a youth, although its infamous urban poverty persisted unchanged.

Having neglected the city, Shaw made eight visits from 1908 to 1922. In fact, Shaw along with his Irish wife, Charlotte, visited Ireland fourteen times between 1905 and 1923. As pioneer motorists, they toured all over the country, with West Cork, Kerry, and Abbey Theatre playwright and director Augusta Gregory's house, Coole Park in Co. Galway, as preferred destinations – not Dublin.¹

Dublin, however, had become the site for the splintered energies of an ever more hopeful national revival seeking to sever constitutional links with England/Great Britain. After the long-promised third Home Rule Bill (1912) was set aside following the outbreak of World War I, the city's social, political, cultural, and polemical tensions, simmering since the fall of Parnell in 1891, boiled over in armed revolution with the 1916 Insurrection, the War of Independence (1918–21) and, finally, the Civil War (1922–23), leaving Ireland divided into two inconclusive politically determined entities: the northeast corner preserving constitutional links with Britain, the remainder, its own nation state, maintaining only vestiges. Shaw, resolutely opposed to xenophobic Irish nationalism, aligned himself with broader nationalist interests by working behind the scenes for both

¹ Their Dublin visits (September 1908, September 1910, March 1913, April 1915, October 1917, October 1918, April 1920, and August 1922) usually lasted about a week, except the last which was only a couple of nights. Dublin was not always included in their Irish visits. From 1905 to 1923, the Shaws spent many summers in south-west Ireland, especially at Parknasilla in Co. Kerry, and stayed three times (1910, 1915, and 1919) with Lady Gregory at Coole, Co. Galway. Information comes from Bernard Shaw's engagement diaries for the years 1908–23, held in the London School of Economics, complemented by Charlotte Shaw's engagement diaries in the British Library, Add. Mss. 63190 A-M.

the Irish National Theatre at the Abbey and the 1917 Irish Convention. He also made many public interventions (letters and speeches in both London and Dublin), including lending his support to Larkin, Connolly, and the Dublin workers during the 1913 Lockout, and defending the 1916 Dublin Rising leaders.

Four distinct incarnations of Bernard Shaw's Dublin arise: Dublin 1856–76: the mid-nineteenth-century city in which he grew up and knew intimately; Dublin 1876–1908: the city that developed during his thirty-two years' absence, familiar from Joyce's *Ulysses*, which Shaw claimed confirmed his own bitter experience of Ireland's capital; Dublin 1908–22: the turbulent centre of the Irish National Revival, to which Shaw frequently returned; and Dublin 1922–50: the capital city of the new Irish Free State, later renamed Eire (1937), and finally the Republic of Ireland (1948), to which he never returned. At the instigation of James Larkin, however, Dublin City Council made ninety-year-old Shaw the 38th Honorary Freeman of the City of Dublin in 1946. This essay concentrates on the first and third, the Dublins of his childhood and later returns.

Unlike near Dublin contemporaries Oscar Wilde and W. B. Yeats, Shaw's childhood was peculiarly confined to the city of 250,000 people, and he never lost the 'unpleasant' memory of having been 'tether[ed] to Dublin and to an office or to school' (*CL* II: 550). Shaw lived out his childhood within a literally circumscribed environment, almost everywhere within walking distance. Maps of Dublin show a city bisected by the River Liffey flowing west–east to Dublin Bay with the semicircular city limits delineated by the two early nineteenth-century canals, the Grand Canal on the 'southside' and the Royal Canal on the 'northside'.

Shaw was born a stone's throw from the Grand Canal, at 3 (later 33) Synge Street, a newish, small house with basement, ground floor, and first floor; his bedroom, doubling as his father's dressing room, was off 'the return' on the stairs between ground and first floor. His mother's musical colleague, George Vandeleur Lee, lived around the corner in 48 Harrington Street. Their musical society rehearsals took place in the Shaw's first floor living-room. A few streets towards St. Stephen's Green, 61 Harcourt Street (now the Harcourt Hotel) provided Shaw his last home in the city, living in lodgings with his father (1874–76). On adjacent Hatch Street, at No. 1, a large, five-level Georgian house on the corner with Lower Leeson Street, the Shaw household (mother, father, two sisters, himself, and presumably a servant or two) lived with Lee from 1866 to 1873. Wesleyan Connexional College, one of Shaw's several hated schools (1865, 1867–68), was a few hundred yards away, at 79 Stephen's Green. Sandwiched between

Harcourt and Hatch Streets, on Earlsfort Terrace, was the site of the Dublin Exhibition of 1865, details of which Shaw recalled as music critic.²

A half-mile west lay Shaw's last 'school-prison' (1869–71) – the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School instituted by the Incorporated Society for Promoting English Protestant Schools in Ireland – at the corner of Aungier Street and Whitefriars Place.³ The young Protestant mischievously shattered a window in the Roman Catholic Carmelite Friary Church across the street, or so his schoolfriend Matthew Edward McNulty attested.⁴ Shaw denied the incident, but wrote *Saint Joan* (largely on his last trip to Ireland in 1923), in part, to atone for his childhood bigotry (*CPP* VI: 238–9).

His parents married (1852) in nearby St. Peter's Church, Dublin's largest Church of Ireland (Anglican) parish. With some of the worst living conditions in the city – and in Europe – the vicinity of St. Patrick's Cathedral, where Jonathan Swift was once Dean, lay within another quarter of a mile and may have been where his nurse took him when she was supposed to be walking him in fashionable Stephen's Green.⁵ This early experience of Dublin's tenements (recognisable from the plays of Sean O'Casey, whom Shaw befriended in London from 1928) motivated the Fabian socialist's life-long campaign against urban poverty. Edward Guinness, first Lord Iveagh, tore down many of these particular tenements from 1894 to 1904 so as to rebuild them as modern, sanitary, housing units for the working poor, known as Iveagh Buildings, providing Shaw with one prototype for Undershaft's model town in *Major Barbara*. This, his first play written in Ireland, contains other surprising Irish resonances, including a character named Snobby Bronterre O'Brien Price and, as model for Undershaft's Cannon Foundry, the lead-mines at Ballycorus in the foothills of the Dublin mountains.

Alternatively, 'Sonny', as the young George Shaw was called by his family, could walk north towards the River Liffey from Hatch Street, passing by Fitzwilliam Square (smallest and most beautiful of the Georgian Squares) to Merrion Square, where he haunted the newly opened (1864) National Gallery, and dreamt of becoming a famous painter. Walking past

² Specifically on 15 August 1885, for the opening of the Albert Palace in Battersea, the re-erected glass and steel structure originally built for the 1865 Dublin International Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures in what is now known as Iveagh Gardens. Sir Robert Shaw, the bachelor second baronet, had been one of the directors of the enterprise. See *SM* I: 335–40.

³ Stanley Weintraub, ed., *Shaw: An Autobiography 1856–1898* (London: Reinhardt, 1969), 53.

⁴ See 'Memoirs of G.B.S. by Edward McNulty', *SHAW* 12 (1992), 8.

⁵ See Peter Gahan, 'Bernard Shaw: Dégriugolade and Derision in Dublin City', *SHAW* 32 (2012), 49.

the Wilde family house on the corner of the square, down Westland Row where Oscar was born, and around Trinity College to Great Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street), he would arrive at the Antient Concert Rooms. Shaw remembered his mezzo-soprano mother, who frequently performed there, making her sole public display of affection towards her children after a performance before the Lord Lieutenant.⁶ Both J. M. Synge, as violinist, and James Joyce, as singer, performed at the Antient Concert Rooms, the latter making it the location for his *Dubliners* short-story, 'A Mother'. There also Shaw delivered his first Dublin public lecture (a major social event in October 1910) on poverty in Ireland.⁷ Another few hundred yards west in Hawkins Street stood the Theatre Royal, Dublin's major theatre where his mother sang *bel canto* roles in opera, and where he saw (from behind the scenes) such visiting stars as Tietjens and Trebelli, and later the great Shakespearean actors Barry Sullivan (his hero) and Henry Irving (his nemesis as drama critic in London).⁸

The Liffey lay just beyond, with Carlisle Bridge (rebuilt as O'Connell's Bridge a year after Shaw left Dublin) leading to Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) on the northside, one of the widest main streets in Europe. A mile upriver stood the Four Courts, where his impecunious alcoholic father once held a sinecure, later sold to set up in business as corn merchant. The resulting firm, Clibborn and Shaw, had their premises at nearby 67 Jervis Street, with their flour mill at Dolphin's Barn 'on the country side of the [Grand] Canal'.⁹ Shaw's worst memory of Dublin lay north of the river: the non-denominational Central Model School on Marlborough Street (now housing the Irish Department of Education) – most detested of all Sonny Shaw's schools. There, in 1869, the young boy-snob was forced to mingle with children of shopkeepers and tradesmen, both Protestant and Catholic, some better-off than the Shaws. The social division between 'wholesale' and 'retail' was absolute in Dublin, even more than the religious divide or the cash nexus. As at his other schools, English rather than Irish history was taught, against which Sonny, always 'a young Fenian' in his sympathies, actively rebelled.¹⁰

⁶ As recorded in Stephen Winston, *Jesting Apostle* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), 18; and quoted in Benjamin Rossett, *Shaw of Dublin* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), 106.

⁷ Nelson O'Ceallaigh Ritschel, *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), 103ff.

⁸ See 1931 Preface to *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence*, in *The Complete Bernard Shaw Prefaces* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965), 781.

⁹ A. M. Gibbs, *Bernard Shaw: A Life* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 15 & 50.

¹⁰ Weintraub, *Shaw: An Autobiography*, 58.

Rather than cross the river, young Shaw may have preferred to walk past College Green with its famous equestrian statue – now removed – of King ‘Billy’ (William of Orange) in front of Trinity College and the imposing portico of the Bank of Ireland, originally ‘Grattan’s Parliament’ in the eighteenth century. There in 1800 Shaw’s most notable relation, Sir Robert Shaw M.P. (1774–1849), voted against the Act of Union. The baronet also founded ‘Shaw’s Bank’ next to the Parliament building in Foster Place and later became Lord Mayor of Dublin (1815). Walking round Trinity another quarter of a mile onto Nassau and Dawson Streets, the teenage office-clerk would arrive at 15 Molesworth Street, premises of Uniack Townshend’s land agency, which managed ‘the estates of Irish landlords’.¹¹ The post may have been procured in 1871 through the influence of another powerful relative, Sir Frederick Shaw, Dublin City Recorder and political opponent of Daniel O’Connell. The lowly ‘office boy’ with artistic pretensions eventually married one of his employer’s wealthier relatives, Charlotte Payne-Townshend from Rosscarbery, West Cork. Not far away, the new Gaiety Theatre, standing near the corner of Stephen’s Green and fashionable Grafton Street, became another of the young clerk’s haunts.

A few places beckoned beyond the city limits. Ten-year-old Shaw could range free, playing with friends all the way from their house in Synge Street to his father’s mill at Dolphin’s Barn and back, three miles in total. Church and Sunday School (hated as much as school) was the Molyneux Church (built 1860) in Upper Leeson Street just across the Grand Canal, while also on the country side of the canal, at Harold’s Cross, lay the city’s Protestant cemetery, Mount Jerome, founded – again – by Sir Robert Shaw (1836). In nearby Terenure village, the two largest estates, Terenure House and then Bushy Park (now Terenure College and Our Lady’s College, respectively) had both been owned by the Shaw family, the latter becoming the seat of the Shaw clan. As music critic, Shaw hilariously described – in an analogy to the slow movement in Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony – a Shaw family funeral, most likely that of the second Sir Robert (1796–1869) as it proceeded from Bushy Park to Mount Jerome.¹² Shaw’s widowed grandmother, relying on this bachelor second baronet’s largesse, lived with her large brood close-by at Roundtown.

In adjacent Rathfarnham, Shaw’s mother’s wealthy maternal grandfather, John Whitcroft (1768–1843) lived in Highfield Manor. As a prominent local resident, Whitcroft’s was a leading signature on a petition for the repeal of the Act of Union in 1840. Scandalously making his fortune as

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72. ¹² Published in *The World*, 14 February 1894, reprinted in *SM* III: 129–36.

a pawn-broker in a poor area of the city, he likely left his mark on Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses*, as did Shaw's duties as a teenage land agent's clerk collecting rents from poor tenants in Terenure.¹³ The horse-drawn tram he took there, the first in the city (1871), was a harbinger of changes Shaw would discover in Dublin after 1908.

Beyond the city, the family made excursions to the scenic Dublin-Wicklow Hills. He knew the Glen of the Downs well enough to write a short story about it for a boy's journal. As art critic (his first professional job), he mentioned 'Mr. C. I. Anson's "Aghavannagh" . . . not for its merit, which is not exceptional, but because I fell, at an early age, into the shallow river depicted in the little sketch, and so, though my critical faculty was then comparatively undeveloped, I can testify to the truthfulness of the painter's observation'.¹⁴ To reach A[u]ghavannagh near Glenmalure in Co. Wicklow, where Synge set his short play *In the Shadow of the Glen*, required a horse-drawn carriage, a journey of some hours. His most extensive journeys outside Dublin (most likely by train) included business trips – traveling 'first-class' – as well as seventy miles north to Newry, Co. Down, to visit his old literary schoolfriend McNulty, now a bank clerk.¹⁵

Seven miles south of the city, near historic Dalkey village, lay his favourite place in Co. Dublin: Torca Cottage, used as a second or summer home (1865–73) by Lee and the Shaws. Perched high on Killiney Hill with Killiney Beach far below, and with spectacular views of Killiney Bay south to Bray Head and the Wicklow Hills, north-west to Dublin Bay with its prosperous suburbs of Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire), Monkstown, Blackrock, and Sandymount, and directly north to the Howth peninsula, it provided young Shaw's imagination a rare refuge during his 'devil of a childhood, . . . rich only in dreams, frightful & loveless in realities' (*CL* I: 773). Torca Cottage thus supplemented the aesthetic delights of Lee's musical society, the National Gallery, and Dublin's theatres.

The Shaw family split up in 1873. His mother – following Lee – left for London with her two daughters, the ostensible object being a singing career for the eldest, Lucy. Bessie Shaw returned briefly in 1874 to install Sonny and his father in their Harcourt Street lodgings. In 1876, George, as the family now called him, left for London to live with his mother and Lucy after Agnes died from tuberculosis on the Isle of Wight.

¹³ See Frank Harris, *Bernard Shaw* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1931), 62.

¹⁴ Stanley Weintraub, ed., *Bernard Shaw on the London Art Scene* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 94.

¹⁵ Weintraub, *Shaw: An Autobiography*, 72.

In 1907, Dublin's Theatre Royal hosted an immensely successful touring production of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*. Written in 1904 for the small new Abbey Theatre situated on the north side of the river, *John Bull* did not, as had been hoped, open or even play at the nascent Irish national theatre. Instead, the Abbey's first Shaw production in 1909 was the censored Wild West-set 'religious tract in dramatic form' *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*. In providing a propaganda victory against the British administration in Dublin Castle, the production reclaimed the theatre's nationalist credentials following the uproar in 1907 over Syngé's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Shaw stayed holidaying in Kerry while Charlotte travelled up to Dublin without him for the opening.

On one visit, Shaw, by now the best-known Irish writer, stayed at the prestigious Shelbourne Hotel on Stephen's Green, directly across from his detested old school Wesley. Taking a short walk down Merrion Row to Merrion Square, he re-visited the cherished National Gallery of his childhood, meeting Æ (George Russell) there by chance in 1908.¹⁶ Ungratefully portrayed by Joyce in *Ulysses*, Æ was a major cultural figure in Dublin during the national revival. An indefatigable poet, visionary, painter, journal editor, writer, and agricultural organiser, Æ worked with his assistant, poet and wit Susan Mitchell, at the headquarters of Horace Plunkett's Irish Cooperative movement, 84 Merrion Square, which became a regular stopping-in place for Shaw and Charlotte on Dublin visits.

The Shaws also visited Charlotte Shaw's niece, Cecily Colthurst, née Cholmondeley, at Lucan House, an eighteenth-century mansion (now the Italian embassy) on the site of Sarsfield Castle, residence of Irish patriot Patrick Sarsfield, first Earl of Lucan, of Treaty of Limerick (1691) fame. Lucan House was built by the Vesey, who married into the Sarsfield family; it was most recently inherited by Cecily's husband, Capt. Richard Colthurst (his great-grandmother was a Vesey), who was High-Sheriff of Dublin from 1920 to 1921.

Horace Plunkett, Ireland's great agricultural reformer, whom Shaw met in Mulranny, Co. Mayo in 1908, became one of his two great Irish friends during these years of return, the other being Augusta Gregory, his main link – with Yeats – to the Abbey Theatre. On Dublin visits, the Shaws based themselves at Plunkett's home, Kilteragh, in the prosperous suburb of Foxrock, five miles southwest of the city. The history of that remarkable modern house (built 1908), which Shaw compared to a Picasso painting in

¹⁶ Alan Denson, ed., *Letters from Æ* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1961), 64–65.



Figure 1.1. Charlotte Shaw and Horace Plunkett standing before Kilteragh, 1913.

1913 (*CL* III: 164), has not yet been told. Sleeping in a roof-top eyrie open to the elements, Plunkett ran it like a cultural centre, bringing together people from Ireland's varied and disparate traditions. There such forward-looking people as he, Æ, Shaw, Yeats, Gregory, Erskine Childers, St John Gogarty, Lennox Robinson, and many others – whether nationalist or unionist – could work constructively towards the Ireland of 'the New Century' that must come with any national settlement. At one dinner for the Shaws, Plunkett invited progressive Catholic nationalist economist Father Finlay S.J. of U.C.D. together with the Protestant Unionist anti-Gaelic Provost of T.C.D., classicist Professor Mahaffy, one-time tutor of Oscar Wilde. And on his hastily arranged last trip to Dublin during the Civil War in August 1922, Shaw met Michael Collins at Kilteragh. Victor of Ireland's War of Independence and new President of the Dáil (parliament) of the Irish Free State, Collins was assassinated two days later. Kilteragh itself was burnt down by republicans the following January.

While at Kilteragh, Shaw (an inveterate all-weather walker) would climb nearby Three Rock Mountain with Plunkett and others to discuss Ireland's future after 1916, or the direction of the 1917 Irish Convention, or the

founding of (and keeping afloat) the notable journal *The Irish Statesman* (1919–29, later edited by Æ).¹⁷ From the top, the most famous Dubliner, beholding a vast panorama of land, mountain, and sea, could gaze across to Dalkey, that ‘wonderland’, where he had been ‘a prince in the world of my own imagination . . . The front garden commanded Killiney bay: the back garden Dublin Bay. When *I* was in those gardens they commanded all the kingdoms of the earth, all the regions of the sky, and all the ages of history’ (*CL* II: 714).

¹⁷ Influenced by the English *New Statesman*, which Shaw also had a hand in founding and funding. Both Shaws would help keep the *Irish Statesman* afloat when its finances became perilous.