

JAMES JOYCE

(2 February 1882–13 January 1941)

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James Joyce was an Irish novelist and poet, and one of the most influential writers in the modernist avant-garde of the early 20th century. He is best known for his landmark novel *Ulysses* (1922), in which the episodes of Homer's *Odyssey* are paralleled in an array of contrasting literary styles, perhaps most prominently the stream-of-consciousness technique. Among Joyce's other works are the short-story collection *Dubliners* (1914), and the well-known novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1904–16) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), as well as three books of poetry, a play, occasional journalism, and his published letters. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked *Ulysses* No. 1, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* No. 3, and *Finnegans Wake* No. 77, on its list of "the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century." The work and life of Joyce is celebrated annually on 16 June, known as Bloomsday, in Dublin and in an increasing number of cities worldwide.



James Joyce 1915

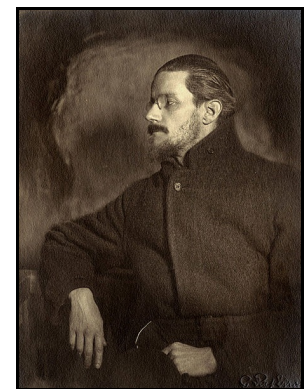
James Joyce was born on 2 February 1882 to John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane "May" Murray, at 41 Brighton Square, Rathgar, Dublin—a kilometer from his mother's birthplace in Terenure. Eldest of ten surviving children (two having died of typhoid), he had several life-long neuroses, among them a fear of dogs, having been attacked by one as a small child, and of thunder/lightning, a superstitious aunt having described thunderstorms to him as a sign of God's wrath. His father's family, originally from Fermoy in Cork, had once owned a small salt and lime works, and his father and paternal grandfather both married into wealthy families. Shortly after his father was appointed rate collector (i.e., a collector of local property taxes) by Dublin Corporation in 1887, the family moved to the fashionable adjacent small town of Bray, 12 miles from Dublin.

However, prospects for the middle-class Joyce family were trending distinctly downward; the family soon slid into poverty, caused mainly by the father's alcoholic drinking and general financial mismanagement. Joyce had begun his education at Clongowes Wood College, a Jesuit boarding school near Clane, County Kildare, in 1888, but in November 1891, Joyce's father was listed in the bankruptcy registry and suspended from work, and James had to leave Clongowes Wood in 1892 when the

family could no longer pay the fees. After studying at home and briefly at the Christian Brothers O'Connell School, he was offered a place in the Jesuits' Dublin school, Belvedere College, in 1893 at reduced fees arranged by priest who was a family friend. A brilliant student, Joyce excelled at these Jesuit schools, despite a chaotic family life and unpredictable finances. He went on to attend the recently established University College Dublin (UCD) in 1898, studying English, French and Italian and becoming active in theatrical and literary circles in the city, writing reviews, other articles, and plays.

After graduating from UCD in 1902, Joyce left for Paris to study medicine, which he soon abandoned, citing cold weather and ill health. He stayed on in Paris for a few months, reading late in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève and appealing for money his family could ill afford. He returned to Ireland when his mother was diagnosed with cancer. She tried unsuccessfully to get him to return to the faith, make his confession, and take communion; she passed into a coma and died on 13 August, her son still refusing to kneel in prayer at her bedside with other members of the family. After her death, Joyce remained in Dublin for some time longer, drinking heavily and scraping a living reviewing books, teaching, and singing—he was an accomplished tenor and won the bronze medal in the 1904 Feis Ceoil. Also in 1904, in his early twenties, he met Nora Barnacle, a young woman from Galway City who was working as a chambermaid and emigrated with her permanently to continental Europe.

This self-imposed exile initially took the form of a long series of peripatetic dislocations, first to Zurich, where an agent in England had supposedly got him a post to teach English at the Berlitz Language School. But the director of the school sent Joyce to Trieste, then part of Austria-Hungary (until World War I) but part of Italy today, where once again there was no teaching position for him, although he finally secured one in Pola (now part of Croatia). However, soon the Austrians expelled all aliens, having discovered an espionage ring in the city, and Joyce moved back to Trieste, where he lived for much of the next ten years. Later in 1905 Nora gave birth to their first child, Giorgio. Joyce, frustrated with life in Trieste, moved in late 1906 to Rome, which he also disliked, then back to Trieste in early 1907, where later that year his daughter Lucia was born. Joyce returned to Dublin in mid-1909 with son George, to work on getting *Dubliners* published. He took one of his sisters, Eva, back to Trieste with him to help Nora run the home, before going back to Dublin, this



Joyce in Zurich 1918

time as a representative of some cinema owners and businessmen from Trieste and launched Ireland's first cinema, the Volta Cinematograph. He returned to Trieste in January 1910 with another sister, Eileen, in tow, then to Dublin again briefly in mid-1912 during his years-long fight over the publication of *Dubliners*. He never again came closer to Dublin than London, despite many pleas from his father and invitations from fellow Irish writer William Butler Yeats. It was while living in Trieste that Joyce was first beset with eye problems that ultimately required over a dozen surgical operations.

Joyce concocted a number of money-making schemes during this period. His skill at borrowing money largely saved him from indigence; what income he did have came partially from his position at the Berlitz school and partially from teaching private students. In 1915, after most of his students were drafted to fight in World War I, Joyce moved to Zurich, where Ezra Pound brought him to the attention of English feminist and publisher Harriet Shaw Weaver, who would become Joyce's patron, providing him with thousands of pounds over the next 25 years, so he could quit teaching and focus on his writing. While in Zurich he wrote his play *Exiles* and published *A Portrait of the Artist*. Zurich's bohemian, multilingual atmosphere during the war suited him. Nevertheless, after four years he restlessly returned to Trieste as he had originally planned. Joyce went to Paris in 1920 at an invitation from Pound, supposedly for a week, but the family ended up living there for the next 20 years.

Joyce set himself to finishing *Ulysses* in Paris, delighted to find that he was gradually gaining fame as an avant-garde writer. A further grant from Weaver meant he could devote himself full-time to writing, as well as consort with other literary figures in the city. Throughout the 1930s he traveled frequently to Switzerland for eye surgeries and for treatments for his daughter Lucia, who suffered from schizophrenia. Carl Jung is said to have concluded that Joyce also had schizophrenia, saying that Joyce and Lucia were two people heading to the bottom of a river, except that Joyce was diving and Lucia was sinking. In Paris, if it were not for the nursing support of friends and Harriet Shaw Weaver's constant financial support, it is very possible that his books might never have been finished or published. Joyce returned to Zurich in late 1940, fleeing the Nazi occupation of France. In January 1941, he underwent surgery in Zurich for a perforated ulcer, fell into a coma, awaking only momentarily to ask a nurse to call his wife and son; he died 15 minutes later, before they arrived. Joyce's body was interred in the Fluntern Cemetery near the Zurich zoo. The Irish government later declined Nora's offer to permit the repatriation of his remains. Nora, who had married Joyce in London in 1931, survived him by 10 years

and is buried by his side, as is their son Giorgio.

Joyce's Irish experiences constitute an essential element of his writings; although he spent most of his adult life abroad, Joyce's fictional universe centers on Dublin, often with precise attention to the streets and alleyways of the city, and is populated largely by characters who closely resemble family members, enemies, and friends from his time there. Shortly after the publication of *Ulysses* he said, "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal." Music is also central to the understanding of Joyce's writings, and his poetry and prose became an inspiration for composers and musicians. He took a keen interest in musical settings of his work, performed some of them himself, and corresponded with many composers.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is a substantial rewrite of the abandoned novel "Stephen Hero," which was rejected in 1904 by the free-thinking magazine *Dana*. *A Portrait* is a heavily autobiographical, coming-of-age *künstlerroman* depicting the childhood and adolescence of protagonist Stephen Dedalus and his gradual growth into artistic self-consciousness. Hints of the techniques Joyce frequently employed in later works, such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and references to a character's psychic reality are evident throughout this novel.

Joyce's relationship with religion was complex and not easily understood, perhaps even by himself. Although the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas had a strong influence on him for most of his life, Joyce lapsed from Catholicism early in life, feeling, according to his brother Stanislaus, that it was imperative to save his real spiritual life from being overlaid and crushed by a false one he had outgrown. He believed that poets' gifts and personality were the repositories of the genuine spiritual life of their race. Some critics have argued that Joyce's work shows he reconciled with the faith later in life, or never really left it. Under this view Stephen, the protagonist of the semi-autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well as *Ulysses*, is not Joyce, who in fact takes a dialectic approach, both affirming and denying Catholicism, Stephen's much noted non-serviam "I will not serve that which I no longer believe" being balanced by his "I am a servant." We know from first hand testimonies and his own writing that Joyce attended Catholic Mass and Orthodox Sacred Liturgy, especially during



Joyce Statue,
Dublin

Holy Week, though purportedly for aesthetic reasons. Critic Andrew Gibson claims, “The modern James Joyce may have vigorously resisted the oppressive power of Catholic tradition. But there was another Joyce who asserted his allegiance to that tradition, and never left it, or wanted to leave it, behind him.”

Joyce’s work has received intense scholarly scrutiny and has been an important influence on writers as diverse as Samuel Beckett, Seán Ó Ríordáin, Jorge Luis Borges, Salman Rushdie, John Updike, David Lodge, and Joseph Campbell. French literary theorist Julia Kristéva characterized his novel writing as “polyphonic” and a hallmark of postmodernity alongside poets Mallarmé and Rimbaud. In 1999, *Time* magazine named Joyce one of “the 100 Most Important People of the 20th century,” stating, “Joyce . . . revolutionized 20th century fiction.” In April 2013 the Central Bank of Ireland issued a silver €10 commemorative coin in Joyce’s honor (although, in an act that would have amused him, misquoting a famous line from *Ulysses*).