

Topic Page: [Joyce, James \(1882 - 1941\)](#)

Definition: **Joyce, James** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Irish novelist. In 1904 Joyce renounced Catholicism and left Ireland to live and work in Europe. Joyce's experiments with narrative form place him at the centre of literary modernism. His debut was the short-story collection *Dubliners* (1914). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) was a fictionalized autobiography of Stephen Daedalus. His masterpiece, the novel *Ulysses* (1922), presents a day (June 16, 1904) in the life of Leopold Bloom. *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) is an allusive mix of Irish history and myth.

Summary Article: **Joyce, James**

From *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Literature: The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*

James Joyce was born in Rathgar, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland, on February 2, 1882, and died in Zurich, Switzerland, on January 13, 1941. His father came from a well-to-do Cork family that invested him with the means and standing to consider himself “a gentleman.” A boisterous, entertaining character, he failed to develop a sustained career or profession. Joyce's mother was a cultured, even-tempered woman whose efforts to maintain her family in middle-class comfort and respectability were eroded by sustained pregnancies and debts that consumed her husband's legacy and drove the family into deeper and deeper poverty. By the time Joyce was 12 years old, the family had 10 surviving children, 11 mortgages, and no remaining property.

As the eldest child, James Joyce felt the family decline in his own fortunes. An early beginning at a prestigious Jesuit boarding school led to a poverty-stricken adolescence, marked by evictions to more and more squalid quarters and the death of a beloved brother from typhoid. The family's ambitions for his education nonetheless managed to keep Joyce in Jesuit schools, and his education at Belvedere College (1893–8) and University College Dublin (1898–1902) trained him in the Latin classics and in the rigors of scholastic thinking. He supplemented his formal education with wide reading in Continental literature available at the Capel Street library, which exposed him to a tradition of progressive literary realism that influenced his own writing.

An unsuccessful sojourn in Paris to study medicine was interrupted by his mother's terminal illness and death, and Joyce spent the next year in desultory activity which included a brief stay at the Martello Tower with his friend Oliver St. John Gogarty. He was saved from this spiritual vagrancy by meeting a young Galway woman named Nora Barnacle with whom he first “went walking” on June 16, 1904—a date later memorialized as the day on which the action of his novel *Ulysses* is set. The relationship resulted in an ill-planned elopement to the Continent that eventually saw the couple settled first in Pola, and then in Trieste on Italy's Adriatic coast.

During the next decade, Joyce worked as an instructor for the Berlitz language school, a position for which his university study in modern languages had prepared him well. Although Nora's adjustment was more difficult, the city, whose cosmopolitan population of eastern and western Europeans gave it a lively intellectual and political complexity, suited Joyce well. Although he had begun writing and publishing stories while still in Dublin, the Trieste period allowed him time to undertake serious and sustained writing even as his domestic life was eventful and sometimes rocky. Joyce drank heavily and, like his father, incurred debt. His brother Stanislaus eventually joined him and Nora and 1905 saw the birth of their son Giorgio. Later, two of Joyce's sisters also joined them. In the midst of this lively domestic

scene – stabilized by Stanislaus's responsible management – Joyce finished the stories for his collection called *Dubliners* and his autobiographical novel, *Stephen Hero*, which became *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Joyce's first publication, a small book of poetry titled *Chamber Music*, appeared in 1907. Two other collections of poetry were published in later years, *Pomes Pennyeach* in 1927 and *Collected Poems* in 1937. Joyce also wrote a study of love titled *Giacomo Joyce* during his early Trieste period, and later produced a series of articles for the Triestine newspaper *Il Piccolo della Serra*. In spite of an early book contract for *Dubliners*, publication was delayed for years by wrangles over censorship issues with Joyce's publisher. These frustrations, among others, inspired a brief, unsuccessful relocation to Rome, a sojourn that led to the conception of a daughter, Lucia, and Joyce's conception of the story "The Dead," and the germ for what would later become his novel *Ulysses*. A productive period ensued after the family's return to Trieste, and, by the end of 1913, Joyce's luck turned with the tides of modern literary history. Joyce was contacted by the poet Ezra Pound, the informal talent scout and fundraiser for innovative writers, who had heard about Joyce from the poet W. B. Yeats. Pound encouraged Joyce to send his work to the "little magazines" that were then publishing experimental writing, and soon chapters of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* appeared in *The Egoist*. In 1914 *Dubliners* was published at last, but war was breaking out in Europe, and by 1915 the Joyces, whose Irish nationality made them British citizens, relocated to neutral Switzerland for the duration of World War I.

The family spent four years in Zurich, a city with a lively avant garde theater scene – important to Joyce, a great lover of drama who had written a play called *Exiles* during his Trieste years. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was published in 1916, and Joyce turned in earnest to his sprawling new novel, *Ulysses*. When the war ended in 1918, the Joyces returned to Trieste but found the postwar city uncongenial. At Pound's suggestion they moved to Paris, a haven for expatriate writers. There they quickly assembled a circle of friends and colleagues that included Sylvia Beach, whose bookstore and lending library-Shakespeare and Company – came to Joyce's rescue when obscenity concerns made commercial publication of his new novel unlikely. Beach offered to bring the book out and the first copies of *Ulysses* came off the press on Joyce's fortieth birthday, February 2, 1922. The novel's publication made Joyce a celebrity and encouraged him to launch a new, even more outrageously experimental work whose title, kept secret for many years, would be *Finnegans Wake*. Since *Ulysses* remained banned for obscenity in much of the English-speaking world during these years, Joyce earned few royalties, and depended for support on bequests and endowments from a generous patron named Harriet Shaw Weaver.

The 1920s in Paris proved to be a heady, troubled time for Joyce. Bouts of eye inflammation, first experienced in Trieste, required a series of painful eye surgeries. They were largely unsuccessful and Joyce began losing his sight. The avant garde extravagance of "Work in Progress," as *Finnegans Wake* was called before its publication, aroused deep skepticism and defection among some of Joyce's most ardent supporters, including Ezra Pound. But new circles of friends and disciples replaced the doubters, including the Irish writer Samuel Beckett, and Eugene and Maria Jolas who eventually published segments of "Work in Progress" in their journal *transition*. To further strengthen support for the work they joined Beckett in assembling a collection of essays published in 1929 under the title of *Our Exagmi-nation Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. The American poet William Carlos Williams also contributed to the volume. Joyce's family life was troubled by the increasing instability of his daughter Lucia, whose schizophrenic symptoms were unsuccessfully treated by a

series of psychiatrists. But there were happy events as well. Joyce's son Giorgio married, and a grandson, Stephen, was born. And Joyce and Nora were themselves finally married in London in 1931, an action that legally secured inheritances for their progeny.

In 1933 a favorable court decision by Judge John M. Woolsey of the United States District Court of New York cleared *Ulysses* of charges of obscenity and allowed for its publication by Random House Press. But the political storm clouds gathering in Europe in the 1930s proved threatening to Joyce and the extended Jewish family, by marriage, of his son. *Finnegans Wake* was completed and its publication celebrated at a lavish party for Joyce's forty-seventh birthday on February 2, 1939. But before the end of the following year, the Joyces had left Paris for Zurich, desperately worried about the safety of their institutionalized daughter. They arrived in Zurich in December 1940 and less than a month later, Joyce was dead, from peritonitis following surgery for a perforated ulcer.

Joyce's works reflected his life, his times, and his varied cultures both in their themes and in their aesthetic aims and development. Late Victorian and turn-of-the-century Ireland placed him in a country whose quasi-colonial status gave it representation in the British parliament but little control over its own affairs. As a result Ireland suffered economic stagnation, rural and urban poverty, and a sense of oppression that led to a Home Rule movement ultimately frustrated by the Catholic Church's role in the downfall of Charles Stewart Parnell, the country's best hope for independence through parliamentary negotiation. Joyce's *Dubliners* stories reflect the national despondency following this failure as a condition of paralysis that called less for political agitation against England than an unflinching self-examination. In this respect Joyce departed from the aims of Irish cultural nationalism – the movement known as the Celtic Revival whose recovery of the Gaelic language and of Irish myth and folklore he regarded as parochial and backward-looking. Inspired by the realism of Ibsen's drama, *Dubliners* offers stories of schoolboy yearning, of entrapment by duty and responsibility, oppressive working conditions, the degradation of patriotism, the ravage of families by alcoholism. The last story in the collection, "The Dead," thematizes the ambiguous clash between Irish revival insularity and the protagonist's look toward the Continent for cultural sustenance.

Joyce characterized his prose in these stories as a style of "scrupulous meanness." Influenced, like Pound, by the style of Gustave Flaubert, Joyce adopted a mode of writing in clean, dry, hard prose that exemplified the modernists' repudiation of the opulent emotional language they attributed to romanticism. Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* also resorts to another tenet of modernism – classicism – to frame its *Kunsterroman*, its semiautobiographical account of a sensitive boy growing up in Dublin with aesthetic aspirations. By naming its protagonist Stephen Dedalus, the novel evokes the myth of Icarus, the son of the artist Dedalus whose winged escape from ancient Crete was aborted by flying too close to the sun, melting the wax that held his wings together. The classical superstructure endows the story of young Dedalus's struggles to free himself from the squalor of poverty, and from the oppressive constraints of the Catholic Church, with universal significance. *A Portrait* also offers moments of enlightenment and self-recognition, termed "epiphany" by Joyce, as antidotes to the paralysis of Dublin life.

Stylistically, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* exhibits an imitative form of writing that expresses the stages of Stephen Dedalus's artistic development in a changing play of language reflective of his evolving consciousness. Childhood is narrated in simple prose, the romantic longings of early adolescence in lyrical language, the rigorous scholasticism of the university phase in erudite expression. A final series of diary entries ending the novel make it clear that the shifting narrative styles

represented aesthetic simulations rather than actual representations of Stephen's consciousness. *A Portrait* ends with Stephen Dedalus, like Icarus, attempting to escape his island home for the Continent. Joyce's next novel, *Ulysses*, begins with Stephen Dedalus returned to Dublin, living in desolate aimlessness following the death of his mother.

In *Ulysses* both the thematic enactment of classical mythology and the experiments with stylistic imitation undergo a dramatic enlargement and expansion. Set in 1904 Dublin, *Ulysses* is structured in correspondence with Homer's classic epic, the *Odyssey*, although the precise relation of each chapter to an Odyssean adventure became apparent only thanks to a schema Joyce sent to his Italian translator, Carlo Linati. The story of Homer's voyager, who must overcome tremendous obstacles with wit and courage, is invested in the unlikely figure of a 38-year-old Jewish advertising canvasser named Leopold Bloom. Joyce's early love of drama recrudesces in the novel's classical unity of time, place, and action. Set on a single specific day, June 16, 1904 in Dublin, the action consists of the movements and interactions not only of the protagonists – Bloom, his wife Marion (Molly), and Stephen Dedalus – but also of a considerable portion of the city's colorful population. The variations from the *Odyssey* are as intriguing as the correspondences. Bloom's obstacles and crises are as much psychological as they are social. He must come to terms with grief over the loss of his infant son, the suicide of his father, and the infidelity of his wife who, unlike the faithful Penelope of the classic, initiates an adulterous affair with her impresario on this day. Bloom also encounters prejudice and anti-Semitism, while Stephen Dedalus, still trying to realize a vocation as an artist, finds himself excluded from the Irish literary and intellectual milieu. The city of Dublin is represented with what has been called “documentary” realism not only for its historically verifiable addresses, buildings, and institutions, but also for the historical personages mixed in with its fictional figures. This creates an effect of tremendous vitality, as its citizens, on the move, visit shops, school, post office, public bath, church, cemetery, newspaper office, library, museum, pubs and eateries, beach, hospital, and house of prostitution.

Ulysses owed its notoriety not only to features of its content but also to the conspicuous experiments in style that produced a dizzying variety of narrative voices. The style of narration, changing virtually chapter by chapter, confronts the reader with considerable difficulty. The early episodes are told by an impersonal voice that nonetheless moves in and out of the minds of protagonists whose thoughts are reported in the process of shaping and expressing. In addition to this “stream of consciousness,” Joyce also produces a variant of the imitative style introduced in *A Portrait* by having the narration reflect themes, settings, and Homeric correspondences. The episode reporting Bloom's visit to the newspaper office is divided into sections introduced by captions or “headlines,” for example, as well as windy rhetoric befitting Aeolus, the keeper of the winds. The episode corresponding to the lure of the siren song tempting Odysseus and his men highlights the musical qualities of the narrative prose, beginning with an “overture” that gives each character a musical leitmotif. The episode set in the Holles Street Maternity Hospital recapitulates the evolving styles of English literary history in mimicry of the embryonic development of a fetus. The final episode is produced by the irrepressible and lively thoughts of Molly Bloom in bed, as she revisits her day and her past. The novel ends with her memory of the moment of love on Howth Hill when she offered an affirmative “yes I said yes I will Yes” to her husband's proposal and to life itself.

The difficulty of reading *Ulysses* is eclipsed by the challenges posed by *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's last work. Its title, inspired by an Irish ballad of a dead hod carrier who is revived by a splash of whiskey during his wake, points to death and resurrection as overall themes of the work. But the

phantasmagoric character of the writing – reminiscent of the hallucinatory brothel episode in *Ulysses* – departs dramatically from the realism of Joyce's earlier texts. The book is without stable characters, setting, or actions. Everything is so fluid and multiple that everything is indeterminate. Although there appears to be a family at the heart of the work – possibly named Earwicker and consisting of mother, father, twin sons, and daughter – nothing is certain about them including their names, numbers, or species. The mother – Anna Livia Plurabelle, as she is designated – may be old or young, or a hen, or the river Liffey. Her husband maybe a pub-keeper, or a mythic giant, or the landscape of Dublin itself. The children, twin sons who are enemies and a daughter who is also sometimes doubled, variously take form as tree, stone, cloud, or rainbow. There are transgressions and sins at issue, including aggression and possible incest, but trials and inquests fail to clarify them. Like *Ulysses*, the work has mythic resonances although these too are multiple. Genesis, the Stations of the Cross, the Oedipus myth, Irish mythology, all play structural roles. Joyce talked of the *Wake* as a “night” work, and the analogue of dream – particularly Freudian dream – offers arguably the best analytical tool for making sense of its seeming nonsense. This nonsense also permeates the language, whose words are multiple, interlaced with other words and meanings reminiscent of the “portmanteau words” in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. The *Wake*'s language layers its English with words from many other languages, creating a universalizing effect.

Joyce's influence on later twentieth-century literature and culture has been enormous, as has been his appeal to common readers. He has had an impact not only on such Irish writers as Samuel Beckett and Flann O'Brien, but also on a much wider international field. Vladimir Nabokov and Umberto Eco reflect Joyce's influence in their word play, puns and puzzles, and historical and arcane trivia. The Latin American writers strongly influenced by Joyce include Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, Pablo Neruda of Chile, and Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz of Mexico. Anthony Burgess, Salman Rushdie, and J. M. Coetzee gloss Joyce significantly in their work. The British playwright Tom Stoppard's 1974 play *Travesties* features Joyce's conflict with an English consular official during a staging of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in Zurich. Joyce's writing also provided instructive study for such influential late twentieth-century critical theorists as Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. In 1979, the American composer John Cage produced an avant garde piece of music titled *Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on “Finnegans Wake.”* Film adaptations of Joyce's work include an early cinematic version of *Finnegans Wake* by the film animator Mary Ellen Bute, as well as ambitious adaptations of *Ulysses* by Joseph Strick (1967) and Sean Walsh (2003). The Strick film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1967. The famous American director John Huston filmed the *Dubliners* story “The Dead” in 1987. A film titled *Nora*, produced by Pat Murphy in 2000, is based on the biography of Joyce's wife by Brenda Maddox. The International James Joyce Foundation, established in 1967, sponsors an international symposium on Joyce's work every two years, generally in a European city. In alternating years a North American Joyce conference is held in the US or Canada. In addition, Joyce study groups formed by common non-academic readers meet regularly all over the world.

SEE ALSO: Beckett, Samuel (BIF); Censorship and the Novel (BIF); Critical Theory and the Novel (BIF); Irish Fiction (BIF); Little Magazines (AF); Modernist Fiction (BIF); O'Brien, Flann (BIF)

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Atherton, J. S. (1959). *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's “Finnegans Wake.”* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Attridge, D. (2000). *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History.* Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press.
- Beck, W. (1969). *Joyce's "Dubliners": Substance, Vision, and Art*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Beja, M. (1992). *James Joyce: A Literary Life*. Columbus: Ohio University Press.
- Bishop, J. (1986). *Joyce's Book of the Dark: "Finnegans Wake."* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Brivic, S. (1985). *JoycetheCreator*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Brown, R. (1988). *James Joyce and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Budgen, F. (1973). *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses."* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Campbell, J.; Robinson, H. M. (1969). *A Skeleton Key to "Finnegans Wake."* New York: Viking.
- Cheng, V. (1995). *Joyce, Race, and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Devlin, K. J. (1991). *Wandering and Return in "Finnegans Wake."* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ellmann, R. (1983). *James Joyce*, rev. edn. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gifford, D. (1982). *Notes for "Dubliners" and "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,"* 2nd edn. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gifford, D. (with Seidman, R. J.), (1989). *"Ulysses" Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's "Ulysses,"* rev. and expanded edn. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilbert, S. (1952). *James Joyce's "Ulysses."* New York: Vintage.
- Gillespie, M. P. (1989). *Reading the Book of Himself*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Groden, M. (1977). *Ulysses in Progress*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Henke, S. A. (1990). *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire*. New York: Routledge.
- Joyce, J. (1963). *Stephen Hero* [1944]. New York: New Directions.
- Joyce, J. (1986). *Ulysses* [1922] (ed. Gabler, H. W. with Steppe, W. ; Melchior, C.). New York: Vintage.
- Joyce, J. (1999). *Finnegans Wake* [1939]. New York: Penguin.
- Joyce, J. (2006a). *Dubliners* [1914] (ed. Norris, M.). New York: Norton.
- Joyce, J. (2006b). *Exiles* [1918]. London: Nick Hern.
- Joyce, J. (2007). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [1916] (ed. Riquelme, J. P.). New York: Norton.
- Joyce, S. (1958). *My Brother's Keeper*. New York: Viking.
- Kenner, H. (1979). *Joyce's Voices*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kenner, H. (1987). *Ulysses*, rev. edn. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kershner, R. B. (1989). *Joyce, Bakhtin, and Popular Literature: Chronicles of Disorder*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Killeen, T. (2004). *"Ulysses" Unbound*. Bray: Wordwell.
- Lawrence. (1981). *The Odyssey of Style in "Ulysses."* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Leonard, G. (1993). *Reading "Dubliners" Again: A Lacanian Perspective*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Maddox, B. (1988). *Nora: The RealLife of Molly Bloom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Mahaffey, V. (1995). *Reauthorizing Joyce*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.
- McCarthy, P. A. (1980). *The Riddles of "Finnegans Wake."* Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses.
- McHugh, R. (1991). *Annotations to "Finnegans Wake,"* rev. edn. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

University Press.
Norris, M. (1992). *Joyce's Web*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Norris, M. (2003). *Suspicious Readings of Joyce's "Dubliners."* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Riquelme, J. P. (1983). *Teller and Tale in Joyce's Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Scott, B. K. (1984). *Joyce and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Senn, Fritz, (1984). *Joyce's Dislocations* (ed. Riquelme, J. P.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Shechner, M. (1974). *Joyce in Nighttown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Valente, J. (1995). *James Joyce and the Problem of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MARGOT NORRIS

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

NORRIS, M. (2011). Joyce, James. In B. W. Shaffer, P. O'Donnell, D. W. Madden, & et. al., *Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of literature: the encyclopedia of twentieth-century fiction*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/joyce_james_1882_1941

 Wiley ©2011

 Wiley ©2011

APA

NORRIS, M. (2011). Joyce, James. In B. W. Shaffer, P. O'Donnell, D. W. Madden, & et. al., *Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of literature: the encyclopedia of twentieth-century fiction*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/joyce_james_1882_1941

Chicago

NORRIS, MARGOT. "Joyce, James." In *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Literature: The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*, by Brian W. Shaffer, Patrick O'Donnell, David W. Madden, and et. al.. Wiley, 2011. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/joyce_james_1882_1941

Harvard

NORRIS, M. (2011). Joyce, James. In B.W. Shaffer, P. O'Donnell, D.W. Madden & et. al., *Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of literature: the encyclopedia of twentieth-century fiction*. [Online]. Hoboken: Wiley. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/joyce_james_1882_1941 [Accessed 16 October 2019].

MLA

NORRIS, MARGOT. "Joyce, James." *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Literature: The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Brian W. Shaffer, et al., Wiley, 1st edition, 2011. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/joyce_james_1882_1941. Accessed 16 Oct. 2019.