

James Joyce: A Biography

James Augustine Joyce, the eldest surviving son of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane ('May') Joyce, was born in Dublin on 2 February 1882. He attended Clongowes Wood College, a Jesuit boys' school in County Kildare, until his father lost his job as a Rates Collector in 1891. Around the same time, Joyce took 'Aloysius' as his confirmation name. After a brief spell at the Christian Brothers School, all of the Joyce brothers entered Belvedere College, a Jesuit boys' day school; fortunately, the school fees were waived.

In 1894, with the Joyces' finances dwindling further, the family moved house for the fourth time since Joyce's birth. They also sold off their last remaining Cork property. Despite increasing poverty and upheaval, Joyce managed to win a prize for his excellent exam results and wrote an essay on *Ulysses* which, arguably, sowed the seeds for Joyce's 1922 masterpiece of the same name. In 1896 Joyce was made prefect of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a devotional society. However, he was not as pure as he seemed; Joyce claimed to have begun his 'sexual life' later that year, at the age of fourteen.[1]

Education

In 1898, Joyce began studying modern languages at the Royal University (now University College, Dublin). During his time at university Joyce published several papers on literature, history, and politics. He also enjoyed visits to the music hall.[2] Joyce became particularly interested in the work of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and Irish writer W. B. Yeats. In 1902, on a visit to London, Joyce met Yeats who introduced him to the British poet and critic Arthur Symons. In the same year, Joyce registered to study medicine at the Royal University but decided to leave Dublin and start medical school in Paris instead. Joyce's Parisian days were largely spent reading philosophy or literature, rather than learning about medicine. Whilst back in Dublin for Christmas, Joyce met Oliver St John Gogarty, a fellow medical student and poet who was to be reimagined as Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses* [1] (1922). Joyce returned to Paris in January but soon gave up his course. In 1903, Joyce came back to Dublin to be with his ailing mother who died on 13 August.

Early Works and Family

1904 was a significant year for Joyce. He began work on his short story collection *Dubliners* [2] (1914) and *Stephen Hero* (a semi-biographical novel), wrote his first poetry collection *Chamber Music* [3] (1907), and wrote an essay entitled 'A Portrait of the Artist' which would later be transformed into a novel entitled *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [4] (1916). Shortly after leaving the family home, Joyce met Nora Barnacle, a charming chambermaid hailing from Galway. Joyce and Nora first went out together on 16 June 1904, the date on which *Ulysses* is set. Four months later, the couple left Dublin for continental Europe. They arrived in Zurich but soon moved to Pola as Joyce secured a job teaching English with the Berlitz School.

In 1905, Joyce transferred to the Berlitz School in Trieste. Except for six months in Rome, attempting to become a banker, Joyce stayed in Trieste for the next eleven years. On 27 July 1905, Joyce's son, Giorgio, was born. He was followed by Joyce's daughter, Lucia, who was born on 26 July 1907. Around the time of Lucia's birth, Joyce was hospitalised with rheumatic fever and began to experience the eye troubles which would plague him throughout his life. Despite his below-par health and lack of money, Joyce managed to avail himself of Trieste's cultural delights; drinking, dining, more drinking, theatre, popular opera, dances, concerts, and films. He also took singing lessons; Joyce's teacher, Francesco Ricardo Sinico, 'praised his voice but told him he would need two years to train it properly'.^[3] Unfortunately, Joyce did not have the funds to continue with his lessons for the suggested length of time. Nonetheless, Joyce's singing teacher clearly made an impression on him as he used his name for Captain and Emily Sinico in his *Dubliners* story 'A Painful Case'.



[5]

Statue of Joyce in Trieste (Italy) by S.Wetzel (CC BY-SA 4.0) via Wikimedia Commons

In 1909, Joyce befriended Ettore Schmitz (Italian author 'Italo Svevo') who praised Joyce's unfinished manuscripts for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and persuaded him to finish the novel. Whilst back in Dublin for talks with publishers, Joyce bumped into an old acquaintance, Vincent Cosgrave, who claimed that Nora had enjoyed relations with him whilst committed to Joyce. Joyce's conflicted emotions regarding this claim can be traced in his letters to Nora.^[4] Joyce eventually reconciled his differences with Nora and returned to Trieste in October 1909. In December of the same year, Joyce went back to Dublin to open one of the city's first permanent cinemas ? *The Volta*. This was a short-lived business venture; the cinema closed down in April 1910.^[5]

Struggle and Success

From 1910 to 1913, Joyce was mainly engaged in revising *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and battling to get *Dubliners* published. To earn money, Joyce lectured at the Università; his series of *Hamlet* lectures could well have been an inspiration for Stephen's *Hamlet* theory in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode of *Ulysses*. In 1914, thanks to the enthusiasm of fellow Modernist Ezra Pound, *Dubliners* was serialised in the *Egoist*, a literary journal. Later that year, *Dubliners* was finally published as a novel by Grant Richards. Whilst other young men were going off to fight in the First World War, Joyce began a prolific writing period; in the final months of 1914, Joyce wrote *Giacomo Joyce* (a semi-autobiographical multilingual novelette which Joyce never attempted to publish), drafted *Exiles* (Joyce's only play), and began writing *Ulysses* (Joyce's famous modern epic).^[6]

In 1915, Joyce, Nora, Giorgio, and Lucia, left Trieste for neutral Zurich. Stanislaus, Joyce's brother who had also been living in Trieste, failed to escape; he was placed in an Austrian detention centre until the end of the war. For the next few years, aided by grants from the Royal Literary Fund and the British Civil List (secured

by Yeats and Pound), Joyce continued to write steadily. Joyce finished *Exiles* in May 1915 and, despite undergoing his first eye operation in August 1917, *Ulysses* continued to progress.

Controversy and Final Works

In 1918, *Exiles* was published by Grant Richards, and in 1919 it was performed in Munich. From March 1918 to September 1920, *Ulysses* (still unfinished) was serialised in the *Little Review*, another literary magazine. However, not many subscribers were able to read certain episodes ('Laestrygonians', 'Scylla and Charybdis', 'Cyclops', and 'Nausicaa') as the magazines were confiscated and burned by the US Postal Authorities. The *Egoist* successfully published and distributed edited (less obscene) versions of several *Ulysses* episodes. In 1921, the *Little Review* was convicted of publishing obscenities and ceased publication. Joyce, now living in Paris (the whole family moved in October 1920), befriended Sylvia Beach who offered to publish *Ulysses* in its entirety under the imprint of her Paris bookshop, Shakespeare and Company. Joyce agreed to Beach's offer; after many revisions before and during the proof stages, the first copies of *Ulysses* were published on Joyce's fortieth birthday, 2/2/1922.[7]

In 1923, Joyce began writing *Work in Progress* which would later become his experimental masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake* [6] (1939). The following year, the first fragments of *Work in Progress* were published in *Transatlantic Review*, with further instalments being published in *transition* in 1927. 1927 also saw the publication of Joyce's second poetry collection, *Pomes Penyeach*, published by Shakespeare and Company. In 1928 *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (an early, shorter version of *Finnegans Wake*) was published in New York. Joyce was also recorded reading *Anna Livia Plurabelle* aloud; he played this recording to the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein when they met the following year.[8]

1929 and 1931 saw French translations of *Ulysses* and *Anna Livia Plurabelle* respectively. In 1930, despite undergoing a series of further eye operations, Joyce finished and published *Haveth Childers Everywhere*, a sequel to *Anna Livia Plurabelle* and another step towards *Finnegans Wake*. On 4 July 1931, Joyce and Nora were officially married, in London. In December of the same year, Joyce's father passed away. In 1932 (15 February), Joyce's grandson, Stephen James Joyce, was born to Giorgio and his wife Helen. Meanwhile, Lucia's mental health deteriorated; she was seen by a clinic in 1932, hospitalised in 1933, and treated by analytical psychiatrist Carl Jung in 1934.

In 1933, *Ulysses* faced an obscenity trial in America. After deliberation, Judge John M. Woolsey declared that the book was not obscene so could be legally published in the USA. This decision prompted the publication of several versions of *Ulysses* over the next couple of years, including the Random House edition (1934), the Limited Editions Club edition with illustrations by Henri Matisse (1935), and the Bodley Head edition (1936). In 1938, Joyce finished *Finnegans Wake*; the following year it was published simultaneously in London and New York. In September 1939, World War Two broke out and the Joyce family moved back to neutral Zurich. On 13 January 1941 Joyce died, following surgery on a perforated ulcer. He was buried in Fluntern cemetery, Zurich, foregoing Catholic last rites. Nora died ten years later and was buried separately in Fluntern. Both bodies were reburied together in 1966.

To see the work of Ezra Pound, contemporary champion of Joyce's fiction, visit the [Pound](#) [7] section of the website.

References

- [1] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 48.
- [2] Jeri Johnson, 'A Chronology of James Joyce?', in James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. lxiii-lxix (p. lxiv).

- [3] John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste, 1904-1920*, (Dublin, The Lilliput Press, 2001), pp. 74-5.
- [4] Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 156-196.
- [5] For more information on Joyce's cinema, see John McCourt (ed.), *Roll Away the Reel World: James Joyce and Cinema* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010) ? especially chapters one and two. Also see my [3-minute lecture on Joyce and cinema](#) [8].
- [6] For an in-depth look at this prolific writing period, see John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*, pp. 191-253.
- [7] For a detailed account of the composition of *Ulysses*, see Luca Crispi, 'Manuscript Timeline 1905-1922', *Genetic Joyce Studies*, 4 (2004), freely available online at: <http://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/GJS4/GJS4%20Crispi.htm> [9].
- [8] For more information of Joyce's meeting with Eisenstein, see Gösta Werner, 'James Joyce and Sergei Eisenstein', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 27:3 (1990), 491-507.

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- [1] <http://writersinspire.org/content/ulysses>
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- [4] <http://writersinspire.org/content/portrait-artist-young-man>
- [5] <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JamesJoyce.jpg>
- [6] <http://writersinspire.org/content/finnegans-wake>
- [7] <http://writersinspire.org/./writers/ezra-pound>
- [8] <http://writersinspire.org/ulysses-joyce-and-cinema>
- [9] <http://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/GJS4/GJS4%20Crispi.htm>