

James Joyce

IRISH AUTHOR

WRITTEN BY:

- [James Stephen Atherton](#)
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Alternative Title: James Augustine Aloysius Joyce

James Joyce, in full **James Augustine Aloysius Joyce**, (born February 2, 1882, [Dublin](#), Ireland—died January 13, 1941, [Zürich](#), Switzerland), Irish novelist noted for his experimental use of language and exploration of new literary methods in such large works of fiction as [Ulysses](#) (1922) and [Finnegans Wake](#) (1939).

TOP QUESTIONS

What is James Joyce famous for?

Where did James Joyce live?

What was James Joyce's family like?

What were James Joyce's most important works?

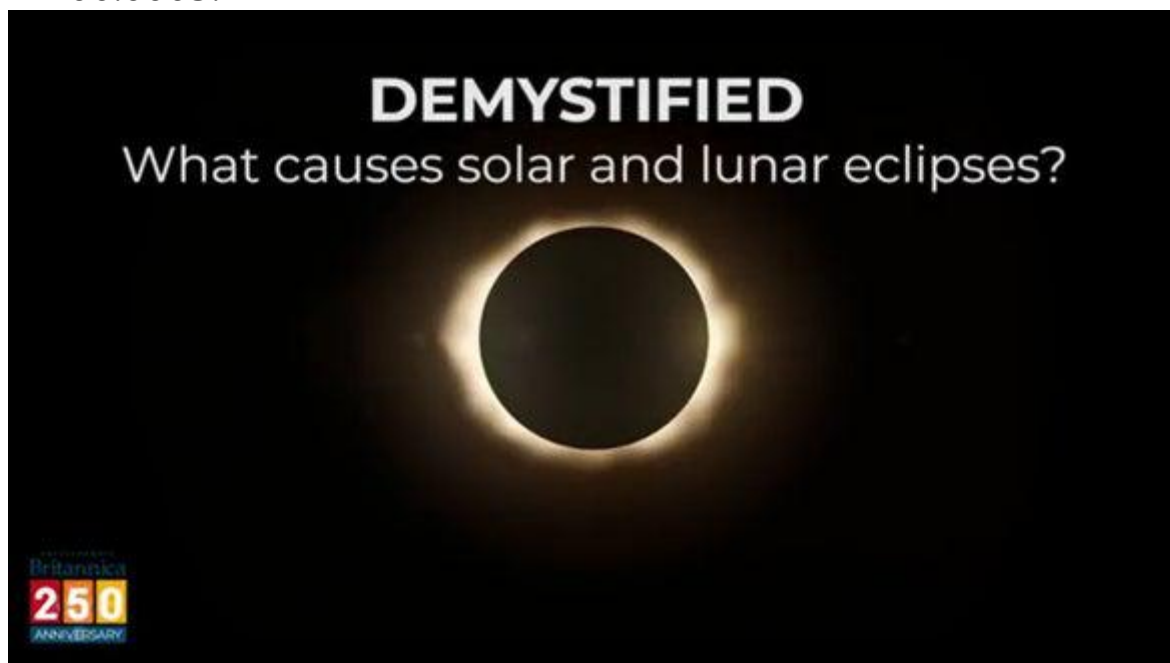
Early Life

Joyce, the eldest of 10 children in his family to survive infancy, was sent at age six to Clongowes Wood College, a Jesuit boarding school that has been described as “the Eton of Ireland.” But his father was not the man to stay affluent for long; he drank, neglected his affairs, and borrowed money from his office, and his family sank deeper and deeper into poverty, the children becoming accustomed to conditions of increasing sordidness. Joyce did not return to Clongowes in 1891; instead he stayed at home for the next two years and tried to educate himself, asking his mother to check his work. In April 1893 he and his brother Stanislaus were admitted, without fees, to Belvedere College, a Jesuit [grammar school](#) in Dublin. Joyce did well there academically and was twice elected president of the Marian Society, a position virtually that of head boy. He left,

however, under a cloud, as it was thought (correctly) that he had lost his Roman Catholic faith.

He entered University College, Dublin, which was then staffed by Jesuit priests. There he studied languages and reserved his energies for extracurricular activities, reading widely—particularly in books not recommended by the Jesuits—and taking an active part in the college’s Literary and Historical Society. Greatly admiring [Henrik Ibsen](#), he learned Dano-Norwegian to read the original and had an article, “Ibsen’s New Drama”—a review of the [play *When We Dead Awaken*](#)—published in the London *Fortnightly Review* in 1900 just after his 18th birthday. This early success confirmed Joyce in his resolution to become a writer and persuaded his family, friends, and teachers that the resolution was justified. In October 1901 he published an [essay](#), “The Day of the Rabblement,” attacking the Irish Literary Theatre (later the [Abbey Theatre](#), in Dublin) for catering to popular taste.

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Joyce was leading a dissolute life at this time but worked sufficiently hard to pass his final examinations, matriculating with “second-class honours in Latin” and obtaining the degree of B.A. on October 31, 1902. Never did he relax his efforts to master the art of writing.

He wrote verses and experimented with short prose passages that he called “epiphanies,” a word that Joyce used to describe his accounts of moments when the real truth about some person or object was revealed. To support himself while writing, he decided to become a doctor, but, after attending a few lectures in Dublin, he borrowed what money he could and went to [Paris](#), where he abandoned the idea of medical studies, wrote some book reviews, and studied in the Sainte-Geneviève Library.

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Recalled home in April 1903 because his mother was dying, he tried various occupations, including teaching, and lived at various addresses, including the Martello Tower at Sandycove, which later became a museum. He had begun writing a lengthy naturalistic [novel](#), *Stephen Hero*, based on the events of his own life, when in 1904 George Russell offered £1 each for some simple short stories with an Irish background to appear in a farmers’ magazine, *The Irish Homestead*. In response Joyce began writing the stories published as [Dubliners](#) (1914). Three stories—“The Sisters,” “Eveline,” and “After the Race”—had appeared under the pseudonym [Stephen Dedalus](#) before the editor decided that Joyce’s work was not suitable for his readers. Meanwhile, Joyce had met Nora Barnacle in June 1904; they probably had their first date, and first sexual encounter, on June 16, the day that he chose as what is known as “Bloomsday” (the day of his novel *Ulysses*). Eventually he persuaded her to leave [Ireland](#) with him, although he refused, on principle, to go through a ceremony of marriage. They left Dublin together in October 1904.

Early Travels And Works

Joyce obtained a position in the Berlitz School at [Pola](#) in [Austria-Hungary](#) (now Pula, Croatia), working in his spare time at his novel and short stories. In 1905 they moved to [Trieste](#), where James’s brother Stanislaus joined them and where their children, Giorgio

and Lucia, were born. In 1906–07, for eight months, he worked at a bank in Rome, disliking almost everything he saw. Ireland seemed pleasant by contrast; he wrote to Stanislaus that he had not given credit in his stories to the Irish virtue of hospitality and began to plan a new story, “[The Dead](#).” The early stories were meant, he said, to show the stultifying inertia and social conformity from which Dublin suffered, but they are written with a vividness that arises from his success in making every word and every detail significant. His studies in European [literature](#) had interested him in both the [Symbolists](#) and the [realists](#) of the second half of the 19th century; his work began to show a synthesis of these two rival movements. He decided that *Stephen Hero* lacked artistic control and form and rewrote it as “a work in five chapters” under a title—[A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man](#)—intended to direct attention to its focus upon the central figure.

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In 1909 he visited Ireland twice to try to publish *Dubliners* and set up a chain of Irish cinemas. Neither effort succeeded, and he was distressed when a former friend told him that he had shared Nora’s affections in the summer of 1904. Another old friend proved this to be a lie. Joyce always felt that he had been betrayed, however, and the theme of betrayal runs through much of his later writings. When Italy declared war in 1915 Stanislaus was interned, but James and his family were allowed to go to Zürich. At first, while he gave private lessons in English and worked on the early chapters of *Ulysses*—which he had first thought of as another [short story](#) about a “Mr. Hunter”—his financial difficulties were great. He was helped by a large grant from Edith Rockefeller McCormick and finally by a series of grants from Harriet Shaw Weaver, editor of the *Egoist* magazine, which by 1930 had amounted to more than £23,000. Her generosity resulted partly from her admiration for his work and partly from her sympathy with his difficulties, for, as well as poverty, he had to contend with eye diseases that never really left him. From February 1917 until 1930 he endured a series of 25 operations for iritis, glaucoma, and cataracts, sometimes being for short intervals totally blind. Despite this he kept up his spirits and

continued working, some of his most joyful passages being composed when his health was at its worst.

Unable to find an English printer willing to set up [*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*](#) for book publication, Weaver published it herself, having the sheets printed in the United States, where it was also published, on December 29, 1916, by B.W. Huebsch, in advance of the English Egoist Press edition. Encouraged by the acclaim given to this, in March 1918, the American *Little Review* began to publish episodes from *Ulysses*, continuing until the work was banned in December 1920. An autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist* traces the intellectual and emotional development of a young man named [Stephen Dedalus](#) and ends with his decision to leave Dublin for Paris to devote his life to art. The last words of Stephen prior to his departure are thought to express the author's feelings upon the same occasion in his own life:

Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.



James Joyce

QUICK FACTS



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BORN

February 2, 1882

[Dublin, Ireland](#)

DIED

January 13, 1941 (aged 58)

[Zürich, Switzerland](#)

NOTABLE WORKS

- ["Ulysses"](#)
- ["Finnegans Wake"](#)
- ["A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"](#)
- ["Dubliners"](#)
- ["The Dead"](#)

MOVEMENT / STYLE

- [Modernism](#)

[Ulysses](#)

After [World War I](#) Joyce returned for a few months to [Trieste](#), and then—at the invitation of [Ezra Pound](#)—in July 1920 he went to [Paris](#). His [novel](#) [Ulysses](#) was published there on February 2, 1922, by [Sylvia Beach](#), proprietor of the bookshop [Shakespeare and Company](#). *Ulysses* is constructed as a modern parallel to [Homer](#)'s [Odyssey](#). All of the action of the novel takes place in [Dublin](#) on a single day (June 16, 1904). The three central

characters—Stephen Dedalus (the hero of Joyce’s earlier *Portrait of the Artist*), [Leopold Bloom](#), and his wife, [Molly Bloom](#)—are intended to be modern counterparts of [Telemachus](#), [Ulysses](#), and [Penelope](#). By the use of interior monologue, Joyce reveals the innermost thoughts and feelings of these characters as they live hour by hour, passing from a public bath to a funeral, library, maternity hospital, and brothel.

The main strength of *Ulysses* lies in its depth of character portrayal and its breadth of humour. Yet the book is most famous for its use of a variant of the [interior monologue](#) known as the [stream-of-consciousness](#) technique. Joyce claimed to have taken this technique from a largely forgotten French writer, [Édouard Dujardin](#), who had used interior monologues in his novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888; *We’ll to the Woods No More*), but many critics have pointed out that it is at least as old as the novel, though no one before Joyce had used it so continuously. Joyce’s major [innovation](#) was to carry the interior monologue one step further by rendering, for the first time in [literature](#), the [myriad](#) flow of impressions, half thoughts, associations, lapses and hesitations, incidental worries, and sudden impulses that form part of the individual’s conscious awareness along with the trend of his rational thoughts. This stream-of-consciousness technique proved widely influential in much 20th-century fiction.

The technical and stylistic devices in *Ulysses* are abundant, particularly in the much-praised “Oxen of the Sun” chapter (Episode 14), in which the language goes through every stage in the development of English prose from Anglo-Saxon to the present day to symbolize the growth of a fetus in the womb. The effect of these devices is often to add intensity and depth, as, for example, in the “Aeolus” chapter (Episode 7) set in a newspaper office, with [rhetoric](#) as the theme. Joyce inserted into it hundreds of [rhetorical](#) figures and many references to winds—something “blows up” instead of happening, people “raise the wind” when they are getting money—and the reader becomes aware of an unusual liveliness in the very texture of the prose. The famous last chapter of the novel, in which we follow the [stream of consciousness](#) of Molly

Bloom as she lies in bed, gains much of its effect from being written in eight huge unpunctuated paragraphs.