

Biography of James 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).

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.

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.

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.

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.

Analysis of An Encounter

This can be analysed – albeit tentatively – as the behaviour of a man setting out to ‘groom’ young boys. The fact that the narrator picks up on the script-like speech of the old man, as if the man is trying out his best lines on the boys in the hopes of impressing them, showing himself to be a kindred spirit, implies as much. But the narrator, being only a young boy, was unable to grasp this for sure: he can't swear he knows what the man's intentions were.

‘An Encounter’ is another example of James Joyce's ability to suggest so much without having to be explicit. Through using the elliptical methods of modernist literature, some examples of which we've analysed above, he explores how childhood and adolescence often present us with moments whose full meaning and import pass us by, and can only be apprehended and analysed more definitely once we reach adulthood.

Joyce's title, ‘An Encounter’, obviously refers to the conversation the two boys have with the older man towards the end of the story. But what kind of an encounter is it? It's difficult to analyse or pin down, because, in true modernist fashion, Joyce offers us only hints and insinuations, gaps and silences, rather than explicit description of what goes on. Partly, **as in ‘The Sisters’**, this is because the narrator was a young boy at the time of the events described, and didn't have an adult's knowledge of the real world.

But as with that earlier story, Joyce offers several hints that there is something very unsavoury about the old man with a moustache who starts talking to the boys. First, the fact that when he mentions the books of Lytton, he remarks that ‘there were some of Lord Lytton’s works which boys couldn’t read.’ Not because they are too difficult for a boy to understand, but because they address more adult themes (not just sex but violence and the macabre: it’s also worth noting that Lytton was associated with scandal, partly for **having his wife locked away for insanity** when she heckled him at a political event, and partly for having an affair with Byron’s old mistress, Lady Caroline Lamb). Second, that the boy seems very interested in the love lives of the two boys (or even premature sex lives? How old are they, exactly?).

Summary And Analysis of Eveline

Eveline is a young woman living in Dublin with her father. Her mother is dead. Dreaming of a better life beyond the shores of Ireland, Eveline plans to elope with Frank, a sailor who is her secret lover (Eveline’s father having forbade Eveline to see Frank after the two men fell out), and start a new life in Argentina. With her mother gone, Eveline is responsible for the day-to-day running of the household: her father is drunk and only reluctantly tips up his share of the weekly housekeeping money, and her brother Harry is busy working and is away a lot on business (another brother, Ernest, has died).

Eveline herself keeps down a job working in a shop. On Saturday nights, when she asks her father for some money, he tends to unleash a tirade of verbal abuse, and is often drunk. When he eventually hands over his housekeeping money, Eveline has to go to the shops and buy the food for the Sunday dinner at the last minute. Eveline is tired of this life, and so she and Frank book onto a ship leaving for Argentina. But as she is just about to board the ship, Eveline suffers a failure of resolve, and cannot go through with it. She wordlessly turns round and goes home, leaving Frank to board the ship alone.

Like many stories in *Dubliners*, ‘Eveline’ explores the relationship between the past and the future by examining a single person’s attitude to their life in Dublin. Joyce was interested in this relationship, and believed that Ireland – which often had a habit of nostalgically looking backwards and holding onto the past – needed to progress and strive to bring itself up to date. In contrast to those writers and artists such as W. B. Yeats who embraced the ‘Celtic Twilight’ – a mythical, traditional view of Ireland as a land of faery and history – Joyce wanted to see Ireland bring itself into the modern world.

In many ways, Eveline typifies the difficulties faced by many Dubliners at the time. Joyce depicts her current existence as dull, uninspiring, even oppressive, with her abusive father highlighting the idea that the older generation needs to be cast off if young Ireland is to forge itself into a new nation. Even the good aspects of the old Ireland, such as Eveline’s mother and her older brother

Ernest, are dead and gone. The promise of a new start in a new country (in a city that means literally 'good air') seems like the best way to shake off the musty old air of Ireland:

And yet when it comes to crunch time, to the moment when she must board the boat, Eveline is unable to do so, and instead clings to the barrier as though literally clinging to old Ireland and the past which is dead and gone but which she cannot leave behind.

'That was a long time ago', and everything has changed, yet Eveline sits and reminisces about this happy time from her childhood. And this brings us to one of the most difficult aspects of Joyce's story to analyse and pin down. Is it this nostalgia for old Ireland – embodied by her childhood memories – that prevents her from emigrating with Frank? Perhaps. The masterstroke on Joyce's part is refraining from telling us precisely *what* makes Eveline stay in Dublin at the end of the story. Is it filial duty to her father and brother? Or is it a nostalgic attachment to Ireland, and the happy memories that it carries for her, even though most of the people who shared those memories with her have either emigrated (*back to* England, revealingly) or have died?

One of the key words in Joyce's *Dubliners* is 'paralysis': people feel immobilised, unable to move or progress, trapped in their own lives. This, Joyce believed, is what Dublin – and, indeed, much of Ireland – was like as a whole: paralysed. 'Eveline' offers in a little snapshot an example of how deeply such paralysis could run, even leading a young woman to forgo the chance of a new start in favour of remaining in an abusive, dead-end life.