

James Joyce and Ireland

James Joyce was a radical Irish writer that gave us a number of writing works which he will always be remembered by. At the moment, we will be focusing on his autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

1. What is Joyce's point of view of Dublin and Ireland.

James Joyce's relationship with Dublin was complex. After 1909, he never lived in Dublin, and after 1912 he never set foot in Ireland again, despite living until 1941. His reasons for leaving were both personal and reflective of social trends at that time. Despite Joyce's will to break away from Ireland, his greatest work is rooted in that country. It seems as if the writer amassed the entirety of his inspiration there, where he had spent 22 years of his life growing up. The exceptional writing of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* comes as Joyce prepares to depart from his homeland.

2. What does the author write about?

This novel is about the life of Stephen Dedalus from his earliest years until he decides to leave Ireland, and the crucial decisions he makes along the way.

3. What kind of similarities did Joyce and Stephen have?

Like Stephen, Joyce experienced prostitutes during his teenage years and struggled with questions of faith. They were both sons of a religious mother and an incompetent father. He attended Jesuit schools, like Stephen, and left Ireland to pursue the life of a poet and writer. Stephen's education included not only his formal education but also his moral, emotional and intellectual development as he observed and reacted to the world around him. Stephen's journey from a sheltered and religious upbringing to becoming a successful writer is a story of growth and self-discovery. The book's importance lies in its portrayal of a sensitive and complex young man, and in the use of autobiographical details.

Stephen is trying to break through Irish cultural history and create an art that is free from foreign influence. From a very young age, he was aware of the conflict in Ireland because a violent quarrel that broke out at a family Christmas dinner and made a deep impression on him. This shows how the Irish view their own history and future.

4. How does Joyce critique Dublin and Irish society?

Joyce saw a design of so called „nets“ which purpose is to trap the writer himself, as he put it:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.(206)¹

And it was in the act of fleeing those nets (of heading to Trieste, Zurich and Paris) that Joyce could write about Dublin. Great writing rarely emerges from settled, satisfied

societies. Uneasiness provides far more fertile ground for creative impulses. Joyce's writing offers a portrait of Ireland as if he had foreseen the great changes that took place between 1916 and 1922. One of his Dubliners stories, "Ivy Day at the Committee Room", apprehends the political tension in Ireland during the 20th century. Language and native Irish games such as Gaelic football and hurling, had been revived in early decades of this century.

You can also find the language and images of the Church throughout his work. However, the Catholic Church constrained Joyce's imagination and his rejection of Ireland was a rejection of the Church. In his works, James Joyce criticizes Irish society's conservatism, devotion and blindfolded nationalism. His most famous critiques of Irish society can be found in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

" - Do you know what Ireland is? asked Stephen with cold violence. Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow."(184-85)¹

5. Why is it important to talk about James Joyce?

The origin of Joyce's productiveness was probably the nature of social transitions the whole area went through (e.g. strong-willed Catholic middle class began to emerge) and Joyce was the first person from this community to achieve significant fame and success in writing in English.

Today, we honor James Joyce's literary brilliance and the cultural and political diversity of Ireland of his time in this 106th year since the publication of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce left Dublin, but in the course of a life spent thousands of miles from home, Dublin never left him.

Thank you for your attention.

Nadja Nikolajev Ćirić III2

¹Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: New American Library, 1991