

Life and work

What kind of a man was it that wrote some of the most dense, difficult books in the English language? One who knew the same struggles as his characters.

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce, born in 1882 in Dublin, was an Irish novelist.

He was the oldest of Mary and John Joyce's ten children but not the firstborn. Joyce was educated in Jesuit schools, Clongowes Wood College, then at Belvedere College, and finally at University College, Dublin, where he concentrated in modern language.

Joyce's first major work, "Dubliners" published in 1914 but written a decade before, is a collection of short stories that portray violent parents and habits of drinking and fighting. This comes from his own life experience and damaged relationship with his father that has shaped his adult life. John Joyce abandoned his medical degree because of his love for music. While Joyce was away in college, his brother Stanislaus once told him that their father had become a man of „unreliable temper and vile humor“, things had gotten so bad that their mother wanted a divorce. John Joyce later lost his job and because of his debts he was forced to sell some of the property he owned. The Joyce family moved 9 times in only 11 years. By the time he finished school his family lived in a miserable home. Joyce went to Paris to study medicine, just as his father, but came back to Ireland because his mother was on death bed and wanted to see him one last time. „I'm finished. I can't do this anymore. If you can't get well, die. Die, die and be damned with you“, were the words John Joyce told his dying wife. He told his children he hated them and for the last decade of his life he lived and died alone. Joyce didn't hate his father, he actually purchased a bench in memory of him near the hospital where John Joyce had died.

In three decades, he published 2 books of poetry, a collection of short stories, one play and three novels all sharing one thing in common: Dublin. „Each of my books“, he once explained to a friend, “is a book about Dublin. Dublin is a city of scarcely 300,000 population, but it has **become the universal city of my work**”.

In 1904 he met Nora Barnacle who will later become his muse. Even though uneducated, she was highly compelling to Joyce. They weren't married at the time but still, they went to Zurich and started living together. Couple settled in Trieste, Italy where they raised children Giorgio and Lucia. His son struggled with alcohol

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and their daughter was also suffering. After the outbreak of World War I they moved again to Zurich and after World War I was over they moved to Paris.

He had medical issues with his eyes and was almost blind, completely relying on his wife's help.

Joyce died at the age of 58 of a perforated ulcer in Zurich in 1941, where he is buried at Funtern Cemetery.

What significance hides behind the title of the novel?

Portrait - it explores his life but also his personality and emotions he experiences on the way of becoming an artist.

As a young man - implies that this implied time is already gone; he is no longer young but in return – as the first part of the title affirms – he has become the author of a self-portrait; that is, he has become an artist.

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