

Born and raised in Dublin, Joyce left his hometown in 1904. He spent the rest of his life on the European continent, although he remained obsessed with Dublin. If he loved his town so much, why did he leave?

Anthony Burgess (1917-1993), author of *A Clockwork Orange*, had an opinion why a man who wrote about Dublin for the rest of his life would never live there again:

You cannot write in Dublin. There's too much talk. Anybody who's tried to write a book in Dublin knows that the book can be spent in a couple of pub conversations. You don't want to write the book after that. You've done the job of being a bard and given out the words.

Joyce was educated by Jesuits and thought about becoming a priest. Then he left the church, thought about being an opera singer, dropped out of medical school and ... left for Europe.

Even though he no longer lived in Ireland, Joyce used every means available to make sure that all events in *Ulysses* - which is set in Dublin - were geographically exact. He told his friend, Frank Budgen:

I want to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day disappeared from the earth, it could be constructed out of my book. (Quoted in *The Bibliophile's Devotional: 365 Days of Literary Classics*, by Hallie Ephron, at [page 16](#).)

Although Joyce left Dublin, the city really never left him. He frequently wrote about his hometown, obsessing over exact details and locations of houses ... and trees ... and buildings. He wrote letters to his relatives, still living in the city, to verify that his descriptions were accurate.

And it wasn't only physical objects which Joyce wanted to accurately portray. He once told a friend:

One of the things I could never get accustomed to in my youth was the difference I found between life and literature.

Joyce spent his writing career trying to fix that difference. He brought into the open what people think in private by using a literary device we call "interior monologue."

Joyce did not have good eyesight. Peter Costello, a Joyce scholar, thinks that fact impacted his writing:

What he absorbed he took in mostly through the sensations of smell and sound - all his books are filled with these sensations rather than actual visions. The small corner of a shop window he could see and appreciate; the wide vista of the encircling mountains glimpsed at the end of so many Dublin streets passes unmentioned

... [Consequently] much of his impressionable youth was passed with restricted sight. The printed work may well have been more real to him than the physical world around him. For the young Joyce, the world was not visual but aural and literary. (Peter Costello, *James Joyce: The Years of Growth* at pages 119 and 129.)

John McCourt, another Joyce scholar, believes that vision impairment led Joyce to focus on other types of details:

Joyce was not interesting in stunning scenery or in architecturally magnificent cities, but in people and their cultures. His letters are devoid of physical descriptions of the European places he travelled through and lived in. (John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste*, at [page 14](#).)

Ten years after he left Dublin, Joyce began writing *Ulysses*.

See, also:

[**James Joyce - Intro to *Ulysses***](#)

[**James Joyce - Meet Leopold Bloom**](#)

[**James Joyce - Meet Stephen Dedalus**](#)

Credits:

From the British television series, "[The Modern World: Ten Great Writers](#)."

This video clip is from the episode, "[James Joyce's *Ulysses*](#)," which originally aired 10 January 1988, on Channel Four. Online, courtesy [BFI National Library](#) and YouTube. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the series and the episode.

Director:

Nigel Wattis

Writers:

Nigel Wattis and Gillian Greenwood

Commentators:

Anthony Burgess

Clive Hart

James Joyce:

Bryan Murray

Leopold Bloom:

David Suchet

Stephen Dedalus:

John Lynch

Molly Bloom:

Sorcha Cusack

May Dedalus:

Patricia Mort

Nora Joyce:

Deirdra Morris

Frank Budgen:

James Aubrey

Narrator:

Tony Doyle

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/James-Joyce-Obsessed-with-Dublin>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/James-Joyce-Obsessed-with-Dublin>