

John McCourt. *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920*.  
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As John McCourt says in his introduction, “*The Years of Bloom* . . . reassesses the impact of the Triestine Years, from [Joyce’s] arrival in 1904, aged just twenty-two (significantly Stephen’s age in *Ulysses*), until his final reluctant departure in 1920, aged thirty-eight (Bloom’s age)” (4). If taken literally, the title misrepresents the contents of this engaging account of James Joyce’s years in Trieste, Italy, for it suggests that Joyce’s focus in these years is solely his creation of Leopold and Molly Bloom, central characters of *Ulysses*; however, taken metaphorically the title is apt, for the book reveals not only the influences in Trieste that enabled Joyce to develop these now-famous characters but how these influences developed Joyce himself, how he bloomed artistically, politically, and personally while in this busy, political, multicultural city.

While in Trieste, Joyce wrote all or parts of many of his most famous works: *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (originally *Stephen’s Hero*), *Exiles*, and *Ulysses*. As a teacher of English at the Berlitz school, Joyce encountered many and diverse students who often became friends, and further, inspirations for his writing. McCourt provides example after example of character traits, names, even words and statements that Joyce incorporated in his fiction. For example, Ettore Schmitz, says McCourt, is “one of the most important prototypes for Leopold Bloom” (89). Schmitz, a Triestine businessman some twenty years older than Joyce, was, like many Triestines, a “hybrid”: “He was Italian by language and politics, Austrian by citizenship, Austro-German by ancestry and education, Jewish by religion” (86). And from Schmitz’ wife, Livia, Joyce got the name Anna Livia Plurabelle, a character in *Finnegans Wake*. Another model for Bloom was Teodoro Mayer, a Hungarian Jew whose newspapers “led the irredentist struggle” (94), and who published a number of Joyce’s articles.

Joyce, who considered himself a socialist during his first years in Trieste but whose socialism waned, was sympathetic to the irredentists and their nationalist movement. When Mayer asked him to write for his newspaper, Joyce saw it both as a financial opportunity and as an opportunity “to introduce the Triestines to the art, literature and mystery of Ireland and to educate them about the tragedy of its politics” (108). McCourt draws many parallels between the struggles of the Irish against the English and the Italian Triestines against the Austrians, who held political control of Trieste. Clearly, Joyce too saw these parallels. He was distressed by the violence, poverty, and suffering in Ireland; he was angry at the English, but

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he was also angry at the Catholic Church, which, as McCourt points out, Joyce attacks in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Man*. The stories in *Dubliners*, too, reflect Joyce's bifocal views on nationalism and Irish life and customs, especially "The Dead," in which Gabriel declares that his language is not Irish, yet he praises the Irish tradition of hospitality. Joyce is clearly proud of and frustrated by his homeland and his heritage. After a visit to Dublin in a final attempt to have *Dubliners* published by Maunsel & Co., Joyce left Ireland, never to return.

The entire time Joyce was in Trieste, he fought to get *Dubliners* published. This struggle reflects Joyce's belief in himself and his tenacity. He succeeded after ten years, with help from Ezra Pound, who published its preface in the *Egoist* and thus gave Joyce the confidence to push harder for its publication. The publication of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* followed, published in the *Egoist* in installments. These ten years also included other struggles: real poverty, drinking, self-absorption, and financial dependency on his younger brother, Stanislaus. McCourt's account of Joyce's personal life, and the intertwined lives of Nora and Stanislaus, is the most interesting and troubling part of *The Years of Bloom*. Joyce's love of languages, literature, conversation, drink, theater, opera, cinema, politics, singing (he took singing lessons, and evidently was a fine tenor)—all were indulgences he enjoyed in the lively and diverse Trieste, often literally at Stanislaus' expense. When World War I broke out, Joyce and Nora took their two children and moved to Zurich, but Stanislaus, evidently because of his irredentist sympathies, was interned in Austria. After the war, Joyce and his family returned to Trieste, but it was not the same, and after some months they moved to Paris.

The years in Trieste were over, but as McCourt argues convincingly, Trieste and the people, experiences, cultures, politics, and life there had an undeniable impact on Joyce's greatest works and on Joyce. *The Years of Bloom* is a fact-filled, engaging book that anyone who is at all interested in Joyce would find worth reading. ✿