

# James Stephens

## (author)

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**James Stephens** (February 9, 1882–December 26, 1950) was an Irish novelist and poet.

James Stephens wrote many retellings of Irish fairy tales. His retellings are marked by a rare combination of humor and lyricism (*Deirdre*, and *Irish Fairy Tales* are often singled out for praise). He also wrote several books (*The Crock of Gold*, *Etched in Moonlight*, *Demi-Gods*) which are fiction, but loosely based on Irish fairy tales. "The Crock of Gold," in particular, achieved enduring popularity, and was frequently reprinted throughout the author's lifetime.

Stephens began his career as a poet under the tutelage of "Æ" (George William Russell); his first book of poems, "Insurrections," was published in 1909. His last book, "Kings and the Moon" (1938), was also a volume of verse. In the 1930's Stephens had some acquaintance with

James Joyce, who found that they shared a birth year (and, Joyce mistakenly believed, a birthday). Joyce, who was concerned with his ability to finish what would later become *Finnegans Wake*, proposed at one point that Stephens assist him, with the authorship credited to JJ & S (James Joyce & Stephens, also a pun for the popular Irish whiskey made by John Jameson & Sons). The plan, however, never came to fruition, as Joyce was able to complete the work on his own. In the last decade of his life, Stephens found a new audience through a series of broadcasts on the BBC.

**1880** (9 February). Possible date of birth of James Stephens in Dublin.

**1882** (2 February). Date of birth used by Stephens.

**1886-96** Attended Meath Protestant Industrial School for Boys.

**1896** Employed as a clerk by a Dublin solicitor, Mr Wallace.

**1901** On a gymnastic team which won the Irish Shield. Employed by Reddington & Sainsbury, solicitors.

**1906** Employed as a clerk-typist in the office of T. T. Meccredy & Son, solicitors.

**1907** Began regular contributions to Sinn Féin. Birth of stepdaughter, Iris, on 14 June; shortly thereafter announced that he had a wife, "Cynthia" (Millicent Josephine Gardiner Kavanagh, 22 May 1882-18 December 1960). Discovered by George W. Russell (Æ).

**1909** *Insurrections*. Acted in the Theatre of Ireland's two productions of Seumas O'Kelly's *The Shuiler's Child*. Birth of son, James Naoise, on 26 October.

**1910** Acted in the Theatre of Ireland production of Gerald h Macnamara's *The SPurious Sovereign*. Associated with David Houston, Thomas MacDonagh, and Padraic he was Colum in founding and editing the *Irish Review* (published March 1911-November 1914).

**1911** Acted in Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Bairbre Ruadh*. *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* produced by the Theatre of Ireland.

**1912** *The Charwoman's Daughter*, *The Hill of Vision*, *The Crock of Gold*.

**1913** *Here Are Ladies*, *Five New Poems*. Received a commission from The Nation (London) to write a series of short stories. Moved to Paris. Another production of *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* at the Hardwicke Street Theatre.

*The Crock of Gold* awarded the Polignac Prize.

**1914** *The Demi-Gods*.

**1915** *Songs from the Clay, The Adventures of Seumas Beg/The Rocky Road to Dublin*. Elected Unestablished Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland.

**1916** *Green Branches, The Insurrection in Dublin*.

**1918-24** Appointed Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland

**1918** *Reincarnations*.

**1919** Married "Cynthia" (then a widow) in London on 14 May.

**1920** *Irish Fairy Tales. The Wooing of Julia Elizabeth* (identical to *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth*) produced at the Abbey Theatre by the Dublin Drama League. One of a series of operations for gastric ulcers.

**1922** *Arthur Griffith: journalist and Statesman*.

**1923** *Deirdre*.

**1924** *Little Things, In the Land of Youth. Deirdre* presented the medal for fiction at the Aonach Tailteann festival. Resigned from the National Gallery.

**1925** *A Poetry Recital, Christmas in Freeland*s. On lecture tour in America. Returned to London;

shortly thereafter settled in the Kingsbury suburb of London. To America for another lecture tour.

**1926** *Collected Poems*.

**1927** Friendship with James Joyce commenced.

Joyce suggested that Stephens complete *Finnegans Wake* if unable to do so; this proposal made more formally in 1929.

**1928** *Etched in Moonlight, On Prose and Verse*.

First BBC broadcast. Lecturer at the Third International Book Fair in Florence.

**1929** *Julia Elizabeth: A Comedy, in one act, The Optimist, The Outcast*. In Romania; met Queen Marie. Trip to America; stay with W. T. H. Howe.

**1930** *Theme and Variations*. Trip to America; stay with Howe.

**1931** *How St. Patrick Saves the Irish, Strict Joy*. Trip to America; stay with Howe.

**1932** Trip to America; stay with Howe. A founder member of the Irish Academy of Letters.

**1933-35** Yearly lecture tours to America; visits with Howe.

**1937** Began regular series of BBC broadcasts. Accidental death of son, James Naoise, on 24 December.

**1938** *Kings and the Moon*.

**1940** Moved to Woodside Chapel in Gloucestershire.

**1942** Awarded British Civil List Pension.

**1945** Returned to London.

**1947** Awarded honorary D. Litt. degree from Dublin University (Trinity College).

**1950** Final BBC broadcast. Death at Eversleigh on 26 December.

## External links

- Works by James Stephens at Project Gutenberg

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