

# GLOBAL IRELAND

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Epiphanies in Joyce

*Epiphany Revisited*

Epiphany was one of the most formative terms of Joyce's aesthetic. It originally derives from the Christian account of the divine manifesting itself to three Magi. What seems to have especially appealed to the young Joyce was the idea that it is through a singular and simple event—the birth of a child—that the sacred claimed to reveal itself to the world. Epiphany signals the traversal of the finite by the infinite, of the particular by the universal, of the mundane by the mystical, of time by eternity. It also signals the fact that truth is witnessed by strangers from afar (as the Gentile Magi were) and that this witness involves at least three perspectives or personas. For Joyce epiphany was to become an operative term in his aesthetics of everyday incarnation. Indeed one of his most moving lyrics went by the epiphanic title of "Ecce Puer" and ended with the lines: "Young life is breathed / On the glass; / The world that was not / Comes to pass. / A child is sleeping; / An old man gone. / O, father forsaken, / Forgive your son!"<sup>1</sup> Given the pivotal role played by the father/son idea in *Ulysses* this is, as we shall see, no insignificant sentiment.

It seems to be in the Pola and Paris Notebooks of 1903 and 1904 that Joyce outlined his early understanding of epiphany. Although it is rumoured that Joyce first heard the term from one of his Jesuit teachers, Father Darlington, it is probable that he really only developed his own interpretation of this idea as he worked through theories of Aquinas and Scotus during his sojourns in Paris. From Aquinas he seems to have gleaned an understanding of epiphany as 'whatness' (*quidditas*), meaning

<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *Collected Poems* (1936), *The Essential James Joyce* (London: Grafton Books, 1977) 463.

an experience of luminous radiance (*claritas*) wherein a particular thing serves to illuminate a universal and transcendental Form. (This is the version offered by Stephen in both *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*). From Scotus, another medieval metaphysician, Joyce learned of a somewhat different notion of epiphany as 'thisness' (*haecceitas*), namely the revelation of the universal in and through the particular. The distinction is subtle but by no means irrelevant. And this second reading—where the divine descends into the world rather than the world ascend towards it—is, I submit, the one which the later Joyce of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* favoured. The Scottist version lays more stress on the sacramentality of the singular event in its carnal and quotidian uniqueness. It is *this* thing, person, phrase or action itself which serves as an incarnation of the divine, rather than as a mere pretext for something transcendent which happens to be passing through. It is its very *thisness* here and now that matters. In short, if 'whatness' tends to see the particular as the divine in drag, 'thisness' sees it as divinity in person, that is, in flesh and blood. I suspect it is this radically in-carnational view that Joyce has in mind in *Ulysses* when he has Stephen reply to Deasy, "That is God. [...] A shout in the street." And this initial shout in the street anticipates, I suspect, Molly's ultimate cry of "yes" in the final chapter.

One of the earliest references to the term epiphany is to be found in chapter 15 of the seminal novel, *Stephen Hero*. Here we find the following definition of Joyce's style of writing around 1904: "Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere in *Stephen Hero* we find epiphany

described as a "sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself." Stephen even tells his friend Cranly that "the clock of the Ballast Office was capable of an epiphany." And we read here that it is for "the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments."<sup>3</sup> This telling description relates in turn to another formative account of aesthetic epiphany in *A Portrait of the Artist*. Here Stephen defines beauty as radiance or *claritas*, which combines with two other Thomistic aesthetic properties—*integritas* and *consonantia*—to constitute the power of epiphanic revelation, especially as it refers (once again) to ordinary or inconsequential events. And yet in *Ulysses*, where we might expect this aesthetic to reach its crowning expression, we find only a single usage of the term

are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance [...]" etc. *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions, 1963) 213. Stephen speaks these words to his friend, Cranly, to explain how even the most demotic of objects—in this case the clock of the Ballast Office—can achieve an epiphany. So from this earliest consideration of epiphany in Joyce's work we realise that it involves 1) a sensible response to an external stimulus in the world (rather than a merely intra-mental insight) and 2) a certain interpretative response on the part of the viewer (or by extension, reader). In *Stephen Hero*, as later in *A Portrait*, this discussion is followed by a Thomistic account of the properties of aesthetic beauty. Though already in *A Portrait* Joyce appears to be taking a certain ironic distance from his early 'theory' of epiphany, though not, I would contend, of the phenomenon of epiphany itself which remains central to Joyce's developing aesthetic—in practice if not in name—in both *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*. I shall use the terms epiphany and epiphany 2 below to mark this important distinction between the early and later Joyce. While the former seeks to force essences out of their everyday vestments, the later Joyce seems to acknowledge that the essences are to be found within the everyday events themselves, no matter how trivial or insignificant. In what follows, I am grateful to my colleagues in the "Joyce-Proust Reading Seminar" and "Phenomenology of Fiction" seminar at Boston College, and especially Andy Van Hendy and Kevin Newmark, who introduced me to so many intriguing aspects of Joyce which I would otherwise have ignored.

<sup>3</sup> Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 211.

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank Amanda Gibeault for bringing this and other such passages to my attention. The full extract from *Stephen Hero* reads: "First we see that the object is *one* thing, then we see that it is an organised composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts

'epiphany,' and that in the context of an ironic allusion to the vainglorious ambitions of the romantic artist.

The reference occurs in the "Proteus" chapter where Stephen is unable to seize the moment of mystical insight—the "secret signature of things"—unlike the hero Menelaus in the original Homeric myth who grasped the slippery figure of Proteus in water. As Stephen negotiates his way over the damp mud of Sandymount strand in Dublin Bay he recalls how, when younger and more narcissistic still, he would bow to himself in the mirror and step forward "to applaud earnestly, striking face," announcing all the wonderful masterpieces he would write to make himself famous for posterity. At which point, we read this telling sentence: "Remember your epiphanies written on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria." And Stephen adds, extending mock-heroic memory into a future anterior—"Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years [...]." The self-irony could not be more pronounced. Then, immediately, in one quick deflationary instant, we are brought back to the banal nature of Stephen's immediate material environment. The ground is giving way. Our hero is beginning to slide and sink. And as he does so, Stephen thinks of the terrible shipwreck of the grandiose Armada sent to rescue the Irish from British tyranny hundreds of years back: "The grainy sand had gone from under his feet [...] lost Armada. Unwholesome sandflats waited to suck his treading soles, breathing upward sewage breath."<sup>4</sup> The hubristic artist rejoins the disenchanting everyday universe of living and dying. Grand illusions are followed by failure and defeat. Epiphany by anti-epiphany.

But this, as it transpires, is not the final conversion for Stephen. It is more like a prelude to the ultimate deflation of Stephen's Promethean ambitions in the National Library

sequence which takes place at the very centre of the novel, signalled by the motto: "the truth is midway." Here the process of aesthetic demystification will open up a path leading towards a new kind of authorship, and a new kind of epiphany. This second epiphany (epiphany 2), I shall argue, is performative rather than nominative.

#### *Between 'Whatness' and 'Thisness'*

But before proceeding to a detailed reading of Joycean epiphany in the National Library scene let us take a closer look at what Joyce actually understood by the operative metaphysical terms 'whatness' (*quidditas*) and 'thisness' (*haecceitas*). While much has been written about the Thomistic sources of epiphany, insufficient attention has been paid, in my view, to the Scottist sources. Like his predecessor at the National University at Newman House on Stephen's Green—Gerard Manley Hopkins—Joyce was very taken by Duns Scotus' teaching about the sacred 'thisness' of things. Scotus understood haecceity to be a concrete and unique property of a thing which characterises one, and only one, subject. As such, it is the "last formal determination which makes an individual to be precisely this individual and not anything else."<sup>5</sup> The haecceity of a thing is that radiance of its internal being as created and apprehended by God. It discloses itself—mystically, poetically, spiritually—in terms of a certain sacred perception. As Hopkins wrote: "I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it."<sup>6</sup> For Joyce's 'epiphany,' as for Hopkins' 'inscape,' haecceity is a way

<sup>4</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Annotated Student Edition, ed. Declan Kiberd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) 50.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Casey, "Hopkins," *Studies*, 84.334: 163.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in William Noon, "How Culious an Epiphany," *Joyce and Aquinas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927) 61. See also Hans Urs Von Balthazar's revealing chapter "Hopkins: Oxford, Ignatius and Scotus" in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, eds. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

of "seeing the pattern, air or melody in things from, as it were, God's side."<sup>7</sup>

But the young Joyce was also reading Aquinas and neo-scholastic journals during his time in Paris. Thus we find Stephen in the *Portrait*, for example, explicitly linking Aquinas' notion of *quidditas* (whatness) with his own aesthetic account of *claritas* (radiance), suggesting that the notion of epiphany is linked to the *causa formalis* or 'essence' of something. But in his book *Joyce and Aquinas*, William Noon concedes that what Stephen seems to mean by *claritas* may have been expressed better by the *haecceitas* of Duns Scotus than by the *quidditas* of Aquinas. Etienne Gilson, an expert on both Aquinas and Scotus, has described the *haecceitas* of Scotus as "l'extrême point d'actualité qui détermine chaque être réel à la singularité."<sup>8</sup> Haecceity is, in other words, the noumenal become phenomenal, the sacred perception of things translated into profane perception, in a manner so luminous and unexpected that it appears like an "explosion out of darkness."<sup>9</sup> This transfiguration of word into flesh can occur in the most ordinary and demotic of events. And Noon argues that the reason that Joyce later parodies Stephen's "epiphanies on green oval leaves" in *Ulysses* is because his various books "with letters for titles," never achieved any existence outside of his own literary mind—they were still figments of his solipsistic fantasy.<sup>10</sup> By the time Joyce writes *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, he has matured beyond his early view that epiphanies depend

on some light within the viewer's mind, to a more ontological or eschatological understanding. He now sees epiphany as coming from the otherness and transcendence of the worldly object—disclosing, as the druid in *Finnegans Wake* puts it, "the Ding hvad in itself id est," "the Entis-Onton," the "sextuple Gloria of light."<sup>11</sup>

But this transition from an idealist to a more ontological comprehension of epiphany presupposes the traversal of language—the "sound sense symbol" of literature which allows the inner radiance of a thing's *claritas* to find expression within the "world of words."<sup>12</sup> Central to this process of textual traversal is what Joyce, in one of his unpublished Zurich notebooks, calls "metaphor," by which he understands not "comparison" (which only tells you "what something is like") but the expression of what something "is." Noon relates this to the scholastic claim that "metaphors are poetic vestments of the truth" of things ("metaphorae [...] sunt quasi quaedam veramina veritatis"), adding that he believes this was not yet fully realised in *Stephen Hero* but would have to await Joyce's mature works.<sup>13</sup> It was, tellingly, during his Paris sojourn in early 1903, when Joyce was steeped in medieval metaphysics, that Joyce penned fifteen short prose snatches which he entitled "epiphanies." These served as "tiny literary seeds" from which whole narratives might issue;<sup>14</sup> they testified to the power of the

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Casey 164. See also the more developed analysis of this subject in Philip Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2000) Chapter 3, especially 193-98. Cf. also Fran O'Rourke's analysis of Joyce's debt to the related scholastic notion of *quidditas* as derived from his studies of Aristotle and Aquinas in his Paris and Pola Notebooks of 1903-1904. F. O'Rourke, "Allwisest Stagyrte: Joyce's Quotations from Aristotle," Diss., National University of Ireland, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Noon, "How Culious" 51.

<sup>9</sup> Noon, "How Culious" 61.

<sup>10</sup> Noon, "How Culious" 61-2.

<sup>11</sup> Noon, "How Culious" 62-3.

<sup>12</sup> Noon, "How Culious" 63.

<sup>13</sup> Noon demonstrates how Aquinas, whom Joyce studied in some depth along with his reading of Aristotle in the Paris Notebooks (1903) and Pola Notebooks (1904), gave a prominent role to the symbolic and sacramental power of language. As he wrote in the *Summa Theologica*: "The illumination of the divine ray of light in this present life is not had without the veils of imaginative symbols, since it is connatural to man in this present state of life that he should not understand without an imaginative sign [...]. The signs which are in the highest degree expressive of intelligible truth are the words of language" (*ST*, II-II, q 174, a 2-4).

<sup>14</sup> Noon "How Culious" 75.

"single word that tells the whole story," to "the simple gesture that reveals a complex state of relationships."<sup>15</sup> The first of these numbered "epiphanies" has particular interest for our reading of the National Library episode in *Ulysses*. It reads as follows:

(Dublin: in the National Library). *Skeffington*—I was sorry to hear of the death of your brother...sorry we didn't know in time...to have been at the funeral...*Joyce*—O, he was very young....a boy....*Skeffington*—Still....it hurts....<sup>16</sup>

It is not clear to what extent Joyce's notion of epiphany ultimately conflates the Thomistic whatness/*quidditas* of radiance with the more Scottist thisness/*haecceitas*. For if radiance/*claritas* is properly speaking a feature of art, epiphany—like *haecceity*—is also available, it seems, to non-aesthetic sensible experience. This latter and more generic sense of epiphany is likely to have its source in what Oliver St John Gogarty surmises to be an insight imparted by Joyce's teacher, the Jesuit Father Darlington, to the effect that epiphany refers to "any shining forth of the mind" by which one "gives oneself away."<sup>17</sup> But it also appears to derive from a more ontological use of the term in Joyce's early Notebooks to refer, not only to art or literature, but also to non-literary "moments of spiritual life" when the soul of the commonest object reveals itself by some trivial attitude or gesture, discloses its secret, "gives itself away."<sup>18</sup> It may even be the case that Joyce translates the more

Thomist interpretation of *claritas* in *Stephen Hero* and the *Portrait* (qua universal form) into a more Scottist interpretation in *Ulysses* (qua individual form). For Stephen in the early works—*Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*—it could be said that "not Being but the Beautiful had been the Absolute."<sup>19</sup> But as we move into *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, it appears that Stephen is leaving the aestheticism of Mallarmé, Pater and the French symbolists behind him in favour of a more ontological experience of art as inextricably connected to the sensible phenomena of the everyday, that is, radiance in contact with the 'thisness' of things.

symbolises, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but is also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion" (246). Merleau-Ponty goes on to elaborate on this Eucharistic power of the sensible as follows: "I am brought into relation with an external being, whether it be in order to open myself to it or to shut myself off from it. If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called just now a sacramental value, this is because the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds in them his momentary law" (248). It is difficult to read these passages without thinking of how Joyce performs literary transubstantiations between the sensible and the sacramental, and vice versa. Indeed Joyce explicitly invokes idioms of transubstantial mutation at several key points in his texts as noted above.

<sup>19</sup> Noon 68. Noon elaborates as follows: "The poet, the literary artist, is the manipulator par excellence of the symbol, or metaphorical signs; he is the craftsman of the phantasmata, the contriver of the meditative verbal image that suggests, reveals, 'epiphanises' [...]. The Joycean epiphany in literature may be described as a formulation through metaphor or symbol of some luminous aspect of individual human experience, some highly significant facet of most intimate and personal reality, some particularly radiant point to the meaning of existence." We may thus see Joyce's work as a series of efforts to find "vital symbols at the verbal level, capable of interpreting the ineffable epiphanies of experience, and of making these 'sudden spiritual manifestations' permanently available through words for the apprehension of other minds" (70).

<sup>15</sup> Harry Levin, *James Joyce* 28.

<sup>16</sup> James Joyce, *Epiphanies*, ed. O.A. Silverman (Buffalo: Lockwood Memorial Library, 1956) #22.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver St John Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1937) 293f.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Prescott notes this in "James Joyce's Epiphanies," *Modern Language Notes*, 64 (May 1949): 436; cited and commented by Noon 70. I think that the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, offers a suggestive gloss on this phenomenon of epiphanic perception in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002) 246-48. He writes: "Just as the sacrament not only

If we may say, therefore, that the early Joyce's understanding of epiphany seems to change back and forth between art and experience, the mature Joyce seems to locate it firmly in the 'relation' between the two, a relation which he increasingly understands in terms of the transfigurative power of language. The basic genesis of Joyce's notion of epiphany can be construed accordingly in terms of a "shift as to the location of radiance (*claritas*), from the actual experience of the spectator in life to the verbal act or construct that imaginatively re-presents this experience in the symbols of language, re-enacts it through illuminating images for the contemplation of the imaginative mind."<sup>20</sup>

One might rephrase this in more hermeneutic terms to say that the *prefigurative* epiphany of lived experience passes through the *configurative* epiphany of the text before reaching the *refigurative* epiphany of the reader. In short, epiphany is a triadic movement from life to text and from text back to life again—a movement amplified and enriched by the full arc of hermeneutic transfiguration.

#### *Epiphany in the Library*

The National Library chapter opens with Stephen proclaiming his grand theory about Shakespeare before a band of fellow literary aesthetes. From the word go, the tone is set. This is about a "ghoststory." Ostensibly Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. But more than that too. When Stephen asks, at the outset, "What is a ghost?" the answer is telling. "One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners."<sup>21</sup> From the beginning of the novel, Stephen has been haunted by the ghost of his own mother, at whose deathbed he notoriously refused to kneel and pray. She returns to him in the form of a recurring guilt—"agenbite of inwit"—

which he tries to dispose of by banishing from his mind the "mothers of memory." But these mothers are also of a more collective and cultural nature, constituting that "nightmare of history" from which Stephen is trying to awake. Motherland (Ireland as Caitlin ní Houlihan), Mother Church (mariolatrous Catholicism), Mother Tongue (Gaelic). Stephen wants to trade in these unholy ghosts of history for a holy ghost of pure aesthetic mediation. He will seek to reconcile a lost son (himself) with a spiritual father through the medium of Art. And he will look for metaphysical confirmation of this in a certain reading of the Christian Trinity whereby Father and Son are united, "middler the Holy Ghost." No women need apply.

But Stephen is not talking in this episode about himself or about Ireland. At least not explicitly. He is talking about Shakespeare who lived through his own crisis of filiality and fiction. According to Stephen, Shakespeare wrote his famous "ghoststory," *Hamlet*, at the very time he was grieving the loss of his son, Hamnet, and his deceased father, John Shakespeare. The play was composed as some sort of aesthetic compensation for Shakespeare's unbearable confusion as he hovered in the in-between space of fatherless sonhood and sonless fatherhood. The suggestion is that the playwright sought reconciliation through the agency of the ghost (which role Shakespeare actually played in the first London production in the Globe theatre). What is more, Stephen proffers the hypothesis that the incestuous Gertrude is a stand-in for Shakespeare's own wife, Anne Hathaway, who betrayed her husband by having an affair with his brother(s) in Stratford. This is how Stephen enunciates his Theory:

The play begins. A player comes on under the shadow, made up in the castoff mail of a court buck, a wellset man with a bass voice. It is the ghost, the king, a king and no king, and the player is Shakespeare who has studied Hamlet all the years of his life which were not vanity in order to play the part of the spectre. He speaks the words [...] *Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit* bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the

<sup>20</sup> Noon, "How Culious" 77.

<sup>21</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 240.

prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live for ever.<sup>22</sup>

Stephen proceeds to suggest that William Shakespeare, in his theatrical performance as King Hamlet's phantom, must surely have been aware that he was playing out his own grief at the loss of his son, Hamnet. "Is it possible," Stephen asks rhetorically, "that that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been prince Hamlet's twin) is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the disposed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen. Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway?"<sup>23</sup>

The ghost thus serves to link father (King Hamlet) with son (Prince Hamlet) by displacing the guilty queen Gertrude and replacing her with the "word of memory"—the story which Hamlet the Prince will eventually release to the world in the final Act of the play as he bids Horatio, "absent thee from felicity awhile to tell my story." By means of such narrative remembrance, the son shall ultimately fulfil the command of the father (Remember me!) through the spiritual-aesthetic agency of the play itself. Shakespeare will be reunited—poetically if not empirically, phantasmatically if not historically—with his lost son (and indeed with his lost father, John Shakespeare). Thus also, we might infer, the ghost may rid Shakespeare of his own 'guilt' by having his story told in this cathartic way. Melancholy gives way to morning as it is 'worked through' in the telling of the "ghoststory." So the Theory seems to go.

But if Stephen is right, are we not witnessing a curious

reversal of Stephen's own history here? Is not the very guilt—"agenbite of inwit"—that Stephen is seeking to absolve by "awaking from the nightmare of history" not occasioned by his own lack of proper mourning? In the transposition of his own history to the story of *Hamlet*, we find a strange transfer of Stephen's guilt *about* his unmourned mother (Mrs Dedalus in *Ulysses*) to the opposite guilt *of* the unmourning mother. Gertrude serves in a perverse sense as the "guilty queen" (like Ann Hathaway on whom she is based, or Mrs Dedalus and Mrs Bloom whom she represents) whose sexual and spiritual betrayal of her spouse qualify her as a suitable "sacrificial scapegoat" whose exclusion from the new Trinity of Father-Son-Ghost will, the theory suggests, lead to a perfect artistic purgation and atonement. As Pater et Filius are mutually absolved through the medium of the spirit, woman (mother, spouse) is dissolved.

But let's have Stephen speak for himself again. After a few rounds of literary jousting with the librarians Eglinton and Best, Stephen returns to his basic thesis that an artist can recompose the different aspects of his being—including that of father and son—through a work of art. Just as the "artist weave[s] and unweave[s] his image" in such a way that "through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth," so too in an "intense instant of imagination" our past and future can somehow, miraculously, be united into a present moment. This is how Stephen, sitting in the National Library surrounded by his literary peers, looks forward to a time when he will be able to look back at himself as he was in the past and in this very instant: "that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the genius of the artist is to be able to transcend the divisions of existence by

<sup>22</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 241.

<sup>23</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 241.

<sup>24</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 249.



means of a spiritual imagination which can subsume the ruptures of our temporality into an aesthetic of eternal redemption. Stephen quotes the poet, Shelley, in this passage, confirming a romantic sentiment which harks back to Mallarmé's description of Hamlet with which the chapter opens—"il se promène, lisant au livre de lui-même, don't you know, reading the book of himself." The fact that this phrase is repeated—in French then in English—in addition to its crucial role of leading off the whole discussion of Hamlet which dominates the chapter, suggests that it is central to the author's meaning.<sup>25</sup> Here is the exemplary paradigm of the Great Book where the contingencies and contradictions of ordinary life may be ultimately transformed.

After several more bouts of repartee about how Shakespeare's dramatic corpus relates to his biography, Stephen returns once more to the theme of father and son in *Hamlet*. We are back with the "ghost" of King Hamlet on the

<sup>25</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 239. This citation from Mallarmé comes from a passage on Hamlet in Mallarmé's *Divagations* which reads as follows: "The play, a pinnacle of the theatre, is, in the work of Shakespeare, transitional between the old multiple plots and the future Monologue, or drama of Self (*avec Soi*). The hero [...] he walks, no more than that, reading in the book of himself, high and living Sign; he denies the others attention." The fact that another line from this same Mallarmé passage—"sumptuous and stagnant exaggeration of murder"—turns up a few sentences later as part of Stephen's own interior monologue, *unattributed to Mallarmé*, that is, without inverted commas or quotes, suggests that the Mallarmé take on Hamlet as a solipsistic self-reading Self is close to Stephen's own stance at this point in the scene. The various references, later in the chapter, to the library as a place of death and ghostliness (e.g. "Confined thoughts around me, in mummycases, embalmed in spice of words." 248) adds to the suspicion that Stephen needs to move beyond this enclosed world of mummification if he is to live and write as a real author, free from the deadening hold of a reified literary and intellectual tradition. The fact that Bloom leads Stephen beyond the National library—as does Mlle de Saint Loup lead Marcel beyond the Guermantes library—towards a life and literature still to come, is a curious parallel between *Ulysses* and *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The solipsistic Selves they leave behind them in the library are, arguably, Stephen Hero (for Joyce) and Jean Santeuil (for Proust) respectively—the romantic narrators whom they have to shed in order to find their own voice.

battlements of Elsinore addressing "the son consubstantial with the father." Now the theological idioms of the Trinitarian mystery are explicitly invoked: "He Who Himself begot, middler the Holy Ghost, and Himself sent himself, Agenbuyer, between Himself and others [...]"<sup>26</sup> This passage, beginning with four uses of the term "himself" and ending with the return of God, now in the person of the crucified and resurrected Son, to sit at the "right hand of His Own Self" in Heaven, is mock-heroic in the extreme. And, if the reader was in any doubt, the graphic invocation of "Glo-o-ri-a in ex-cel-sis De-o" to round off the theological parody adds a defining touch of mischievous melodrama.

But this is not all. Stephen comes back to his Trinitarian theory—like a kitten playing with a ball of wool—later in the chapter when raising the question of physical versus spiritual paternity. "A father," Stephen now opines, is at best a "legal fiction," at worst a "necessary evil." He means of course a biological father who has no real relation to a son apart from the physiological "instant of blind rut," which engendered him. Paternal and filial affection are therefore, so the theory goes, unnatural, and no son can ever be certain who is father really is (unlike the mother). Whence Stephen's rather cynical quip: "Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?"<sup>27</sup>

### *Trinities and Triangles*

So Stephen's overall hypothesis seems to be that in *Hamlet* Shakespeare is replacing the experience of actual fatherhood (his dead father, John Shakespeare) with a spiritual fatherhood that will compensate for all the doubts, uncertainties and rivalries that exist between real fathers and sons (for the male child's "growth is his father's decline, his youth his father's

<sup>26</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 253.

<sup>27</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 265-6.

envy, his friend his father's enemy").<sup>28</sup> According to Stephen, this "mystery" of spiritual paternity—represented by the Ghost in *Hamlet* and the Holy Ghost of the Christian Trinity—lies at the very root of the Western church and culture. Here "fatherhood [...] is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten."<sup>29</sup> And it is precisely this ingenious fantasy of mystical fatherhood which meant that when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* "he was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson," etc.<sup>30</sup> In this manner, Shakespeare contrived to resolve the tragic ruptures of his own life-history (death of his father and son, betrayal by his wife and brothers) by transmuting this history into a mystical story. John Eglinton sums up Stephen's metaphysical theory thus: "The truth is midway [...] He is the ghost and the prince. He is all in all." And Stephen readily agrees: "He is. [...] The boy of act one is the mature man of act five."<sup>31</sup>

The implications of this are extensive. Just as Pater and Filius are miraculously reconciled, so too are a host of other human antinomies—"bawd and cuckold" (being now "a wife unto himself"), male and female, (united as "androgynous angel"), possible and actual ("He found in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible"), and so on. All of which suggests that the solution to life's tragic contradictions and divisions is to be found in the great Trinitarian fantasy—forged by Christian theologians like Sabellius and writers like Shakespeare—in which father and son are reunited through the mediating agency of *Geist*. Is this not what is meant by the summary statement that "truth is midway"—echoing the earlier allusion, "middler the Holy

Ghost?" This surmise would certainly seem to be born out by Stephen's citation of Maeterlinck's mot about Socrates and Judas going forth only to find themselves again. Or as Stephen puts it in his own words: "We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves."<sup>32</sup> Meaning that if God was the "playwright who wrote the folio of this world," Shakespeare rewrites the folio of his own world in a play called *Hamlet*. And we might presume, Stephen Dedalus will do likewise when he finally comes to realise his vocation as romantic Artist par excellence. In other words, if Stephen's theory is correct, art would be the greatest feat of mystical solipsism—Self-Thinking-Thought, Self-Loving-Love, Self-Causing-Cause, Self-Creating-Creation.

But is that the end of the story? Is it simply a matter of converting the mimetic conflicts and Sunderings of French "triangles" into the spiritual sublimity of mystical "Trinities?" When, at the end of all the brilliant and grandiloquent discoursing, John Eglinton puts the hard question to Stephen: "You have brought us all this way to show us a French triangle. Do you believe your own theory?" Stephen replies "no." And replies, we are told, "promptly."<sup>33</sup> So what are we to make of this sudden recantation? Why such a labyrinthine detour in this august national library, conducted by some of the smartest minds of the young Dublin literati, if we are to end up in a *cul de sac*? And why does Stephen go on to claim that the one who helps him to "believe" in the very theory which he now disowns, is "Egomen?" (Egomism is defined in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as "the belief of one who believes he is the only one in existence").

<sup>28</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 267.

<sup>29</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 266.

<sup>30</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 267.

<sup>31</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 272.

<sup>32</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 273-4.

<sup>33</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 274. See also here René Girard's intriguing reading of this passage in "French Triangles in the Shakespeare of James Joyce: Do You Believe in Your Own Theory?" in *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Let us reflect a little more on what exactly might be meant here by the notion of "French triangle." A motif running throughout the Library episode, as noted above, is that of Ann Hathaway's betrayal of her husband William. This is very much a subtext compared to the central paternity theme but it serves a significant role nonetheless. The terms used to describe Shakespeare's unfaithful spouse are invariably disparaging. She is portrayed as a seductress who tumbles young William in the hay, before going on to do likewise with Shakespeare's brothers (Richard, Edmund and Gilbert), once her husband had left Stratford for London. "Sweet Ann I take it, was hot in the blood. Once a wooer twice a wooer."<sup>34</sup> Which is why, according to Stephen, Shakespeare brands Queen Gertrude with "infamy" in the fifth scene of *Hamlet*. And when Stephen and Eglinton rejoin the discussion of Ann later in the chapter it is in the disparaging context of "an age of exhausted whoredom groping for its god."<sup>35</sup> The theological discussion of mystical paternity which immediately follows (discussed above) adds a further nail to the coffin of the banished woman. It was on the mystery of the Christian Trinity—and not on the "madonna which the cunning Italian intellect flung to the mob of Europe"<sup>36</sup>—that the true Church was founded. And this theme resurfaces one last and very telling time as a terminal salvo of Stephen's Grand Theory, accounting for that singular note of banishment—"banishment of the heart, banishment from home"—which we are told "sounds uninterruptedly" from one end of Shakespeare's corpus to the other. The theme of betrayal is not some isolated matter. "It is in infinite variety everywhere in the world he has created," concludes Stephen. And is further born out by the fact that Ann Hathaway's betrayal repeats itself again in the next generation ("his married daughter, Susan [...] is accused of adultery"); while Ann herself is refused burial in

<sup>34</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 259.

<sup>35</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 265.

<sup>36</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 266.

the same grave as Shakespeare. "It is between the lines of his last written words," claims Stephen, "it is petrified on his tombstone under which her four bones are not to be laid."<sup>37</sup>

Otherwise put, the theme of the infidel woman (wife-mother-daughter) ghosts the entire thesis of spiritual paternity and, Stephen argues, is the real hidden motivation for Shakespeare's invention of a literary "ghoststory"—a drama where the "guilty queen" could be sacrificially purged and "Hamlet père" and "Hamlet fils" find themselves ultimately atoned "middler the Holy Ghost." In other words, if the Artist-Author-Creator can become a mystical Father who is "Himself his own Son" and thereby dispense with the profane mediation of woman ("being a wife unto himself"), then we would seem to have finally hit upon a solution to the cruel Sunderings of existence. In this grand finale, Stephen's theory would end where it began—returning to itself in triumphal self-congratulation—that is, with the romantic vision of the great poet writing and reading the book of himself. The "playwright who wrote the folio of this world" echoing the Mallarméan poet "*lisant au livre de lui-même*."

But, once again, the matter is not so simple. Not only does Stephen revoke his own theory of triangles-supplanted-by-trinities, but he goes on to confront the radical consequences of this disavowal. First, he undermines the metaphysical model of self-thinking-thought as the ultimate guarantor of truth. The mystical paradigm of a self-sufficient-paternity (Trinitarian or other) is now parodied as solipsistic and masturbatory. Mulligan's Dublin ditty about onanistic litterateurs—"afraid to marry on earth / They masturbated for all they were worth"—leads to a send-up of Socratic self-knowledge: "Jest on. Know thyself." And this point is further reinforced by Mulligan's proposal of a mock-heroic drama (recalling the earlier theological conceits of self-engendering Trinities and

<sup>37</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 272.

androgynous angels) entitled:

*Everyman His own Wife*

or

*A Honeymoon in the Hand*

(a national immorality in three orgasms).<sup>38</sup>

This is Mulligan's way of trying to outdo the Irish revivalist movement of Synge, Lady Gregory and Yeats—as well as AE Russell who actually participates in the National Library discussion. But Stephen, it now seems, will have none of it. He parts company here with Buck Mulligan and his literary peers. He alone of the Library company is not party to the subsequent reunion in the literary soiree. And this decision to pass beyond the pretentious antics of Dublin's aesthetic coterie—which has preoccupied him up to now—on foot of his renunciation of his Grand Literary Theory, prepares Stephen to meet Bloom. The "jesuit jew," as Mulligan labels Stephen, is now ready to behold the "wandering jew," Bloom. "Jewgreek" crosses paths for the first time with "Greekjew." Stephen now definitely renounces his proud presumption to become the great Irish writer to succeed Synge, Shaw and Yeats (all mentioned in the episode). "Cease to strive," he resolves.<sup>39</sup> And in so doing, Stephen begins the second half of his odyssey. He follows Bloom out of the National Library onto the street of Dublin, a journey which will lead through nighttown and the cabman's shelter to Bloom's own home in Eccles Street, and eventually to Molly. The motto that "the truth is midway" now takes on another meaning, retrospectively, in so far as Stephen finds a way through the extremes of Scylla and Charybdis to embrace a new aesthetic insight—what I will call the "epiphany of the everyday." This is how Joyce describes this crucial traversal of paths:

About to pass through the doorway, feeling one behind, he [Stephen] stood aside.

Part. The moment is now. Where then? If Socrates leave his house today, if Judas go forth tonight. Why? That lies in space which I in time must come to, ineluctably. [...]

The wandering jew. [...] A dark back went before them. Step of a pard, down, out by the gateway.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that Stephen will take his departure here from both Mulligan—and Mallarmé—and choose to follow Bloom instead is decisive. He trades in a popular, anti-Semitic litterateur for a vagrant, cuckolded ad-man. This is the real turning point in the novel and marks the threshold separating the narcissistic romantic Stephen from the later author of the everyday. And the epiphany that marks this turn? I would suggest it is that instant of recognition wherein Stephen suddenly 'sees' what he had previously been blind to—the Other. The will of another—Bloom the despised and humiliated Semite—that fronts and confronts him humbly and unpretentiously ("bowing, greeting"). The "other chap," who Stephen confesses presciently helps him to "unbelieve" his Grand Theory. In short, that other who will lead him out of the self-enclosed, self-regarding circle of literary solipsism away, back, down, out onto the streets of the ordinary universe. Into a world where the self leads not back to itself—as with Socrates, Judas, Sabellius—but beyond itself towards otherness. A world where time does not subsume space into itself but comes to heed and serve it: "That lies in space which I must come to..." And as soon as Stephen accepts this, he sees not only his wayward past illuminated in the instant—"cease to strive"—but also his imminent adventures with Bloom: traversing the roads of Dublin city ("men wandered"), nighttown ("street of harlots after") and, finally, Molly ("a creamfruit melon he held to

<sup>38</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 278.

<sup>39</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 280.

<sup>40</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 279.

me").<sup>41</sup> "You will see," Stephen realises. This moment of traversal is the epiphany that will change his life.

Moreover, the last lines where the plumes ascending from the chimneys of Kildare Street are compared to the smoke rising from altars in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, may well allude to the return and resurrection of the sacrificed woman (Imogen-Ann Hathaway-Gertrude-Penelope?)—another pointer to the return of Molly in the last chapter of the book? If this reading is sound, then the throwaway line in the very middle of Stephen's peroration on mystical paternity takes on—retrospectively—another complexion: "*Amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life."<sup>42</sup> If so, then Stephen's "agenbite of inwit" regarding his dead and unmourned mother may itself, at last, be subsiding, the repudiated "mothers of memory" assuming a more benign visage, the nightmare of history returning as that epiphany of

<sup>41</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 279. It is telling that these allusions hark back to Stephen's anticipatory dream in the Proteus chapter where he speaks of a "street of harlots" and a certain Haroun al Raschid, an 8<sup>th</sup> century Caliph of Baghdad who disguised himself as a commoner and wandered among his people to find out who they really were and what they really needed. In his dream, Stephen follows the man who offers him a melon ("creamfruit smell") just as in the Library chapter Stephen will follow Bloom who holds out a "creamfruit melon" to him, a reference which anticipates the final fruits of the "melonsmellonous" Molly in the Penelope episode. This convoluted temporality of forward reprise or anticipatory memory typifies the experience of epiphany which is never just a "once off" isolated moment, but a multivalent present (*kairos/Augenblick*) traversed by both past and future. Commenting on this phenomenon, Amanda Gibeault writes: "Stephen's enjoinders to remember the scenes leading up to the epiphany take on accrued importance: without the memories, the epiphany will cease to have an anchor in the world of the text and will appear an ad hoc combination of words. The conclusion we can draw from this is that an epiphany is only genuinely a revelation if it includes the context of description of the revelation—that is, if it is actually embedded in a narrative with a temporal unfolding [...]. This means that the reader must do the work of reconstruction to reach a full understanding of Stephen's epiphany" ("Epiphany in Joyce and Narrative Identity," presented at Boston College "Phenomenology of Fiction" Seminar, November, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 266.

the mundane so faithfully and jubilantly recorded in Molly's polymorphous poem (itself one sustained coming back of time to space).

There is still a way to go, of course, from here to there, from the middle of the book to the end. But the tide has turned, and there is no going back. Stephen, it seems, has undergone a profound conversion from belief to unbelief in his own Theory. He has died a death and shed his most fundamental delusions. No longer striving to fulfil the Great Expectations of Immortal Art—fostered by his confreres in the Irish literary revival as well as by Mallarmé and the symbolists (in a different key)—Stephen is ready to take his lead from a simple ad-man, Bloom. Renouncing all forms of literary solipsism, Stephen chooses someone who will guide him towards another way of 'seeing' and 'hearing,' another kind of art (in the lower case) where father and son do not sacrifice procreation for creation, otherness for selfhood, space for time, female for male, history for mystique, the world of flesh-and-blood for a world of Ghosts and *Geists*. Leaving his Grand Theory behind him on the shelves of the National Library, Stephen follows Bloom out into a profane universe where divinity is witnessed in a "shout in the street," in the "yes" of a woman's desire. "God: noise in the street: very peripatetic." This is the truth of epiphany to which Stephen finally comes.

#### *Epiphanies—Intra-Textual, Extra-Textual, Trans-Textual*

Our account above suggests how we might identify the role of 'epiphany' within the Joycean text. But if Joyce is correct when he claims that "it would be a brave man would invent something that never happened,"<sup>43</sup> is it not legitimate to wonder if Joyce's intra-textual epiphanies might not repeat certain extra-textual experiences in Joyce's own life? Any attempt nowadays—after formalism and structuralism—to

<sup>43</sup> Richard Ellmann, Appendix to the 1968 Penguin Edition of *Ulysses* 705.

relate an author's work to his/her biography is contentious at least. But it is not always unprofitable. Indeed, if we are to give any credence to Stephen's own procedure in correlating Shakespeare's oeuvre with his life—while accepting his disavowal of his own "theory" about this correlation—we may assume there is more than madness in the method.

I would like to suggest that there are three possible episodes in Joyce's own life which might be said to prefigure crucial epiphanies in the novel.

First, and most obviously, we know from Joyce himself that his first 'going out' with Nora Barnacle on 16 June 1904, lies at the core of the book. This is the very day and date for the setting of the whole story, subsequently commemorated as "Bloomsday." If this is so, by the author's own admission, then it is probably fair to conjecture that Molly's climactic phantasia is, in some respects, an epiphanic 'repetition' of this moment—the existential past being given an open future through the *kairos* of the literary moment. Here the human eros of space and time is celebrated in an epiphany of sacredness. "What else were we given all those desires for Id like to know," Molly reminds us.<sup>44</sup> And as Joyce suggests in a letter to his Paris friend, Valéry Larbaud, we can take Molly at her word: "Pénélope, le dernier cri."

Second, it is possible that a particular experience that Joyce had of being rescued after a mugging in Dublin was at the root of his motivation to invent Leopold Bloom. As he relates in a letter from Rome to his brother, Stanislaus, dated 13 November 1906, a brutal mugging in Rome in 1906 which left him robbed and destitute, recalled the earlier mugging in Dublin when he found himself rescued by a Dublin Jew called Hunter who took him back to his home and gave him cocoa. The Hunter in question, as Joyce's biographer Richard Ellmann explains, refers to a "dark complexioned Dublin Jew [...] rumoured to be

a cuckold whom Joyce had met twice in Dublin." In his letter to Stanislaus, Joyce reveals that this same Hunter is to be the central character of a planned new story called "Ulysses." Ellmann comments:

On the night of 22 June 1904 Joyce (not yet committed either to Nora or to monogamy) made overtures to a girl on the street without realising, perhaps, that she had another companion. The official escort came forward and left him, after a skirmish, with 'black eye, sprained wrist, sprained ankle, cut chin, cut hand' [...] He was dusted off and taken home by a man called Alfred Hunter in what he was to call 'orthodox Samaritan fashion.' This was the Hunter about whom the short story 'Ulysses' was to be projected.<sup>45</sup>

Curiously, however, it was not until the second mugging triggered the forgotten memory of the first that Joyce resolved to create Bloom. Epiphanies seem to have something to do with a certain *anagnoresis* which coincides with a creative repetition or retrieval of some "inexperienced experience"—a sort of *anamnesis* which in turn calls for a particular *ana-aesthesis* of literary epiphany. We might even propose the neologism, *ana-phany*, to capture this curious phenomenon of doubling.<sup>46</sup>

And Stephen? I would hazard a guess that the existential epiphany which lies at the root of the invention of Stephen—if there is one—relates to some pivotal event of awareness-through-sundering which the young Joyce experienced in a Dublin library. Such a moment would most likely have entailed a break with his Dublin literary rivals (for example, Oliver St John Gogarty and Vincent Cosgrove, who falsely claimed to have slept with Nora)—a break which finally prompted Joyce to take the route of exodus and exile. At least, that is what

<sup>45</sup> Ellmann, Appendix 705.

<sup>46</sup> For more on our theory of ana-aesthetics see Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Towards a Micro-Eschatology," *After God: The Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 925.

might be inferred from the National Library exchange which we have analysed above. As Declan Kiberd suggestively remarks about this decisive mid-way chapter: "Written in 1918, but dealing with a day fourteen years earlier, this section includes lines which predict its future composition, implicitly uniting the young graduate of 1904 with the mature father and artist of 1918. [...] Already, Stephen sets himself at an aesthetic distance from events."<sup>47</sup> The recurring phrases which young Stephen addresses here in 1904 to his future authorial self—"see this. Remember" and "You will see," etc.—indicate the criss-crossing of past and future which epitomises the singular temporality of epiphany (identified by Paul as *kairos* and by Kierkegaard and Heidegger as *Augenblick*). Moreover, the fact that a key epiphanic moment in *A Portrait* also takes place in a library—Stephen's revelation of the power of words in the famous 'tundish' exchange with the Jesuit Dean of Studies—might further point in this direction. As indeed might the National Library incident in 1903-1904 concerning Joyce's exchange with a literary companion (Skeffington) about the untimely demise of his young brother: an incident, let us not forget which Joyce entered as the first of his fifteen numbered "epiphanies" recorded in his Paris Notebooks. The place of this epiphany is explicitly stated: "Dublin: in the National Library." In this respect, might not young Hamnet's demise, as interpreted by Stephen, be a literary transposition of Joyce's own brother's demise? "O he was very young .... a boy," writes the author. "Still it hurts," replies Skeffington. The traumatic loss of a young child whose 'hurt' and 'sundering' could only find healing in literature.

All such attempts to link literature to life remain, of course, a matter of conjecture and surmise. Though the fact that pivotal experiences in Joyce's life around the time of 1903-1904—being rescued by Hunter, being separated from his friends in the

National Library, being embraced by Nora Barnacle—were later revisited in the text in the form of three epiphanic Magi (Bloom, Stephen, Molly) cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. In any case, if one is looking for some kind of historical genesis for Joyce's epiphanies in his own life experience, 1904 would be the year to begin.

Let me conclude with a few supplementary remarks on the *intra-textual* epiphanies of *Ulysses*. Concerning Stephen, the actual proponent of the notion of epiphany in the first instance, we might say that the 'epiphany' of the Library scene is one which mutates and migrates through the book, until it reaches its culmination in the "Part. [...] You will see" intuition. Previous prefigurations of this epiphany are to be found, arguably, not only in the Sandymount Strand scene analysed above ("Wait. [...] Remember"), but already in the opening exchange with Mr Deasy where Stephen expresses his insight that God is "a shout in the street." Such a developmental reading of epiphany—that it emerges within a process of genesis and gestation—would seem to find some support in *Stephen Hero's* initial description of an object or event "*achieving* its epiphany." The "radiance" of the "commonest object"—be it apprehending divinity in a "street cry" or in the unprepossessing figure of a wandering ad-man—attests to the traversal of eternity through time. But the eternity incarnate in the instant equally refers back to a past and forward to a future which overflows the moment.

In this sense, we might say that epiphany manifests a paradoxical structure of time which Paul called "eschatological." It is exemplified, for instance, in the Palestinian formula for "remembering the one who is still to come"—a phenomenon which numerous contemporary thinkers have called "messianic" time (Levinas, Benjamin, Derrida). We are referring here to a singular form of "anticipatory memory" which recalls the past into the future through the present. A temporal anomaly which Levinas calls the "paradox of posterior anteriority." And which the poet

<sup>47</sup> See Declan Kiberd's very informative note to the Penguin Annotated Student Edition of *Ulysses* 1013.

Hopkins—who studied theology and literature in the same Dublin libraries as the young Joyce—called “aftering” or “over-and-overing,” an ana-esthetic process which enables us to bear witness to the manner in which each simple mortal thing “[d]eals out that being indoors each one dwells; Selves [...]rying *What I do is me: for that I came* [...] for Christ plays in ten thousand places.”<sup>48</sup>

And yet how do we explain that in *Ulysses* Stephen does not invoke the term epiphany except in the ostensibly derogatory sense identified above in the Proteus/Sandymount episode? I think that what we have in *Ulysses* is the mature Joyce translating his—and Stephen’s—youthful notion of epiphany into a post-romantic literary praxis. So that what we witness is not a doctrinal exegesis of epiphany—derived from some grand metaphysical theory—but the *performance* of epiphany in the text itself. It does not have to be named. It is the very process of naming and writing itself. A process which retrieves life through the text and prefigures a return to the life-of-action after the text. Epi-phany as epi-phora and ana-phora: a transferring back and forth between literature and life.

<sup>48</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame,” *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. W.H. Gardner (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) 95. The analogies with Hopkins, also a Jesuit priest, are not meant to suggest that Joyce’s reading of epiphany was in any way exclusively Christian. He no doubt first learnt of the Christian feast in his own early Catholic upbringing and education, and certainly seems to have refined it in his readings of two major Christian philosophers, Scotus and Aquinas. But the way Joyce reworks the notion of epiphany in his own aesthetic clearly extends the notion to other religions, in particular Bloom’s Judaism, but also (in *Finnegans Wake*) to Eastern and Vedic wisdom traditions (e.g. the reference to the “Ding hvad in itself id est” in note 9 above). If anything I would suggest that Joyce’s aesthetics of epiphany is trans-religious, though some might argue that it is a thoroughly secularised version of an originally religious notion. I have attempted to develop the philosophical and theological connotations of the Joyce-Hopkins notion of epiphany in “Epiphanies of the Everyday: Towards a Micro-Eschatology” and “Epiphanies in Joyce and Proust” in *Traversing the Imaginary: Encountering the Thought of Richard Kearney*, eds. Peter Gratton and John Manoussakis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

Transversality, moving in both directions.

If this is so, then the return of epiphany by performance rather than by name in the Library chapter, might be termed epiphany 2. Such a second epiphany, which dares not speak its name—out of modesty as much as discretion—would be post-romantic and post-metaphysical, democratic rather than elitist, and deeply demotic in its fidelity to the ordinary universe. Such epiphany is what we might call *posthumous* to the extent that it resurfaces after the experience of radical parting, powerlessness and loss. For “[t]here can be no reconciliation,” as Stephen learns, “if there has not been a sundering.”<sup>49</sup>

And what, finally, of the *intra-textual* epiphanies of Leopold and Molly? For Leopold, as for Stephen, one could say that they are multiple, recurring at various key moments in the text (e.g. in Davy Byrne’s pub, in the Hollis Street Hospital, in the cabman’s shelter, in nighttown, when he chooses compassion over violence and hate)—recurrences which seem to ‘achieve’ their ultimate epiphany in the culminating passage of Ithaca where Bloom, curled up at Molly’s feet, embraces a condition of quiet equipoise: “less envy than equanimity [...] the childman weary, the manchild in the womb.”<sup>50</sup> Resisting the path of mimetic rivalry (with Blazes Boylan), jealousy (with Molly), competition (with Stephen) and hatred (with the Citizen and other anti-semitic persecutors), Bloom chooses rebirth.

And Molly’s epiphany? The final sequence speaks for itself. Joyce’s own verdict, cited above, is not impertinent: “Pénélope, le dernier cri!” So that the only remaining question might be: is this one more epiphany amongst a plurality of epiphanies or the ultimate epiphany of epiphanies? Or might we conclude that the entire novel itself is an epiphany from beginning to end, with Stephen, Bloom and Molly serving as three mundane Magi—offering us different aspects of a single seed-moment in

<sup>49</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 249.

<sup>50</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 865, 870.



Joyce's own life: 16 June 1904? Or a trinity of such moments (Hunter's rescue, Nora's kiss, Skeffington's phrase) combined into one? One epiphanic time in one epiphanic space? A day in the life of three Dubliners, retrieved, rewritten and resurrected as literature? Not a triumphal literature of closure to be sure, but a textuality of endless receptivity to the events of life as serendipity, surprise, accident, grace? Joyce leaves it to his readers to decide.

*Epilogue: Between Molly and the Song of Songs*

The three Magi who witness the event of meaning, which epitomises the epiphanic paradigm, may also be interpreted more textually—or more hermeneutically—as *author*, *actor* and *reader*. Thus we might say that while a) the lived action of Joyce's world (*le vécu*) 'prefigures' the text, and b) the voice of the narrator-actors (Stephen-Bloom-Molly) 'configure' the meaning in the text, it is we readers who c) complete the function of third witness by 'refiguring' the text once again in our own lived experience, that is, as a world enlarged and epiphanised by the new meanings proposed by the text. This triangular model of epiphany always implies a certain birth or re-birth which constitutes something of a miracle of meaning: the *impossible* being transfigured into the *newly possible*. One thinks of the three angels that appear to Abraham (Gen XVII, 6.8) announcing Sarah's conception of an 'impossible' child (Jacob); the three Magi who bear witness to the 'impossible' child Jesus; or the three persons of the Christian Trinity who bear witness to the birth of a new and 'impossible' kingdom (viz Andrei Rublev's icon of the Blessed Trinity).

This third example, as illustrated by Rublev, brings together the first two and foregrounds the pivotal role of the empty chalice or space (*chora*) at the centre of the triadic epiphany. The movement of the three persons/angels/Magi around the still vacant centre—which the Church fathers named *peri-choresis* or the dance around the open space—may be read, hermeneutically, as the creative encounter of *author / narrator /*

*reader* in and around the locus of language. Moreover this suggests, further, that the triadic model of epiphany always implies a fourth dimension—*chora* understood as the space of advent for the new (Jacob, Jesus, mustard seed, etc.), the miracle of semantic innovation as an event of language, the transfiguration of the impossible into the possible. That the witness of the three personas is usually met with a celebratory 'yes' (Sarah's 'laugh' in Gen XVII, Mary's 'amen' in the Gospels, Molly Bloom's final "yes I will yes") is itself significant as an illustration of a *kairological* time which breaks into our conventional chronological time and opens up a surplus of possible meaning hitherto unsuspected and unknown. Epiphany may thus be seen as testifying simultaneously to an *event* of meaning (it is *already* here) as well as to an *advent* still to come (it is *not-yet*). In this wise, it re-enacts the Palestinian formula of the Passover/Eucharist which remembers a moment of saving while at the same time anticipating a future ("until he comes").<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Molly's final cry blends past and future tenses in a typically *kairological* way—"I *said* yes I *will* yes." Her scatological memories are *repeated forward* to the rhythm of eschatological time.

*Ulysses* may be read as a series of anti-Eucharists or pseudo-Eucharists (Mulligan's black Mass, Stephen's parodic Mass in nighttown, Bloom and Stephen's failed Mass over a cup of cocoa in Ithaca) which ultimately—after a long deconstructive *via negativa*—open up a space where the "kiss" of the seed cake on Howth Head, as recalled/anticipated by Molly in Penelope, reprises not only the "kisses of the mouth" celebrated by the Shulamite woman in the opening verse of the *Song of Songs* but also the Eucharistic Passover of Judeo-Christian promise. Molly's remembrance of the "long kiss" where she gave Bloom

<sup>51</sup> See my discussion of the eschatological temporality of the Palestinian formula in both Judaic and Christian messianism in "Hermeneutics of the Possible God," *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

the "seedcake out of [her] mouth" might be thought of as a retrieval of the genuine Eucharistic gift of love after the various deconstructions of failed or inflated Eucharists recurring throughout the novel. In this sense, we might say that Molly's "yes" epitomises Walter Benjamin's intriguing notion of messianic time as an openness to each moment of the future as "the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter."<sup>52</sup> This is, in short, epiphany understood as a transfiguring of each ordinary moment of secular, profane time (*chronos*) in terms of sacred time (*kairos*).

It is also worth reiterating here that epiphany implies witnesses that come as strangers from afar—the three angels to Abraham, the three Magi from the East, etc. This may be read, hermeneutically, as the event of textual openness to new, alien and unprecedented meanings through the perichoretic textual encounter between *author*, *narrator* and, above all, *reader*. Reading *Ulysses* as just such an "open text," Rudolphe Gasché writes of the "desire to open writing to unforeseeable effects, in other words, to the Other. It is a function of a responsibility for the Other—for managing in writing a place for the Other, saying *yes* to the call or demand of the Other, inviting a response."<sup>53</sup> In his commentary on Joyce, Derrida invokes Elijah

<sup>52</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) 264.

<sup>53</sup> Rudolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994) 230. Gasché is here elaborating on Derrida's reading of Joyce in "Ulysses Gramophone" in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, (New York: Routledge, 1992). Derrida offers a useful gloss on the language of Molly/Penelope in an intriguing footnote to his commentary on the relationship between Greek and Jew in Emmanuel Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 320-21. Commenting on a phrase in *Ulysses*—"Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet"—Derrida attributes this not only to "woman's reason," as in Joyce's text, but he also identifies Joyce here as "perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists" (153). The implication here seems to be that the discourse of "feminine logic,"

associated with Molly/Penelope, is one which, for Levinas at least, suggests an "ontological category" of return and closure: namely, Odysseus returning to Penelope in Ithaca, Stephen and Bloom returning to Molly in Eccles Street where they may find themselves "atoned" as father-son, jew-greek, greek-jew, etc. It is not quite clear where Derrida himself stands towards Joyce in this early 1964 text, though it is evident that he thinks Levinas would repudiate the Joycean formula as overly Hegelian and Greek (that is, not sufficiently respectful of the strictly Jewish/Messianic/eschatological need for a radically dissymmetrical relation of self and other). In his later essay, "Ulysses Gramophone," first delivered as a lecture to the International Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt, 1984, he makes it clear that the "yes" of Molly/Penelope marks an opening of the text beyond totality and closure to an infinite and infinitely recurring 'other.' Even if it is a response to oneself, in interior dialogue, "yes" always involves a relay through an other. Or as Derrida cleverly puts it, *oui-dire*, saying yes, always involves some form of *oui-dire* or hearsay. "A yes never comes along, and we never say this word alone" (300). With this relay of self through the other, this willing of yes to say yes again, "this differing and deferring, this necessary failure of total self-identity, comes spacing (space and time), gramophonizing (writing and speech), memory [...]" (254). And this 'other' clearly implies a reaching beyond the text of *Ulysses* itself to the listener, the reader, an open call for our response. I think Derrida makes a similar point in "Two Words for Joyce" when commenting on the last lines of Book 2, Chapter 2, of *Finnegans Wake*: "The final 'Mummm,' maternal syllable right near the end, could, if one so wished, be made to resound with the feminine 'yes' in the last line of *Ulysses*, the 'yes' of Mrs Bloom, of ALP, or of any 'wee' girl, as has been noted, Eve, Mary, Isis, etc..." *Post-Structuralist Joyce*, eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Derrida's point seems to be that the feminine yes in both of Joyce's masterpieces defies the "phallogocentric" system and opens onto new beginnings and birthings of meaning.

In this sense we would say that *Ulysses* is a deeply anti-Hegelian book. Molly's finale does not represent some great teleological reconciliation of contradictions in some absolute synthesis of Spirit, but an on-going affirmation of paradoxes, struggles, contraries, contingencies in a spirit of humour and desire. "What else were we given all those desires for [...]?" asks the polymorphously perverse Molly, a far cry from the Hegelian triumph of Identity. We may conclude therefore that the story of struggle and trouble does not end when Stephen follows Bloom out of the library, it only begins... And by the same token, Molly, when she finally arrives, does not put paid to Trinities as such, she simply reintroduces us—along with Stephen and Bloom—to another kind of trinity, one without a capital T and more inclusive of time, movement, natality and desire (all those things banned from the Sabellian Trinity of self-

as a sort of messianic model of the reader—as unpredictable Other—who calls the text forth and is called forth by the text. This notion of *Ulysses* as an open textual invitation to ‘refiguration’ finds confirmation in Joyce’s own repeated appeal to the ‘ideal reader’: a gesture akin to Proust’s appeal to his future readers to discover in his novel the book of their own life. One of Joyce’s most telling refrains in letters is—“is there one who understands me?” The metaphor of Eucharistic transubstantiation to convey the miracle of textual composition and reception is also present in Proust, of course, in the epiphany of the Madeleine.<sup>54</sup>

But how are we to read these novelistic repetitions (in Kierkegaard’s sense of repeating forward rather than merely recollecting backward) of Eucharistic transformation in Joyce? What is the particular genre, idiom or style which performs such gestures? In Joyce we encounter a certain comic—or as he put it “jokoserious”—tone. It is clear that Molly is a mock-heroic parody of the elevated and aristocratic Penelope. One only needs to compare Molly’s marvellously mundane musings with the following description of Penelope in the last scene of Homer’s *Odyssey*: “So upright in disposition was Penelope the daughter of Icarus that she never forgot Odysseus the husband of her youth; and therefore shall the fame of her goodness be conserved in the splendid poem wherewith the Immortals shall celebrate the constancy of Penelope for all the dwellers upon earth.”<sup>55</sup> This is a far cry from Molly’s final cry. Penelope could never say of her spouse what Molly says of hers—“as well him as another!” And yet it is typical of Joyce’s irony that in turning the principle of Homeric epic heroism on its head, his characters curiously maintain the truth of the situation in a kind

of creative repetition (not to be confused with Hegelian sublation). Bloom is strangely blessed with his wife (however unfaithful) and does manage to defy her suitors (however indirectly and passively). Molly does not forget Bloom and her ultimate affirmation is ‘celebrated’ by many “dwellers upon earth.” In the transliteration of Penelope and Odysseus into Molly and Bloom, Joyce performs an extraordinary act of Eucharistic humour and humility.

Molly’s rewriting of Penelope conforms to the basic features of comedy outlined by Aristotle and Bergson, namely: the combining of more with less, of the metaphysical with the physical, of the heroic with the demotic, of death with love. (Recall that *Ulysses* begins with a series of death and burial themes, Stephen’s mother, Bloom’s son, Dignam’s funeral, etc. and ends with a call to love: *eros* defying the sting of *thanatos*). Molly’s ultimate passing from *thanatos* to *eros* is prefigured several times during her own soliloquy, from fantasies of being buried (e.g. “well when Im stretched out dead in my grave then I suppose Ill have some peace I want to get up a minute if Im let wait O Jesus [...] O Jamsey let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin [...]”)<sup>56</sup> to the climatic cry of eschatological bliss. Here, finally, echoing the Shulamite woman’s celebration of wild flora and nature in the *Song of Songs*, Molly affirms that “we are all flowers all a womans body.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed the culminating Moorish and Mediterranean idioms of sensory ecstasy and excess are deeply redolent of the Shulamite’s Canticle—itsself styled after the Jewish-Babylonian nuptial poem or epithalamium. As are the multiple allusions to seeds and trees and waters and mountains and irresistible passions between men and women. If there is something irreducibly humorous in this replay of the *Song of Songs*, there is something deeply serious too. As always in Joyce, the scatological and the eschatological rub shoulders—

enclosed Identity). And one might add, more inclusive of the reader. For like any epiphany, Molly’s too calls out to an open future of readers.

<sup>54</sup> On this later point see Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 3-22.

<sup>55</sup> *The Odyssey*, XXIV, 219-23.

<sup>56</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 913-14.

<sup>57</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses* 932.

as do Greek and Jew, Molly and Bloom, life and death—without succumbing to some final synthesis or solution. Joyce's comic transliteration is not the same as Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*). He keeps the dialectic open to the end, and beyond.