

# Epiphany in James Joyce's a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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**UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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**Epiphany in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist  
as a Young Man***

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and Art History at the University of Rijeka**

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**Abstract:** The main focus of this thesis is explaining the notion of epiphany in James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, how the epiphanies in the novel affect the development of the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, their relation to Joyce's theory of aesthetics, as well as the development and shift in the narrative aspect of the novel. In the first part of the thesis, I will introduce the character of Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of the novel, contextualizing his line of thought, the first steps of his development as an artist and philosopher and his uniqueness as an individual. I will present the importance of epiphanies to Joyce's characters and Joyce himself, as well as putting the notion of epiphany in the context of modernist literature. Joyce's aesthetic theory will also be touched upon, as epiphanies are an important element of it. Epiphanies will be examined as a general term and concept, as well as their different roles in the fields of aesthetics, literature and philosophy. Next, I will examine different specific epiphanies in the novel, explaining the context of their happening, as well as their effects on Stephen's character and the narrative aspect of the novel. In the final part of the thesis I will round up all the points that were discussed, presenting a final, cohesive explanation of the epiphanies in the novel.

**Key words:** Joyce, artist, epiphany, Stephen, Dedalus, character, narrative, portrait, aesthetics, theory

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Thesis and novel introduction

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a semi-autobiographical modernist novel written at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and published as a book on December 29<sup>th</sup> of the year 1916. It is a creative successor to one of Joyce's other literary works – *Stephen Hero*, and as such, *A Portrait* complements it and vice-versa in terms of character development and narration. The novel adopts a free indirect style, which allows the reader to peer deep into the main character's consciousness and experience his world through his inner thoughts.

The narrative centre is on Stephen Dedalus, who is the protagonist of both of the aforementioned novels. All other characters in the novel, as well as events, emotions and experiences are seen and felt from Stephen's point of view, the narrative is bound to Stephen's thoughts and experiences and as Stephen's character develops the narrative also shifts and develops. Stephen's character development in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is heavily intertwined with his character experiencing epiphanies at different points in his life and in different contexts. Epiphanies are, as Joyce said himself, a sudden awareness of the soul. His use of epiphanies spans over several of his literary works, including *A Portrait*, *Dubliners*, *Stephen Hero* and *Ulysses*. According to Joyce's theory of aesthetics, an epiphany is an event that brings forth true intentions and true meaning of the observable.<sup>1</sup> It is a short flash of emotional lucidity and inspiration stimulated by ordinary life happenings, which can be positive or negative, rather than a pure analytical or logical train of thought.<sup>2</sup> The main argument of this thesis is to show the cruciality of epiphanies in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, placing them in context of

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<sup>1</sup> Walzl, Florence L., *The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce*, PMLA, vol.80., num.4, September 1965, p. 436

<sup>2</sup> Natali, Ilaria, *A Portrait of James Joyce's Epiphanies as a Source Text*, HUMANICUS, issue 6, 2011, p. 2

Stephen's character development, as well as their role in the development of the narrative aspect of the novel.

## 1.2. Characterization of Stephen Dedalus

Stephen Dedalus is the protagonist of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as well as *Stephen Hero* and plays a part in other Joyce's works, such as *Ulysses*. It is important to describe his character and the first impressions of him the novel offers, as it makes understanding the epiphanies he experiences that much easier to understand. The name *Dedalus* comes from Greek mythology; it is a reference to Daedalus, the architect that had build King Minos' labyrinth as a means of imprisoning the Minotaur and the inventor of wax wings that were supposed to liberate his son Icarus and himself, whis is actually referenced by Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*. The name "Dedalus" also symbolizes Stephen's interest to "fly" above constraints of religious, nationality, and politics in his own growth.<sup>3</sup> Acting as Joyce's fictive alter ego, a lot of Stephen's character is Joyce's own view of himself. Stephen acts as a sort of an anti-hero, often being petty, clownish, dishonest and ignominious.<sup>4</sup>

The first glimpses of Stephen's character are seen at the very beginning of the novel, depicting him as quite the intelligent, thoughtful and sensitive boy, with an artistic mind. Often getting picked on by his classmates, Stephen acts like a regular and somewhat reserved child, trying to find his place among his colleagues by going along with the insults and trying to make friends with most of the children. However, it is difficult for Stephen to escape his own thoughts and emotions. Stephen tends to remain in a very pensive and analytical state of mind, trying to intellectually resolve the situation while questioning himself and his own surroundings.

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<sup>3</sup> Azizmohammadi, Fatemeh; Kamarzade, Sepide, *Study of Stephen Dedalus, The Main Protagonsit of A Portrait of the Young Man as an Artist*, ALLS, vol. 5, n.2, April 2014, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Azizmohammadi, Kamarzade, 2014., p. 1

The combination of the other children's constant exclusion and mocking of Stephen and Stephen's own thoughts, create a sort of exile mentality in Stephen, in which he sees himself as a wholly different being to the other kids, intellectually superior but far more lonely and insecure. One of the first instances of Stephen's early train of thought, where he tries to reason with himself and the situational context he found himself in, as well as his exile status in school can be seen during his exchange with an older kid, Wells, during a break.

Then he went away from the door and Wells came over to Stephen and said: –Tell us, Dedalus, do you kiss your mother before you go to bed? Stephen answered:–I do. Wells turned to the other fellows and said: - O, I say, here's a fellow says he kisses his mother every night before he goes to bed. The other fellows stopped their game and turned round, laughing. Stephen blushed under their eyes and said:–I do not. Wells said: –O, I say, here's a fellow says he doesn't kiss his mother before he goes to bed. They all laughed again. Stephen tried to laugh with them. He felt his whole body hot and confused in a moment. What was the right answer to the question? He had given two and still Wells laughed. But Wells must know the right answer for he was in third of grammar. He tried to think of Wells's mother but he did not dare to raise his eyes to Wells's face. He did not like Wells's face. It was Wells who had shouldered him into the square ditch the day before because he would not swop his little snuff box for Wells's seasoned hacking chestnut, the conqueror of forty. It was a mean thing to do; all the fellows said it was. And how cold and slimy the water had been! And a fellow had once seen a big rat jump plop into the scum.<sup>5</sup>

Stephen is a child filled with deep insecurities and conflicts, stemming mostly from his parents and surroundings. He is troubled by conflicts happening in religion, politics and his own country of Ireland, spending a lot of time thinking about the notions of catholicism and nationalism. While trying to grasp the essence of being a good Catholic and Irishman at a very young age, his own sense of artistic freedom and his poetic soul stir in him a storm of conflicts.

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published by Planed eBook in digital form (first published 1916), p. 12-13

Finding himself stuck between his parents' and his family's worldviews and his own artistic path, Stephen often plunges himself into a state of despair and pessimism, resorting to different ways of coping with his situation, mostly overthinking and burying himself even deeper into despair.

With adolescence comes a more mature overview of his situation, while bringing a few problems of its own. During this period his artistic expression becomes more pronounced and he cultivates a newfound love for Romantic literature. Stephen's adolescence brought forth different kinds of conflicts within himself, his sense of innocence and holiness was tested by his craving for human contact which came in form of seeking and having intercourse with prostitutes, as well as feeling his first instances of affection towards a girl named Emma. Conflicts of different nature come in the form of Stephen's disillusionment with his father, who has by this point, become a washed-up drunk who lives completely in the past, while still spouting cries of nationalistic nostalgia. All of these and similar conflicts eat at Stephen, creating a pessimistic and deeply troubled young man, solidifying his anti-hero appeal.

However, Stephen is a specific character in the way in which these problems and conflicts get resolved. He experiences epiphanies at different points in his life, which offer a much needed moment of lucidity and help him resolve these conflicts, both at a physical and emotional level. Stephen tries to escape the emotional and psychological constraints put on him that manifest themselves in the form of religious and political conflicts and insecurities, while remaining true to his own nature and not losing his identity in the process, in which epiphanies play a major role.

MARCH 24. Began with a discussion with my mother.

Subject: B.V.M. Handicapped by my sex and youth. To escape held up relations between Jesus and Papa against those-between Mary and her son. Said religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have



read too much. Not true. Have read little and understood less. Then she said I would come back to faith because I had a restless mind. This means to leave church by back door of sin and re-enter through the skylight of repentance. Cannot repent. Told her so and asked for sixpence. Got threepence.<sup>6</sup>

All of these situations and conflicts will be discussed later on, when I will address different specific epiphanies, the context of the situation and their results. Stephen's journey is one of searching inwards and outwards, allowing himself to express himself artistically, even if it means cutting off ties from his family, religion and country, which leads to a life of artistic, religious and sexual freedom, which he acknowledges and looks forward to.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Epiphanies

### 2.1. Epiphany as a Concept

By definition, epiphany is both a moment of sudden understanding, clarity and consciousness which has major personal relevance to the individual experiencing it and a powerful religious experience.<sup>8</sup> Other definitions include explanations such as ‘an illuminating realization or discovery, often resulting in a personal feeling of elation, awe, or wonder.’<sup>9</sup> The term epiphany offers a multitude of different meanings, all of which are synonymous, such as ‘to show’, ‘to reveal’ and ‘to bring forth’. Etymologically, it comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, which meant an apparition or manifestation, as well as coming into light.<sup>10</sup> Its importance derives

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<sup>6</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 311

<sup>7</sup> Pursel Zimbaro, Valerie, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man Notes*, Cliffs, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1992, p. 35-41

<sup>8</sup> Taken from the online Cambridge dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/epiphany>, visited: 4 August 2019, 8:23 P.M.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the online Definitions archive: <https://www.definitions.net/definition/epiphany>, visited: 4 August 2019, 8:39 P.M.

<sup>10</sup> Kim, Sharon, *Literary Epiphany in the Novel (1850-1950): Constellations of the Soul*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2012, p.7-8

from Christian doctrine as an extension of the tale of the three magi, as an account for the divine manifestation that came upon them. In broader terms, it is the realization that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Different religious schools inside Catholicism have varying explanations of epiphany, but most western schools and churches agree on the Visitation of the Magi and the Incarnation of Christ being the pivotal instances for the explanation of epiphany. In most religions, epiphany is considered a moment when an individual becomes aware of their faith and accepts the religious doctrine and path of the individual's own religion. The biblical reference of the epiphany holds another special meaning in this context, as Joyce often criticizes and problematizes Christianity as a system and the effects of the catholic doctrine, as well as the role it has played on Ireland's history, society and culture. He takes a notion that existed only in the context of a religion and turned into a general term, one which the ordinary person might relate to, thus taking this metaphorical power from the 'holy' and giving it to the ordinary (Irish)man.

Epiphanies as a concept have changed during the years, changing forms and definitions as to accommodate the context in which they find themselves in respect to the era.<sup>11</sup> In ancient Greece and other old civilizations, epiphanies came in form of mostly both religious rapture and religious rites, and in form of artistic satisfaction, which was the more complex form of epiphany. Greek poets and dramatists had a clear goal in mind when creating their art, be it an amphitheater play or an epic poem; it was to induce a state of catharsis. Catharsis is an act of mental and emotional purification and clarity, allowing the person experiencing it to reach new plains of knowledge, understanding and to break mental and emotional barriers.<sup>12</sup> In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen is plunged into a self-induced state of catharsis multiple times.

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<sup>11</sup> Scholes, Robert, *Joyce and the Epiphany: A Key to the Labyrinth?*, The Sewanee Review, Vol. 72, No.1, 1964, p. 69

<sup>12</sup> Taken from: *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. Merriam-Webster. 1995. p. 217, visited: August 8, 2019., 20:35

The clarity he experiences is not rooted in some Greek tragedy or an epic poem written by Homer but rather, by ordinary daily happenings and situations, which he interprets in his own peculiar way. His states of catharsis are in fact, what we know and call in the modern novel as epiphanies. Stephen is unique in this case, as he is arguably the most important character in the modernist novel, as we know it, and the first character ever to be subject to epiphanies in the modern, joycean sense.

James Joyce first borrowed the term *epiphany* when writing *Stephen Hero* and turned it into a specialized literary device that became a staple of modern fiction.<sup>13</sup> Defined as a moment of sudden realization and awareness after which events are viewed through a new light, it became a feature of many works of different modernist writers. Different authors took on Joyce's mode of using epiphanies as a literary device, such as Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. However, the idea of using epiphanies in modernist literature did not completely have its inception with James Joyce. Authors such as Morris Beja and M.H. Abrams hold an opinion that the modernist epiphany has its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century lyric poetry, more precisely, in William Wordsworth's 'spots of time' from his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*.<sup>14</sup> Epiphanies were used in Romantic literature and poetry as structural and stylistic devices, while they became a literary device in modernist literature.<sup>15</sup> Wordsworth tried to interpret these as demonstrations of the workings of unknown modes of being, as well as dreamlike states, a symbol of the mind and a real insight.<sup>16</sup> He did not have an exact definition for them, but he was aware of the significance they carry. He understood the crucial role they play in a narrative sense, as well as the author's

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<sup>13</sup> Beja, Morris, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (1916). London: Peter Owen, 1971., p. 48

<sup>14</sup> Abrams, M.H., *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, The Norton Library, 1973., p.375-381

<sup>15</sup> "*Epiphanies and Time*", [www.victorianweb.org](http://www.victorianweb.org), visited: 13 September 2019.,21:14

<sup>16</sup> Bishop, Jonathan, *Wordsworth and the 'Spots of Time'*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, ELH, Vol.26, no.1, 1956, p.45-65

own experience being an enormous factor for the depiction of epiphanies. Joyce would pick up this significance later on and he would finally give Wordsworth's 'spots of time' a name – epiphanies. As a way to distinguish these modern epiphanies from traditional visions in literature, Morris Beja offered two criteria on which an epiphany could be identified; the Criterion of Incongruity – the epiphany is irrelevant to the occurrence or object that is the trigger, and the Criterion of Insignificance – that the epiphany is triggered by an ordinary, trivial object or occurrence.<sup>17</sup> These two criteria are the base of identifying a modernist epiphany. Other authors built upon Beja's theory, adding more criteria as a way to strongly define a modernist epiphany, especially in Joyce's work. Robert Langbaum offers four more criteria: the Criterion of Psychological Association<sup>18</sup>, the Criterion of Momentaneousness<sup>19</sup>, the Criterion of Suddenness<sup>20</sup> and the Criterion of Fragmentation.<sup>21</sup> All of these criteria and definitions give the modern epiphany a shape and context, putting it in the framework of modernist literature and Joyce's work.

## 2.2. Joyce and epiphanies

Before going into the specific epiphanies and the context of their occurrence in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, it is necessary to discuss about Joyce's personal views on epiphanies and the reasons of their existence in Joyce's literary universe. Joyce's view of epiphanies is closely linked to his aesthetic principles, which he channels and explains through the character of Stephen Dedalus. The first instance of defining this theory is actually present in

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<sup>17</sup> Langbaum, Robert, *The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature*, *New Literary History*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1983, pp. 335–358

<sup>18</sup> The epiphany is not influenced by an outside entity (God), but it is rather a psychological experience that arises from a real experience

<sup>19</sup> The epiphany occurs for a short period of time, but it has long lasting effects

<sup>20</sup> Changes in external context cause a shift in perception that signals the observer that an epiphany is occurring

<sup>21</sup> The text doesn't directly acknowledge the epiphany, it is up to the reader to recognize it

*Stephen Hero* and further explained in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where Joyce gives a glimpse on his thoughts on epiphanies and their importance.

This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was 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>22</sup>

In this passage, Joyce explains his views and his own work on epiphanies through the character of Stephen. The first important piece of information about his theory is the importance of recording epiphanies, as they hold much importance and are very fragile and temporary. He defines a relationship between the writer and epiphanies, showing how even a vulgar part of speech or a common gesture may hold great importance, and that the responsibility of a writer is to be able to capture these moments and put them on paper. Offering more than just his view on epiphanies, Joyce shows his thoughts the process of writing literature and the different dimensions of thought while developing a character. Joyce shows this peculiar relationship in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, again through Stephen, emphasizing the passing moment and how epiphanies can come from ordinary and common places, gestures and emotions.

Epiphanies are not just features of a temporal dimension; in Joyce's literature, they are intertwined with space and language, as well. Language is vital to Joyce's work and epiphanies in his novels; it is a living, breathing being that changes and shifts with the narrative. Joyce uses rhetorical devices such as aposiopesis, as to create a dramatic effect and a feeling of an unfinished thought process.<sup>23</sup> Another unorthodox way Joyce plays with language is the usage of

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Hero: *A Part of the First Draft of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* By James Joyce. Edited /from the manuscript in the Harvard College Library by Theodore Spencer. New Directions., 1944, p. 234

<sup>23</sup> Examples of aposiopesis can be seen in *Ulysses*, such as "All quiet on Howth now. The distant hills seem. Where we. The rhododendrons. I am a fool perhaps."

the figure of gnomon, which is a geometrical plane figure that is formed by removing a parallelogram from the corner of a similar, bigger parallelogram.<sup>24</sup> According to Irene Hendry, epiphany is one purpose of Joyce's virtuosity of language.<sup>25</sup> Language becomes reality for Stephen, as his own language comes before his senses.<sup>26</sup> The narrator's development coincides with the temporal aspect of Stephen's life, developing language as Stephen gets older, changing again and shifting with the narrative. Epiphanies occur as a period of Stephen's own life comes to a close, with a shift in language being the direct result of an epiphany.

The spatial aspect of the epiphany is evident in *Stephen Hero*, as Stephen explains the relationship between epiphany and art. Epiphanic art is object-oriented; according to Stephen, an epiphany is achieved when the observer realizes that the object is what it is. The observer is able to perceive the 'soul' of the object through a spatial feature of all objects Joyce calls *radiance*.<sup>27</sup> When the observer allows the essence of an object to come to him/her, that is when an object achieves its epiphany.<sup>28</sup> Space and objects shift in Stephen's mind, contracting and expanding in rhythm with Stephen's state of mind. During Father Arnall's speech, Stephen feels suffocated and claustrophobic, as if the walls around him are closing in, blocking off all escape paths. In contrast, after his epiphany on the beach, Stephen feels as if the world opens up to him, objects become far more vibrant in colour, the streets become wider and the water becomes clear. Joyce uses space as an element of constructing the world around Stephen, but also as a reflection of Stephen's state of mind, which changes with every epiphany he experiences. The temporal and

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<sup>24</sup> Examples of the metaphoric usage of gnomon can be seen in *Dubliners*: play on words between *Paralysis* and *Parallelogram*, as well as a metaphoric meaning of something incomplete, fragmented

<sup>25</sup> Hendry, Irene, *Joyce's Epiphanies*, *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 54, No.3., The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946, p. 458

<sup>26</sup> Kershner Jr., R.B., *Time and Language in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, ELH, Vol.43, No.4, 1976., p.606

<sup>27</sup> Radiance is first defined by Joyce and expanded by Langbaum as the intensification of the object's whatness – the 'essence' of the object

<sup>28</sup> Langbaum, pp. 335–358

spatial aspect of epiphanies, as well as language, are key elements of Joyce's aesthetics, which will be examined in the next section.

However, it is important to note that epiphanies are not unique to Joyce. Rather, almost every artist or writer has a feeling of clarity and sudden realization at one point in their artistic or literary careers. It is in a way, an experience that holds as much importance as a religious epiphany, offering psychological and emotional freedom to the person experiencing it, as well as putting the person in an ecstatic state of mind. What differentiates Joyce from other writers that might have thought about epiphanies is that he offered a systematic formulation to a common aesthetic experience.<sup>29</sup> His study and recording of epiphanies through his literary works and theories is one of the main reasons Joyce is considered the most important writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2.3. Joyce's aesthetics

As mentioned in the previous sections, Joyce presents his aesthetic theory through the character of Stephen Dedalus, which is most prominent in *Stephen Hero* and reinforced in *A Portrait*. From the very start of his literary career, Joyce wanted to create and define his own theory of aesthetics. In *Stephen Hero*, it is mentioned that Stephen was engaged in creating an entire science of esthetic.<sup>30</sup>

Joyce states multiple times, both in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, that his aesthetic theory is 'applied Aquinas'.<sup>31</sup> Fran O'Rourke states that Thomas Aquinas did not have an extensive or greatly elaborated theory of aesthetics, but rather he touched upon the topic while

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<sup>29</sup> Hendry, 1946, p. 451

<sup>30</sup> O'Rourke, Fran, *Joyce's Early Aesthetic*, Indiana University Press, , Journal of Modern Literature, Vol.34, No.2, 2011, p.98

<sup>31</sup> O'Rourke, 2011, p.98

writing about theology, metaphysics and his theory of knowledge, which is testament to either Joyce's incredible creativity or his naiveté.<sup>32</sup> Joyce elaborates his theory of epiphanies by presenting three cardinal principles of aesthetics, which have their philosophical origins in Aquinas' *integritas*, *consonantia* and *claritas*. *Integritas* is explained by Stephen as 'wholeness' as a concept, the perception of an aesthetic image as a complete unit, which is self-contained in an unmeasurable expanse of time and space which are not part of it.<sup>33</sup> *Consonantia* is the multitude, rhythm and symmetry of structure, the concept of an aesthetic image being separable, made of the sum of its parts and harmonious. *Claritas* is a principle which Stephen equates with another term coined by Aquinas, *quidditas*, or the 'whatness' of an object.<sup>34</sup> It is also closely described as *radiance*, which has been touched upon in the subsection regarding the spatial aspect of epiphanies.<sup>35</sup> *Quidditas/Claritas* is the principle which directly connects Joyce's aesthetics with his theory of epiphanies. Stephen in *Stephen Hero* makes the connection clear:

Claritas is quidditas. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organized composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts 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. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> O'Rourke, 2011, p.98

<sup>33</sup> Hendry, 1946, p. 449

<sup>34</sup> Hendry, 1946, pp. 449-450

<sup>35</sup> Spatial aspect of epiphanies on page 13

<sup>36</sup> Hendry, 1946, pp. 449-450, taken from *Stephen Hero: A Part of the First Draft of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* By James Joyce. Edited /from the manuscript in the Harvard College Library by Theodore Spencer. New Directions., 1944



This theory is one that Joyce uses in the characterization of his characters, with *Consonantia* and *Integritas* being vital for *Claritas*, which in turn resides deeply in the principle of *Quidditas*. The main point in this theory, which Joyce tries to convey, is that *Claritas* is *Quidditas*.<sup>37</sup> The epiphanies felt by Stephen in *A Portrait* are subject to *Quidditas* and Joyce constructs the world around Stephen by subjecting it to these three principles.

## 3. Epiphanies in the novel

### 3.1 Opening the epiphany box

Joyce created *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a collection of systematically and chronologically placed epiphanies. As opposed to just bluntly putting obvious epiphanic moments and experiences at crucial points in the novel, Joyce strategically puts subtle epiphanies and realizations throughout the novel. There are a couple of major epiphanies that will be covered thoroughly in the following pages, but it would not be correct to assume that these major epiphanies are the only ones existing in the novel. Joyce understands an individual's perception; he acknowledges that human beings are not just visual beings, but rather beings equipped with a myriad of different tools which allow them to perceive their situation and the world around them. Stephen is an observant character in this sense, and a perfect example of Joyce's system of perception; from the very first page, Stephen perceives his surroundings with his hearing and smelling, feeling the people and objects around him, giving them another dimension of existence.

O, the wild rose blossoms  
On the little green place. He sang  
that song. That was his song. O, the green wothe botheth.  
When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His  
mother puton the oilsheet. That had the queer smell. His  
mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the  
piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance. He danced.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Hendry, 1946, p. 451

<sup>38</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 3

This way of perception has another explanation, and that is Stephen's poor eyesight, which is another aspect of Joyce's own life projected onto Stephen. His eyes are an interesting element, as they are being threatened from the very beginning of the novel, and eyes are arguably one of the most important organs for an artist.

Dante said: –O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes. –Pull out his eyes, Apologize, Apologize, Pull out his eyes. Apologize, Pull out his eyes, Pull out his eyes, Apologize.<sup>39</sup>

.....

He felt his body small and weak amid the throng of the players and his eyes were weak and watery.<sup>40</sup>

This mode of perception is closely linked to the way Joyce begins the journey of epiphanies. The concept of eagles pulling out his eyes because he likes a protestant girl named Eileen Vance is one of the smaller realizations Joyce has put in. In this very moment, Stephen's first steps towards disillusionment in his own surroundings begin. He is beginning to realize the nationalistic and religious aspect of his family members and how it affects his everyday life. It affects Stephen to the point of him dreaming about Charles Parnell's death, intertwined with visions of his own demise and imagery of his family. These dreams are direct representations of Stephen's rising disappointment in his family's political, religious and nationalistic quarrels.

He saw him lift his hand towards the people and heard him say in a loud voice of sorrow over the waters: –He is dead. We saw him lying upon the catafalque. A wail of sorrow went up from the people. –Parnell! Parnell! He is dead! They fell upon their knees, moaning in sorrow. And he saw Dante in a maroon velvet dress and with a green velvet mantle hanging from her shoulders walking proudly and silently past the people who knelt by the water's edge.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 3-4

<sup>40</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 5

<sup>41</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 29

These are the first minor glimpses of future epiphanies of Stephen Dedalus.

### 3.2. Victorious epiphany of Stephen's youth

When discussing major epiphanies in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, there is a tendency to jump straight into Stephen's adolescence and adulthood when he is already a developed character and artist. However, an argument must be made about a possibility of an earlier major epiphany. The epiphany in question is the moment of Stephen's discussion with the school's rector and his subsequent feeling of victory over an injustice done to him, but also a realization of religion's very fragile and often times, unfair nature.

Setting up the context of the epiphany, Joyce plays with the notion of religion and religious teachings. In the conflict between Father Dolan and Stephen, Joyce pushes forward the idea of religious institutes not doing a proper job and Catholicism itself being flawed in practice, at the very least, in Ireland. Father Dolan is presented as an unscrupulous and almost sadistic clergyman who takes pleasure in punishing little boys with a pandybat. He represents everything Joyce saw as wrong and twisted in Irish Catholicism, and by making him Stephen's torturer he is showing how religion can destroy an honest man, and an artist. Father Dolan's disbelief in Stephen's honest story about how his glasses broke creates in Stephen a further disillusionment in religion, a seed that had already been planted in him while overhearing his family's quarrels. In the moments after regaining his composure from the beating, Stephen realizes the notion of unfairness and cruelty, changing his childlike perspective on life, while fueling his disdain for religion and anything related to it.

He listened to Father Arnall's low and gentle voice as he corrected the themes. Perhaps he was sorry now and wanted to be decent. But it was unfair and cruel. The prefect of studies was a priest but that was cruel and unfair. And his white-grey face and the no-coloured eyes behind the steel-rimmed

spectacles were cruel looking because he had steadied the hand first with his firm soft fingers and that was to hit it better and louder.<sup>42</sup>

....  
It was wrong; it was unfair and cruel; and, as he sat in the refectory, he suffered time after time in memory the same humiliation until he began to wonder whether it might not really be that there was something in his face which made him look like a schemer and he wished he had a little mirror to see. But there could not be; and it was unjust and cruel and unfair.<sup>43</sup>

This could be called a smaller epiphany, or a realization of the cruel reality of this world. However, being changed by this unfortunate event, Stephen begins to take matters into his own hands, rather than surrendering to the unfair act done to him. With the help of his colleagues' moral support, Stephen shows a mature mental strength for his age and chooses to discuss the issue with the Clongowes School rector. During his discussion with the rector, Stephen stands up for himself, pushing the conversation forward as a means of finally receiving justice, while trembling and almost breaking down and crying during the entire ordeal. This event is first of many where Stephen goes against the expected, fighting for his own justice and liberty. After the conversation, Stephen is met with approval from his school colleagues, something he tried to achieve for quite some time. The narrative in this chapter shifts from a childlike state of describing Stephen's surroundings to a more mature and introspective manner of depicting Stephen's mental states.

The cheers died away in the soft grey air. He was alone. He was happy and free; but he would not be anyway proud with Father Dolan. He would be very quiet and obedient: and he wished that he could do something kind for him to show him that he was not proud.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 61

<sup>43</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p. 62-63

<sup>44</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.70

This is however, the first major event that pushes Stephen into a great disillusionment with the Church and Catholicism as a whole, an event which was bound to happen, only fortifying Stephen's religious doubts. With Stephen entering adolescence and becoming more mature in his way of thinking, his disdain for religion and religious institutions will only grow stronger.

### **3.3. Epiphany of sinful surrender**

Chapter 2 of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the part of the novel which Joyce used to touch upon the theme of corporeality and sexuality. Following Stephen's journey into adolescence, this part of the novel offers two important moments which result in a single epiphany by the end of the chapter. Joyce understood the importance of sex and the curiosity of an adolescent boy brought up in a Catholic household, showing the gradual transformation of a child's curiosity to a literal physical and sexual act which will leave an eternal mark onto Stephen's life and way of thinking.

The first part of the chapter offers an introduction to the question of sex, as well as Stephen's thoughts slowly lingering towards that concept. However, in Stephen's twelve year-old mind, this notion is not overly physical, nor is it sexually twisted or perverted, but rather it shows itself in a subtle manner. Stephen spends his summer evenings reading a translation of Alexandre Dumas' adventure novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He often imagines himself and dreams of being the hero in the novel, creating narratives in which he enjoys the company of Mercedes, a female character in the novel. The intensity of his investment in the novel and his infatuation with Mercedes are the first signs of Stephen physically and mentally maturing, as well as subtly becoming aware of his sexuality. To Stephen, Mercedes is also a symbol of his own liberation, a being that could help him escape the bleak reality of his life, which has become burdened by religious, political and nationalistic quarrels even at that young and tender age.

Both on the outward and on the homeward journey he measured distance by this landmark: and in his imagination he lived through a long train of adventures, marvellous as those in the book itself, towards the close of which there appeared an image of himself, grown older and sadder, standing in a moonlit garden with Mercedes who had so many years before slighted his love, and with a sadly proud gesture of refusal, saying —Madam, I never eat muscatel grapes.<sup>45</sup>

...

They would meet quietly as if they had known each other and had made their tryst, perhaps at one of the gates or in some more secret place. They would be alone, surrounded by darkness and silence: and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment he would be transfigured. Weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment.<sup>46</sup>

Stephen's idealization of women in his life was apparent from the first pages of the novel, beginning with his mother, the protestant girl Eileen Vance, one of his first 'love' interests Emma, as well as the Blessed Virgin Mary. With Stephen's growth as an individual, so does his view of women develop and change with him. Mercedes is an imaginary character from a novel, but to Stephen she is the realest and most tangible being in his life at the time and his only hope of escaping from the burden of religion, politics and family problems. Stephen has an interesting tendency of combining his sexual and romantic desires with his hope of escaping and creating a better version of himself and his current life, which is mostly prominent in this chapter.

With Stephen's first steps into adolescence, his sexual urges become far more accentuated and primal in their nature. Faced with a plethora of personal issues, mostly stemming from his disappointment in his father and the lifestyle he leads which has brought a sense of ruin upon his family, Stephen plunges himself into a state of sinful apathy. He wanders the streets alone, allowing himself to succumb to his sexual urges. The narrative shifts, depicting his inner states; Joyce uses savage motifs from nature, comparing Stephen to a blood-thirsty beast.

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<sup>45</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.74

<sup>46</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.77

He turned to appease the fierce longings of his heart before which everything else was idle and alien. He cared little that he was in mortal sin, that his life had grown to be a tissue of subterfuge and falsehood. Beside the savage desire within him to realize the enormities which he brooded on nothing was sacred. He bore cynically with the shameful details of his secret riots in which he exulted to defile with patience whatever image had attracted his eyes.<sup>47</sup>

During his nocturnal prowl, Stephen cherishes the moments of mental respite, in which he is not a prisoner of his own urges. During these moments of clarity, Stephen's thoughts are filled with imagery of Mercedes, his own symbol of freedom and peace of mind. The concept that was once responsible for the first vestiges of his sexual awakening now becomes the only barrier between Stephen's innocence and complete surrender to his sexual urges. Stephen is aware of Mercedes' role in his mind and being, and that awareness is an epiphany in itself. Stephen jumps between different degrees of sexual frustration, with Mercedes being the mental manifestation of his epiphany in that state of mind.

Only at times, in the pauses of his desire, when the luxury that was wasting him gave room to a softer languor, the image of Mercedes traversed the background of his memory. He saw again the small white house and the garden of rose-bushes on the road that led to the mountains and he remembered the sadly proud gesture of refusal which he was to make there, standing with her in the moonlit garden after years of estrangement and adventure.<sup>48</sup>

However, the image of Mercedes does not stay with Stephen for long. By that point, he becomes lost in his own urges, abandoning completely the Catholic teachings on surrendering to sin. The culmination of this chapter and Stephen's journey through the narrow and dark streets of Dublin come in the shape of a woman, an object of Stephen's desire. Stephen sees salvation in the arms of a prostitute in a long, pink gown. To Stephen, she is a manner of escapism; a way for him to satisfy his urges, to escape from the problems brought forth by his family and to finally be

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<sup>47</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.120

<sup>48</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.121

able to indulge in sin. She is the final result of Stephen's search for Mercedes; a woman in the flesh that might just be the damsel he could return to after his adventures, a woman in whose arms he might feel safe and strong. In that moment of complete desperation and surrender, she was Stephen's only safe haven.

His lips would not bend to kiss her. He wanted to behold firmly in her arms, to be caressed slowly, slowly, slowly. In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself. But his lips would not bend to kiss her.<sup>49</sup>

Being with her in that moment, Stephen still felt some guilt in terms of his upbringing and Catholic teachings. He still held some doubts about his actions and recklessness. All of these doubts were, however, extinguished in a blaze of an epiphany of surrender. Triggered by the warmth of the prostitute's lips, Stephen abandons all of his previous religious and moral values, completely allowing sin to come all over his being, as sin carried comfort in that moment; a comfort Stephen has not been able to feel for quite some time. This act of surrender is an intense moment of epiphany, an act of surrender towards another being, in body and mind; an epiphany that started with a very innocent reading of a translation of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and the fantasies of a young boy, and had its culmination on the lips of a prostitute in the dark streets of Dublin.

It was too much for him. He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark pressure of hersoftly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech; and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour.<sup>50</sup>

Sin swallows Stephen up, forever changing his outlook on love, romance, life and religion, as a prostitute was able to offer Stephen far more comfort through sin, than religion ever

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<sup>49</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.123

<sup>50</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.123-124



could through its teachings and prayers. The narrative shifts again, with the atmosphere becoming gloomy, bleak and hopeless, perfectly depicting Stephen's spiritual emptiness in that moment.

### **3.4. Epiphany of hellfire**

Directly related to the epiphany that occurred at the end of chapter two, the burden of sin still lingers throughout chapter three. Perhaps the most intense, as well as emotionally and mentally straining moment of the novel is the core of this chapter. It puts Stephen face-first into a vortex of conflicts, making him question his own morality, the concept of sin and ethics, as well as revisiting his opinion of religion. The result of Stephen's struggle in this vortex is the most prominent epiphany in the novel.

It is necessary to provide context for the occurrence of this epiphany, as it also carries a deeply felt religious experience for Stephen, one which he has not been able to reach his entire life. Not long after his visits to the prostitutes of Dublin, the rector of Stephen's school announces a three-day spiritual retreat held at Belvedere in honor of Francis Xavier, the school's patron saint. The epiphany Stephen experiences during this retreat is a result of a prolonged and systematic torture; a sermon that spans through all of the three days and is held by Father Arnall. Stephen's torture is one at the emotional and mental level, triggering in Stephen all the possible points of guilt he felt as a result of his sins. Stephen had been feeling the sin he committed with the prostitute sparked a chain reaction of all other deadly sins, revealing his sinful nature.

The chaos in which his ardour extinguished itself was a cold indifferent knowledge of himself. He had sinned mortally not once but many times and he knew that, while he stood in danger of eternal damnation for the first sin alone, by every succeeding sin he multiplied his guilt and his punishment.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.126

Father Arnall's sermon being divided into three smaller sermons affects Stephen's experience of his epiphany, also subdividing it into three smaller epiphanies resulting in a great epiphany by the end of the last sermon. Every sermon focuses on one aspect of hell and the way it relates to the common sinner. The first sermon revolves around the last things that happen to an individual during his life: death and judgment, which result in the soul's departure to either heaven or hell. Father Arnall focuses on the notion of a person's responsibility of repenting during his or her lifetime, examining one's conscience and not surrendering to sin. Every single word uttered during the sermon feels personal to Stephen, awakening in him an intense feeling of guilt and fear. Stephen considers his insignificance in the face of an omnipotent God, as well as the repercussions of his sins if he were to die in that very moment.

The faint glimmer of fear became a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul. He suffered its agony. He felt the death chill touch the extremities and creep onward towards the heart, the film of death veiling the eyes, the bright centres of the brain extinguished one by one like lamps, the last sweat oozing upon the skin, the powerlessness of the Dying limbs, the speech thickening and wandering and failing, the heart throbbing faintly and more faintly, all but vanquished, the breath, the poor breath, the poor helpless human spirit, sobbing and sighing, gurgling and rattling in the throat.<sup>52</sup>

....

Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed. The preacher's knife had probed deeply into his disclosed conscience and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin. Yes, the preacher was right. God's turn had come.<sup>53</sup>

The epiphany he feels after this first part of the sermon is one of realization, one of facing one's own sins and acknowledging God's wrath. The first part of Stephen's epiphany is awareness of his own sinful nature and the neglect he had showed towards his Catholic upbringing, religion as a whole and the Church.

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<sup>52</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.136-137

<sup>53</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.140-141

God, who had long been merciful, would then be just. He had long been patient, pleading with the sinful soul, giving it time to repent, sparing it yet awhile. But that time had gone. Time was to sin and to enjoy, time was to scoff at God and at the warnings of His holy church, time was to defy His majesty, to disobey His commands, to hoodwink one's fellow men, to commit sin after sin and to hide one's corruption from the sight of men. But that time was over. Now it was God's turn: and He was not to be hoodwinked or deceived.<sup>54</sup>

The second sermon revolves around the notion of Hell's hunger, an insatiable appetite for the souls of sinners. This part of the sermon is characterized by vivid depictions of hell, detailed explanations of tortures on different sensory levels. Relating to the earlier discussion about Stephen perceiving the world in a multitude of senses,<sup>55</sup> these images have a far more intense effect on Stephen than on any other student. The epiphany Stephen experiences during this part of his torture is one of fear. The concept of eternal punishment, torture and suffering finally gets to Stephen, making him cower in front of the weight of his own sins. Each epiphany during these sermons complements the other, creating a complete picture of a massive religious epiphany. At that point, all of Stephen's senses are on alert, especially his sense of smell, which is triggered by Father Arnall's description of rotting corpses.

Consider then what must be the foulness of the air of hell. Imagine some foul and putrid corpse that has lain rotting and decomposing in the grave, a jelly-like mass of liquid corruption. Imagine such a corpse a prey to flames, devoured by the fire of burning brimstone and giving off dense choking fumes of nauseous loathsome decomposition. And then imagine this sickening stench, multiplied a millionfold and a millionfold again from the millions upon millions of fetid carcasses massed together in the reeking darkness, a huge and rotting human fungus. Imagine all this, and you will have some idea of the horror of the stench of hell.<sup>56</sup>

Stephen acknowledges, with the help of his epiphany after the second sermon, that he must confess to a priest as a means of spiritual salvation. However, the burden of shame is still

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<sup>54</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.137

<sup>55</sup> Related to the discussion on page 10

<sup>56</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.147-148

greater than the burden of guilt and fear, paralyzing him during his first (unsuccessful) confession. There is a meaning to this, as the sermon was not yet complete, and Stephen's torture has not yet run its due course.

The third part of the sermon is one that resonates with Stephen the most and springs him into action. It is based on the concept of POENA DAMNI<sup>57</sup>, which is roughly described by Father Arnall as pain of loss after being removed from the mercy of God. He elaborates on this concept, introducing *the cruel worm's sting*, which can be defined as Satan's devious intentions. Arnall subdivides the sting into three aspects of sin, each resonating within Stephen's guilty conscience. The first aspect or sting is remembrance of one's sins and past pleasures, an eternal memory which is viewed upon with disgust and abhorrence.

They will remember all this and loathe themselves and their sins.  
For how miserable will all those pleasures seem to the soul condemned to suffer in hellfire for ages and ages.<sup>58</sup>

The second sting is one of vision, a truth granted by God himself to enable the sinner to view his sins through God's eyes, finally seeing the horrid and appalling nature of the sin.

His own knowledge of sin, so that sin will appear to them in all its hideous malice as it appears to the eyes of God Himself. They will behold their sins in all their foulness and repent but it will be too late and then they will bewail the good occasions which they neglected.<sup>59</sup>

The third sting is the choice of not repenting. Father Arnall puts the final nail in the coffin of Stephen's torture, explaining that regardless of the Church's presence in an individual's life and the multiple possibilities one has the opportunity to confess and repent one's own sins, the individual chooses not to repent and to continue living in sin, and the only appropriate

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<sup>57</sup> Defined as: pain of loss, allegory of unhappiness, pain of damnation

<sup>58</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.158

<sup>59</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.159

punishment is eternal damnation. Turning one's back on his family, religion and the Church is the gravest sin of all.

The conscience will say: You had time and opportunity to repent and would not. You were brought up religiously by your parents. You had the sacraments and grace and indulgences of the church to aid you. You had the minister of God to preach to you, to call you back when you had strayed, to forgive you your sins, no matter how many, how abominable, if only you had con-fessed and repented. No. You would not.<sup>60</sup>

The final part of the third day of Father Arnall's sermon rounds up Stephen's torture. He feels lost, afraid and filthy, as a result of the three smaller epiphanies he had during the sermons. The final and greatest epiphany Stephen experiences in this chapter is a result of these smaller epiphanies. Lost and in panic, Stephen hides under the blankets in his bed, pondering his situation and how not to be subject to eternal damnation. He decides on wandering the streets of Dublin in search of a church where he can finally confess his sins and start a new, pious life. In this manner, Joyce presents the irony in Stephen searching and scouring the same streets for spiritual salvation, as he walked not long ago, but for a completely opposite reason. Stephen's epiphany begins with him finding a chapel in Church Street and confessing his sins to an elderly and understanding Capuchin priest. After being told about his penance and the prayers he must direct towards the Blessed Virgin, Stephen's final epiphany shows its face, and with it the narrative shifts, transforming the depiction of Stephen's surroundings into an enormous religious experience that is blessed by God's light. Stephen exits the chapel in a state of religious bliss, finally feeling his soul being freed from the shackles of sin, metaphorically changing the focus of his desire from prostitutes to the Blessed Virgin.

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<sup>60</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.159

In spite of all he had done it. He had confessed and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy once more, holy and happy. It would be beautiful to die if God so willed. It was beautiful to live in grace a life of peace and virtue and forbearance with others.<sup>61</sup>

This epiphany is one that started with promise of hellfire, pain and judgment, one which triggered all of Stephen's senses into a state of complete and utter panic. It is the most extreme epiphany in the novel, as it completely shifts Stephen's perception of the world and his surroundings, and not just slightly changing his worldview as was showed in the past epiphanies he experienced. Although all of Stephen's epiphanies carry importance for his character development and the novel's narrative aspect, this epiphany is by far the one that resulted in the biggest change in Stephen's mindset.

### **3.5. Epiphany of Freedom**

The epiphany which occurred at the ending of chapter three was the most intense and difficult epiphany in the novel, but the epiphany which occurs in chapter four is the most important one, both for the narrative and for Stephen's character. It is the culmination of Stephen's inner conflicts during his entire childhood and adolescence, a single moment of utter clarity which defines his character from that point on and through all other works of Joyce. Being the last epiphany Stephen experiences in the novel, it is also a statement made by Joyce, which will be addressed later in this section.

As with many elements in the novel, this epiphany is again a result of a conflict Stephen faces after deciding to dedicate his life to the Catholic Church, God and the Blessed Virgin. Stephen's life of piety and religious restrictiveness do not last for long, as the principles and restrictions he adheres to and decides to blindly follow are in complete conflict with his true nature. He goes as far as to intentionally shut out his own senses as a means of

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<sup>61</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.179

disciplining them, which is a manner of an ultimate sacrifice for Stephen.<sup>62</sup> During the chapter, he starts sensing this conflict eating at him and making him feel at deep unease. Stephen's disappointment with religion and the church start to emerge again, creating in him further unrest. The carnal desires which he had tried so hard to suppress, start eating at him once again, with the only thing keeping him away to turning back to his old self being his self-discipline and prayer.

He seemed to feel a flood slowly advancing towards his naked feet and to be waiting for the first faint timid noiseless wavelet to touch his fevered skin. Then, almost at the instant of that touch, almost at the verge of sinful consent, he found himself standing far away from the flood upon a dry shore, saved by a sudden act of the will or a sudden ejaculation; and, seeing the silver line of the flood far away and beginning again its slow advance towards his feet, a new thrill of power and satisfaction shook his soul to know that he had not yielded nor undone all.<sup>63</sup>

However, Stephen was bound to be once again completely disillusioned in the church, an opinion which was triggered by the infamous talk with the director of the school about Stephen's vocation. He is thrown into another vortex of confusion and disappointment, finally realizing that Ireland and the Catholic Church will never accept his true nature. Stephen accepts at that point, the fact that he was made for more than just a life of piety, and that he is bound to learn his own truth, and not one fabricated by clergymen. Even if it meant travelling and experiencing sin, Stephen's character finally starts acknowledging its own nature, slowly moving towards a vision of an artist, rather than one of a priest.

He would never swing the thurible before the tabernacle as priest. His destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders. The wisdom of the priest's appeal did not touch him to the quick. He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The notion of personal importance of Stephen's senses was elaborated on pages 12 and 22 of the thesis

<sup>63</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.188

<sup>64</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.200

The true epiphany of the novel starts taking shape with Stephen's character finally becoming aware of itself; the narrative also starts shifting towards a positive, optimistic and liberating way of describing Stephen's surroundings. However, confusion, anger and disappointment are still present in Stephen's thoughts. He finally feels free, but he is unsure of the path he must take. After an encounter with some friends and a short exchange of words, he gladly accepts his name, 'Dedalus – the great artificer', as a symbol of soaring high above the restrictions put on him by religion, politics and family. Empowered by newfound strength and confidence, Stephen is on a path towards becoming a true artist. The single moment which starts a chain reaction resulting in Stephen's most important epiphany is the instance in which he sees a young lady on the beach, with her skirt being lifted up to her waist. Stephen's final epiphany comes in the form of a flash of clarity, a deep understanding of his own self, his own desires and the type of life he wishes to live. The girl in the water is again, a female symbol in his life, but the first one which offered him true clarity and peace of mind. The ecstasy he feels in that moment is such that makes him cry out in happiness.

—Heavenly God! cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy. He turned away from her suddenly and set off across the strand. His cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow; his limbs were trembling. On and on and on and on he strode, far out over the sands, singing wildly to the sea, crying to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him. Her image had passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory. On and on and on and on!<sup>65</sup>

After this moment, Stephen's character is forever changed. The final epiphany in the novel grants him liberty from the emotional shackles he was bound to from very early in his childhood; this epiphany finally allows Stephen to view life through the eyes of an artist. The

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<sup>65</sup> Joyce, James (1916), p.212-213



fifth and final chapter of the novel is completely written through the eyes of an artist, and the narrative stay with Stephen in his transformation. From that point on, thoughts, descriptions and monologues are narrated by a true artist. The final chapter does not offer any significant epiphanies, but it is rather, a prologue to Stephen's newfound joy of life, which is the result of his last epiphany.

## 4. Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to show the different ways in which Joyce presented Stephen's epiphanies, their effects on Stephen's character and the narrative aspect of the novel. Their importance cannot be understated, as they are crucial points in the novel and catalysts for the development of the narrative. Epiphanies are important to Joyce, and different authors agree that Joyce used them very precisely and deliberately.<sup>66</sup> As was shown in the section explaining the epiphanies in the novel, each epiphany is in its place for a reason, as it is an essential element of the novel and it serves as a crossroads for Stephen's character; each epiphany forever changes Stephen's character, in a minor or major effect. Joyce also used the character of Stephen and the notion of epiphanies to elaborate on his aesthetic theory, both in *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero*, as well as *Dubliners*.<sup>67</sup> His theory did not have much theoretical or practical explanation in this specific novel, but it is still a starting point for Joyce's future endeavors in the field of aesthetics and it shows young Joyce's understanding of epiphanies. His theory of aesthetics was also touched upon, explaining the importance of the three principles of Aquinas for the novel and Joyce himself.

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<sup>66</sup> Hendry (1946), p. 451

<sup>67</sup> Hendry (1946), p. 449-453

By explaining the context surrounding major epiphanies and notable minor epiphanies in the novel, I have shown how they affect Stephen as a character and how these epiphanies help form an artist out of a troubled young man. From the earliest memories of Stephen's childhood, where he started his observations of the world to the final parts of the novel, Joyce's methodology in developing the experience of epiphanies was shown. Each epiphany is specifically tailored for the period of Stephen's life in which it occurs, starting from the smaller realizations based on Stephen's senses during his childhood, to the pronounced religious epiphanies during his adolescence and the liberating realizations of a young adult on his path to becoming a true artist. According to the author Florence Walzl, the epiphanies occurring in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are unique in Joyce's works as they are true epiphanies of an artist, as they are almost religious in character and offer a deeply-felt experience that has a character-changing nature, as opposed to other epiphanies in some of Joyce's other works that are not as intense or life-changing.<sup>68</sup> The path of development of Stephen's character is a series of recorded epiphanies, which is closely related to Joyce's own musings on epiphanies in *Stephen Hero*, which was touched upon in the second section of the thesis, regarding Joyce's aesthetic theory. Joyce stated that it was the duty of a 'man of letters' to record epiphanies as they are important and fragile; Joyce followed his own theory and recorded his own epiphanies. Through the character of Stephen, Joyce channels his own thoughts and experiences. Knowing this, it is safe to assume that the epiphanies Stephen experiences are at least partly based in Joyce's own experience with epiphanies. With the novel being autobiographical in nature, it is apparent that epiphanies are of major importance to Joyce, and the way that importance is translated onto his work is

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<sup>68</sup> Walzl (1965), p. 441-445

extensively depicted and shown in the novel in the way Joyce constructs each epiphany of Stephen, which was the main focus of this thesis.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown the importance of epiphanies to Stephen's character development, the narrative aspect of the novel, Joyce's aesthetic theory and philosophy and Joyce's work in general, focusing on different epiphanies as to show the different ways Joyce constructs epiphanies and the world around his characters. This specific novel offers good insight into young Joyce's stance towards epiphanies and how he perceived them in his own personal life. All of the important epiphanies and crucial moments in the novel were presented and elaborated on, creating a complete and cohesive picture of the importance of epiphanies in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

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