Introduction

A Book of Epiphanies

In *Stephen Hero*, an early version of the novel that was to become *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the hero, Stephen Daedalus, overhears a snatch of conversation that makes him think of writing "a book of epiphanies":

> A young lady was standing on the steps of one of those brown brick houses which seem the very incarnation of Irish paralysis. A young gentleman was leaning on the rusty railings of the area. Stephen as he passed on his quest heard the following fragment of colloquy out of which he received an impression keen enough to afflict his sensitiveness very severely.
>
> The Young Lady—(drawling discreetly) . . . O, yes . . . I was . . . at the . . . cha . . . pel . . .
>
> The Young Gentleman—(inaudibly) . . . I . . . (again inaudibly) . . . I . . .
>
> The Young Lady—(softly) . . . O . . . but you're . . . ve . . . ry . . . wick . . . ed . . .
>
> 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.
>
> (*SH* 211)

Although Joyce never published the book Stephen envisages, between 1900 and 1904 he wrote at least forty short texts he called "epiphanies." Approx-

imately half are snatches of dialogue, akin to the "fragment of colloquy" Stephen overhears; the rest are prose-poetic vignettes. These two types of epiphany seem to correspond to Stephen's definition, suggesting that the dramatic texts record the "vulgarity of speech or of gesture," while the lyrical pieces describe "memorable phase[s] of the mind." According to Stephen, both kinds record an everyday experience that occasions "a sudden spiritual manifestation." He proceeds to explain to his friend Cranly how even a "triviality," such as the Ballast Office clock they are passing, can awaken a "sudden" revelation when the "spiritual eye" of the beholder comes into focus with its object. The prospect that any event could occasion an epiphany is tantalizing, and the parallels between Stephen's account and Joyce's early texts make it tempting to read the epiphanies as attempts to record such "delicate and evanescent" moments. But if the experiences themselves are fleeting and difficult to capture, Joyce's epiphanies are equally evanescent, shimmering delicately between a sense of profound but ungraspable significance and inscrutable banality.

The publication of *Stephen Hero* in 1944 stimulated considerable interest in the concept of epiphany, with many critics regarding it as central to an understanding of Joyce. Critical interest continued to grow in the 1950s and 1960s when the epiphanies were published, first in a partial edition of twenty-two epiphanies at Buffalo in 1956, then in *The Workshop of Daedalus* (1965) as a complete set. A few critics, such as Morris Beja and A. Walton Litz, recognized Joyce's epiphanies as among his "earliest important literary compositions" (*PSW* 157) and thus as significant texts in their own right, but the majority of Joyceans focused on the account of epiphany in *Stephen Hero*. This emphasis on Joyce's discarded early novel meant that when literary scholars turned toward poststructuralism and other critical theories, the notion of epiphany seemed naive and outdated. From the 1970s to the early 2000s the epiphanies fell out of favor, as critics focused increasingly on *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, with a widespread assumption that Joyce had abandoned his epiphanies after *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). This assumption is manifestly false—Joyce reused fifteen epiphanies in *Ulysses* and eight in *Finnegans Wake* (see the table of epiphanies)—but having been advanced in the first complete edition in *The Workshop of Daedalus*, it became the predominant view in Joyce studies for almost half a century, which is a major reason why the epiphanies have not been published since *Poems and Shorter Writings* (1991).

The Workshop of Daedalus and *Poems and Shorter Writings* are valuable compendiums, but a new edition of Joyce's epiphanies is long overdue, as is

a reassessment of these early works. This critical edition provides a corrected text, based on fresh transcriptions of the manuscripts, with a comprehensive list of textual variants, including those found in a typescript at Yale University in 2015 (MacDuff, "Yale"). The Yale typescript postdates 1927, providing further evidence that Joyce was drawing on his epiphanies when he composed *Finnegans Wake* (1923–39). It also raises questions about the order of the epiphanies, since the order in the typescript differs from that of the Buffalo manuscript it is copied from. Previous editions have presented the epiphanies in a numbered sequence, but there is not enough evidence to reconstruct that sequence with any certainty. Consequently, this edition reprints the epiphanies in their manuscript order, referring to individual epiphanies by the short titles Morris Beja has given them ("Epiphany" 712–13), on the basis that Joyce referred to his epiphanies by titles, not numbers. Each of these decisions is justified in the following sections, which also present an introduction to the historical, biographical, and literary contexts of the epiphanies, an overview of how Joyce reused them in his subsequent works, and a survey of their critical reception.

Before we turn to critical readings of the epiphanies, however, it may be useful to begin with their popular reception, because Joyce's early texts and the account in *Stephen Hero* have profoundly shaped our understanding of epiphany. The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies two meanings of *epiphany*: the first, referring to the revelation of Christ to the Magi on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, is recorded in 1350; the second, in use since the late seventeenth century, refers to the "manifestation or appearance" of a divinity. Stephen's definition of epiphany as "a sudden spiritual manifestation" is clearly in keeping with these uses, though the "manifestation" he refers to is a "triviality," a "fragment of colloquy" overheard in the street, rather than a divine apparition. There is continuity here with classical and biblical theophanies, where deities appear in human or animal form (though they also come in the guise of angels, dreams, stars, and so on), but unlike their antecedents, Joyce's epiphanies are overwhelmingly secular (see Beja, *Epiphany* 14, 21, 24–27; MacDuff, *Panepiphanal* 23–30; Nichols 13–16). This shift in the use of epiphany was already underway in the nineteenth century—in 1838 Ralph Waldo Emerson called an epiphany "a fact . . . of God" (qtd. in Abrams, *Natural* 413), and in 1859 Thomas De Quincey referred to two "epiphanies of the Grecian intellect" (qtd. in *OED*)—but Joyce extends its secularization into everyday speech and gesture, or a "memorable phase of the mind." This transference pushes the word beyond its earlier senses, recorded in the *OED*, toward the dominant contemporary

meaning of epiphany as "an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure" (*Merriam-Webster*, 3a). We are probably all familiar with such moments, however fleeting they may be, but they would rarely, if ever, have been called "epiphanies" before Joyce.

Joyce is also responsible for the use of epiphany as a literary term referring to "a revealing scene or moment" (*Merriam-Webster*, 3b). These definitions link the two senses, and the connection between epiphany as "a sudden manifestation or perception" (3a; Stephen's "sudden spiritual manifestation") and as "a revealing scene or moment" (3b; the dialogue that makes Stephen think of "a book of epiphanies") is brought out by Oliver St. John Gogarty, Joyce's contemporary, who speculated that "F[ather] Darlington had taught him, as an aside in his Latin class—for Joyce knew no Greek—that 'Epiphany' meant 'a showing forth.' So he recorded under 'Epiphany' any showing forth of the mind by which he considered one gave oneself away" (294–95). Gogarty, to his chagrin,[1] was the subject of an epiphany that exposes his own arrogance ("Is That for Gogarty?"), which may explain his aside on Joyce's lack of Greek. Joyce would surely have known the word *epiphany* from the liturgy, though, where the Epiphany season runs from Twelfth Night (January 6) to Candlemas (February 2, Joyce's birthday). Moreover, given Joyce's interest in etymology,[2] he might not have needed Father Darlington to tell him that the word is derived from the Greek prefix *epi* (to, upon, beside) and the verb *phainein*, to show. Regardless of where Joyce learned the word, Gogarty's recollection that Joyce "recorded under 'Epiphany' any showing forth of the mind by which he considered one gave oneself away" brings out the link between these inadvertent moments of revelation and the records of them, which Joyce titled "Epiphany."

Gogarty's singular, capitalized title, placed in quotation marks, offers an interesting comparison with Stephen Daedalus's idea of "collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies." The earliest reference to this projected work appears in a letter from Joyce to his brother Stanislaus, dated February 8, 1903, indicating that Joyce's work on "Epiphany" was well underway, for he had given a manuscript copy to George Russell, mentioning to Stanislaus that "my latest additions to 'Epiphany' might not be to his liking" (*LII* 28). This clearly implies a single, titled work that Joyce was composing in February 1903; just over a month later, Joyce informed his brother: "I have written fifteen epiphanies—of which twelve are insertions and three additions" (*LII* 35). Here, then, it seems that "Epiphany" was Joyce's working title for an ordered collection of "epiphanies," with new pieces intended as insertions or additions to the sequence. Joyce may even