Introduction

He desired not to be a man of letters but a spirit expressing itself through language.

James Joyce

In Joyce’s early novel, *Stephen Hero*, Stephen Daedalus famously defines an “epiphany” as

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* 216)

This definition introduced the term “epiphany” to literary studies, shaping all subsequent debates. Indeed, the passage has been interpreted so extensively that one might wonder whether there is anything left to add, but the quotation I have chosen for my epigraph, which Joyce recorded under “Dedalus” in his alphabetical notebook (*WD* 96), indicates how much remains to be analyzed, for there has not yet been a study of Joyce’s *linguistic* epiphanies.

In this book, I argue that language is the site of the Joycean epiphany: unlike classical, biblical, and Romantic epiphanies, the “spiritual manifestation” is not a divine apparition or an immanent revelation but “spirit expressing itself through language” (*WD* 96). Stephen’s aesthetics of epiphany, the manuscript epiphanies themselves, their role in the genesis of Joyce’s works, and the lifelong investigation of language he conducted through them all point to a single conclusion: for Joyce, an epiphany is not a revelation of God, nature, or the mind but of the human spirit embodied in language.
But if Joyce’s epiphanies are simply linguistic phenomena, why has their significance been overlooked for so long? From the publication of Stephen Hero in 1944 until Morris Beja’s Epiphany in the Modern Novel (1971), the concept of epiphany was central to Joyce studies; indeed, it became so widespread that some critics believed the term had become a worn-out cliche or meaningless catch-all. Ironically, the most virulent attack came from Robert Scholes, who edited the first complete edition of Joyce’s epiphanies in 1965. Having coauthored The Workshop of Dae-dalus, Scholes’s objection to “epiphany hunters” was naturally influential, and since the 1970s, the epiphanies have largely been neglected in Joyce studies.

While Scholes’s demand for greater precision was warranted, the reaction against the epiphanies was misguided, particularly because there has been so much confusion about Joyce’s early texts. In 1941, Harry Levin, one of the earliest and best of Joyce’s readers, believed that the “book of epiphanies” Stephen thinks of writing in Stephen Hero was Dubliners (Levin 1941, 29). With the publication of the manuscript “epiphanies” in Buffalo (1956) and Cornell (1965), Levin’s mistake became apparent: by 1904, Joyce had written at least forty short texts he called “epipha-nies.” Even when these were identified, there was still confusion about their genre: several critics referred to them as prose pieces, despite the fact that Joyce’s brief, enigmatic texts alternate between dramatic sketches and prose-poetic vignettes. The latter are highly lyrical but obscure, while the elliptical dialogue of the dramaticules is frequently puzzling; there is rarely, if ever, a “sudden spiritual manifestation.” Indeed, Joyce’s epiphanies often seem trivial, or even insignificant, rather than revelatory, making it difficult to reconcile them with Daedalus’s epiphanic theory. To many commentators, this obscurity and banality seemed to undermine the claims of early critics like Irene Hendry that “Joyce’s work is a tissue of epipha-nies” (1946, 461), but one could equally argue that it is their “vulgarity of speech”—or ordinariness of language—that substantiates her intuition. Not recognizing the fundamentally textual nature of the epiphanies, in the 1970s and 1980s post-structural critics concentrated on Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, with some critics regarding the epiphanies as juvenilia—a notion conclusively disproved by the fact that three-quarters of Joyce’s epiphanies are reused in his later works.

These misunderstandings concerning the nature and function of the epiphanies are partly explained by the uncertainty surrounding the texts.
Their date of composition is unknown: the most likely interval is 1901–1903, but Joyce may have begun earlier and continued later. Their number is uncertain: since an autograph manuscript of twenty-two epiphanies in Buffalo is numbered discontinuously to seventy-one, it has long been thought that more than thirty are missing, and critics have tried to identify the “lost” epiphanies in Joyce’s works; but a typescript of the epiphanies I discovered in 2015 raises doubts about the authenticity of the verso numbering. The sequence of the Yale typescript and the uncertainty of the Buffalo numbering also call into question the order of the epiphanies: it has been assumed, for instance, that Joyce progressed from dramatic to lyrical epiphanies in his prose works, but close study of the extant manuscripts, including the Yale typescript, shows that this claim rests on false grounds, and that little, in fact, can be said with any confidence about the order of the epiphanies.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the date, number, and order of the epiphanies, I believe it is high time to reassess their significance. In this book, I offer fresh readings of Joyce’s epiphanies, both as distinctive individual texts that question the nature of epiphany as an event and as a genre, and also as an ordered collection or “book of epiphanies.” Since Joyce reused thirty of the forty extant epiphanies, I examine them in the context of his subsequent works, returning to the earliest surviving manuscripts to consider the role of the epiphanies in shaping Joyce’s oeuvre, their relation to other modernist epiphanies, and what this might teach us about modernism as a whole.

The Crucible

The earliest critical commentary on Joyce’s epiphanies is Stanislaus Joyce’s Dublin Diary, begun in September 1903. The diary, which Stanislaus called “My Crucible,” is a key, and familiar, source of information about Joyce’s earliest work, but its crucial, alchemical role as a repository of those works has rarely been recognized. The diary opens with a memorable account of James Joyce’s developing character, lamenting his preference for “the sampling of liqueurs, the devising of dinners, the care of dress, and whoring” over serious artistic endeavor, for Stanislaus recognized his brother’s literary talent to be “very great indeed” (1971, 14). Writing before Joyce had drafted any of the works that were to make his reputation, and with only a handful of poems and epiphanies to go by, Stanislaus proved an
astute judge of his elder brother, and his preference for Joyce’s epiphanies over his lyrics was equally prescient (1971, 14). The finely wrought poems, put into sequence by Stanislaus, yielded Joyce’s first publication, *Chamber Music* (1907), but the formal innovations of the epiphanies initiated an extraordinary literary experiment that led to *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*.

When Stanislaus Joyce copied twenty-four of his brother’s epiphanies into his “Selections in Prose from Various Authors” (begun in October 1903), alongside quotations from Tolstoy, Goethe, and Rousseau, the comparison must have seemed almost as precocious as Joyce’s comment to his parents, aged thirteen, on Hermann Sudermann’s *Heimat*: “The subject of the play is genius breaking out in the home and against the home. You needn’t have gone to see it. It’s going to happen in your own house” (*MBK* 87). Despite Joyce’s monumental hubris, however, in hindsight he was vindicated, just as Stanislaus’s “Selections” now appears to be an accurate assessment of Joyce’s stature. Copied no later than 1904, the collection indicates the crucial role of the epiphanies in shaping Joyce’s oeuvre: A. Walton Litz rightly judges them Joyce’s “earliest important literary compositions” (157), and to the extent that Joyce’s work is “one great work” (Tindall 1959, ix), the epiphanies are a point of origin.

In addition to his notebook “Selections,” which contains the only extant copy of seventeen epiphanies, Stanislaus made two fair copies (*Cornell 4609 Bd Ms 3*). These epiphanies are preserved, along with nine of Joyce’s earliest manuscripts, on paper that Stanislaus Joyce reused for his diary, showing the extent to which Stanislaus was already his brother’s keeper in Dublin. In December 1904, Stanislaus decided to call the diary “My Crucible” (1971, 99), but the literary miscellany he used to “refine [him]self” (1971, 99), including five early essays, Joyce’s holograph copy of Revelation, two poems, and three epiphanies, constitutes the crucible of Joyce’s art.

In the first of these essays, a review of “Ecce Homo” at the Royal Hibernian Academy (1899), Joyce’s response to Munkácsy’s Passion trilogy tells us much about his attitude toward divine revelation. *Ecce Homo*: “Behold the Man,” Joyce translates Pilate’s words, praising the humanity of Munkácsy’s Christ not as a remote instrument of “Divine Law,” the “Incarnate Son of God,” but as a simple “Man of Sorrows.” Likewise, he approves the artist’s choice “to make Mary a mother and John a man” (*CW* 36): his figures are not symbols of higher spiritual truths but dramatic
representations of the human spirit, just as the “sudden spiritual manifestation” of Joyce’s epiphanies is an immanent, humanist revelation rather than a transcendental theophany.

In “Ecce Homo,” Joyce calls this “drama,” an expression of “the everlasting hopes, desires and hates of humanity” in any form of art (CW 32), echoing the same definition in his first paper for the Literary and Historical Society of University College Dublin (CW 41). In that paper, “Drama and Life” (1900), Joyce claims that “drama arises spontaneously out of life and is coeval with it” (43); more radically still, he argues that drama exists even “before it takes form, independently” of the work of art (41): “It might be said fantastically that as soon as men and women began life in the world there was above them and about them, a spirit, of which they were dimly conscious, which they would have had sojourn in their midst in deeper intimacy and for whose truth they became seekers in after times, longing to lay hands upon it” (41). At first, this spirit, above and about us, is an “elfish . . . Aerial” thing, yet “in after times,” we seek to lay hands on it through a “deeper intimacy” with the “truth” of our own experience (41). Drama seeks to manifest this spirit, and since it is “coeval” with life, Joyce concludes that “life we must accept as we see it before our eyes, men and women as we meet them in the real world, not as we apprehend them in the world of faery” (45). This fundamental acceptance of life, however we encounter it, is the attitude of Joyce’s mature art; yet here, at least, it grows out of a “longing to lay hands upon” spirit. As it happens, Joyce’s adverb, “fantastically,” derives from the same root as “epiphany,” and it might be said epiphanically that in the “Crucible” essays Joyce conceives of drama, encompassing all arts and all of life, as the revelation of an animating spirit.

The most zealous statement of this youthful credo occurs in the next paper Joyce read to the Literary and Historical Society, “James Clarence Mangan” (1902), where he writes of a “serene spirit which enters . . . the hearts of men.” This spirit is beauty, or “the splendour of truth,”7 “a gracious presence when the imagination contemplates intensely the truth of its own being or the visible world, and the spirit which proceeds out of truth and beauty is the holy spirit of joy” (83). While Joyce came to distrust those big words like “beauty” and “truth,” recoiling from Platonic forms and theosophical beliefs into the empirical, “the holy spirit of joy” remains, from bathers whooping a raucous “call of life” in Portrait (184) and the hockey players celebrating joyfully in “Nestor” (prompting
Stephen's famous definition of God as “a shout in the street” ([U 2.386]) to the “joysis crisis” of *Finnegans Wake* (395.32; see Spurr 2015). These spontaneous outbursts of powerful emotion are highly dramatic, in Joyce’s sense, but also Romantic, whereas his epiphanies frequently appear trivial and enigmatic; yet Joyce’s conception of an immanent, ubiquitous epiphany “you damn well have to see” ([U 9.86] is already contained in the manifestation of “the visible world.” Unlike the vision of the Romantics, there is nothing beyond this revelation, just as there is no hidden significance in Joyce’s epiphanies; everything is given, however prosaic it may appear. Yet this does not entail the reduction of the world, or the text, to meaningless matter; rather, the world as we see it comes into being through imaginative contemplation, just as for Joyce the materiality of language reveals “the continual affirmation of the spirit” ([CW 83]).

Joyce echoes this conclusion in *Ulysses*, where Bloom dissents “tacitly from Stephen’s views on the eternal affirmation of man in literature” ([U 17.29–30]), suggesting a certain distance from the author’s early theory. Yet the substitution of “man” for “spirit” is wholly in keeping with Joyce’s earlier view, as *Stephen Hero* makes clear: “The spirit of man makes a continual affirmation” ([SH 85]). Although Daedalus, the “heaven-ascending essayist,” is undoubtedly mocked for his epiphanic vision of literature and poetry (“the poetic phenomenon is signalled in the heavens”), it is important to realize that the paper he delivers to the University’s Literary and Historical Society—an essay first titled “Drama and Life,” though it takes its conclusion from “James Clarence Mangan”—is a tissue of Joyce’s early aesthetics and criticism (44–85). Whatever irony there may be, these are Joyce’s poetics, and after being refined in the crucible of his art, they culminate in a powerful conclusion: that language is itself an epiphany, the continuous manifestation of the human spirit.

**The Language of Revelation and the Revelation of Language**

One word stands out in Stephen’s “revelation of the beautiful” ([SH 85]). The only word in italics, it emphasizes the revelatory quality of Stephen’s aesthetics. This is not simply a manner of speaking; Stephen’s aesthetics are literally drawn from Revelation. “[T]he holy spirit of joy” that continually affirms the human spirit is announced in Apocalyptic terms: after the “treacherous order” is destroyed, “a host of voices is heard singing, a little faintly at first, of a serene spirit which enters . . . the hearts of men”
Likewise, the primeval spirit of “Drama and Life,” that “roaming air” that “has never left our vision, [and] shall never leave it, till the firmament is as a scroll rolled away,” proceeds to and from the Apocalypse (CW 41; Rev. 6:14; P 121). These allusions are explained by a surprising document in Stanislaus’s “Crucible”: a handwritten copy of Revelation, made by the young James Joyce.

This manuscript, titled “The Apocalypse of St. John,” has not received the attention it deserves. It was discovered by Scholes and Kain, who cite it as evidence of Joyce’s familiarity with the King James Bible, the version he copied (despite the Douay title [WD 264]). Virginia Moseley repeats this point in her preface to *Joyce and the Bible* (viii), but, surprisingly, she doesn’t mention the manuscript again. Roy Gottfried elaborates on the same point, providing a fuller account of the Bibles Joyce quotes from, but his account of the manuscript itself adds little to Robert Scholes’s catalog of the Joyce Collection at Cornell. Although Michael Groden’s *Index* also lists the manuscript, it was not reproduced in the *James Joyce Archive* and remains unpublished. This may explain why Joyce’s autograph copy has not been studied in detail, but scrutiny of the “Apocalypse” reveals a tantalizing glimpse of Joyce’s early attitude toward religion and aesthetics.

On sixty-four loose sheets, Joyce copied the entire book of Revelation, through to chapter 18, verse 3; an additional leaf contains Revelation 19:11–17, suggesting that Joyce may have completed the copy on pages now lost, rather than having deliberately broken off. The manuscript must predate epiphany 1904, since the first date Stanislaus records on the recto used for his diary is January 6, 1904 (f.71), but it may have been made considerably earlier. An unusually fair copy, the extant pages contain no marginalia or annotations, and aside from the lacuna (18.3–19.11), there are very few omissions, errors, or repetitions. This fidelity is interesting in itself: I can think of no other text Joyce copies with such careful and sustained attention, which raises the question why he did so and why he chose the King James Version rather than the Douay-Rheims translation he was brought up with.

Notwithstanding its accuracy, there are several significant changes to the source text that shed light on Joyce’s procedure. In addition to minor punctuation changes, there are six corrections, thirty-six substantive variations, and hundreds of marked letter s’s. Many of these are trivial, but in three cases they are revealing. First, Joyce occasionally seeks to clarify the sense through parenthetical insertions, suggesting an interest in the literal
meaning of the text: for instance, in 4.3 he adds, “And he that sat (on the throne) was to look” (Joyce’s alterations in bold), and in 4.7, “the second living being (was) like a calf.” In the Authorized Version Joyce owned, the latter verse reads “And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle”; Joyce substitutes “living being” for “beast” throughout, as he does through most of the book, suggesting an alternative interpretation of the beasts of Apocalypse. Likewise, his version of 2.4, which changes “thy first love” to “my first love,” and 11.3, where “peace” replaces “power,” may provide clues to Joyce’s reading of Revelation; in these cases, variation implies interpretation. The third type of change concerns the letter s, which Joyce strikes through more than three hundred times, as in 5.1: “And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven Seals.” At first, he marked only soft initial s’s, as in this verse, suggesting that he was interested in the frequent sibilance of the Authorized Version, but later he also slashed Z, ʃ and ʒ sounds, in initial, medial, and terminal positions (while never striking through a soft c), indicating that he became focused more on the letter than on the sound.

This characteristically Joycean focus on the meanderings of a single letter indicates an interest in the language of Revelation, lending support to the obvious explanation that Joyce chose the King James Version for its celebrated style, perhaps copying it as an exercise in literary apprenticeship. But if so, this doesn’t explain why Joyce chose the book of Revelation in particular. He would have found “the rhythmic rise and fall” of “lucid supple periodic prose” (P 180–81) throughout the Authorized Version; and even the most characteristic qualities of Revelation—its geometrical structure, its rich, concatenating imagery, and its lyrical language—can be found in Daniel, Ezekiel, or Psalms. Nevertheless, the formal structure of Revelation, organized around sequentially unfolding symbolic patterns like the seven churches, seals, trumpets, figures, and vials of chapters 1–16, rather than linear plotlines, may have attracted Joyce as a model of narrative order. Similarly, the Apocalyptic proliferation of images and symbolic associations, whose ultimate significance remains obscure, can be compared to the gnomonic principles of absence and reiteration that govern Joyce’s art, from the epiphanies to the Wake.

Joyce’s changes, whether clarifying the sense or altering the meaning, show his interest in interpreting Revelation; how he did so can be inferred
from the extensive use he made of it subsequently. Each of Joyce’s works can be considered as a revelation: the thwarted hopes and dreams of Dubliners, the artist’s soul in Portrait, the extraordinariness of the ordinary in Ulysses, the revelation of language in the Wake; and each of Joyce’s books alludes frequently to the book of Revelation. In Portrait, Father Arnall draws on the imagery of Apocalypse to convey the dread of final judgment:

Doomsday was at hand. The stars of heaven were falling upon the earth like the figs cast by the figtree which the wind has shaken. The sun, the great luminary of the universe, had become as sackcloth of hair. The moon was bloodred. The firmament was as a scroll rolled away. (P 121)

Compare Revelation 6:12–14:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;
And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.
And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

The preacher goes on to cite Revelation 10:1–6, and after the sermon, Stephen feels the sinful “beast” in his soul blasted by “the angel’s trumpet,” and the “wind of the last day” scourging the “jewel-eyed harlots of his imagination” (P 123–24; Rev. 8–11, 17). His contrition leads to repentance, confession, absolution, and a new communion with church and God, but this traditional journey of the soul is only a passage in the artist’s apprenticeship, so that the language of Revelation prepares the ground for Joyce’s Künstlerroman.

Ulysses also contains numerous allusions to Revelation, including Bloom’s throwaway, “Blood of the Lamb” (U 8.9; Rev. 7:14–15), Ann Hathaway, “whore of Babylon” (U 9.339; Rev. 17:5), “the new Jerusalem” (U 12.1473; Rev. 21–22), the Alpha and the Omega (U 3.39, 13.1258, 1264; Rev. 1:8, 1:11, 21:6, 22:13), and the traditional iconography of the evangelists (U 12.1443–46; Rev. 4.7–8). The densest concentration is found in “Circe,” leading Virginia Moseley to claim that “Joyce’s technique of hallucination in the Nighttown scene points directly to the last book of
the New Testament” (65). This probably overstates the case, but the episode is certainly branded with the “Mark of the beast” (U 15.209): the phrase is repeated at 15.844–45; another firebrand preacher, Alexander J. Dowie, denounces Bloom as “the white bull mentioned in the Apocalypse” (15.1757–58; cf. Rev. 13, 16–17); and soon after, news of the “Antichrist” is in the papers (15.2135), with a Nessian “Sea serpent” announcing his “Safe arrival” (2140; cf. 2135 and Rev. 12:19). On the one hand, these examples support Moseley’s reading of the book of Revelation as the nightmare of history; on the other, they attest to Joyce’s continuing fascination with the beasts of Apocalypse, whether evangelical or anti-Christian. Setting aside problems of tone, in both cases Joyce tends to bring symbolic beasts back down to earthly creatures: the “living beings” representing Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are brought closer to home as the four Annalists of Irish history, symbolized by a “bogoak sceptre” (lance), an American puma (in place of the British lion), “a Kerry calf and a golden eagle from Car- rantuohill” (12.1443–46). Similarly, “Mark of the beast” (15.209) refers to Bloom’s close brush with a “dragon sandstrewer” (185), or street-cleaning vehicle, and more immediately to “lost cattle” (208), which in light of the preceding chapter, “Oxen of the Sun,” can be read as both real cattle lost to foot-and-mouth disease and the semen Bloom expended through auto-stimulation in “Nausicaa,” a mark of his crime against fecundity.

_Finnegans Wake_ pursues this interest in beasts of burden and beasts of revelation: at the end of 3.3, the four old men who represent, among other things, the four evangelists and the four Masters, metamorphose into the ass: “Mattahah! Marahah! Luahah! Joahanahanahanah!” (554.10); in 3.4, they become the “four hoarsemen on their apokaloops” (557.1–2; Rev. 7). Unlike in _Ulysses_, though, this beast is less humanized or animalized than made literal: according to the four, “there are fully six hundred and six rag-words” in Shaun’s “Magis landeguage,” tainting the language of the _Wake_ (cf. 478.17–18) with the number of the beast (Rev. 13:8), here reduced to Salvarsan 606, a remedy for syphilis. Beginning with “a bockalips” (6.26), the _Wake_ is frequently figured as “Revelation!” (242.21): Shaun the Post, circulator of language, declares “Johannisburg’s a revelation” (453.33–34); as “Walker John Referent,” he is an avatar of John of Patmos, exhorted by the Four (analysts as well as Annalists and evangelists) to “Play us your patmost! And unpackyoulloups!” (526), thereby revealing the book’s unconscious. Indeed, one of the most strikingly self-reflexive images in the _Wake_ is that of the sealed book of life (Rev. 5–6, 20:12; cf. _FW_ 22.28, 212.23,
245.20, 264.06), a closed scroll that finally unfurls in book 4, when “A hand from the cloud emerges, holding a chart expanded” (593.18; cf. Rev. 6:14). As these examples indicate, *Finnegans Wake* rewrites the book of revelation as the revelation of the book, an epiphany of language.

The origins of this revelation can be traced back to “The Study of Languages” (1898–1899), held in Stanislaus’s “Crucible.” Joyce’s matriculation essay, composed when he was sixteen or seventeen, lacks the sophistication of his mature reflections on language, but it provides a brilliant insight into his early theory. Shaped by pedagogical influences and the prevailing intellectual climate, Joyce’s essay gives the first sign of his lifelong fascination with etymology, noting that “in the history of words there is much that indicates the history of men” (28). Echoing Ruskin (1864, §27), Joyce recommends studying the classics because they allow us to access “the feelings of great writers, to enter into their hearts and spirits, to be admitted, by privilege, into the privacy of their proper thoughts” (*CW* 29). This spiritual conception of literature may sound naive, particularly when Joyce idealizes the purity of language, which the “masters of English” keep “inviolate,” but later he was to see the same epiphany constantly manifest in the continuous “transition” of language (*CW* 29), whether through its written history or through the protean speech he heard around him. As Joyce saw, language is constantly being created in its continuous affirmation of the spirit, and each of his works presents this linguistic epiphany.

The result of this experiment was Joyce’s discovery, “I can do anything with language I want” (*JJ* 702). His practice of turning words over and around, breaking old languages down letter by letter to piece together a new one, prompted *transition* to hail the “Revolution of the Word,” but really Joyce was engaged in the *revelation* of the word, or better still, its “revolutions” (*FW* 350.32). The origins of this practice go back to the epiphanies.

“Epiphany” and the “book of epiphanies”

Alongside critical and theological texts, “My Crucible” contains Joyce’s most formative literary material: drafts of two poems for *Chamber Music* and three epiphanies. Stanislaus Joyce copied these epiphanies twice in the same order (*JJA* 7.46–49), suggesting they may have been intended for circulation, which correlates with Joyce’s reference to a collection titled “‘Epiphany’” (Joyce’s quotation marks: February 8, 1903, *LII* 28) that he
seems to have shown George Russell and W. B. Yeats, who praised Joyce’s “delicate spiritual writing” (S. Joyce 1971, 14). Writing from Paris a month later, Joyce told Stanislaus he had “written fifteen epiphanies—of which twelve are insertions and three additions” (LII 35), which indicates that Joyce thought of his “epiphanies” as an ordered collection. Although he chose not to publish the ensemble in an independent volume, he clearly held his early work in high esteem, apparently keeping a copy with him, through all his peregrinations, until the last months of his life, when he fled Saint-Gérand-le-Puy in the winter of 1940. With the exception of Dubliners, Joyce recycled epiphanies in every major work, including Pomes Penyeach, Stephen Hero, Exiles, and Giacomo Joyce, as well as Portrait, Ulysses, and Finnegans Wake, so that Joyce’s “earliest important literary compositions” can also be regarded as a point of origin for his oeuvre.

In total, forty epiphanies survive, although there may originally have been more. Twenty-three are in Joyce’s hand (including one draft), while seventeen are preserved by Stanislaus. Never more than a page long, they are roughly divided between dramatic sketches and lyrical prose poems, recording two types of manifestation, “in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture” and those from “a memorable phase of the mind” (SH 216). Daedalus thinks of “collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies” (216); within the surviving pages of Stephen Hero, he never does so, but the fourteen epiphanies Joyce reused form key points in the novel (cf. WD 6). Similarly, Joyce (who signed his first short stories Stephen Daedalus), never published a single volume of “Epiphany”; instead, he wrote several books of epiphanies, constantly recycling his earliest work.

Before examining how he did so, it will be useful to consider an example of each type of epiphany. “The Hole in Georgie’s Stomach,” a dramatic epiphany, opens a hiatus in the text, a hole that leads to the death of Joyce’s brother George and to the navel, as the source of life and oracular knowledge:

[Dublin: in the house in Glengariff Parade: evening]

Mrs Joyce —(crimson, trembling, appears at the parlour door) . . . Jim!

Joyce —(at the piano) . . . Yes?

Mrs Joyce —Do you know anything about the body? . . What ought I do? . . . There’s
As with the other dramatic epiphanies, stage directions, speech headings, and precise lineation evince Joyce’s careful composition, while the use of contractions, Hiberno-English, timed pauses, and prosodic features give the impression of authentic speech. The most important of these features is certainly ellipsis, both in the gaps and silences that riddle the text and in the unspoken hole “we all have / . . . . here.” This epiphany is surely the most striking example of Stephen’s “vulgarity of speech or of gesture,” and it is shocking, at least on a virginal reading, precisely because of its uncertainty: which hole? Clearly Joyce is confused, since he has to ask, and the dramatic stage direction, “stands up,” immediately after Mrs Joyce’s deictic indication, mischievously plays on the reader’s principal doubt, the anus.

When we know that Georgie Joyce contracted typhoid fever, developed peritonitis, and died of a perforated intestine on March 9, 1902 (JJ 97–98), then we can be sure the hole is the navel. It would be implausible to assume that Mrs. Joyce doesn’t know the word, and even if she considers it indelicate, it seems strange that she doesn’t use it. Perhaps, like Mr. Kernan, who cannot remember the correct word for the body of a church in “Grace”—that is, the nave—she is simply unable to recall it. In fact, “navel” is derived from “nave,” which originally means a central hub, and like the hub of a wheel, into which radial spokes are inserted, this central hole supports a number of possibilities. A textual hole itself, we may be tempted to think that if this is one of the little slips Stanislaus said Joyce was trying to capture, those “little errors and gestures . . . by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal,” then perhaps May (Mary) Joyce betrays her fear of the body, or mortality, or alternatively perhaps Joyce, under the shadow of Ibsen, wants to reveal the social mores that prevent people from speaking openly, even in the face of death.
Stanislaus tells us how deeply Georgie’s death affected James (MBK 134–36)—after all, he called his own son Giorgio, and by a strange coincidence, Joyce himself died of peritonitis (JJ 98)—yet the power of this epiphany lies less in the shock of the experience than in its associations. This is apparent in the word “hole,” repeated three times, which is not only a semantic hole, holding the space open for a number of possible referents, but also, when fixed to the navel, a linguistic cord linking back to the body of language. Indeed, the navel has a central place in Joyce’s corpus: Maud Ellmann contends that Stephen’s “strandentwining cable of all flesh” (U 3.37) can be traced back to the word “foetus” in Portrait (89), and that the “irrepressible Greek e” in Ulysses betrays a Holmesian clue to the omphalos, for at the navel of the world is inscribed a capital epsilon; she even suggests that this capital E may be related to Earwicker’s lateral symbols in the Wake (1984, 96–103). Be that as it may, it is worth remembering that in both the Gilbert and the Linati schemata, the art of “Proteus,” in which Stephen thinks of a navelcord leading to “Edenville,” is philology. Thus, as Hugh Kenner argues, the strandentwining cables are not only of flesh but also of language, cords of all words linking back through the great philological tree (94–120).

In Stephen Hero, we learn that Daedalus reads Skeats’s etymological dictionary “by the hour” (SH 32), and it is a fair bet that Joyce did the same. The power of the epiphany comes from the fact that “the hole we all have here” is never named, so that its very absence exerts a pressure of meaning, asking the reader to supply the missing reference. Throughout the epiphany, words are put under pressure, and this pressure comes from within—that is, from the pressure of meaning they bear within themselves. For instance, “hole,” meaning hollow, is cognate with “hold,” as in the hold of a ship, and both may be derived from the Teutonic base bal, meaning to cover or hide. Thus, in Joyce’s epiphanies, apparently hollow words cover their own hidden meanings. A good example is the word “matter,” which, according to Skeat, is etymologically related to “pus” and “mother,” so that the word itself threatens to secrete its subcutaneous content. In a similar vein, Skeat defines “body,” related to the Sanskrit bandlia (meaning “bondage” or “fetter”) as “that which confines the soul,” while “stomach” is derived from a Greek word στόμαχος, meaning a mouth, an opening, or the gullet, probably connected with στένω, to groan or sigh, and Sanskrit stan, to sound, so that we can read the epiphany in a new light: despite his absence, Georgie’s specter seems to speak through the
confines of the “body” in the text, as his “stomach” becomes a kind of mouth giving voice to its own meanings through the “matter” that exudes from its unspoken “hole.”

In a quite literal sense, spoken language issues from an oracular hole, but if Lacan is right that language arises from desire and that desire is founded on an imaginary lack at the heart of subjectivity, then language itself is predicated on a central nave, an absence at its origin. Attempting to pin down the meanings of a word like “matter” through dictionary definitions or etymological derivations leads to endless threads of receding meaning that support unlimited webs of linguistic association. Even when diligent detective work uncovers definite referential content, as is the case in this epiphany, there is always an element of uncertainty in Joyce’s language. Philip Herring traces Joyce’s uncertainty principle back to the word “gnomon” in *Dubliners* (xii), but I would argue that it is already at work in the epiphanies, for, as Jean-Michel Rabaté has argued, Joyce’s work, like Stephen’s world, micro- and macro-cosm, is founded “upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood” (1991, chap. 1; *U* 9.842).

That void, I have suggested, lies at the heart of language, but Rabaté contends that for Joyce as much as Stephen, there is one tenet of faith: *amor matris*, the love of a mother, in both its senses (viii–xxiii, 39–40). We see this in one of Joyce’s lyrical epiphanies, “She Comes at Night”:

She comes at night when the city is still; invisible, inaudible, all unsummoned. She comes from her ancient seat to visit the least of her children, mother most venerable, as though he had never been alien to her. She knows the inmost heart; therefore she is gentle, nothing exacting; saying, I am susceptible of change, an imaginative influence in the hearts of my children. Who has pity for you when you are sad among the strangers? Years and years I loved you when you lay in my womb.

Stanislaus tells us that this is the record of a dream Joyce had in Paris, probably in early 1903, in which Mary Joyce is “confused in his sleeping brain with the image of the Virgin Mother” (*MBK* 229–30). “[M]other most venerable” seems to support Stanislaus’s interpretation, but it is not
the only one. As she says, her image is “susceptible of change”: “ancient seat” evokes a pagan figure of power, while “the least of her children” suggests female fertility, so that she is as much matriarchal goddess as mother of God. In dreamlike fashion, her image changes from phrase to phrase, exerting a potentially unlimited “imaginative influence” on the mind of the reader. Yet the reason this epiphany evokes so many associations is precisely that at its heart there is a gap, an absence, like “The Hole in Georgie’s Stomach.” “She knows the inmost heart,” but she never reveals its truth, even in “Circe” when Stephen asks the ghost of his mother, “Tell me the word, mother, . . . The word known to all men” (U 15.4192–93). Gabler’s restoration at 9.429–30 strongly suggests that word is “love,” but its power, surely, lies in the fact that it is not given, because the very absence of an answer summons up any number of possibilities.

This paradoxical nexus in which meaning seems to proliferate from its absence characterizes Joyce’s lyrical epiphanies, pointing to a constituent paradox at the nucleus of the signifier itself. There are various ways one might theorize this gnomic condition; here I draw on psychoanalysis. As the record of a real dream, epiphany #34 confirms Freud’s remarks on the nature of condensation: “It is in fact impossible to be sure that a dream has been fully interpreted. Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have yet another meaning,” because “[t]here is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown” (1977, 383, 186). Analogous to the unspoken umbilicus of the “Hole” epiphany, in “She Comes at Night” this navel that connects to the unknown is the “inmost heart” the mother never names.

Although Stephen hedges his bets in saying that “amor matris . . . may be the only true thing in life” (U 9.843; my emphasis), Rabaté is more definite: he posits love as Joyce’s central tenet of faith, for love is “[w]hat resists, or ought to resist, doubt” (xviii). As I have shown, though, it is not clear what the mother knows in epiphany #34; her knowledge of the “inmost heart” is passed over in silence, so that love is only one possibility. Through resonant hiatuses like the hole in epiphany #19 and the heart in epiphany #34, Joyce seems to show that the only thing definite in language is its lack of definite meaning, while paradoxically, uncertainty produces a potentially infinite number of possibilities.

This certainty in the void, coupled with the endless deferral and proliferation of meaning, characterizes Joyce’s elegiac epiphanies, four of which
deal with the death of his brother Georgie and three with the loss of his mother. Like Wordsworth’s “spots of time,” each of which is an encounter with mortality, death is a central theme in Joyce’s epiphanies and their only certainty. Another epiphany, which relates to Georgie’s death, ends: “I am very sorry he died. I cannot pray for him as the others do. . . . Poor little fellow! Everything else is so uncertain!” Given the narrator’s inability to pray, and Joyce’s refusal to do so at his mother’s wake (JJ 141; MBK 234), this certainty can hardly be faith; the only thing certain is death, as *Exiles* confirms when Richard hears Beatrice make the same remark: “And does death not move you, Mr. Rowan? It is an end. Everything else is so uncertain!” (E 23; Beja 1971, 101).

Death, then, is “an end,” “the end,” and the one thing of which we can be certain (E 23; P 122–23). Yet this certitude cannot be grasped empirically: as Wittgenstein says, we can never experience death, for it lies at the boundary of nonbeing (6.4311). Joyce’s epiphanies manifest this finitude through the emptiness at the heart of language, an absence that is revealed through the textual hole in epiphany #19, or the lacuna of the inner heart in “She Comes at Night.” These resonant hiatuses become charged with all the uncertainty of the poetic words and images that surround them, and the imaginative associations of Joyce’s poetic language are apt to proliferate endlessly. Thus, we see in the epiphanies two fundamental principles of Joyce’s mature art: the art of silence and cunning concealment, where the world and the word are founded on resonant lacunae; and the endlessly proliferating profusion of polysemous and polyphonic signifiers, echoing across languages, texts, speakers, and time to animate the *Wake*. These techniques are both epiphanic, but in two quite different ways: the first manifests an absolute certainty in the revelation of absence; the second manifests a continuously changing presence in the act of being created. They come to light in Joyce’s epiphanies of death because death is the natural limit of experience, a limit that simultaneously reveals the universal truth of our mortality, opens onto the void beyond experience, and puts pressure on the finite present.

**Protean Epiphanies**

In the “Proteus” episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen reflects ironically on his early work: “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?” (U 3.141–43). Many critics assume that Joyce shared Dedalus’s ironic attitude, losing interest in the epiphanies after Portrait, if not Stephen Hero, but in fact he continued to use them until the final pages of Finnegans Wake (see appendix). Indeed, one of the earliest sketches for Finnegans Wake, the contest between Berkeley and St. Patrick, which Joyce drafted in 1923 and returned to in 1938, includes a striking vision of the “hueful panepiphanal world” (611.22). Archdruid Berkeley’s theory of color, in which the all-manifest world of reflected light blinds us to the “true inwardness of reality,” invites imaginative contemplation of the “truth” of the “visible world,” sending a ray back to “Mangan” (CW 83); at the same time, like Martha Clifford’s substitution of “world” for “word” (U 5.244), it reflects on the panepiphanal wor(l)d of Joyce’s text.

Subsequent chapters will trace the emergence of this linguistic epiphany through Dubliners, Portrait, Ulysses, and Finnegans Wake, arguing that, in addition to the structural importance of the epiphanies Joyce reuses and the stylistic poles they define, there is a natural development, or unfolding, from the language of the epiphanies to the “panepiphanal” language of the Wake. As his neologism suggests, for Joyce, like Wordsworth, epiphany is manifest everywhere. Naturally, therefore, it is manifest in language, so it seems evident that language should be the site of the literary epiphany, but as I will show in the next chapter, traditional epiphanies record the apparition of a deity, while Romantic epiphanies show forth the sublimity of nature and/or the mind; Joyce’s epiphanies are unique in making language the vehicle of its own revelation.

For almost forty years, Joyce conducted an ongoing literary experiment into the nature of his medium; the importance of the epiphanies is that they pose the central problem he investigates. As A. Walton Litz observes, the two types of epiphany, dramatic and lyrical, represent “the twin poles of Joyce’s art,” which Litz terms “dramatic irony and lyric sentiment” (PSW 158). One might quibble with these terms (there is little or no dramatic irony in the epiphanies, for instance), but Litz’s thesis provides a powerful model for the structural significance of the epiphanies in Joyce’s later work. By adapting this stylistic model to its underlying principles, I argue that these poles operate like anode and cathode: the “negative” charge of ellipses, gaps, and silences in the dramatic epiphanies create resonant lacunae for the imagination to fill, while in the lyrical epiphanies complex patterns of repetition and variation give a “positive,” accretive charge to symbolic associations, which is nevertheless riddled with indeterminacy.
In chapters 3 and 4, I develop this model through the epiphanies and *Dubliners*, redefining Joyce’s twin poles as ironic realism and lyrical symbolism before refining them into the principles of silence and repetition. Exploring the resonant hiatuses of the dramatic epiphanies and their subsequent reworkings, I show that the “negative” pole is associated with absence and the void: in the domain of writing, it is represented by the blank page before inscription, the space between words, and the referential gap they contain; in the realm of speech, it is the silence before, between, and after every utterance. In Derrida’s terms, this pole represents the play of difference in the chain of signification; following Rabaté, I call it silence, or “the void element which ensures displacement” (1984, 45). Conversely, the prose poetry of Joyce’s lyrical epiphanies typifies his art of repetition and variation: the “positive” pole represents the generative impulse underlying Joyce’s interlacing patterns, from overarching symbolic structures to recurrent imagery or leitmotifs, from endless inter- and intra-textual chains of quotation to the repetitive patternings of sound and letter that weave each phrase together.

For the sake of clarity, I refer to these poles as silence and repetition, but they are never wholly separate; as in an electrolytic circuit, linguistic current flows between. The frequent silences and ellipses of the dramatic epiphanies always occur before, between, or after vocal utterances, and it goes without saying that the words Joyce records are both different and repeated. Likewise, the frequent repetition of words, images, phonemes, and graphemes in the lyrical epiphanies always contains a difference, if only in the intervening text. Even when an identical phrase is reused, its context varies, so that the repetition necessarily differs from the original, an insight Joyce has fun with: in “Eumaeus,” Bloom thinks comically of “history repeating itself with a difference” (16.1525–26), while *Finnegans Wake* traces innumerable permutations of the “same renew[ed]” (e.g., 18.5, 134.17, 226.17, 277.22–28). Derrida’s term “iteration” “(iterum, anew, does it not come from Sanskrit itara, other?)” shows how repetition enfolds difference, even when a text is copied identically (1976, 209); indeed, difference is a condition of repetition because there must be a gap (whether temporal, spatial, or contextual) between the element that repeats and that which is repeated.

This gap, or difference, emanates from the pole of silence, in the broad sense I have defined it. Since repetition includes difference, and difference is a name for silence, repetition must include silence, demonstrating one
way that Joyce’s poles interact. Following J. Hillis Miller, I argue that this gap between repetitions opens the space for imaginative association, revealing the generative, cornucopian impulse of language. This generative notion of repetition as difference, or reiteration, can be related to a third term, “reproduction.” “[W]hen we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction I require a new terminology,” Stephen tells Lynch (P 227), and at least one critic has proposed that the term he is looking for is epiphany (Harrison 149). Stephen’s triad figures art as a natural process, emphasizing the artist’s progeny, but the third term is also a synonym of repetition as reduplication, implying that every copy is different, just as every offspring is a mutation. This notion of reproduction as mutation (rather than the organic unity of art) is crucial to Joyce’s developing aesthetics, particularly in “Oxen of the Sun,” where Joyce’s difference from his source texts reveals the originality of his own linguistic creation. These devious reproductions invite comparison with another of Stephen’s triads, whose last term, “cunning,” may be derived from the Aryan root *gen-* to bring forth or produce (Skeat), while the first of Stephen’s “arms” is “silence.”

On this correlation, silence corresponds to “artistic conception,” tracing the biological metaphor back to the moment of creation. Stephen is fond of this trope, echoing Shelley and D’Annunzio as he declares: “In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh” (236). Stephen’s ejaculation of the villanelle is laced with irony (a point I will return to), but at the same time, the physical nature of Stephen’s jouissance underscores the materiality of his poem (scribbled on the back of a cigarette box), just as his ambition “to recreate life out of life” (186) grounds his epiphanic aesthetics in biological reproduction. Throughout Portrait, language, fantasy, and sexuality are constantly intertwined, suggesting that language manifests desire, and each of Joyce’s works brings the materiality of language to the fore. These are key aspects of Joyce’s linguistic epiphany, but Stephen’s maieutic conception of the artist is particularly interesting because, if the analogy holds, it suggests that repetition (as reproduction) issues from a silent conception. Speech obviously issues from silence, and I have already shown that silence, as difference, is a condition for repetition; but in Joyce’s triad, the reverse is also true—reproduction is a condition for conception, posing the analogous question: is repetition a condition of silence?
As John Cage realized when he stepped into an anechoic chamber, we can never experience silence; it can only be imagined as the absence of sound, a property of the void. Conceptually, too, silence, as absence, can only be imagined in opposition to presence; a transcendental signified, its referent can never be given. Like the Real in Lacanian theory, silence cannot be attained through Symbolic representation, and yet the gap it represents is the condition for language. For Lacan, the Symbolic order of language arises from the desire to fill a fundamental gap or béance; yet this desire itself originates in the mirror stage, at the moment the subject recognizes itself as other and thereby enters the Symbolic order. Rodolphe Gasché proposes a similar movement in his “General Theory of Doubling,” arguing that “[t]o give oneself a presence entails relating to oneself” through “spacing” or self-difference; subjectivity emerges through an act of “originary doubling,” where doubled and double come into being simultaneously through self-reflection (225–39). According to these theories, identity and difference, like silence and repetition, emerge together, so that the manifestation of silence necessarily depends upon repetition. Again, silence is exemplary here because it has no empirical referent; it can be posited only in relation to other signifiers (absence, quiet, snow, space, and so forth). In Derrida’s words, “there is no repetition possible without the graphics of supplementarity” (1981, 168), where the supplement, in both its senses (as replacement and addition), depends upon a gap, a space of silence. Another term for this “infrastructural” space is différence, which simply reunites two words with a common root: difference and deferral, a repetitive movement or play in the chain of signifiers. As Derrida’s terms reveal, the relation is commutative: difference implies repetition, just as repetition implies difference, because repetition, derived from re (back, again) + petere (to make for or pursue), is not only a restatement but also a turning (back or again) toward a repeated or repeating element.

For Joyce, like Heidegger, language is an epiphany, but whereas Heidegger sees the world becoming manifest through language, Joyce’s epiphanies focus on the moment language comes into being. The paradox of this moment is that language issues from silence in a referential act, yet this “originary doubling,” a self-differing reduplication, actually brings silence into being. All of Joyce’s works issue from this paradox; indeed, it is constantly reproduced in them. The same could be said of all writing, but the remarkable thing about Joyce’s texts is that they become increasingly
conscious of this condition, from the “perfectly silent” ending of “A Painful Case” to the “thought-enchanted silence” of *A Portrait*, from the “universal language” of gesture in *Ulysses* to “silence speak[ing] the scene” in *Finnegans Wake*. Likewise, Joyce’s work manifests a growing awareness of its repetitive structures, from Farrington’s absent-minded scribal error, writing “*Bernard Bernard* instead of *Bernard Bodley*” in “Counterparts” and Father Arnall’s vision of hell, with its “ceaseless repetition of the words: ever, never” ticking in the silence, to *Ulysses* “constantly repeating itself with a difference” and the *Wake*’s endless variations on the “seim anew” (215.23). At the same time, each of Joyce’s works insists more stringently than the last on the materiality of its own text, from the strange-sounding words on the opening page of *Dubliners* to the peregrinations of the letter in *Finnegans Wake*. This increasingly self-reflexive awareness of both the materiality of the text and its signifying function are Joyce’s vehicles of revelation. Both can be traced back to the epiphanies, where they always appear together, because in the nucleus of the linguistic epiphany, the two poles fuse together, suggesting that materiality and reflexivity are two sides of the same sign, like silence and repetition.