In comparison to the classical, biblical, and Romantic traditions of epiphany outlined in the previous chapter, Joyce’s epiphanies seem trivial, even meaningless. Where classical and biblical epiphanies present a direct manifestation of a deity and Romantic epiphanies offer sublime visions of the infinitude of nature and/or the mind, Joyce’s consist of baffling snatches of dialogue and opaque paragraphs of poetic prose. Their significance is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to determine, which has led some critics to dismiss them as the immature productions of a “piping poet” (MBK 247).\textsuperscript{1} Failure to inspire revelation is usually accounted for by lack of context: “Narrative context is everything, for without it, the epiphany remains a mere fragment” (Beja 1984, 715). Since the dramatic sketches record real events, and more than half the extant epiphanies are reused in Joyce’s later works, the majority of critical discussions rely on biographical evidence or surrounding narratives to elucidate their significance.\textsuperscript{2} Yet, while factual and fictional contexts help us understand their import, there is nothing in the form that requires a narrative setting; Robert Scholes argues, “It was the essence of epiphany in Joyce’s youthful theory and practise that it had no context. Each was a little independent gem” (1964, 76). M. H. Abrams, Robert Langbaum, Morris Beja, Ashton Nichols, Wim Tigges, and Paul Maltby all emphasize the momentary nature of epiphany, and many of the most famous Romantic epiphanies are brief lyrics. Thus, the failure of Joyce’s epiphanies to instill revelation in the manner of their biblical or Romantic precedents is not caused by lack of context; rather, it is the result of their radically different aesthetics.

In this chapter I argue that, in contrast to biblical or Romantic revelations, Joyce’s epiphanies reveal nothing beyond themselves. For all the contextual background we can supply, their significance remains funda-
mentally obscure. This opacity draws attention to linguistic form, revealing the nature of language through its own textual presence. The two types of epiphany, dramatic and lyrical, manifest two fundamental features: a void at the heart of language, caused by an absence of determinate meaning, and teeming presence in the unlimited profusion of signification.

As A. Walton Litz has observed, the dramatic and lyrical epiphanies form the “twin poles of Joyce’s art” (PSW 158). Litz defines these poles as “dramatic irony and lyric sentiment,” although there is little or no dramatic irony in the epiphanies, and “lyric” suggests a connection to poetry. In place of these terms, I prefer “ironic realism” and “lyrical symbolism,” which apply more directly to Joyce’s narrative modes. Using these labels, I show that in the dramatic epiphanies Joyce develops a range of stylistic techniques that lead to the realism and irony of his mature works and that in the narrative epiphanies he hones the poetic techniques that create the lyricism and symbolism of his fiction.

Beyond these stylistic tendencies, I hold that the indeterminate nature of Joyce’s later work is already present in the epiphanies, because at the heart of all the interpretations they suggest, there is a fundamental absence of referential meaning: we find Phillip Herring’s “uncertainty principle” in the epiphanies, along with the void of Pyrrhonic skepticism Rabaté identifies in Joyce Upon the Void. In contrast to Rabaté, though, I question whether love is the central tenet of Joyce’s faith; in the epiphanies, death is a stronger certitude, while both are subordinate to language.

The Manuscript Epiphanies

Joyce’s epiphanies were probably written between 1901 and 1904, the same time as Chamber Music. They have been seen as counterparts to Joyce’s lyrics and are frequently described as prose poems, although this is somewhat misleading since sixteen of the forty extant epiphanies are in dramatic form and three of the lyrical epiphanies include dialogue. Verso numbering on Joyce’s manuscript suggests that originally there may have been more than seventy. Twenty-three are in Joyce’s hand (Buffalo 1.A, Cornell 18), while Stanislaus Joyce’s “Selections in Prose and Verse” (Cornell 4.10) contains twenty-four epiphanies, seventeen of which are not included in the Buffalo manuscript. Joyce’s holograph epiphanies at Buffalo are copied with unusual care, each on a single page, though they are never more than twenty lines long, suggesting the value Joyce
gave them, while one epiphany exists in draft form (Cornell 18), evincing Joyce’s meticulous composition. Their importance can be judged from Joyce’s correspondence: he refers to the epiphanies in seven letters written between 1903 and 1907. The first, dated February 8, 1903, indicates that his work on “Epiphany” was well under way, 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), while just over a month later, Joyce tells his brother: “I have written fifteen epiphanies—of which twelve are insertions and three additions” (LII 35). This clearly suggests that Joyce thought of the epiphanies as an ordered collection; he may even have considered publishing them in a slim volume akin to Baudelaire’s Petits Poèmes en Prose before deciding that he could reuse them in Stephen Hero (JJ 89).5

In The Workshop of Daedalus, Robert Scholes uses internal biographical evidence and the verso numbering on the holograph leaves to establish an order for the epiphanies, suggesting that “[w]hen Joyce had arranged his seventy-some Epiphanies, he had before him an excellent supplement to the outline for Stephen Hero” (6). Scholes’s order is far from certain, but Joyce’s plans for Stephen Hero support the contention that “[t]hese Epiphanies became [Joyce’s] principal building blocks for the novel” (WD 6). After copying out his 1904 essay, “A Portrait of the Artist,” Joyce recorded a series of notes for Stephen Hero, including “Epiphany of Thornton,” “Epiphany of Hell,” and “Epiphany of Mr Tate” (Buffalo 2.A.16, 20). These notes speak to Portrait’s complex genesis, from Stephen Hero, his 1904 essay, and ultimately, the epiphanies. Scholes may be right in stating that the epiphanies provide cornerstones for Stephen Hero, but since half the original manuscript is lost, his claim is problematic, whereas there is a strong case for regarding them as the key moments in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

In all, at least fourteen epiphanies are reused in Stephen Hero and twelve in Portrait, with a number of additional echoes. Morris Beja identifies twelve epiphanies in Ulysses and three notable similarities in Finnegans Wake (1984, 712–13), a list that could well be expanded (see appendix). In addition to these, several critics have attempted to identify lost epiphanies.6 Although speculative, their putative epiphanies illustrate the extent to which the modes of ironic realism and lyrical symbolism that Joyce developed in the epiphanies shape the dialogue, narrative, and poetics of his mature work, allowing one to read all of Joyce as epiphonic.
The Theory of Epiphany

The best guide to Joyce’s epiphanies is Daedalus’s theory in Stephen Hero. Toward the end of chapter 24, Stephen is walking through Eccles Street (Bloom’s street) with Cranly one evening “when a trivial incident set him composing some ardent verses which he entitled a ‘Vilanelle [sic] of the Temptress’” (216):

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. . . . (SH 216)

This “fragment of colloquy” produces a keen effect on Stephen’s “sensitiveness,” apparently because, through the embodiment of its elided words, it reveals a hidden content of desire. The words are “trivial,” but the effect they produce is not; by hinting toward some undisclosed sin enacted at the moment the woman is praying, they seem to give voice to Stephen’s fantasy, as though his cloudy reflections on religion, femininity, and masculinity had suddenly precipitated into the real world, projecting desire onto the words he overhears. The associations evoked by the dialogue are as vague as Stephen’s ruminations before the incident, and they can never finally be pinned down because a) there is a hiatus in the text (we are not told what the young man says); and b) we can imagine any number of possibilities in its place. This basic nexus provides the seminal structure of Joyce’s epiphanies, where textual lacunae propel speculation into the hermeneutic void.

In theory, any hiatus shares these properties, but the power of Joyce’s epiphanies depends on the extent to which he is able to create resonant gaps and silences, just as the effect of this incident depends upon the fact that there is no limit to the thoughts we can imagine “dancing the dance of unrest” in Stephen’s brain. Like Flo feeling “the rings” as Come and Go closes in silence (Beckett 2006, 355), Joyce’s epiphanic gaps train readers to hear the ringing silence of textuality; in doing so, the theoretical properties of the lacuna are shown to have been actual all along, a play of difference in the chain of signification. In the next section, I show that
silence (including any hiatus in the text) and repetition (a relation that encompasses difference) characterize Joyce's two types of epiphany. To the extent that these are fundamental properties of language, they characterize all literary texts, but the epiphanies are paradigmatic because they explicitly manifest these conditions.

**Dramatic and Lyrical Epiphanies**

The structure of Stephen's triviality suggests that Joyce's epiphanies are very different from his Romantic forebears, but he may have drawn on Shelley for his two types of epiphany. Where Shelley distinguishes between poetic moments inspired by “people or places” and those arising in “our own mind” (532), Joyce makes a distinction between spiritual manifestations in “the vulgarity of speech or of gesture” and in a “memorable phase of the mind itself” (SH 216). But whereas Shelley's dyad is theoretical, Joyce put it into practice, creating a formal difference between dramatic and lyrical epiphanies.

Stanislaus Joyce tells us that Joyce’s earliest epiphanies were dramatic: “In the beginning . . . Epiphanies were always brief sketches, hardly ever more than some dozen lines in length, but always very accurately observed and noted, the matter being so slight” (MBK 124–25). Stanislaus refers to the early epiphanies as “notes,” records of authentic conversation, which is borne out by Oliver St. John Gogarty’s quip in *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street*: “Which one of us had endowed him with an ‘Epiphany’ and sent him to the lavatory to take it down?” (294). Gogarty must have known that he figured in an epiphany, for he complains that “to be an unwilling contributor to one of his ‘Epiphanies’ is irritating” (294). Gogarty had a right to feel aggrieved, but the epiphany he inspired is of particular interest because it is the only surviving draft:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{in O'Connell St:} & \quad \text{[Dublin: \^\text{in Hamilton, Long's,}} \\
& \text{the chemist's,]} \\
\text{Gogarty} & \quad \text{—Is that for Gogarty?} \\
\text{The Assistant} & \quad \text{—(looks)—Yes, sir . . . Will you \^\text{take}} \\
& \text{it with you? for it now?} \\
\text{Gogarty} & \quad \text{—No, send it put it in the}
\end{align*}
\]
account; send it on. You know the address.

(takes a pen)

The Assistant —Yes, Ye . . . es.
Gogarty —5 Rutland Square.

while

The Assistant —(half to himself as he writes)
. .5 . . Rutland . . . Square.8

It is apparent from this draft that Joyce did not simply transcribe a real conversation: the use of stage directions, speech headings, and lineation create a dramatic sketch, and revisions such as “while” for “as” (presumably for assonance) and the phonetic extension of “Ye-es” reveal the pains Joyce took to construct its effects. These details play a crucial role in creating the tone, for the piece seems to depend upon the contrast between the assistant’s hesitant deference and Gogarty’s crisp imperatives. In this context, the long-drawn “Ye-es” begins to look uncertain, making Gogarty’s assertion “You know the address” seem presumptuous; the result is to give the address a prominence it would not otherwise have, especially when it is repeated in the final line with emphasis, as if to underline that this is a solid, middle-class address,9 one from which payment can be expected (WD 50). Thus, the subtle irony with which Gogarty’s pretensions are unveiled, in contrast to the servility of the assistant, suggests another contrast, with the artist paring his fingernails above or behind the epiphany, just as Joyce himself was presumably beside or behind Gogarty at the chemist’s during this brief exchange.

The extent to which this piece has been composed raises questions about the authenticity of the dialogue, but there can be little doubt that the epiphanies record real events. “Poor Little Fellow” is a direct response to the death of Joyce’s brother Georgie in March 1902; the “Two Mourners” were observed by Stanislaus and James at their mother’s funeral in August 1903 (MBK 235); the party described in “She Dances with Them in the Round” was given by the Sheehys (Joyce, not having a suit of his own, went in a baggy dress suit borrowed from Gogarty [MBK 256–57]). The dramatic epiphanies situate these events precisely because their location is specified at the head of the text, like the opening stage directions in a play. Five epiphanies are set at the Sheehys’ house in Belvedere Place, which Joyce frequented from 1897 to 1901 (#11–14, #17); two are records of his trip
to Mullingar in July 1900 (#9, #15); “His Dancing” is another response to Georgie’s death; “Fred Leslie’s My Brother” must have occurred on Joyce’s return from Paris around Christmas 1902; and the Bray address given in “Apologise” dates the scene to 1891.

The fact that these epiphanies record real persons, places, and events does not necessarily mean that the dialogue is authentic, although each of these sketches employs a range of features designed to create the impression of real speech. To this end, Joyce employs contractions, ellipsis, timed pauses (marked by a variable number of dots), exclamations, false starts, repetition, incomplete utterances, Hiberno-English, deixis, and colloquial language to mimic natural speech, as well as a range of paralinguistic and prosodic features indicating the tone and manner of delivery. In comparison with nineteenth-century fiction, or even the naturalistic drama Joyce admired, these techniques make Joyce’s dialogue seem extremely realistic, giving the impression that the “fragment of colloquy” he constructs transcribes spontaneous conversation.

To the extent that speech is the verbal manifestation of our thoughts and feelings, this is an epiphanic aim, but Joyce’s purpose appears to have been more precise. According to Stanislaus, the epiphanies “were in the beginning ironical observations of slips, and little errors and gestures—mere straws in the wind—by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal” (MBK 126). There is no guarantee that Joyce would have shared his brother’s judgment, but Stanislaus’s account is telling. His verbal “slips” and “gestures” probably recall Stephen Hero’s “vulgarity of speech and of gesture,” and many of the epiphanies can be read as ironically observed parapraxes. For instance, this scene seems opaque in isolation:

[Dublin: at Sheehy’s, Belvedere Place]

Joyce — I knew you meant him. But you’re wrong about his age.

Maggie Sheehy — (leans forward to speak seriously) Why, how old is he?

Joyce — Seventy-two.

Maggie Sheehy — Is he?

But when reused for a guessing game in Stephen Hero (51), where the subject is Ibsen, it reveals Miss Daniel’s ignorance in contrast to Stephen.
“Your Favorite Poet” works in the same way, with Hannah Sheehy, after a dramatic pause and hush, answering that her favorite German poet is “I think. . . . Goethe. . . .,” implying a limited frame of reference. The effect of these pieces is surely ironic, revealing the ignorance and conventional assumptions of the speakers in contrast to the sensitivity and intelligence of the artist capable of recording them (compare #9, #10, #13).

In this sense, the dramatic epiphanies appear to betray the ignorance of others through the vulgarity (or ordinariness) of their words and gestures, in contrast to Joyce’s memorable phases of the mind, which are shown forth in the lyrical epiphanies. But on several occasions, Joyce seems the subject of irony: if the epiphanies record “any showing forth of the mind by which he considered one gave oneself away” (Gogarty, 294–95), then Joyce was not averse to giving himself away. Skeffington and Maggie Sheehy’s mockery of “our friend Jocax” in “The Day of the Rabblement” is a good example, as is “The Stars on Joyce’s Nose,” where Dick Sheehy pokes fun at Joyce’s literary snobbishness (playing on the conventional license of the artist) by asking if he has read a mildly salacious anti-Catholic novel, *The Escaped Nun*.

[Dublin, on the North Circular Road: Christmas]

Miss O’Callaghan —(*lisps*)—I told you the name, *The Escaped Nun*.

Dick Sheehy —(*loudly*)—O, I wouldn’t read a book like that . . . I must ask Joyce. I say, Joyce, did you ever read *The Escaped Nun*?

Joyce —I observe that a certain phenomenon happens about this hour.

Dick Sheehy —What phenomenon?

Joyce —O . . . the stars come out.

Dick Sheehy —(*to Miss O’Callaghan*) . . . Did you ever observe how . . . the stars come out on the end of Joyce’s nose about this
hour? . . . (she smiles). . Because
I observe that phenomenon.

If Sheehy’s joke is rather lame, it exposes Joyce’s ruse as lamer still, while Joyce’s obvious evasion of the question draws attention to the peculiarly evasive nature of Sheehy’s observation. The apparition of the stars is the epiphanic phenomenon par excellence, recalling Matthew and Luke, and their appearance at the end of Joyce’s nose creates an image at once comic, under cutting Joyce’s studied ignorance with a pinocchioesque outgrowth, and gnomic, in the sense that the very absence of meaning attributed to such meaningful symbols seems to imbue the stars on Joyce’s nose with an absurd but ineradicable significance.

Morris Beja points out that this epiphany may explain the curious star on Joyce’s nose in the portrait he commissioned from César Abin for his fiftieth birthday (715–16; Figure 1). It is of course impossible to verify the connection, but Joyce’s meticulous instructions for the drawing, figuring himself as a question mark hanging above the point of the world (occupied entirely by Ireland, with Dublin in black) suggest both the mystery and the mysterious significance of his work, a point that is nowhere more evident than at the point of his nose.

While every other symbol has a stated significance, the illumination of the star is gnomic, in both its ordinary, sententious sense (associated with the star of the magi) and the obsolete, jocular meaning of “gnomon” as the nose (OED). Joyce plays on this meaning in his first short story, “The Sisters,” where Father Flynn’s cavernous nostrils, filled with the snuff of simony, loom large. At the key moment in the story, when Eliza confides that “there was something queer coming over him latterly” and seems about to reveal the mystery of her late brother, the priest, she suddenly breaks off and lays a finger against her nose, as though to conceal a secret (D 9). It is this sense of a concealed truth, a hidden meaning, that Joyce’s epiphanies tease us with. Like the star on the end of Joyce’s nose, they hint toward an epiphanic revelation, but when we search for it, we find only an absence of meaning, like the complete non sequitur of Joyce’s answer, or the gaps and silences that pervade “The Sisters.”

Phillip Herring has argued that Joyce’s texts are fundamentally indeterminate because they introduce “a range of interpretive possibilities” while “an essential piece of evidence is missing that would allow us a measure of security in interpretation” so that “readers are invited to fill the gap by
speculating about what is missing” (xxii). Herring traces the uncertainty principle back to the word “gnomon,” showing that Joyce’s short stories are as riddled with gaps as his later works, but he could equally have begun with the epiphanies.

“Forty Thousand Pounds” provides a good example of the uncertainty principle at work:

[Dublin: on Mountjoy Square]

Joyce —(concludes). . . . That’ll be forty thousand pounds.

Aunt Lillie —(titters)—O, laus! . . . I was like that too. . . . . .

. . . When I was a girl I was sure I’d marry a lord . . . or something . . .

Joyce —(thinks)—Is it possible she’s comparing herself with me?

Here, as in the other dramatic epiphanies, deixis, contractions, exclamations, hesitations, emphasis, and vague language create the impression that we are breaking in on a real conversation, but this epiphany is unique because the stage directions indicate that Joyce’s final line is thought, not said. As a literal representation of Joyce’s mental response, the question is pellucid, yet its significance remains unclear: Is it supposed to show Aunt Lillie’s solipsism in comparing herself to Joyce, or Joyce’s arrogance in rejecting the very possibility? Ultimately, it is not possible to decide whether Aunt Lillie betrays herself or Joyce gives himself away, and in either case, what they reveal. If we identify with the Joyce character as implied author, then the epiphany appears to reveal Aunt Lillie’s vulgarity,12 in contrast to Joyce; if, on the other hand, we identify with Lillie, or adopt an “objective” position outside the characters, then the omniscient perspective of the dramatist whose stage directions afford access to Joyce’s thought allows us to read the epiphany as a revelation of his narcissism. Joyce creates similar ambiguities in many of the epiphanies and in his subsequent works, but irrespective of the interpretative stance readers adopt, there is further uncertainty about what exactly is being compared (vain, self-aggrandizing fantasies? ego? self-worth?)? This inscrutability of reference is central to the dramatic epiphanies, which betray “the very things they [are] most careful to conceal” (MBK 126) through their own slips and lapses.

If the dramatic epiphanies are objective, presenting characters directly through their own words, “Forty Thousand Pounds,” with its representation of unspoken thought, provides a bridge toward the subjective mode
of the lyrical epiphanies, which record “memorable phases of the mind.” Stanislaus Joyce tells us that as they progressed, “[t]he epiphanies became more frequently subjective and included dreams which [Joyce] considered in some way revelatory” (MBK 125). According to Stanislaus, he himself figured as “An Arctic Beast” in one of the earliest dream pieces, while in another he appears as “The Big Dog” (135–36). “His Dancing,” “She Comes at Night,” and “Two Sisters” record dreams in which George Joyce, May Joyce, and Henrik Ibsen appear. “The dreams are genuine,” Stanislaus says, although “they have undergone literary treatment . . . to reproduce dream impressions” (127). He explains that “[t]he revelation and importance of the subconscious had caught [Joyce’s] interest,” and “he may have hoped [dreams] would reveal things our controlled thoughts unconsciously conceal” (126–27). In this sense, they are subjective counterparts to the dramatic epiphanies, for both seek to reveal “the significance of unreflecting admissions and unregarded trifles” (127), whether through verbal slips or memorable phases of the mind.

There is no way to corroborate Stanislaus’s claims, but editors have noted the dreamlike quality of many of the later epiphanies. Whether dreams or not, these lyrical epiphanies create memorable images and impressions through carefully wrought poetic language. Written at the same time as *Chamber Music*, they have the rhythmical and musical qualities of Joyce’s lyrics; they can be compared to prose poems that make use of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm, and the techniques of repetition and variation Joyce was perfecting in his poetry to irradiate symbolic and imagistic associations. For example, in “The Race”:

The human crowd swarms in the enclosure, moving through the slush. A fat woman passes, her dress lifted boldly, her face nozzling in an orange. A pale young man with a Cockney accent does tricks in his shirtsleeves and drinks out of a bottle. A little old man has mice on an umbrella; a policeman in heavy boots charges down and seizes the umbrella: the little old man disappears. Bookies are bawling out names and prices; one of them screams with the voice of a child—“Bonny Boy!” “Bonny Boy!” . . . Human
creatures are swarming in the enclosure, moving backwards and forwards through the thick ooze. Some ask if the race is going on; they are answered “Yes” and “No.” A band begins to play. . . . . . A beautiful brown horse, with a yellow rider upon him, flashes far away in the sunlight.

The opening words create an odd, dreamlike effect, as though the crowd might not be human, an impression accentuated by the bestial connotations of “swarms” and “enclosure,” which make it difficult to situate the scene. Apparently set at a racetrack, there is a deliberate blurring of the animal and the human, an imprecision that enhances the magical realist effect of the woman “nozzling in an orange” and the “little old man” with “mice on an umbrella.” Joyce’s use of alliteration, assonance, and anaphora make the figures almost as indefinite as the articles that introduce them, and in dreamlike fashion, the little old man disappears, after which we get two and a half lines of pure poetry:

Bóokies are báwling out námes and prícés;  
Óne of them scréams with the vóice of a chíld—  
Bónny Bóy! Bónny Bóy!

The first two lines have a marked dactylic rhythm, which contrasts nicely with the amphimacers in the horse’s name. The alliteration at the beginning and end of the sentence also undergoes a pleasing transformation as the long stressed vowels of “bookies” and “bawling” are shortened in “bonny” and wrenched up into the diphthong “boy.” The effect of these lines is one of great realism, as though the voice comes to life through its rhythmic precision, and the clarity of the bookie’s call, in contrast to the haziness of the preceding images, sets up the final juxtaposition. Between the ellipses, Joyce recalls the opening, offsetting the flat realism of the dialogue (“‘Yes’ and ‘No’”) with the band, and this musical association, like the bookie’s poetic cry, helps to ensure that the animalized crowd of “[h]uman creatures . . . swarming in the enclosure” is both opposed to, and mirrored in, the beautiful racehorse “with a yellow rider upon him, flash[ing] far away in the sunlight.”

Joyce’s techniques of repetition and variation can be compared to musical variations on a theme, employing counterpoint to set one melody off
against another, or creating harmonies and overtones through careful arrangement of the parts. These subtle effects can be heard in the following epiphany:

The spell of arms and voices—the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We are alone,—come. And the voices say with them: We are your people. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me their kinsman, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth.

The opening states the theme in a musical phrase whose alternating stresses emphasize three nouns. The phrase could hardly be simpler, but just as the genitive can be read both ways (as the spell whose ingredients are arms and voices, or the spell cast by them), so too each noun phrase rings with overtones, even the first time it is sounded: the spell is both objective and subjective (a mood or affect); the arms are literal and figurative (a military synecdoche); the voices seem heard and imagined. Through contrasting adjectives (white, black) and complementary metaphors (roads, ships), a complex series of correspondences is constructed in which the arms are both enticing and forbidding. In the “tale” they tell, the arms morph into the voices, commingling as “they are held out to say,” but just as their words are paradoxical (“We are alone”), they never fully merge, because the balanced offset structure of the sentences (“We/And/We/And”) serves to keep them apart. This marked structural divide, at the very moment the bodily symbols unite, mirrors the position of the dreamer, who is at once alone and among his kin (“We are your people”). At the same time, this balanced movement carries the reader forward with assurance as the symbols accrue associations of homecoming and belonging, creating the impression that their significance is understood. Recapitulating the theme, Joyce unites his keynotes in the final sentence, where the initial dreamlike indeterminacy of “the spell” becomes as charged as the air is thick with “their company” calling (in both the literal and figurative senses) to the narrator, “their kinsman” (which recalls “your people,” “nations,” and “the promise of close embraces”). And in the final verb phrases, a magical reversal is effected, for the pronouns make it seem almost as though it is the narrator making ready to go.
Reused in both *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait*, this is one of Joyce’s most significant epiphanies. The surviving pages of *Stephen Hero* begin in its midst, the sketch transposed to fit the third-person, past-tense narrative, but otherwise little changed. Immediately after the epiphany, across the paragraph break, Joyce has written “Departure for Paris” (*SH* 240). Marked in blue crayon, this note refers to Joyce’s revisions for *Portrait*, where the same epiphany is returned from the third to the first person, forming the antepenultimate entry in Stephen’s diary, headed “16 April: Away! Away!” In these final brief entries, the epiphany is linked to three crucial themes: Mrs. Dedalus’s hopes that her son may learn “away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels” (275); Stephen’s poetic affirmation, “to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race”; and the final invocation to Daedalus. As Robert Scholes points out, in “The Spell of Arms and Voices,” “we see Joyce beginning to clothe himself in the Daedalian myth” (*W* 40); in fact, he creates a double image, for when Stephen cries “[o]ld father, old artificer,” he seems to create himself anew, as both the namesake of Daedalus and his son, Icarus, preserving a powerful tension between prophecies of Stephen’s escape through flights of the poetic imagination and a hubristic fall, as he stands on the brink of the future, “shaking the wings of his exultant and terrible youth.”

This epiphany is as important for its linguistic qualities as for its thematic content, revealing the power of poetic language to create epiphanic effects through aural, imagistic, and semantic associations. These poetic effects become central to Joyce’s fiction: throughout *Dubliners*, *Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, musical and symbolic associations are used to create not only lyrical prose but also radiant and epiphanic moments, like the poetic language of “Araby” or the famous ending to *Portrait*, chapter IV. At the same time, in the midst of all the proliferating associations Joyce generates, meaning is impossible to pin down, creating both indeterminacy and a superabundance of signification.

**The Aesthetics of Epiphany**

To recognize Joyce’s epiphanies as moments of revelation, we need a new aesthetics of epiphany, and this is exactly what Joyce set out to define in the Commonplace notebook he kept in Paris and Pola from January 1903 to November 1904—a period during which he composed at least
fifteen epiphanies (*LII* 35). Extracts from the Paris-Pola notebooks are reused widely in *Stephen Hero*: Aquinas’s statement, “*Pulchra sunt quae visa placent*” (“beauty is that which pleases when seen”) and his criteria of beauty—*integritas, consonantia, claritas*—are introduced during Stephen’s interview with the President of the College at the end of chapter 18 (100–101); in chapter 22, Stephen discusses the relationship between the beautiful and the good with Father Artifoni (175–76), who encourages his student to write a treatise on aesthetics; and this impulse is recalled several times before Stephen finally expounds his theory to Cranly in chapter 24, culminating in Stephen’s famous definition of epiphany: “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” (*SH* 216). For all the attention this sentence has received, no one, to my knowledge, has noted that Daedalus’s epiphany is a significant act, pointing the way to Joyce’s linguistic epiphany. The signs here are subtle, their significance not readily apparent, but by carefully unpacking Daedalus’s key terms, the emphasis on language becomes clear. Like the restless thoughts that precipitate his theory, “spiritual” suggests a number of possible interpretations, beginning with Emma’s soul “manifest[ing] itself” in “every stray image of the streets” and the “theory of dualism” Stephen toys with, in which “the twin eternities of spirit and nature” are manifest in “the twin eternities of male and female” (215). This openness to interpretation may explain why the term “epiphany” has become so widespread (Harrison 143), but there is a common anthropological thread. “[S]pirit” is derived from *spiritus* (breath), as Stephen recalls in “the poor breath, the poor helpless human spirit, sobbing and sighing” (*P* 120). The critical writings that inform *Stephen Hero*, such as “Ecce Homo,” “Drama and Life,” and “James Clarence Mangan,” clearly conceive of the spirit in human terms, and there can be no doubt that Stephen’s “spiritual manifestation” is a natural experience, occurring through language, mind, or body.

For Stephen, epiphanies are always significant, because they are conveyed through a signifying system: the vulgarity of “speech or of gesture, or in a memorable phase of the mind.” Here “vulgarity” refers primarily to ordinary speech or gesture, rather than indelicacy (*OED*), but Stephen is clearly responding to hints of vulgar eroticism in the dialogue he overhears (*SH* 216). In the preceding chapter, Stephen is also provoked by a group of young students (including Emma), whose postural “affectations” and
phatic “babble” irritate him with their “vulgarity” (188), suggesting a connection between desire and the charged language or gestures that occasion an epiphany. In fact, the retreating rain clouds that brighten Stephen’s mood after this show of “vulgarity” are copied with very few changes from “The Girls, The Boys” (epiphany #25), and immediately afterward Stephen tells Cranly, “There should be an art of gesture” (SH 188). On the following page, Stephen repeats the word six times, linking gesture to rhythm and music, even that of a single word (189). Naturally, words and gestures go together: the boy in “Araby” compares his body to a harp and his beloved’s “words and gestures” to “fingers running upon the wires” (D 23); in Portrait, Stephen is drawn to the theatrical “voices and gestures” priests assume rather than their “awful power” (171; cf. 153, 198, 251); and in Ulysses, he is wooed by J. J. O’Molloy’s “grace of language and gesture” (7.776). Indeed, in “Circe” Stephen thinks that “gesture . . . would be a universal language” (15.105–07), and in Finnegans Wake Joyce plays on the work of Marcel Jousse, who studied the gestural origins of language: “In the beginning was the gest he jousstly says” (FW 465.05).

Joyce’s interest in gesture suggests that he regarded it as a semiotic system structurally equivalent to speech, and the same premise underlies Stephen’s definition, where ordinary speech and gesture provide two manifestations of the linguistic epiphany. Moreover, when Dedalus reads the flight of birds as script (P 243–45), he traces the origins of writing back to movement, a gestural expression derived from the ibis-headed Thoth, “god of writers” (244), so that “speech” or “gesture” can be taken to imply any act of communication. The reference to Thoth indicates Dedalus’s reverence for language, but he is equally amused by “the god’s image for it made him think of a bottlenosed judge in a wig, putting commas into a document” (244), demonstrating again that the “sudden spiritual manifestation” is always a revelation of human spirit through language, whether through speech, gesture, writing, or “a memorable phase of the mind.”

“Memorable,” meaning both “worthy of remembrance” and “able to be remembered,” is derived from Latin memorâre, “to say, mention, recall to mind” (OED). According to Daedalus’s definition, then, epiphanies encompass not only striking, unforgettable moments but any experience capable of being remembered, where recall depends on the possibility of relating an event verbally or summoning it in the mind through symbolic representation. For something to be memorable, it must leave a trace,
and these traces constitute the Symbolic order (Ansermet and Magistretti 2015), which means that a “memorable phase of the mind” is predicated on our perceptual capacity for language.

But for Joyce the significance of “phase” is more specific. Skeat defines the word as “an appearance,” tracing it back to the same root as “epiphany,” the Indo-European BHA, meaning to shine, speak, or show. As Skeat explains, “phasis not only means ‘appearance,’ . . . but also ‘a saying, declaration’” (as in emphasis), pointing once more to the connection between epiphany and language. This is also borne out by its original meaning, the appearance of the moon or planet at a given time, for, as we shall see, Joyce extends the traditional association between epiphany and the apparition of luminous bodies in the heavens to language (e.g., “the signature of [W. Shakespeare’s] initial” Stephen reads in Cassiopeia, or Bloom’s “interstellar . . . writing” [U 9.931, 14.1106–09]). This emphasis on speech and writing as shining brings to light Joyce’s conception of the epiphanic origins of language, whose clearest precedent is the Gospel According to St. John. John associates the Word with God, and God with the source of life and light (1:1–9), incarnated as Jesus Christ (1:13). The evangelist’s avowed role is “to bear witness of the Light” (1:7) of Christ’s revelation, so the words John sets down represent the manifestation of divine light. However hubristic it might appear, this is remarkably similar to Joyce’s “countergospel,” Finnegans Wake (Spurr 2015), where language is figured as light, all-manifest in the “hueful panepiphanal world” (FW 611.22). Likewise, Professor MacHugh associates language and radiance in “Aeolus,” recounting the epiphanic origins of writing: having “spoken with the Eternal amid lightnings,” Moses brings the tablets of the law down from Sinai “with the light of inspiration shining in his countenance” (U 7.866–69; cf. Ex. 24:12, 31:15–16, 34:1–29).

The connection between light and language is present from Joyce’s first published story, “The Sisters,” which opens with a boy looking for the reflected candlelight that would provide a sign of death while repeating the memorable words “gnomon,” “paralysis,” and “simony.” This theme, presented on Joyce’s first leaf of prose and numerous subsequent foliations, can be traced back to Stephen’s definition, where the word “phase,” like “epiphany,” has roots in an Indo-European base meaning to speak, show, or shine. These senses are all at play in the original aesthetics of Stephen Hero, but Portrait develops them further. It will be recalled that Stephen’s
theory of beauty involves three “phases of apprehension”: Aquinas’s “integritas, consonantia, claritas” translated as “wholeness, harmony and radiance” (P 229). The “first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object,” either in space or time, allowing “the esthetic image” to be “luminously apprehended” (230). In the second phase, consonantia, an object is analyzed as “complex, multiple, divisible, . . . the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious” (230). Initially, Stephen thinks claritas refers to “a light from some other world” (230), but this Platonic enlightenment is rejected in favor of Duns Scotus’s haeccitas: “You see that [the object] is that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic quidditas, the whatness of a thing” (231). This third “phase of apprehension” (P 229) corresponds to the moment of epiphany in Stephen Hero, when Stephen first states that “Claritas is quidditas,” declaring that when “we recognise that it is that thing which it is . . . the commonest object . . . seems to us radiant” (SH 218). Developing the aesthetics of Stephen Hero, these “phases of apprehension” illuminate the connection between light, language, and epiphany: “The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the aesthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state” (P 231). This shift in emphasis from “epiphany,” suggesting a singular event, to the cognate “phase,” implying change, indicates a broader development in Joyce’s epiphanies. As the partial apparition of a cyclical process, revolving planetary phases are much closer to the poetics of Finnegans Wake than are singular apparitions of being. This may explain why Joyce revised the theory of epiphany in Stephen Hero; indeed, the failure of Daedalus’s ideal points to Joyce’s changing conception of epiphany, especially his turn to language.

Having defined “epiphany” in the passage analyzed above, Stephen gives Cranly an example: the Ballast Office clock. “I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it,” he says, with no special significance; “[t]hen all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany” (216). The revelation is sudden and unexpected, but the underlying experience is repetitive (“time after time”), suggesting that one of the functions of verbal repetition in Joyce’s epiphanies is to facilitate such moments, particularly when they are developed into leitmotifs in his prose works. Appearing as a single moment in a repetitive cycle, the epiphany marks a phase on the
face of a clock, indicating the double nature of Joyce’s temporality, particularly in *Ulysses* and the *Wake*, whose time is both cyclical and punctual, allowing epiphanies to become both universal and arbitrary.

Stephen explains the revelation by asking Cranly to imagine a “spiritual eye” adjusting its vision to “[t]he soul of the commonest object”; at the moment it is brought into focus, “[t]he object achieves its epiphany” (218). This slippage between the observer and the observed has led to disagreement about whether the manifestation of spirit occurs in the subject or the object, propagating a wide range of critical interpretations. For instance, Beja compares Stephen’s aesthetics to Schopenhauer’s Romantic rereading of Kant, which “does away with the dualism between subject and object” (1971, 30). Caufield explores the connection to Schopenhauer in greater detail, arguing that “Stephen’s use of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics” can be explained by the fact that “Post-Kantian German Idealism and its Romantic reverberations in *fin de siècle* letters . . . were a part of the critical medium in which Joyce’s aesthetic sense developed” (714). In the same vein, Scholes and Corcoran derive Stephen’s aesthetics “from the tradition that includes Lessing, August and Friedrich von Schlegel, Kant, Schelling and Hegel” (691). However, the Schopenhauerian parallels that Caufield provides are tenuous, while Scholes and Corcoran provide no textual evidence for their claim that Stephen’s aesthetics are “explicitly indebted” to Hegel.

In fact, Joyce seems to have regarded the aesthetics in the Paris-Pola notebook not as “applied Aquinas” or Aristotle, neither as Kantian nor Hegelian, but as his own, for he signed and dated each entry with a flourish. In *Stephen Hero*, Daedalus tells Cranly, “No esthetic theory . . . is of any value which investigates with the aid of the lantern of tradition” (217). Stephen’s point here is that beauty is relative (“Greek beauty laughs at Coptic beauty and the American Indian derides them both” [217]), but it also justifies his desire to formulate a new aesthetic theory with a universal criterion for beauty. This is a recurring theme in the *Commonplace book* of 1903–1904, where Joyce draws on the Greek roots of “aesthetic” (of or relating to sensory perception) to equate beauty with apprehension: “Every sensible object that has been apprehended can be said in the first place to have been and to be beautiful in a measure beautiful; and even the most hideous object can be said to have been and to be beautiful insofar as it has been apprehended” (*WD* 81; cf. 82–83). Daedalus makes the same equation between beauty and apprehension in *Stephen Hero*: “It is almost impossible to reconcile all tradition whereas it is by no means impossible
to find the justification of every form of beauty which has been adored on the earth by an examination into the mechanism of esthetic apprehension. . . . The apprehensive faculty must be scrutinised in action” (SH 217). Thus Daedalus’s aesthetics, like Joyce’s, are founded on “the mechanism of esthetic apprehension.” This original sense of “esthetic” as sensory perception is particularly associated with Kant, and although Stephen analyzes the “apprehensive faculty” in relation to Aquinas’s criteria of beauty, his theory shares several similarities with Kantian aesthetics.

First, Stephen says to Cranly: “Consider the performance of your own mind when confronted with any object, hypothetically beautiful. . . . To apprehend it you must lift it away from everything else: and then you perceive that it is one integral thing, that is a thing. You recognise its integrity. Isn’t that so? . . . That is the first quality of beauty: it is declared in a simple sudden synthesis of the faculty which apprehends” (217). This “simple sudden synthesis” is similar to Kant’s “synthesis of apprehension” in the Critique of Pure Reason, where a manifold of empirical data is “gathered together” in a single “moment” (A99). Of course, for Kant, this intuition of an object, such as a house, is never a conception of “a thing in itself at all but only an appearance, i.e., a representation, the transcendental object of which remains utterly unknown” (A190). Indeed, the fundamental premise of Kant’s first Critique is that we can never have access to the transcendental object, the noumenon; what the synthesis of apprehension reveals is the a priori idea of unity that structures spatiotemporal experience (A100). But the culmination of Stephen’s theory, in which “the object achieves its epiphany,” suggests that when the focus of the perceiver’s “spiritual eye” is perfectly adjusted, “the object is epiphanised” (SH 216–17), letting its noumenal reality shine forth.

In Stephen’s aesthetics, this occurs after the second phase, analysis, where “[t]he mind considers the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects,” examining its form and structure in detail (217). This second stage of apprehension corresponds quite closely to Kant’s “synthesis of reproduction in the imagination,” where the mind comprehends a given object by comparing a series of sensory presentations, past and present (A101–2). The processes are not identical, since Kant emphasizes the temporal sequence of apperception and the role of memory in facilitating our imaginative recognition of the unity of the phenomenal representation, while Stephen focuses on the formal “symmetry” of the object, “travers[ing] every cranny of its structure” to recognize
its integrity (217), but there is nevertheless a marked similarity between
Stephen’s analytical procedure and Kant’s synthesis of reproduction.

However, Stephen’s third phase, in which the object is epiphanized,
seems to have nothing in common with Kantian aesthetics. After rec-
ognizing the object as “one integral thing” and then, through analysis,
as “an organised composite structure, a thing in fact,” he says that the
mind makes “the only logical possible synthesis,” discovering “that it is
that thing which it is” (218). This is the moment Stephen calls epiphany,
when the soul of the object, “its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment
of its appearance” and seems “radiant.” Ostensibly, Stephen is reinterpret-
ing Aquinas’s claritas as quidditas, but Stephen’s “whatness” sounds sus-
piciously like Kant’s noumenon shining forth from the vestments of its
appearance. On this reading, Stephen’s third phase amounts to a revelation
of the noumenal object, which is unequivocally barred in Kant’s doctrine,
so it is no surprise when Stephen concedes that the Ballast Office clock
“has not epiphanised yet” (218). Kant’s proscription implies that Stephen
will wait forever for an epiphany of the clock, a rejection emphasized by
Cranly’s “hostility” (218) toward the theory.

Stephen’s failure to demonstrate epiphany is significant, because noth-
ing in Joyce’s epiphanies or any of their subsequent reworkings suggests
that Joyce ever deviated from Cranly’s skepticism toward the possibility of
epiphany as an absolute or noumenal revelation. Nevertheless, Stephen’s
“yet” implies a vestige of hope. So long as epiphany depends on the ob-
ject, they will wait in vain, but in Stephen’s theory any object is capable
of epiphany at any moment, if only we have eyes to see it, for every ob-
ject offers an epiphany in its quidditas. And this is precisely the kind of
revelation Joyce’s epiphanies offer: not the flash of insight from beyond
but “whatness” manifest to the reader as a textual object shown forth for
subjective contemplation.

One might object that this makes the epiphanies into the Emperor’s
New Clothes, dressing the bare manifestation of textuality in theological
raiment, but the discourse of the sublime Joyce appropriates in his aes-
thetics shows that language is itself the epiphany. Just as Joyce’s autograph
“Apocalypse” sheds light on his revelation of language, its sublimity is illu-
minated by Kant. Like Wordsworth, Joyce interprets the Kantian sublime
as potentially present in any empirical experience, but Joyce goes beyond
Wordsworth to include language in the realm of sensory experience. In
doing so, Joyce was far ahead of his time, for we are only just beginning
to recognize the relevance of Kant’s “Analytic of the Sublime” to the philosophy of language.

It is well known that Kant follows Burke in distinguishing between the beautiful and the sublime. For Kant, “[t]he beautiful in nature is a question of the form of an object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality” (2009, 245). While beauty is a formal quality, consisting in limitation, the sublime is not necessarily formless: a more literal translation of “das Erhabene ist dagegen auch an einem formlosen Gegenstande zu finden” is “the sublime can also be found in a formless object” (Pillow 2000, 69). Although the sublime is frequently found in objects that appear formless, such as a storm or the heavens, it also refers to objects that are too large to perceive in their totality. When confronted by objects such as these, “our imagination, even in its greatest effort to do what is demanded of it and comprehend a given object in a whole of intuition (and thereby to exhibit the idea of reason), proves its own limits and inadequacy, and yet at the same time proves . . . itself adequate to that Idea” (257). This applies most obviously to the “mathematical sublime” (248–50), where the mind submits vast or formless objects to the idea of totality. Since space and past time are infinite, Kant reasons, this totality “does not even exempt the infinite,” and our “ability even to think the given infinite without contradiction, is something that requires the presence in the human mind of something supersensible” (254).

Kant argues that nature “is sublime in such of its phenomena as in their intuition convey the idea of their infinity,” and these phenomena reveal not only our ideas of totality but also our own freedom (see 260–64 on the “dynamical sublime”). While Kant’s examples are typical of eighteenth-century aesthetics—cliffs, thunder, lightning, the Milky Way, and so on—suggesting vast, powerful, or formless natural phenomena, there is nothing to prevent smaller objects, including works of art, from being sublime. As Kirk Pillow explains, in addition to the mind’s regress to infinity in the mathematical sublime, Kant reasons that “[t]he power of imagination is limited by a maximum of comprehension which it cannot exceed” (Pillow 2000, 74). This limitation applies not only to phenomena of great magnitude but also to our inability to comprehend all the parts of a sufficiently complex object as a whole: “Imagination runs into difficulty in trying to
comprehend an object as a unity . . . whenever it faces something vast, elaborate, or complex enough to overwhelm its powers” (Pillow 2000, 74). That this complexity applies not only to physical structures but also to the ideas of reason is evident from the fact that Kant links the sublime to God, freedom, immortality, eternity, and even “aesthetic ideas” that “evoke much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever . . . and which language, consequently, can never fully capture or render completely intelligible,” such as “death, envy and all vices, as also love, fame, and the like” (314). These examples, empirical but “transgressing the limits of experience” (314), just as their concepts defy the bounds of language, indicate that sublime reflection, as Kirk Pillow calls it, is also to be found in literary texts.

In the last chapter, I argued that the Kantian sublime is central to Wordsworth, epitomizing the Romantic epiphany as a whole, with its focus on the infinitude of time, space, and the human mind. Based on Stephen’s disquisition in Stephen Hero, it is tempting to apply Kant’s dictum to the theory of epiphany, seeing Stephen’s aesthetics as a failed attempt to reach the noumenal. But the aesthetics in Stephen Hero apply to language as much as any other experience, with a special, self-reflexive relevance to their own text, so that the Kantian parallels point to the sublimity of language. Just as Kant’s transcendental aesthetic is a theory of experience per se, in which the awe and majesty of the sublime is potentially available in any experience (assuming that at a microscopic level all experience is sufficiently complex to overwhelm our apprehensive faculties), for Joyce the sublime is not a rhetorical mode but a basic property of language.

Toward the end of his “Analytic of the Sublime,” Kant concludes that poetic “genius” is none other than the ability to awaken the sublimity of the mind through language (313–16). His account of the faculties “which constitute genius,” including “spirit” (“the animating principle in the mind”) and “the soul” (313–14), are reminiscent of Daedalus’s aesthetics, and Kant’s “Analytic” helps to explain how the complex symbolic and linguistic associations of Joyce’s later texts, can, at times, evoke a feeling of the sublime: since we are unable to assimilate the full assembly of symbolic associations in a work like Finnegans Wake, while recognizing its unity as a work of art, Joyce’s texts awaken a pure idea of totality. Yet these glimpses are fleeting and can never be attained as a present totality, because Joyce’s semantic voids ensure that complete assimilation of the text is no more attainable than the noumenal; the revelation, if there is
one, is not of absolute, determinate meaning but of the limitlessness of language. Whereas the Kantian sublime is a transcendental intimation of totality, Joyce preempts Derrida in presenting the infinitude of language as an endless system of differences, where meaning is always deferred. Pervading this system is a referential void, an abyss of meaning that is itself sublime, explaining why, in place of traditional revelation, Joyce’s epiphanies manifest absence as the highest form of presence. And yet, as we have seen, the epiphanies present this revelation in literary form, bringing silence into language and constantly repeating it to create a series of linguistic epiphanies from *Dubliners* to the *Wake*. 