Table 2 provides an overview of the epiphanies in *Ulysses*. All told, fourteen epiphanies are reused in *Ulysses*, the same number as *Stephen Hero* and two more than *Portrait*, debunking Scholes’s assertion that “the epiphany seems never to have been in [Joyce’s] recorded thoughts except in *Stephen Hero*” (1964, 72). In this section I outline the role of these epiphanies in *Ulysses*, showing that even as the epiphanies fade into the background, a ghostly trace of their imprint remains, like a watermark on the page.

The first epiphany in *Ulysses*, “She Comes at Night” (quoted on page 15, above), records a dream in which Joyce was visited by the specter of his mother (*MBK* 229–30). In the introduction, I showed how the dreammother’s knowledge of the “inmost heart” is alluded to but never revealed, creating a textual lacuna. The possibilities suggested are as “susceptible of change” as the figure in the epiphany, thereby exerting an “imaginative influence” over the reader as well as the text, and it is this symbiotic relationship between resonant hiatuses and semantic proliferation that characterizes Joyce’s epiphanies. Reduced to their simplest form, the qualities that emerge from the dramatic and lyrical epiphanies are silence and repetition; and paradoxical though it seems, the two are interconnected.

This original structure is evident in the use Joyce makes of epiphany 34 in *Ulysses*. The epiphany is echoed four times in the opening twenty pages, resurfaces in Stephen’s thoughts several times during the day (e.g., 9.439–40), and is explicitly recalled at the end of “Circe,” a moment often considered the climax of the book.Stanislaus Joyce’s account of the oneiric origins of the epiphany around the time of their mother’s death (*MBK* 229–30) sheds light on the first appearance of the epiphany in “Telemachus”: “Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death” (1.112–13). But the passage in *Ulysses* fuses the epiphany with another dream, recorded under “Mother” in Joyce’s Trieste notebook: “She came to me silently in a
Table 2. Epiphanies in *Ulysses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Major Use</th>
<th>Echoes and Allusions(^a)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Telemachus”</td>
<td></td>
<td>34. “She Comes at Night” (1.112–13, 270–79)</td>
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| “Nestor”      |                                   | 34. “She Comes at Night” (1.112–13, 270–79)  
|               | 29. “Images of Fabulous Kings” (2.155–72)\(^b\)  
|               | 32. “The Race” (2.307–12)          |
| “Proteus”     |                                   | 5. “Is That Mary-Ellen?” (3.70–75)  
|               | 16. “An Arctic Beast” (3.300–309)  
|               | 30. “The Spell of Arms and Voices” (3.503–5) |
| “Wandering Rocks” |                                      | 15. “The Lame Beggar” (10.239–56) |
| “Nausicaa”    | 38. “Is Mabie Your Sweet-heart?” (13.64–74)  
| “Circe”       | 34. “She Comes at Night” (15.4194–204)  
|               | 32. “The Race” (15.3962–83)          
|               | 35. “Fred Leslie’s My Brother” (15.4795–97) |
| “Ithaca”      | 5. “Is That Mary-Ellen?” (17.139–41)  
|               | 18. “The Stars on Joyce’s Nose” (17.1256–58) |
| “Penelope”    | 15. “The Lame Beggar” (18.346–47)\(^c\) |

**Notes:**
\(^a\) Numbers refer to those given in *WD* and *PSW*; the titles are taken from Beja (in Bowen and Carens, 712–13). Some of my examples are drawn from the previous source and McFadzean (229).

\(^b\) Beja and McFadzean detect thematic echoes here, though there are few repeated phrases. The same applies to epiphany #16 in “Proteus,” #18 in “Scylla and Charibdis,” and #39 in “Nausicaa.”

\(^c\) Although there are no direct echoes of the epiphanies in “Penelope,” “when I threw the penny to that lame sailor for England home and beauty” (18.346–47) recalls the coin flung to the one-legged sailor in “Wandering Rocks” (10.228–53), a passage that echoes epiphany #15, indicating how the epiphanies become woven into Joyce’s text. I include this as a representative example; if indirect echoes were admitted throughout, the table would be extensive.
dream after her death: and her wasted body within its loose brown habit gave out a faint odour of wax and rosewood and her breath a faint odour of wetted ashes.” Comparing this passage with the scenes in “Telemachus” (1.112–15, 1.270–73) shows how similar the lines are, although the variations are equally revealing: in the first echo her breath becomes “mute, reproachful” (1.105), and in the second it is “bent over him with mute secret words” (1.272), suggesting a link to the silent, secret knowledge of the heart possessed by the ghostly mother in the epiphany. This connection is strengthened by Stephen’s memories of “[h]er glazing eyes, staring out of death. . . . Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror. . . . Her eyes on me to strike me down,” the prayer, “Liliata rutilantium,” and “Ghoul! Chewer of corpses!” in the following lines (1.274–79), all of which are recalled in quick succession when May Dedalus’s ghost returns in “Circe” (15.4157–240). As with Stephen’s earlier memories, the Nighttown apparition draws on the Trieste notebook (e.g., “her breath of wetted ashes” [15.4182]), as well as Mulligan’s recriminations from the Martello tower episode, but the text is now centered on Joyce’s epiphany: “Who had pity for you when you were sad among the strangers? . . . Years and years I loved you, O, my son, my firstborn, when you lay in my womb” (15.4197, 4203–4). Thus the two dreams, from the Trieste notebook and the epiphany, become fused in Ulysses, allowing the “silent word” uttered by the ghoul (15.4161) to suggest at once the “mute secret words” she breathes in “Telemachus” (1.272), the “inmost heart” of epiphany 34, and the “word known to all men” (15.4192–93), which may or may not be “Love” (9.429–30).

The epiphany seems to be travestied in “Circe” (“Get Dilly to make you that boiled rice every night after your brain work” 15.4195, 4202–3), but at the same time, these realist details strengthen the mother’s pleas for Stephen’s repentance, while the ironic reappropriation of earlier lines (e.g., “Our great sweet mother!” [4180]) places the reader in the same position vis-à-vis the text as Stephen before the ghost, which only he can see. As with the closet scene in Hamlet, there is a gulf between what Stephen sees and everyone else does; readers are made aware of this gap (e.g., at 4208, when Florry says “Look! He’s white”), providing a privileged perspective to judge the apparition (i.e., as the return of Stephen’s repressed guilt) and his reaction to it. Likewise, differences between the scene in “Circe” and the textual details it repeats (notably those based on the epiphany) invite readers to analyze Stephen through the transformation from interior monologue to interior dialogue. Far from negating the significance of the
epiphany, irony opens a gap in the text that allows meaning to proliferate. The effect is comic but not insincere; as Joyce told Budgen, “There’s only one kind of critic I . . . resent . . . . The kind that affects to believe that I am writing with my tongue in my cheek” (108).

Ironic realism, derived from the dramatic epiphanies, plays a crucial role in “Circe,” but the lyrical symbolism of epiphany 34 is also manifest in May Dedalus’s reproach to Stephen: “You sang that song to me. Love’s bitter mystery” (15.4189–90). This is the song Stephen hears Buck Mulligan sing in “Telemachus”: “And no more turn aside and brood, / Upon love’s bitter mystery; / For Fergus rules the brazen cars” (1.239–40). The following lines of Yeats’s “Who Goes with Fergus?” are woven into Stephen’s thoughts of “Woodshadows” and the “White breast of the dim sea” (1.242–45), providing another thread in the tapestry of repetition and variation that weaves Joyce’s text, for not only is the image of the sea spun from Yeats’s (“Wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide” 1.246–47), but a few lines later Stephen thinks of “Fergus’ song: I sang it alone in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love’s bitter mystery” (1.249–53). According to Richard Ellmann, in August 1903, as his mother lay on her deathbed, Joyce sang Yeats’s lyric to her, accompanying himself on the piano, just as he had a year before to his dying brother George (JJ 141, 98), which explains why the ghost-mother in “Circe” accuses Stephen of killing her by singing “that song” (15.4189).

If Ellmann can be trusted, Joyce seems to have consciously patterned this repetition–in–death through Yeats’s song, and, as I showed in chapter 2, he does the same thing in the epiphanies, four of which concern Georgie’s death and three of which are related to the loss of his mother. In this context, it is tempting to think that the decaying chords Stephen desists from in Stephen Hero (168) are the same “long dark chords” he remembers “holding down” at the end of “Fergus’ song” in “Telemachus,” before going silently to his mother’s bedside, just as the protagonist in Stephen Hero is bent over the keyboard “in silence” (SH 168; cf. epiphany #19) when his mother questions him about the “matter coming away from the hole in Isabel’s . . . stomach.” As I have shown, this navel is both a void—“The hole we all have / . . . . here” (PSW 179)—and the “strandentwining cable of all flesh” (U 3.37); linguistically, it is both a hiatus (the referential hole in
every signifier) and the opening in language through which all signs link up in the play of signification.

Earlier, I argued that these limits of language—referential indeterminacy and semantic proliferation—first come to the fore in Joyce’s death epiphanies, and it is notable that the second major epiphany in *Ulysses* occurs in “Hades”:

Two mourners push on through the crowd. The girl, one hand catching the woman’s skirt, runs in advance. The girl’s face is the face of a fish, discoloured and oblique-eyed; the woman’s face is small and square, the face of a bargainer. The girl, her mouth distorted, looks up at the woman to see if it is time to cry; the woman, settling a flat bonnet, hurries on towards the mortuary chapel.

Said by Stanislaus to have been written two or three months after May Joyce’s funeral (*MBK* 235), Joyce reused this epiphany, with the minimum changes necessary to fit the past tense narrative, for Isabel in *Stephen Hero* (172), whose death is based on Georgie Joyce’s. The “[t]wo mourners” at the beginning of the scene are hurrying to the “mortuary chapel,” whose origins (*mortuus*) indicate the mortal nature shared by “all the living and the dead” (*D* 225). Joyce emphasizes this continuity when he reuses the same epiphany for an unnamed child in “Hades”: “Mourners came out through the gates: woman and a girl. Leanjawed harpy, hard woman at a bargain, her bonnet awry. Girl’s face stained with dirt and tears, holding the woman’s arm, looking up at her for a sign to cry. Fish’s face, bloodless and livid” (6.517–20). David Hayman suggests that “‘Leanjawed harpy’ carries out some of the underworld themes of ‘Hades,’ besides being sharper and quicker than the first version” (Hart and Hayman 106). This stylistic change is equally evident in “Fish’s face,” which compresses a sentence of twelve words into a single phrase, drawing each syllable into focus. Here, Joyce’s cuts allow the piscan features to be attributed to either the girl or the woman, while the change of adjectives shifts attention from vehicle (the “discoloured” fish, with side-facing eyes) to tenor (where the tear-stained girl might seem pale or “bloodless,” the rapacious bargainer “livid”). As in the original epiphanies, interpretations multiply, but this
change is paradigmatic, cutting to the heart of the chapter. Revised from “discoloured,” “bloodless and livid” suggests deathly pallor, embodying the shades of “Hades,” but “livid” originally referred to a bluish, leaden color (Skeat) and can be applied to purple, red, black, or white, especially in relation to bruises (OED). In each case, discoloration is due to circulation: temporary breaks cause blood to drain from the face (white, “bloodless”); excess blood makes one “livid” with rage; ruptured capillaries trap blood beneath the skin, forming varicolored contusions. Again, indeterminacy allows associations to proliferate, and the ambiguity of “livid” brings out a vital connection to circulation, showing how a central rift sets the chain of signification in motion.

Circulation is the governing trope for this motion in Ulysses: blood circulates through the body, citizens circulate through the city, money circulates on the waters of civic finance, news is circulated by the organs of the press, words and letters circulate through the book. The theme can be traced back to the digestive and generative cycles of “Calypso,” or even earlier, to the textual and intertextual recycling that begins in the Telemachiad, but “Hades” breaks the cycle, introducing an underworld variation. Naturally enough, this break is occasioned by death, as Bloom pauses to wonder would Paddy Dignam’s cut corpse bleed? “He would and he wouldn’t,” Bloom supposes: “The circulation stops,” but “some might ooze out of an artery” (6.432–34). “[B]loodless and livid,” the mourners embody this ambivalent condition in the land of the living, and this in turn leads to Bloom’s thoughts on broken hearts “pumping thousands of gallons of blood every day. One fine day it gets bunged up: and there you are” (673–75): “The circulation stops.” In a similar vein, “Aeolus” begins “IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS” where trams circulate citizens along Dublin’s arteries, “vermilion mailcars” put letters into circulation, and “A GREAT DAILY ORGAN” pumps (mis)information into the collective bloodstream (7.1–2, 16, 84; see M. Ellmann 2008, 55); but by the end of the chapter, the tramcars stand motionless in their tracks, “be-calmed in short circuit” (7.1043–47), just as the end of Deasy’s letter has been torn away (7.521), and Bloom’s call to Monks, the dayfather, about Keyes’s ad produces a break in the text, marked by the line of botched type “jeatondph 1/8 ado dorador douradora” (16.1257–58). Notwithstanding the importance of circulatory systems in the symbolic economy of Ulysses, these breaks become increasingly dominant because they thematize the break in the text itself.
These breaks draw attention to the circulating system, allowing the material quality of each paralyzed element to be examined in isolation, like the eight lines of tramcars and trolleys individually enumerated at the end of “Aeolus” (7.1043–47); at the same time, they reveal the conditions necessary to set the circuit in motion. Hence, an analogy can be drawn between breaks in circulation and the silence and repetition of the epiphanies: both lead to an acute awareness of the materiality of language, coupled with heightened self-reflexivity as Joyce’s text doubles back on itself. Together, this heightened materiality of the text and the self-reflexive awareness it manifests of its own textuality create the conditions for the linguistic epiphany.

The Epiphany of Language

Between these epiphanies of death, there is a telling echo in “Nestor.” As the boys play hockey outside, Stephen is called into Mr. Deasy’s study. While Deasy types out the end of his letter on foot-and-mouth disease, Stephen notices framed images of famous nineteenth-century racehorses, which remind him of an incident at the racetrack with Cranly, “hunting his winners among the mudsplashed brakes, amid the bawls of bookies on their pitches and reek of the canteen, over the motley slush. Fair Rebel! Fair Rebel! Even money the favourite: ten to one the field. Dicers and thimbleriggers we hurried by after the hoofs, the vying caps and jackets and past the meatfaced woman, a butcher’s dame, nuzzling thirstily her clove of orange” (2.307–12). Although the general atmosphere of “The Race” has been retained along with similar phrases (“bawls of bookies . . . motley slush. . . . Nuzzling thirstily her clove of orange”), the passage has been substantially rewritten to fit its new context. The most significant transformation is that in Ulysses the scene is truncated: whereas the original epiphany ends with a marked contrast between “[h]uman creatures . . . swarming in the enclosure” and the romantic image of “[a] beautiful brown horse . . . flash[ing] far away in the sunlight” (PSW 192), Stephen’s reverie is interrupted by the shouts and whistle of a goal outside, sending his thoughts back to his own boyhood among “battling bodies in . . . the joust of life.” Recalling “that knockkneed mother’s darling,” Stephen sees himself in Cyril Sargent, tying this scene back to the history lesson (“Time shocked rebounds”) and “She Comes at Night” (2.139–50). But as well as bringing back the past, the boys’ shouts on the playing field
echo forward to the moment Stephen counters Deasy’s Hegelian view of history moving toward “one great goal, the manifestation of God” with his own view of God manifest in the hockey players’ spontaneous shouts of celebration (“Hooray! Ay! Whrrrwheel!”), which Stephen, feigning indifference, or perhaps uncertainty (“shrugging his shoulders”), generalizes to any vocal utterance: “A shout in the street.” This deferral of the manifestation underscores both its arbitrariness and universality, suggesting that for Dedalus any moment is the occasion for epiphany, but equally the boys’ shouts (2.313, 378) are echoed by the “shout in the street” (386), a vocal manifestation.

Joyce returns to this scene near the end of “Circe.” With faint echoes of Hamlet 1.4, Stephen challenges his father to a battle of the spirits (15.3940–1), at which point a sleepy Simon Dedalus swoops down to castigate his son for “stab[ing]” with Mulligan and Haines. In the hallucinatory hunt that follows, Stephen’s fox, “having buried his grandmother,” is pursued by a motley crowd that “bawls of dicers, crown and anchor players, thimbleriggers, broadsmen,” while “hoarse bookies in high hats clamour deafeningly: . . . Card of the races. Racing card!” (3960–63). Soon after “A dark horse, riderless, bolts like a phantom past the winningpost,” followed by a field drawn from the day’s Gold Cup (“Sceptre, Zinfandel . . .”) and the “Skeleton horses” from Deasy’s wall (“Shotover, Repulse, . . . Ceylon”), with Garrett Deasy himself brandishing a hockeystick as he rides “Cock of the North” (3974–82). Like the shouts outside the window in “Nestor,” Stephen’s reverie, which condenses and displaces “The Race,” is broken only by the sound of discordant singing beneath the window: “Hark! Our friend noise in the street” (3998), recalling Dedalus’s vocal manifestation of God as a “shout in the street” (2.386).

Behind the complex web of repetition in this passage, a pattern emerges from the epiphanies. Echoes of “The Race” close the scene, while the airborne battle it begins with, pitting Stephen’s “vulture talons” against his father’s “buzzard wings,” and his cries against his father’s (e.g., “An eagle gules volant” [3948–49]), can be traced back to “Apologise” and “Upon Me from the Darkness.” Moreover, the riddle of the fox (15.3952–53, 2.101–50) is connected to “She Comes at Night,” which recurs soon after (15.4157ff), so that the first epiphanies in Ulysses are repeated in reverse order at the end of the “Odyssey” (episodes 4–15). Returning to themes raised at the beginning of the novel (mourning, love, religion, filial bonds), this chiastic
structure provides a sense of closure at the end of “Circe,” and following this mirroring, Stephen is finally able to free himself from the specters of authority.

Four moments, all connected to “She Comes at Night” and “The Race,” can be identified in this break with authority: at the end of “Telemachus,” with the prayer for his dead mother still ringing in his ears, Stephen rejects Mulligan’s hold over him, vowing to return neither to the tower nor to his home (1.740); preferring a shout in the street to mammon or universal history, Stephen rejects Deasy’s gods in favor of a shouted epiphany; the same faith, bolstered by recourse to Joyce’s ur-texts, defends him against the internalized voice of the father, which threatens to break his spirit and his art; so when Stephen smashes the chandelier (15.4243–34), dispelling the ghostly apparition of his mother, his cry of “Nothung!” (needful, 4242) can be read as an attempt to exorcise the guilt he feels over her death, and for having left the Church, as well as a broader rejection of institutional authority. Morris Beja argues that this break from filial bonds creates the necessary space for Stephen to recognize Bloom “as his father,” and following “the thematic unification achieved by this epiphany” all that remains is for Bloom to “recognise his role” (1971, 106–11). For Beja, “he does so in the most effective moment of vision in all of Joyce” (111), the apparition of eleven-year-old Rudy as Bloom stands guard over Stephen at the end of “Circe.”

There is a sense of wonder here, but it is more ambiguous than Beja suggests. The “climactic epiphany” (Beja, 1971, 111) is not based on any of Joyce’s extant epiphanies, and the connection between Bloom and Stephen is never overtly stated. Far from recognizing his father, when Bloom rouses the unconscious Stephen, the latter responds “Who? Black panther. Vampire,” and the song he returns to reveals the grip of the dead: “Who . . . drive . . . Fergus now” (4932–43). Punctuated by ellipses, Stephen’s last lines take him back to the loss of his mother, showing the repetitive drive of the death epiphanies. As Beja intimates, Bloom’s vision of Rudy reading “from right to left inaudibly” is a distorted reflection of the poem Stephen “murmurs.” When Bloom “calls inaudibly” to Rudy, he sees his son in Stephen, but the vision is filled with irony. Holding Stephen’s hat and ashplant, Bloom sees Rudy wearing “a little bronze helmet” and “a slim ivory cane with a violet bowknot” (4936–67), and in the final line of the episode, Bloom sees a white lambkin peeping out of Rudy’s waistcoat,
having just undone the buttons of Stephen’s waistcoat. These ironies are accentuated by Bloom standing guard “in the attitude of a secret master” and Rudy’s apparition as “a fairy boy . . . , a changeling, . . . dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes” (4957–58), adding humor to the scene while multiplying its significance through hybrid imagery (Masonic, Greek, Hebraic).

Bloom himself is “wonderstruck” by the vision, and after the climax of Stephen shattering the chandelier, and the abrupt fall to earth following his altercation with Carr, there is something wondrous about this resonant silence. Appearing almost artless, the moment is akin to Stevens’s “The Snow Man,” revealing “[n]othing that is not there and the nothing that is.” The fact that it occurs in the wake of Stephen’s “[n]on serviam!” (15.4228), as he lies semiconscious on the ground, suggests that only by breaking with traditional notions of epiphany as intense, climactic moments of revelation was Joyce able to extend his epiphanic aesthetic to the rest of his texts. For it is notable that from this point on, few epiphanies are explicitly reused in *Ulysses*; instead, in the final three episodes that constitute the *nostos*, or return, the epiphanic quality of language comes to the fore.

A good example of this generalization of epiphany is the echo of “Is That Mary Ellen?” in “Ithaca.” Ellmann considers it a “major use,” even though Joyce reduces a fourteen-line epiphany to a single listed item in *Ulysses*. Without contextual knowledge, the reader is more likely to associate this scene with “The Dead,” but biographical evidence enables us to recognize the fire kindled by Stephen’s “godmother Miss Kate Morkan in the house of her dying sister Miss Julia Morkan at 15 Usher’s Island” (17.139–41) as the fire described in the “Mary Ellen” epiphany (*PSW* 274n; *JJ* 84, 286). Several critics have noted the similarity between the fire in the epiphany and the fire Bloom kindles in “Ithaca” (17.126–33), as well as the series of “similar apparitions” Stephen thinks of—“others elsewhere in other times who . . . had kindled fires for him” (17.134–35), including Brother Michael in the infirmary at Clongowes (cf. *P* 21, 25), his father, his mother, and the dean of studies in *Portrait* (*P* 200ff; *U* 17.134–47). Of course, the dean’s “art in lighting a fire” (*P* 200) is closely associated with Stephen’s aesthetics and the theory of language he struggles to articulate in *Portrait*, so the recollection of this moment, along with the infirmary scene that culminates in “The Ship” and the fireplace on Usher’s Island,
points again to the relationship between Joyce’s epiphanies and his aesthetics. Moreover, the obvious connection to “The Dead” indicates the role Joyce’s epiphanies play in bringing back “others elsewhere in other times,” including one’s former self, for subjectivity, like language, is founded on a lacuna.

This structure of the self-replicating lacuna is reiterated in all of Joyce’s epiphanies, and even as the epiphanies fade from the text, a ghostly trace of their imprint remains, like a watermark on the page. The following epiphany offers a good example:

[Dublin: at the corner of Connaught St, Phibsborough]

The First Young Lady — (half kneeling, takes his hand) — Well, is Mabie your sweetheart?
The Little Male Child — Na . . o.
The Second Young Lady — (bending over him, looks up) — Who is your sweetheart?

In “Nausicaa” this becomes:

— Tell us who is your sweetheart, spoke Edy Boardman. Is Cissy your sweetheart?
— Nao, tearful Tommy said.
— Is Edy Boardman your sweetheart? Cissy queried.
— Nao, Tommy said.
— I know, Edy Boardman said none too amiably with an arch glance from her shortsighted eyes. I know who is Tommy’s sweetheart. Gerty is Tommy’s sweetheart.
— Nao, Tommy said on the verge of tears. (13.66–74)

None of the eight “Anatomies of ‘Nausicaa’” in Benstock’s Critical Essays (1989) mentions this epiphany: it has become practically invisible. Perhaps this is because the scene merits no more attention than Scholes paid in calling it “a showing forth of banality and vulgarity,” an “insipid episode” easily translated to “Nausicaa” (WD 48). Yet the episode appears far from insipid when read as a comment on the role of desire in language
acquisition. Tellingly, the first dialogue in the chapter shows Cissy Caffrey instructing baby Boardman to

Say out big, big. I want a drink of water.
And baby prattled after her:
—A jink a jink a jawbo. (13.26–8)

A little later, Cissy tells baby to “Say papa,” mimicking her own speech in infantile form: “Say pa pa pa pa pa pa pa” before being interrupted by the baby’s attempt to do so: “Haja ja ja haja” (13.392). Joyce’s phonetic representation of baby talk is humourously childish but also pleasurable, eliciting a kind of jouissance, because he evokes both aspects of “the remainder”: language as a material product of the body, and the fact that meaning belongs to the community before it belongs to the individual.

Both these qualities manifest Joyce’s linguistic epiphany, and in this context, the toddler’s repeated syllables are as interesting for their form as their referential content. In the epiphany, the boy’s reluctance to reply to the young ladies’ questions is emphasized by ellipsis (“. . .Na. . .o,” “Na . . . o”). When the second young lady “looks up” (at the first?), one might think they collude in mocking him, which would explain his reticence, a reading strengthened by Edy’s “arch glance” in “Nausicaa.” Yet substitutions of the “sweetheart” suggest the endless deferral of desire, from which it follows that desire must be denied to be perpetuated, providing an alternative explanation for Tommy’s paralyzed discourse, as he hypnotically repeats a single negative diphthong. However, “Cissy’s quick motherwit” guesses that Tommy’s tears are not related to the questions at all; the boy’s symbolic negations are charged by a real need to urinate. Banal as it might appear, this is as good an example of lalangue, that meaningless, infantile babble by means of which Lacan claimed Joyce was able to graft the Symbolic order onto the Real, as may be found anywhere in Joyce. The fact that it occurs in one of the most unremarkable epiphanies in Ulysses indicates that this endlessly circling rupture is a fundamental property of (Joyce’s) language, everpresent in the simple repetition and variation of phonemes (“Habaa baaaaahabaaa baaaa” 13.398) and the circulation of letters that constitutes writing (recall Wisdom HELY’S sandwich boardmen, with “apostrophe S” trailing behind). Indeed, the great cycle of life and death Bloom imagines in “Lestrygonians” always commences with the same repeated vagitus: “maaaaaa” (8.483), extending the first vowel
indefinitely from its voiced bilabial origins into the newborn’s first word, calling back the (m)other.

Mind the Gap

If the epiphanies in *Ulysses* become invisible, refined out of existence, one might wonder why Joyce chose to reuse them. Reasons of economy have been suggested, with some validity, but when this is reckoned solely as a saving in labor, the account is incomplete; there is also wastage involved in reduplicating texts, as Nora was quick to note. In fact, both James and Stanislaus Joyce recycled paper, and many of Joyce’s earliest fragments are preserved on the versos of other texts, such as Stanislaus’s diary. This physical recycling provides a useful analogy with the way Joyce’s epiphanies are reused in his later texts, including *Ulysses*, where they increasingly seem to remain within or behind or beyond the text, like God—or the artist—in *A Portrait*. However fleeting (e.g., “Mary Ellen”) or unremarkable (“Is Mabie Your Sweetheart”), the epiphanies Joyce recycles create intertextual links, and since their phrasing is typically repeated (e.g., “She Comes,” “The Race”), they also create *intra*textual patterns of repetition and variation. Like *Portrait*, these variations weave the complex entrelace of the text as innumerable scenes and passages are interwoven through multiple threads of repetition, while different strands of the same motif allow associations to propagate. The end of “Proteus” provides a ready example as Stephen, with echoes of Hamlet leaving Ophelia, turns his head over his shoulder, “rere regardant” (*U* 3.503; cf. *Hamlet* 2.1.108–12) and sees “[m]oving through the air high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship” (3.503–5). In the silent arrival of the ship, echoes of “The Ship” and “The Spell” may be heard, with all the resonance they accrue in *Portrait,* but even if these epiphanies are not recalled, the structure of repetition and variation is evident: Joyce himself drew attention to the importance of the word “crosstrees,” repeated in “Scylla and Charybdis” (9.496), and DB Murphy, the memorable sailor who arrives on “the threemaster *Rosevean*” (16.450), recalls not only the ship and the themes of wandering and return (e.g., at 16.421) but also introduces a mini-cycle of epiphanic repetition since his first appearance in the “Wandering Rocks” episode clearly echoes epiphany 15 (10.239–53). This scene is itself echoed when he
sings “For England, home and beauty” in “Eumaeus” (16.420) and again in “Penelope” as Molly remembers throwing a penny “to that lame sailor for England home and beauty” (18.346–7). Here, then, is another small but significant example of the lyrical-symbolic method Joyce devised in the narrative epiphanies, demonstrating how the Joycean text is composed of a tissue of repetition and variation, both intratextual and intertextual; in both cases, resonant gaps between similar but nonidentical passages allow imagery to proliferate (Benjamin 201–16; Miller 9).

However, there is a significant shift in emphasis between the epiphanic structure of Portrait and that of Ulysses. In Portrait, the nonidentical similarity between two textual elements (repeated and repeating) defines a gap between them, whereas in Ulysses, Joyce homes in on the gap itself, allowing textual limits to be defined from within. This can be understood as the difference between a traditional concept of repetition as the doubling of some preexistent whole (however inexact the copy) and the notion of “originary doubling” (Gasché 227). Gasché argues that subjectivity entails relating to oneself, which is only possible through a space of self-difference, so that doubled and double come into being simultaneously through self-reflection: an “originary duplication” (225–39). Gasché’s “General Theory of Doubling” extends to language, both in the act of writing or reading and within the signifying system (différance). Admittedly, it is hard to reconcile this abstract notion of repetition that originates in an act of spacing, or opening, with the linear text on the page, but as soon as one tries to theorize the creative act of writing, it seems clear that all texts arise from silence, from an imaginative space that precedes them, and that the writer typically assesses the words composed according to the accuracy with which they are perceived to represent some hitherto unarticulated thought. This should not be taken to imply that writing represents preverbal thought; rather, I am suggesting that thought and language come into being together from a space of silence. And it is this space of silence, this originary act of linguistic creation, that Joyce reopens in the Ulysses epiphanies.

To give a concrete example, consider “The Stars on Joyce’s Nose” (quoted on pages 58–59, above). I analyzed this epiphany, and its relationship to the César Abin caricature, in chapter 2, but there is one moment I wish to return to: the curious gap between Sheehy’s question and Joyce’s response. Joyce’s complete non sequitur, foreclosing the conversation, could be taken as a snub by Sheehy (who himself seems to be poking fun
at Joyce), but instead this gap becomes the point of departure for a new turn in the dialogue. If one reads the text aloud, it becomes clear that the break does not function as a pause between utterances; rather, Joyce’s studied response issues from silence, initiating a new turn. Joyce deliberately evades Sheehy’s question; the force of his turn, in both its ordinary and linguistic sense, depends upon difference—a difference that also defers the question. This differance, arising from a silence in the text, is marked by the epiphanic phenomenon par excellence: the appearance of the stars. Twice “the stars” follow an ellipsis: in a momentary silence the “phenomenon” appears. Thus, far from ending the conversation, Joyce’s unexpected observation opens a new cycle of repetitive dialogue orbiting around ellipses: phenomenon . . . phenomenon . . . star . . . star . . . phenomenon. The entire cycle issues from a silence in the epiphany, providing an early illustration of one of Joyce’s major developments in Ulysses, where attention shifts from the gaps defined between iterations to the silence before speech. Before returning to these original silences, however, we need to consider how they are manifest in Ulysses, particularly through the celestial imagery that transforms the biblical epiphany of the star into a linguistic phenomenon.

“the heaventree of stars”

Ulysses is replete with celestial apparitions and epiphanic imagery, creating its own epiphany of the stars. For instance, when Stephen ascribes the significance of William Shakespeare’s name to the fact that a new star appeared “as the signature of his initial” in the W-shaped constellation of Cassiopeia at the time of his birth,15 Thomas Lyster, “the quaker librarian” (9.928–42) asks:

Was it a celestial phenomenon?
   —A star by night, Stephen said. A pillar of the cloud by day. (942–44)

This “celestial phenomenon” may carry a trace of the “star . . . phenomenon” in the epiphany, but the obvious allusion is to Exodus 13:21, where God appears to Moses and the Israelites “by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.” This Old Testament shekinah is important in Portrait, and the same verse is cited repeatedly in Ulysses (e.g., 7.865–6, 15.1407, 17.1999), while clusters of related cloud and star imagery recur throughout, showing the significance
of Old Testament epiphanies, as well as the apparition of the star in Matthew and Luke.

The most famous examples occur in “Ithaca,” when Stephen and Bloom emerge silently into the penumbra of the garden to see “the heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” (17.1039), and Bloom demonstrates various constellations, including Orion with its nebulous belt, and “new stars such as Nova,” which appeared in February 1901 (17.1040–51). Indeed, among the “various features of the constellations” considered are “the condensation of spiral nebulae into suns” (1108) and the appearance of a star (1st magnitude) of exceeding brilliancy . . . about the period of the birth of William Shakespeare over delta in the recumbent neversetting constellation of Cassiopeia and of a star (2nd magnitude) of similar origin but of lesser brilliancy which had appeared in and disappeared from the constellation of the Corona Septentrionalis about the period of the birth of Leopold Bloom and of other stars of (presumably) similar origin which had (effectively or presumably) appeared in and disappeared from the constellation of Andromeda about the period of the birth of Stephen Dedalus, and in and from the constellation of Auriga some years after the birth and death of Rudolph Bloom, junior, and in and from other constellations some years before or after the birth or death of other persons. (17.1118–32)

Here, with clear echoes of “Scylla and Charibdis,” Bloom and/or Stephen extend the original epiphany of Christ to Shakespeare, themselves, Rudy, and anyone else; but quite apart from the questions of tone raised by this heretical appropriation of epiphany, which simultaneously bestows Christ-like significance on each human being and destroys the unique status of the Son of God, the imprecision of “some years before or after the birth or death” indicates a characteristically Joycean gesture, making epiphany both everpresent and arbitrary. This gesture is evident in Stephen’s epiphany of God as “a shout in the street” (substituted, with a shrug, for shouts on the playing field [2.386]) and again in his conception of the world as God’s book (“Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot” [3.2–3]).

How sincerely Stephen is supposed to believe in the vision of world and language he espouses is open to interpretation, but Joyce’s text certainly undercuts the Romantic ideal of epiphany as something absolute,
universal, and immanent—the Wordsworthian moment ever ready to
appear. The chief difference is that Joyce foregrounds a void of mean-
ing that has no place in the Romantic epiphany, and this hole under-
cuts the significance of Joyce’s epiphanies even as epiphanic significance
is extended to all phenomena. The hiatus I identified in “The Stars on
Joyce’s Nose” provides one example, but the linguistic world of Ulysses
is riddled throughout by the same “incertitude of the void,” as the word
“phenomena” makes plain. In “Cyclops,” for example, when Bloom tries
to explain the “natural phenomenon” of “a morbid upwards and outwards
philoprogenitive erection in articulo mortis per diminutionem capitis” (i.e.,
the hanged man’s “poker,” 12.464–65, 477–78), he is mocked for “his jaw-
breakers about phenomenon and science and this phenomenon and the
other phenomenon” (466–67), a motif that is continued in the “hubbub
of Phenomenon” answering Bloom’s explanation of thunder in “Oxen”
(14.424–28, 436) and the onanistic suggestions of the natural phenomena
he recalls in “Circe” (15.2795–96, 3354–55). These manifest ironies under-
cut any claim to empirical certitude, drawing all phenomena down to the
same level, just as every word is riddled with uncertainty. Yet the word
“phenomenon” is derived from phainein, the same root as “epiphany,”
while in the plural it has a long-standing association with astronomy, sug-
gest that, notwithstanding their incertitude, all phenomena have uni-
versal significance.17 These meanings are in play in the epiphany quoted
above, as they are in “Ithaca,” both in the list of “attendant phenomena”
following the starbirth passage (17.1132–6, above) and in Bloom’s expecta-
tion of an everyday epiphany:

What prospect of what phenomena inclined him to remain?
The disparition of three final stars, the diffusion of daybreak, the
apparition of a new solar disk. (17.1256–59)

In this “diurnal phenomenon” (1262), epiphany has again been general-
ized, becoming both universal and arbitrary, for Joyce reminds us that
epiphany takes place daily (in fact, at every moment, somewhere in the
world), each time our closest star appears.

Œmissions

Stephen and Bloom have a shared interest in the stars, but they view the
heavens quite differently. For Stephen, as we have seen, the apparition of
Tycho’s star is a symbol of Shakespeare’s literary stardom, whereas Bloom seeks to explain celestial phenomena scientifically. Stephen tends to symbolize the world through art, transforming experience into language, whereas Bloom seeks to reify symbols, making sense of language through empirical data. Thus, for Stephen, the significance of stars is figurative, whereas for Bloom they are literal, and Stephen seeks meaning in signifiers, whereas Bloom looks to the signified. The linguistic parallax between them is expressed most clearly in the difference between Stephen’s fascination with proper nouns and Bloom’s with phenomena.

Stephen’s theory of *Hamlet* rests on the coincidence of a few proper nouns. The “celestial phenomenon” (9.942–43) that Stephen interprets symbolically is offered as empirical evidence of the revelatory significance of appellations. Having discussed Hamlet/Hamnet, Richard and Edmund, Stephen turns to the identity of the father/son/ghost/brother/maker (“He has hidden his own name, a fair name, William, in the plays. . . . He has revealed it in the sonnets where there is Will in overplus” [9.921–24]), and asks “What’s in a name? That is what we ask ourselves in childhood when we write the name that we are told is ours” (9.927–28). As he “read[s] the skies” (939), finding “the signature of [W. Shakespeare’s] initial among the stars” (931), this thought takes Stephen back to his own name, initials, and astrological “configuration,” as well as the nicknames he had as a child (“Bous Stephanoumenos”), recalling his musings on the same theme in *Portrait*. “Your own name is strange enough,” Eglington remarks, echoing Mulligan on the opening page (“your absurd name, an ancient Greek!” [1.34]), which brings back the mythical associations of Daedalus that Stephen dwells on in *Portrait* (“Fabulous artificer. The hawklike man . . . Lapwing. Icarus”), implying that the Stephen of *Ulysses* believes as fervently as his literary forbear that the meaning of a name will reveal the identity of its bearer.

If Stephen seeks the light of logos to illuminate experience, Bloom seeks to reify the signifier by determining its empirical referent. In “Nausicaa,” for example, as dusk falls on Dollymount Strand, Bloom gazes up at the darkening sky: “A star I see. Venus? Can’t tell yet. Two. When three it’s night” (13.1076–77). Whereas Stephen’s star is abstract, a symbol of William Shakespeare, Bloom gazes at real stars that serve to define the precise moment night arrives. This moment is clearly mirrored by Bloom’s thoughts of daybreak in “Ithaca,” announced by “the disparition of three
final stars” (17.1257, qtd. above); in both cases, he may be thinking of the Talmud, but the result is the same: beginning with phenomena, in the Kantian sense, Bloom seeks to attach a precise sensory experience to the words “night” and “day,” as though all nouns could be made concrete. He applies the same strategy to foreign words, seeking familiarity in the material (e.g., “Corpus: body. Corpse” [5.350]), to dead metaphors such as Kernan’s “inmost heart,” which Bloom returns to its visceral organ (6.670–76), and to clichés like “stream of life” (“Because life is a stream” [8.95]) used in reference to the river Liffey, whose name means “life,” and only by extension to the figurative flow of Dublin (8.88–95).

Both Stephen and Bloom seek a determinate relationship between signifiers and signifieds that will reveal the true meaning of the sign. In doing so, they seek a linguistic epiphany that corresponds to the Romantic revelation of the immanent. Yet Joyce’s language continuously manifests the impossibility of achieving this revelation due to the arbitrary nature of the sign, while, paradoxically, the gap between signifiers and signifieds becomes the site of epiphany. This double gesture explains why the epiphanies in *Ulysses* seem arbitrary, meaningless, or ironic, and also funny, since Joyce’s unexpected gaps of meaning possess endless potential to signify anew.

But signifiers can also be defined in relation to other signifiers, emphasizing formal and semantic relationships. These may be authorized by folk etymology or reference works, but regardless of status they are never fixed; they exist in a state of play, showing how signification is generated. In *Ulysses*, this playful approach characterizes Molly, who breaks unfamiliar words into their constituent letters and sounds, spinning new meanings from the threads she untwines, like Penelope weaving and unweaving her web—think of “met him pike hoses,” for example. Faced with an unfamiliar word, Bloom tries the same approach: “Parallax. I never exactly understood . . . Par it’s Greek: parallel, parallax” (8.110–12), and although his derivation rests on surer ground, he recognizes the similarity to Molly (“Mer him pike hoses she called it till I told her about the transmigration” [8.112–13]). As I showed in the last chapter, in *Portrait* Stephen is also fascinated by the sound and etymology of words (e.g., *kiss, suck, ivory, tundish*). In *Ulysses*, he rarely breaks words down; instead, they are given for us to decode. “[P]ostprandial, do you know that word?” [3.222] offers an easy example, but try “Autontimorumenos” or “Stephanoumenos” (9.939;
These words come from the same passage on names in “Scylla and Charibdis,” where Stephen plays on the materiality of his own name: “Stephen, Stephen, cut the bread even. S. D: *sua donna.*” (9.940), showing how this kind of word play, common to children, leads to more complex nicknames like “Bous Stephaneferos” (P 182; U 9.939). This verbal invention becomes central to Stephen’s “theolologicophilolological” portmanteaux (9.762), and however much we may suspect him (or his creator) of taking the piss here (the word is followed by “Mingo, minxi, mictum, mingere” [9.762], conjugations of the Latin verb *micturire, to urinate*), Joyce too discovers the common root of theology, logic, and philology in *logos.*

Stephen’s, Bloom’s, and Molly’s shared interest in the materiality of language, along with the pleasure they derive from playing with sound, letters, and signification, is fundamental to the aesthetics of *Ulysses,* because as Joyce draws attention to the materiality of language, he shows phonological, graphological, and semantic change in play. Paronomasia, or wordplay, demonstrates linguistic change in real time, showing how verbal invention depends on difference—that is, difference from a recognizable unit of signification—and how this variation leads to formal change and/or new meaning. This procedure is so fundamental to Joyce’s verbal invention that practically any line could be cited, but as a paradigm case, consider Molly’s substitution of “omissions” for *e*missions when she recalls the doctor “asking me had I frequent omissions where do those old fellows get all the words they have omissions” (18.1170). The context is ambiguous, passing from bowel movements to menstruation (1163–70), and since Molly is seated on the chamberpot where the flow of her thoughts accompanies (1) the beginning of her menstrual cycle (1105–10), (2) her urination (1142–44), (3) recollections of “that white thing coming from me” (1152–53), and (4) her subsequent visit to Dr. Collins, a gynaecologist (1153–74), her “omissions” include a range of bodily secretions, including the secret of Boylan’s emissions (“anyhow he didn’t make me pregnant” [1123]) that she has omitted to tell Bloom. This extension from Molly’s and Milly’s emissions to Boylan’s and Bloom’s is authorized in the next section when she refers to Bloom’s ejaculation as “his omission,” compressing “a period of 10 years, 5 months and 18 days during which carnal intercourse had been incomplete, without ejaculation of semen within the natural female organ” (17.2282–84) into the change of a single letter. Besides their narrative significance, the bodily functions and desires expressed...
by this substitution provide a paradigm for the linguistic epiphanies in *Ulysses*, where a textual hole, an omission, in the body of the text emits, or disseminates, an unlimited stream of linguistic associations. In a word, *œmissions.*

“*Remember your epiphanies . . . ?*”

How do *œmissions* relate to epiphanies and their permutations in *Ulysses*? The answer is in Joyce’s aesthetics, which, though not confined to the epiphanies, can be traced back to them, as Stephen does in “Proteus”: “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? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years, a mahamanvantara. Pico della Mirandola like. Ay, very like a whale. When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once” (3.141–46). The irony of this passage is frequently noted, but it is worth recalling that the first part is based on Joyce’s comment to Stanislaus (JJ 113) and that as a young man Joyce modeled his character and his writing on Pater.20 Clearly Joyce outgrew the florid style and aestheticism of *The Renaissance,* but his continuing use of the epiphanies, right through to the *Wake’s ricorso,* shows that he never outgrew their aesthetics. Indeed, the irony of *Ulysses* is a consequence of his epiphanic language—far from negating the significance of his early work, this passage contains, in nebulous state, a development of their aesthetics.21

The clue is Stephen’s allusion to Hamlet mocking Polonius:

Hamlet. Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?
Polonius. By th’ mass, and ’tis like a camel indeed.
Hamlet. Methinks it is like a weasel.
Polonius. It is back’d like a weasel.
Hamlet. Or like a whale.
Polonius. Very like a whale. (*Hamlet,* 2.2)

Echoing Polonius echoing Hamlet, Stephen’s “very like a whale” (3.144) can be read in a number of ways, positioning himself as mocker, mocked, or both; but the image of the protean cloud, and the protean language it precipitates, is central to the episode and the novel. Like their Danish ancestors, Stephen and Bloom view the same cloud from different
perspectives, one of the clearest examples of parallax in the book. Stephen sees it artistically: just as he thinks of *Hamlet* in the “epiphanies” passage, he first sees the cloud colored by Yeats’s “Who Goes with Fergus”: “A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, wholly, shadowing the bay in deeper green” (1.248). By contrast, Bloom’s first impressions, which occur at almost the same moment,22 are more literal than literary: “A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, wholly. Grey. Far” (4.218). Thirteen hours later, when Bloom counts the stars and sees “nightclouds” metamorphose, unlike Stephen’s literary symbolism, their transformations are brought back down to physical phenomena: “A star I see. [. . . ] Two. When three it’s night. Were those nightclouds there all the time? Looks like a phantom ship. No. Wait. Trees are they? An optical illusion. Mirage” (13.1076–79). Following Stephen’s allusion to *Hamlet* in the “epiphanies” passage, it seems reasonable to assume that these lines echo the same scene, thereby implying a connection between Stephen’s reflections in “Proteus” and Bloom’s in “Nausicaa.” As well as the star and cloud clusters discussed above, Bloom’s “phantom ship” recalls the oneiric vessels in “The Ship” and “The Spell,” whose imagery is echoed in the “silently moving” ship at the end of “Proteus.” Indeed, the word “phantom,” derived from *phainein*, is cognate with “epiphany,” “phenomenon,” and “fantasy”; like the phantom mother in “She Comes at Night,” the fantastical phenomenon of Bloom’s nightcloud is “susceptible of change.”

Taken alone, these threads constitute a minor motif, but numerous parallels between the episodes bring out the pattern: Stephen and Bloom walk along the same strand, seeing the same objects—hoops, bottles, rocks, and so on—that lead them to closely related reflections; both fantasize about women on the beach (Stephen’s midwives, Bloom’s Gerty) before relieving themselves through the same bodily organ; and each episode climaxes with an act of writing that reflects the perpetual flux of language.

As one might expect, Bloom’s text is more straightforward. Picking up a stick from the beach (to mirror Stephen’s ashplant), Bloom writes a message in the sand:

I.

. . .

AM. A.

No room. Let it go.

Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. (13.1258–66)
Bloom’s unfinished message to Gerty suggests many endings, ranging from the confessional to the revelatory (e.g., Fritz Senn proposes “... a cuckold,’ ‘... a naughty boy,’ ‘... alone,’ “an incomplete half of the Christ of Revelation (who is A and O, beginning and end),” and “a faint adumbration of a Jehovean I AM THAT I AM” [in Hart and Hayman, 294–95]). These biblical allusions suggest the epiphanic nature of the text, but it is an everchanging manifestation, in which any noun could follow the indefinite article: the gap in Bloom’s text is both meaningless and limitless. Drawn from the resonant hiatuses of the dramatic epiphanies, Bloom’s composition goes beyond them, and beyond the ephemeral nature of traditional revelations, to show the transience of the epiphany itself, effaced by Bloom even before the tide has a chance to wash it away.

The connections between Bloom’s physical inscription, erased by his boot, and Stephen’s protean poetry are manifold: “Signatures of all things I am here to read,” Stephen thinks, for “these heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here” (3.2, 288–89), foreshadowing Bloom’s legend, while Bloom sees “rocks with lines and scars and letters” (13.1261) in the midst of writing his message in the sand, recalling the poem Stephen composed upon a rock. Similarly, the “bottle with story of a treasure in it” that Bloom sees (or imagines) recalls the “porterbottle” Stephen sees after remembering his epiphanies (13.1249–50; 3.152). Bloom’s bottle probably wasn’t “thrown from a wreck” (13.1250), just as Stephen’s is unlikely to be a relic of the “lost Armada” (3.149); Stephen’s is an empty “sentinel” of the “isle of dreadful thirst” (153–54), and Bloom’s is an example of countless unknown objects encountered among “[a]ll those holes and pebbles on the beach” (1248–49). These echoes ensure that when the bottle becomes the imaginary repository of “a piece of paper” Bloom finds on the strand (“Letter? No. . . . Page of an old copybook” [1247–48]), the torn page recalls the poem Stephen writes on the torn end of Deasy’s letter in “Proteus.”

It requires careful reading to realize that Stephen is writing a poem in “Proteus,” and it is only in the “???” section of “Aeolus” (some seventy pages later), when Myles Crawford asks who tore Deasy’s letter, that we finally hear it:

*On swift sail flaming*
*From storm and south*
He comes, pale vampire,  
*Mouth to my mouth.* (7.522–25)

These lines are recognizably Dedalian when we recall the words he scribbled on the blank end of Deasy’s letter earlier in the day:

He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth’s kiss.

Here. Put a pin in that chap, will you? My tablets. Mouth to her kiss.

No. Must be two of em. Glue em well. Mouth to her mouth’s kiss.

(3.387–400)

Stephen’s poetry is risible, but by emphasizing the physical properties of the fragment, and then reflecting back on it, Joyce creates a self-reflexive text. Its buccal image stems from the epiphanies, since Stephen’s imagery is drawn from memories of Parisian prostitutes “shattering with gold teeth *chaussons* of pastry, their mouths yellowed with the *pus* of *flan Breton*” (3.214–15), itself based on epiphany #33’s description of prostitutes eating pastries in Paris. With some irony, Stephen searches for an ending in birth and death (“mouth to her moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb”), but he winds up thinking “Why not endless till the farthest star? Darkly they are there behind this light, darkness shining in the brightness, delta of Cassiopeia, worlds” (408–10).

These lines take on greater significance in the light of Stephen’s theory of names and literary stardom, but like the move from the unique star that heralds Shakespeare’s birth in “Scylla and Charibdis” to the universally meaningless celestial events that accompany human life and death in “Ithaca,” there is a move from the “word known to all men” that Stephen ponders in “Proteus” to the chameleonic language of “Rhymes and Reasons,” where multicolored words exchange letters like garments:

Mouth, south. Is the mouth south someway? Or the south a mouth? Must be some. South, pout, out, shout, drouth. Rhymes: two men dressed the same, looking the same, two by two.

. . . . . . *la tua pace*
. . . . . *che parlar ti piace*
*Mentre che il vento, come fa, si tace.*

He saw them three by three, approaching girls, in green, in rose, in russet, entwining, *per l’aer perso*, in mauve, in purple, *quella pacifica*
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*oriafiamma, gold of oriflamme, di rimirar fè più ardenti.* But I old men, penitent, leadenfooted, underdarkneath the night: mouth south: tomb womb. (7.714–24)

The Dantean rhymes (peace, pleases, falls silent) are significant, as is the context (*Inferno* 5), but Stephen seems to associate the interlocking rhymes of Dante’s terza rima with the two old men, dignified and grave, in Dante’s heavenly pageant (*Purgatorio* 29.134–35), while the verses come in threes, like the wings of the cherubim (“three and three”) or the trio of brightly colored virtues (29.110, 121–29). Dressed in red, green, and white, they represent faith, hope, and charity, but the procession emerges from a “burst of incandescence,” led by seven golden candlesticks emitting a spectrum of light (29.16, 43–78). This heavenly pageant, interpreted self-reflexively, connects the passage with “the prism of a language multicoloured and many-storied” in *Portrait*, explaining why Stephen’s personified verses change color. In *Portrait*, Stephen imagined “A day of dappled seaborne clouds” glowing with “sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the grey-fringed fleece of clouds” (*P* 180); here too, Stephen’s feminine rhymes wear gold, russet, and green. But whereas Stephen’s synesthetic vision of language in *Portrait* was founded on the idea of a singular meaning animating each word through all its changing forms—an identity that could be traced back to its etymological root—the metamorphoses of Stephen’s rhymes in “Aeolus” point to a fundamentally protean view of language, in which the strandentwining cables of philology (the art of “Proteus”) are not only hollow “navelcord[s]” but also link back to an original void (“no navel” [3.42]). Yet this notion of language as “Creation from nothing” (3.35) is anything but empty; like the carefully camouflaged heading, “Rhymes and Reasons,” Joyce gives a positively plural spin (both/and) to the negative he plays off, neither rhyme nor reason.

Stephen’s protean vision of language constantly coming into being, where chameleonic words change their appearance as easily as their significance, gradually becomes generalized to Joyce’s text, permitting Stephen’s reflections on poetry to become a self-reflexive poetics. In the cabman’s shelter of “Eumaeus,” Stephen stares at “nothing in particular” (Wallace Stevens would be proud), vaguely listening to a “synopsis of things in general,” and hears “all kinds of words changing colour like those crabs about Ringsend in the morning burrowing quickly into all colours of different sorts of the same sand” (16.1141–45). Here again, Stephen’s chromatic
hearing pictures the physical form of language changing, and although we
never see those crabs in “Proteus,” Stephen’s colored words burrowing into
the shore recall his earlier reflection: “These heavy sands are language tide
and wind have silted here” (3.288). With linguistic crustaceans burrowing
down into the sand and rock sediment writ by the elements, Stephen’s
gerological (geo, Earth + logos) transformations recall the “fossil poetry” of
Trench and Miller, except that Stephen’s “words changing colour” show
that this process is not only diachronic, the long, slow process of language
change, but also chameleonic, changing shades of meaning before our
eyes.

Metaphorically decrepit, the tired “old” narrative of “Eumaeus” (Gil-
bert scheme) is particularly rich in examples (see Senn 1995, 156–75). For
instance, when Bloom misunderstands Stephen’s scholastic use of the
word “simple” to describe the incorruptible soul, Bloom feels “bound to
enter a demurrer”: “Simple? I shouldn’t think that is the proper word.
Of course . . . you do knock across a simple soul once in a blue moon”
(16.756–65). Throughout “Eumaeus,” Joyce comically, but conclusively,
explodes the possibility of irreducible, incorruptible meaning, as even
simple words like “simple” become anything but. In the following lines,
Bloom provides a colorful figure for this anything but simple, anything
but empty language of the shelter: “a horse of quite another colour”
(16.770–71). Senn points out how the chapter, “in analogy to its phrasal
horses, varies its colour,” as does *Ulysses* (1995, 156–58). In this passage,
for instance, the incongruity of Bloom’s cliché makes the horse-image a
kind of hologram, since Joyce’s modification defamiliarizes a relatively
uncommon idiom, allowing it to latch onto more familiar Ulyssean meta-
phors. For example, Bloom is twice figured as a “dark horse” in “Cyclops”
(12.1557–58), and the same phrase appears in “Eumaeus” when the 20–1
(16.1242–43). This recollection picks up on the “dark horse” who “bolts
like a phantom past the winningpost” in “Circe,” followed by a field in-
cluding Deasy’s spectral racehorses from “Nestor” and the runners from
the day’s Gold Cup. As well as coloring Bloom’s clichéd horse with various
equine shades, these echoes weave the passages based on “The Race” back
into the account Bloom reads (16.1276–89), in which he, the “dark horse,”
is metaphorically associated with the winning outsider, Throwaway.

Picking up on mutations of the horse and the epiphany, Joyce’s
incorporation of real and fictional articles from the *Evening Telegraph* creates a high degree of self-reflexivity. In “Cyclops,” Bloom is “on his high horse” (12.1798), and in “Eumaeus,” he is “Nettled not a little by” his misnomer, “L. Boom,” and “the line of bitched type”: “.)eatondph 1/( ador dorador douradora,” “not forgetting the usual crop of nonsensical howlers of misprints” in the notice of Paddy Dignam’s funeral (16.1248–61). However, he is “tickled to death simultaneously by C. P. M’Coy and Stephen Dedalus B. A. who were conspicuous, needless to say, by their total absence (to say nothing of M’Intosh),” Joyce’s cloaked representative. When Bloom points out the unreliability of print, seeing the day’s events change before their eyes, he receives an extraordinary reply: “Is that first epistle to the Hebrews, [Stephen] asked as soon as his bottom jaw would let him, in? Text: open thy mouth and put thy foot in it” (1268–69). Picking up on Deasy’s subject, foot-and-mouth disease, as well as Stephen’s poem, “mouth to thy mouth” (Stephen has reason to think he may have put his foot in it by tearing Deasy’s letter—see 7.521), the sentence also refers to the syntax of Stephen’s question, delaying the preposition until he can open his mouth.

Here, by echoing the bodily production of speech in self-reflexive text, Joyce articulates a new aesthetic of errancy as the source of linguistic creativity. This focus on creative uncertainty can be traced back to the resonant hiatuses of the epiphanies, but *Ulysses* goes much further than Joyce’s earlier works in showing how the materiality of language begins to change the moment it is produced, like the baby talk of “Nausicaa,” or the “[i]nked characters fast fading on the frayed breaking paper” of the freshly printed *Freeman’s Journal* (6.160). In *Portrait*, Stephen prefers the word “phase” to epiphany, and *Ulysses* carries his aesthetic one step further, showing language in a state of flux, for even as meaning is produced, it is riddled with uncertainty. Instead of “dagger definition[s]” (“horseness is the whatness of allhorse” [9.84]), Joyce gives us linguistic horseplay, making the revelations in *Ulysses* increasingly comic, and this shift in the overall tenor can be measured by the change of organic metaphor: in *Portrait* Stephen earnestly seeks a new terminology to describe the processes of artistic conception, gestation, and reproduction but pointedly fails to find it, whereas “Oxen” uncovers a new word, the “postcreation,” replacing the metaphor of reproduction with a new aesthetics of mutation.
Mutation and Irony in “Oxen of the Sun”

_Portrait’s_ epiphany of language is an image of creation, _Ulysses’s_ a self-image in mutation. The most explicit example in “Oxen” is its catalog of real and imaginary human deformities, including “aprosopia due to a congestion, the agnathia of certain chinless Chinamen,” and “multiseminal, twikindled and monstrous births conceived during the catamenic period or of consanguineous parents—in a word all the cases of human nativity which Aristotle has classified in his masterpiece with chromolithographic illustrations” (14.968–77). In fact, _Aristotle’s Masterpiece_ mentions neither aprosopia (the absence or imperfect development of the face) nor agnathia (complete or partial absence of one or both jaws), but the reference to this pseudo-medical treatise on midwifery (not, it goes without saying, by Aristotle) is interesting because it is one of the works Bloom leafs through at the bookstall in “Wandering Rocks”: “Mr Bloom turned over idly pages of _The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk_, then of Aristotle’s _Masterpiece_. Crooked botched print. Plates: infants cuddled in a ball in bloodred wombs like livers of slaughtered cows. Lots of them like that at this moment all over the world. All butting with their skulls to get out of it. Child born every minute somewhere. Mrs Purefoy” (10.585–90). A 1900 edition contains six plates that fit Bloom’s description (e.g., figure 3), while earlier editions offer more explicit illustrations (e.g., figure 4), suggesting that Bloom’s interest in the image is more likely to be prurient than anatomical, just as his interest in _The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk_ is probably salacious rather than puritanical. With its scandalous allegations of sexual liaisons between the nuns of the Hotel Dieu convent in Montreal and the monks of a neighboring monastery, whose offspring were baptized before being strangled and buried in the convent’s basement, Monk’s _Disclosures_ (1836) belongs to the same anti-Catholic genre as Rebecca Reed’s _Six Months in a Convent_ (1835) and Edith O’Gorman’s _The Escaped Nun_ (1871). The latter, it will be recalled, is the novel Dick Sheehy asks Joyce if he has read in “The Stars on Joyce’s Nose,” prompting Joyce’s turn to the celestial apparition. In “Wandering Rocks,” the same non sequitur is made in reverse, from Bloom “pointing out all the stars and the comets in the heavens” (apparently oblivious to his wife’s earthly infidelities) to Maria Monk’s _Awful Disclosures_, marked even more clearly by a break in the text (see 10.567–86). This line of three asterisks (Joyce’s characteristic section break) comes between sections 9 and 10 of the episode—that is, at the
Figure 3. “Position of a Child in the Womb.” Aristotle’s Masterpiece (London: Published for the booksellers, 1900), plate 4.

Figure 4. “Form of a Child in the Womb.” Aristotle’s Masterpiece (New York: Published for the trade, 1846), 16.
center of the episode (comprising eighteen parts plus a coda), and since “Wandering Rocks,” which Marilyn French calls “a series of epiphanies of Dublin” (1976, 117), is often considered as the central episode in *Ulysses*, these stars centered on a white line can be regarded as the structural center of the novel. As with *A Portrait*, one could locate other centerpoints, such as the break between episodes 9 and 10 (treating the 18 episodes equally), a moment comparable to epiphany 18 and the stars at 10.584, for it marks a significant break in the text while remaining indissolubly linked to what has gone before.

This linguistic structure, and the aesthetic that develops from it, can be termed “mutation.” On this principle, the very idea of pure repetition, of perfect reproduction, is sterile, for evolution, whether linguistic or organic, takes place through variation, introduced genetically by random mutation and linguistically through actual language use. In the realm of parole, at least, language is never identical, for the context always varies, leading to semantic, phonological, and orthographical change.

These mutations arise from the same gaps and silences that riddle Joyce’s epiphanies. A fundamental feature of language change, they can be traced across his oeuvre, but they are particularly evident in “Oxen of the Sun.” In a letter to Frank Budgen, Joyce describes the chapter as “a nineparted episode without divisions introduced by a Sallustian-Tacitean prelude (the unfertilised ovum), then by way of earliest English alliterative and monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon” to Mandeville, Malory, the Elizabethan chronicle style, Milton, “and so on through Defoe-Swift and Steele-Addison-Sterne and Landor-Pater-Newman until it ends in a frightful jumble of Pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowery slang and broken doggerel” (*LI* 139–40). Joyce links this literary and linguistic progression with “the natural stages of development in the embryo and the periods of faunal evolution in general,” showing how ontogenesis recapitulates philogenesis, both in an individual human fetus named Mortimer Purefoy and a single chapter in the history of English literature titled “Oxen of the Sun.” Estimations of Joyce’s stylistic imitations vary from virtuoso ventriloquism to poor pastiche, but regardless of their quality, studies of Joyce’s sources, such as Saintsbury’s *History of English Prose Rhythm* and Peacock’s *English Prose from Mandeville to Ruskin*, concur that the differences between Joyce’s rendition of, say, Anglo-Saxon English and the original are at least as great as the similarities. Indeed, Robert Janusko and James Atherton show that Joyce had no qualms about distorting his
sources or introducing anachronisms into his history of English literature (Atherton, in Hart and Hayman; Janusko 1983, 58–60); in all probability, he did so deliberately, suggesting that he viewed the differences between model and imitation, or one period and another, as more fertile sources of literature than faithful reproduction. In a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, Joyce gives this principle the first and last word when he states that the nine-parted embryonic development of “Oxen” begins and ends with “a headpiece and tailpiece of opposite chaos” (LIII 16). In view of the governing metaphor of genesis, this chaos seems to represent something like the primeval chaos of creation, a chaos that itself stems from the void, so the entire episode (representing in miniature the history of English literature and the development of the English language) is flanked by two passages whose “opposite chaos” represents, in literary form, the incertitude of the void. Again, what we see here is not a gap being opened between repetitions but an originary gap from which linguistic representation emerges.

Yet perhaps the most striking feature of these sections at the beginning and end of “Oxen” is their opacity. Difficulty generates a chaos of meaning, and in opposite ways: the opening chiefly through its Latinate vocabulary and convoluted syntax; the ending by virtue of unfamiliar idiomatic phrases and the lack of deictic references with which to ascribe them to speakers. With painstaking labor, both passages can be restored to order (see Turner 1997; Mamigonian and Turner 2002), but this probably misses the point, since the immediate effect is to enforce an intense awareness of the materiality of language and the way in which graphic and aural similarities encourage the reader to produce meaning in or from uncertainty. By occluding (but never effacing) the referential function of language, Joyce forces readers to participate in producing whatever significance they find in “Oxen” directly from the material and significatory constituents of its language. This is a similar experience to that provided by the Wake, although there Joyce estranges the process even further by breaking those constituents down to phonemes and graphemes; he does so, I would suggest, to show that these hermeneutic processes are always at work, no matter how transparent a text may appear.

A typically jocoserious example occurs in “Oxen” as Bloom stares at a bottle of Bass ale, letting the voices of Stephen, Mulligan, Lenehan, Crothers et al. “blend and fuse in clouded silence” (14.1078). The voices Bloom hears return to the “infinite,” all-encompassing space of silence (1079), a “clouded silence” in which his “soul is wafted over regions of cycles of
generations that have lived,” recalling both the end of “The Dead” and
the “endless reverberation of the choirs of endless generations” Stephen
hears in Portrait. These “cycles of generations” heard in the blended silence
of unattended voices can also be read as the vast histories of language
change that resonate behind each word, those endless echoes and repeti-
tions that fill the clouded silence of our utterances. Although the entire
passage is comically colored by Bloom’s thoughts and De Quincey’s prose,
leading some critics to conclude that Bloom’s “trance” is sheer nonsense,
a parody of sententiousness, which lures readers into “looking for sense
where possibly there is none” (Beckett 2006, 314), the serious substrata
should not be dismissed. The twilight and dusk, scattering its perennial
dew of stars, seems to parody the Celtic revival (along with Dedalus’s
poetry in A Portrait), but at the same time, star and cloud imagery, drawn
from Exodus and a long tradition of biblical epiphanies, form leitmotifs in
both Portrait and Ulysses, where they always occur in an epiphanic setting.
In this case, the echoes of Giacomo Joyce (“a mare leading her fillyfoal” [U
14.1083]) point to the fragmentary, lyrical-symbolic quality of Bloom’s
reveries. Twice described as “phantoms,” these figures must refer to Molly
and Milly, but they also bring back other phantoms: Bloom’s jumbled
recollections of “Agendath” and “Netaim” (1086–87) echo back to “Ca-
lypso”; the “ghosts” of biblical and zodiacal “beasts,” stalked by Parallax
personified, are all phrases that haunt the text; and so it continues. Clearly
Bloom is being satirized, all the more flagrantly when the red triangle of
the Bass label transforms (“wonder of metempsychosis!”) into “the ever-
lasting bride, harbinger of the daystar,” mother Mary, thence to Martha,
and finally to “Millicent, the young, the dear, the radiant . . . coiffed with a
veil of what do you call it gossamer” (14.1099–1104; cf. 13.1020); but at the
same time, the passage contains epiphanic hints about the nature of writ-
ing, particularly in the “clouded silence” of the opening and the “mysteri-
ous writing” in the sky that concludes the passage (1078, 1107). The adverb
“writhing,” and the fact that “after a myriad metamorphoses of symbol,
it blazes” back into the “ruby and triangled sign” on a bottle of ale leaves
no doubt that this is ironic (1107–9), but that doesn’t invalidate it. On
the contrary, its full significance can only be conveyed through irony: far
from being a single, determinate, or transcendental vision of the logos, the
“myriad metamorphoses” of each symbol are central to Joyce’s epiphanic
vision of language, which means that the linguistic embodiment of this
theory must contain the self-distanciating gap that irony provides.
At the structural level, divergence emerges as a key aesthetic principle, governing not only the difference between each part of “Oxen,” its intertexts, and the preceding styles but also the remarkable diversity of Joyce’s Odyssey, where each episode seems to embark on a break from its predecessors, just as the epiphanies form a set of discrete units whose gaps belie a dense network of interlacing repetition. When it comes to the function of irony, whether the stylistic imitations in “Oxen” are regarded as parodies, pastiches, or travesties is irrelevant; what matters is that there is a recognizable gap between each one and the text it is supposed to imitate. This gap creates tonal uncertainty by opening a distance between the surface meaning of the text (insofar as that can be ascertained) and what it is thought to imply. In its most general sense, irony always depends on this gap, and its recognition causes readers to double back and question the significance of the text just read. This potential for irony, or more generally, tonal ambiguity, to reveal the epiphany in any utterance explains why it is so central to Joyce’s texts: through the internally echoing tonal resonance we call irony, Joyce writes self-reflexive readings into his texts, bringing heightened awareness to the materiality of language, its signification, and the gap between them, until the strange form(s) of language come to seem both devoid of significance and supersaturated with it.

*     *     *

In chapter 2, I postulated two limits of language: indeterminacy and semantic proliferation, whose central mechanisms are silence and repetition. To recapitulate, the dramatic epiphanies foreground silence through resonant hiatuses, while the lyrical epiphanies depend principally on repetition, but both modes go hand in hand, as Dubliners and Portrait make apparent. These stylistic poles remain evident in the first half of Ulysses, but as I have attempted to show, there is a significant break in Joyce’s later treatment of epiphany. Whereas the previous works employed structures of repetition and variation to foreground epiphanic silences, in Ulysses Joyce homes in on the gap itself, showing how the text unfolds from an originary silence. The “Stars” epiphany provides a good example, both in itself and in the way that this text, though absent from Ulysses, seems to hover behind its epiphanic leitmotifs of star and cloud, as well as Stephen’s and Bloom’s reflections on language and names, their respective compositions in “Proteus” and “Nausicaa,” and the three-starred break between the central sections of “Wandering Rocks.” The structure of that
episode is itself metonymic of the structure of the novel, which can in turn be compared to the structure of Joyce’s original epiphanies (taken as a collection), while each of the fourteen epiphanies Joyce reuses in *Ulysses* replicates this structure in miniature, through features such as pauses and breaks in conversation or the mysterious lacunae left ringing by Joyce’s prose-poetic mode.

The same could be said of the epiphanies reused in *Portrait*, but I have tried to indicate the evolution of Joyce’s Ulyssean epiphanies in three ways. First, I showed how the central gap they stem from is thematized through Joyce’s breaks in circulation—the stopping of the bloodflow in death, the short-circuiting of the tram system, breaks in communication caused by interruption, and so on. These breaks are analogous to the silence between repetitions in the epiphanies, but by singling out the *rupture*, Joyce deconstructs the circulating system of language, bringing a heightened, self-reflexive awareness of both the materiality of language and its limitless capacity to signify.

Second, I highlighted *divergence* as a stylistic and structural principle in *Ulysses*, governing the relationship of part to part, both within an individual episode (such as “Oxen”) and between episodes; again, this divergence is a natural consequence of the gap between repetitions and can thus be traced back to the epiphanies, but it emerges as a new aesthetic of mutation in “Oxen,” where Joyce celebrates diversion—even random, “artless” change—over perfect repetition (which is in any case shown to be impossible), because these gaps are the source of linguistic originality and vitality.

Finally, I have attempted to describe the actual process of coming-into-being that I call the linguistic epiphany. To reiterate, this process depends upon a gap becoming visible. In Joyce’s epiphanies, as in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, the gap is typically produced in one of the following ways: a) through the difference between similar, but not identical, repetitions; b) by producing narrative hiatuses through ellipses, silences, pauses, euphemisms, and associated figures. In *Ulysses*, Joyce employs both these means, but increasingly, he also offers the reader c) a humorous or ironic recognition of a gap between what we expect to encounter and what we in fact read, and d) moments of self-reflexivity in which we reflect back on the text from a new perspective. Both these strategies differ from technique a) in that they do not depend upon a difference from some earlier textual instance and from b) in that the gap is not posited as something missing
that we are invited to speculate upon but as something actually present in the text. The result of this is that Joyce invites the reader to reflect upon a gap that is already present in language—a gap that shares the same fundamental indeterminacy and semantic proliferation as the resonant hiatuses of the epiphanies. This gap can, in a sense, be called silence, but it is the silence of language, the silence that puts the endless cycle of repetition and variation that constitutes the signifying chain into play; by rupturing that chain, even if only for a moment, Joyce brings our attention back to the self-reflexive silence language stems from.

As a final illustration, consider the word “wimbles” from the end of “Aeolus”: “DIMINISHED DIGITS PROVE TOO TITILLATING / FOR FRISKY FRUMPS. ANNE WIMBLES, FLO / WANGLES—YET CAN YOU BLAME THEM?” (7.1069–71). According to Stuart Gilbert, “wimbles” is an example of hapax legomenon, a word used only once. If this were true and the word carried no history, one would expect it to be unguessable, but in fact the physical sound and shape of the word are suggestive, and since it is paired with “Wangles” as a verb, the narrative of the “Frisky Frumps” already lies behind any attempt to decode its meaning. Moreover, the word does have a history, and it would seem unlikely that Joyce did not know it from other sources, but even if he didn’t, and even supposing the word had been used only once (like moly in Homer, famously), that still does not preclude or delimit its meaning, because as soon as we read the word, we immediately bring a range of interpretive strategies to bear (syntactic position, grammatical relations, etymology, aural and graphic similarities, contextual factors, and so on). As soon as a word is read, we attempt to decode it in relation to the signifying networks of the language(s) we know, so even a word like “wimble,” which seems to rupture the signifying chain, is never a complete blank; instead, it wimbles, “boring into” language, and the holes it opens are the very openings through which it threads the interwoven strands of signification, “wimbling” the haybonds of language (OED). By deconstructing language in this way, Joyce suggests that no rupture in language is complete; even the most meaningless string of sounds or letters has the potential to generate signification, and the revelation of this vast, ancient, complex, fecund, wimbling system constitutes the linguistic epiphany.

Critics have long been at odds over the stylistic thread that connects Ulysses and Finnegans Wake. “Sirens,” “Oxen,” “Circe,” “Eumaeus,” and “Penelope” have all been proposed as prototypes for Wakean language, yet throughout Ulysses Joyce brings attention to the teeming, cornucopian
void of signification that forms the nucleus of his *Work in Progress*. This focus on incertitude and infinitude is first evident in the epiphanies, and their constant reworkings in *Portrait* and *Ulysses* attest to Joyce’s intense preoccupation with these qualities of language; by homing in on the epiphanic gap between repetitions, the epiphanies in *Ulysses* begin a self-reflexive deconstruction of language that leads to *Finnegans Wake*. 