

## (Mis)applied Aquinas: The Concept of Epiphany in Joyce<sup>\*</sup>

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### I

James Joyce noticed the significance of trivialities, the inner truth sparkling within the mundane. His preoccupation with these moments of illumination inspired him to write *Dubliners*, which exposes the state of paralysis of Dubliners. Remarkably, diverse aspects of paralysis are arrested by moments of radiance Joyce calls ‘epiphanies.’ Each of the stories proceeds and is summarized by continual epiphanies in the course of the narrative. The relatively scarce appearance of epiphanies in later works, however, does not necessarily mean that Joyce has no interest in them. Rather, a closer reading betrays the idea invariably penetrates his later novels, together with other narrative devices. The purpose of this paper is to trace the origin of the concept of epiphany as expounded by Stephen Dedalus in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In both works,

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Stephen's perception of aesthetics is a crucial component in the protagonist's pursuit of individuality and ambition as a budding artist. The main character's growth as an artist parallels with his discovery of a "new mode of life or art whereby the spirit can express itself in unfettered freedom" (*P* 246). Stephen's search goes on with his struggle to elaborate his own theory of art as a young aesthete. In order to elucidate how Stephen developed his key-concept of aesthetics, I would compare his idea of epiphany with Thomas Aquinas's aesthetics, out of which he allegedly takes its theoretical background. In so doing, I also examine what conceptual similarities they share, and how Stephen interprets, and even thwarts, Aquinas's aesthetic ideas in order to turn them into his own account.

## II

Since Theodore Spencer's publication of *Stephen Hero* from the manuscript in the Harvard College Library in 1944, scholars have been working on the concept of epiphany to unlock the fictional works of Joyce. Harry Levin first suggested Stephen Dedalus's theory of epiphany as a tool to interpret Joyce's works, calling *Dubliners* "a collection of epiphanies" (28-31). William York Tindall also followed his track, saying "Joyce's works are more than containers of little epiphanies." He goes on, adding "*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are also great epiphanies, disclosing their whatness and the whatness of reality" (121). Oscar Silverman's publication of *Epiphanies* in 1965 has invited even more heated debate concerning the concept of epiphany. Hugh Kenner supported Levin's argument, recognizing epiphany as a crucial concept in understanding *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, especially in relation to Stephen Dedalus's development as an artist.

Robert Scholes, however, strongly opposed the patent application of epiphany to Joyce's whole body of work by previous critics (60). Joyce, he argues, actually lost interest in epiphany after 1904 because he finds no reference to epiphany in Joyce's later works, except for one comment in *Ulysses*. Textual evidence, however,

contradicts this assumption. Several epiphanies from the original manuscript appear in *Ulysses*, and many in the context of epiphany in *Finnegans Wake*, as Beja proposes (84-85). Joyce, I would argue, resorts to the theory of epiphany in later fictions, showing a consistent concern with the relationship between ephemeral detail and inner significance.

The relevance of epiphany as Joyce's narrative device could be proven if we trace his aesthetic development. Joyce used to take down *Epiphanies*, Gogarty mentions, whenever he encountered revelatory moments in 1900-1903 (295). Also, Joyce reveals, in his Paris letter to Stanislaus, that he has a serious intention to materialize them as *Stephen Hero* on which he started working in January, 1904 (124-27). Joyce arranged more than seventy epiphanies in a chronological order, and even modified them with insertions he thought were needed. Even if the first manuscript of *Stephen Hero* is not currently available, the first epiphany employed at the beginning of *A Portrait* must have been the first ever materialized from the data base. We can say, therefore, Joyce has built up, with his "vigilant" perception, whatever epiphanic moments were accessible to him to use as a matrix for his future works.

Next, we should consider the origin, both biographical as well as etymological, of epiphany as Joyce picked up as the starting point of his literature. Gogarty mentions a circumstantial episode: "Probably Father Darlington had taught him, as an aside in his Latin class—for Joyce knew no Greek—that 'Epiphany' meant a 'shining forth'" (295). So Joyce recorded under 'epiphany' any shining forth of the mind by which one gave oneself away. Joseph Prescott suggests another possibility: "Joyce, for instance, might have consulted Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*, with a textual evidence that Stephen read it 'by the hour'" (26). William T. Noon proposes still another possibility by tracing the origin to 'epiphénome,' a French word which Joyce used as a pun for epiphany (70-71).

The most promising evidence might be, as Florence L. Walzl notes, Joyce's design for the collection of short stories: "I am writing a series of epicleti—ten—for a paper . . . I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of the *hemiplegia* or

paralysis which may consider a city” (Gilbert 55). What are these *epicleti*? The *epiclesis* (or *epiklesis*), according to Walzl, is “an invocation of the ancient Mass which besought God to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ” (437). Joyce’s adoption of this term is very suggestive because he frequently compares the artist’s vocation to that of Catholic priesthood. Stephen, in the *Portrait*, calls himself “a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of ever living life” (240). Epiphanies and *epicleti* are closely related in Joyce’s aesthetics but they are not synonymous. The *epicleti* are the effective “processes” of a priest who, by uniting himself with Divinity, affords the laity a similar experience by delivering the eucharist while epiphanies are the “consequent” manifestation.

The most crucial factor in Joyce’s concept of epiphany is solemnity on January 6, when the Catholic Church commemorates the Magi’s visit to the infant Jesus. What they saw at the moment, according to Matthew’s *Gospel* (2:1-12), was not simply a vulnerable baby. Rather, they witnessed a radiant Divinity shining forth in the manger. A born Catholic with a Jesuit background, Joyce was too well-informed of the theological implications of Epiphany not to notice its aesthetic significance. He might have recognized the trivialities of Dublin life, when properly adjusted, would be able to illuminate her general symptom of paralysis. He thus intends epiphany to be an aesthetic signifier to provide Dubliners with ‘a nicely-polished lookingglass’ against which they can see themselves trapped in a state of living-death, illuminated only by the radiant light of epiphany.

We encounter the full-fledged explication of the epiphany in chapter XXV of *Stephen Hero*, where the topic of triviality and its rich narrative potential is mentioned. In “Drama and Life,” Joyce also shows his interest in the “changeless laws” of human society and “underlying truth” of life, which is quite similar to his theory of epiphany, uniting such paradoxical terms as “triviality” and “spiritual manifestation” (CW 45). Thus, each story in *Dubliners* as well as each of Stephen’s developmental episodes in *A Portrait* ends with manifestations of truth that resolve the conflicts dramatized in each. The experience of epiphany *is* spiritual because

intense moments of mental anguish and emotional exhilaration reveal the essence of character's personality, relationship or environments, thus affecting his life thereafter. Epiphany is a "spiritual manifestation" and, as such, happens "suddenly" (*CW* 81). It is a revelation that cannot be worked out in a certain way. Rather, it is an experiential phenomenon which simply happened that way. In order to capture such a moment of 'sudden revelation,' the Modernist writers developed their personal ways to grasp the elusive, spiritual moment and convey their messages. Hence Joyce's 'epiphany,' Virginia Woolf's 'moments of being,' E. M. Foster's 'prophecy,' T. S. Eliot's 'still point,' and so on. Such personal, intuitive ways enable the Modernist writers to arrest the flow of narrative and illuminate the inner reality of the moment. Subsequent changes in narrative form, style and technique also demand readers of Modernist texts to be hyper-sensitive in order to catch the sudden moment of enlightenment in the narrative (Daiches 1-24). In Joyce's works, however, readers can arrive earlier than characters at the epiphanic moment, thanks to his selection and arrangement. There exists, therefore, not only a time-difference between readers and characters in their response to the radiant moment but a difference of epiphanic content, despite some similarities (Tindall 120-21).

In reference to epiphany as a 'spiritual manifestation,' Stephen makes a sharp division between two categories of triviality from which it arises: (a) vulgarity of speech or of gesture or (b) a memorable phase of the mind itself. Walton Litz calls the former "dramatic epiphanies," the latter "lyrical epiphanies" (37). Form (a) puts more emphasis on the external reality of objects observed, and form (b) on the internal process of the observer's mind. Form (a) shows Joyce's fascination with the trivial, vulgar, and despicable realities of Dublin life and he, in correlating them, finds moments of epiphany in his works. Even Stephen in *Ulysses* refers to the telling importance of gesture, calling it "a universal language . . . rendering visible . . . the first entelechy, the structural rhythm" (432). If a spiritual significance can be deduced from the vernacular speech or idiosyncratic gesture, they no longer are trivial or vulgar for Joyce, for they can provide rich material for him to dramatize. From the outset, Joyce never failed to notice the fictional possibilities in Dublin's

drab realities, the dramatization of which has become his main preoccupation as a fiction writer.

What does Joyce mean by form (b), ‘a memorable phase of the mind’? Beja suggests three alternatives (76). First, it can be ‘dream-epiphanies’ frequently employed in Joyce’s works. Second, it is related to the use of memory when a certain event, trivial as it may seem when it occurs, assumes consequence when remembered afterwards. Beja calls it a ‘retrospective-epiphany.’ In Joyce’s works, the ‘recaptured’ moment of the past frequently penetrates into the present, connecting one to another, thus illuminating the ‘radiant’ meaning hitherto unrecognized. Third, it happens in the perceiving consciousness of the subject when he observes an object. The subject recognizes the soul of the commonest object, when so adjusted, becoming radiant, making the object “epiphanized” (*SH* 213). The relationship between subject and object in the act of perception needs more detailed explication here because it is crucial to understanding the concept of epiphany as well as Stephen’s theory of aesthetics.

Let’s examine the philosophical context of Thomas Aquinas from which Stephen’s theory allegedly comes. Basically epiphany concerns the psychological process included in aesthetic apprehension, which is not a passive realization but an active participation on the observer’s part. The epiphanic moment is elusive but it can still be, Stephen argues, dissected into three main processes of epiphanization. Stephen explicates the three formal aspects of an object—integrity, symmetry and radiance—postulated by Thomas Aquinas as constituents of a thing of beauty. (Umberto Eco suggests, the three qualities of beauty are not unique to Aquinas but common to Scholastic aesthetics in the Middle Ages [47-78].)

Consider the performance of your own mind when confronted with any object, hypothetically beautiful. Your mind, to apprehend that object, divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object. 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 recognize its integrity . . . That is the first quality of beauty; it is declared in a simple sudden synthesis

of the faculty which apprehends. (*SH* 212)

As shown in the quotation, Stephen replaces the three requisites of beauty with three stages of apprehension. His emphasis shifts from the autonomy of object to the role of the percipient, placing his aesthetic theory in the line of Romanticism which puts much emphasis on imagination in the artistic re-creation of the world. The epiphany, Beja points out, is a “Romantic” phenomenon (32-33).

Regarding an object of beauty, the first thing the subject should do is to recognize its “self-boundedness” and “self-containedness” presented in space or in time, depending on whether the aesthetic image is spatial or temporal (*P* 230). When the subject recognizes the integrity of a thing, its autonomy is transferred to the subject’s consciousness. In other words, the object is enclosed with the *subjectively* meaningful net of epistemology. The autonomy of the object is, then, *temporarily* realized in the consciousness of the subject. Ironically, the indomitable integrity of the object is achieved in the subject’s consciousness by surrendering to the humanizing process, the process of apprehension. The ‘otherness’ of a thing is achieved in its *subjective* revelation. If we thus understand the apprehension as a subjective process, equal emphasis should also be given to the terrible ‘otherness’ of a thing, even if the ‘otherness’ is achieved in its subjective revelation (Beja 78).

The second stage is how we get the impression that a thing is symmetrical—the second requisite of a beauty. Stephen explains what sort of active analysis is involved in this process.

The mind considers the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects, examines the balance of its parts, contemplates the form of the objects, traverses every cranny of the structure. So the mind receives the impression of the symmetry of the object. The mind recognizes that the object is in the strictest sense of the word, a *thing*, a definitely constituted entity. (*SH* 212)

This stage is related to the recognition of the formal elements of a thing: the

essential relationship between the whole and its parts. In *A Portrait*, Stephen calls the second stage “the analysis of apprehension,” in contrast to “the synthesis of the immediate preception” (230) in the first because it requires far more active participation on the observer’s part: for instance, examination, contemplation and traversal of the formal, structural attributes of the thing concerned. Finally, the object transforms itself from ‘one thing’ to ‘a thing’ in the subject’s consciousness. The *one* integral thing in the first stage is transformed into “an organized composite structure” (*SH* 213) in the second when the subject grasps the constitutive logic of the object. Now the observer can enjoy the rhythm of the structure, underlining the composition of the thing. This is the state of *consonansia*, as Stephen calls it. In this way, an object’s autonomy is further strengthened by the formal symmetry of an object, each complementing the other, which is a prerequisite for still another phase of aesthetic perception to be followed:

—Now for the third quality. For a long time I could not make out what Aquinas meant. He uses a figurative word (a very unusual thing for him) but I have solved it. *Claritas* is *quidditas*. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognize that the object is *one* integral thing, then we recognize that it is an organized composite structure, *a* thing in fact; finally when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany. (*SH* 213)

Unlike the first two stages of apprehension which could be realized by the subjective scrutiny of the object concerned, the third stage is something that lies, contrary to Stephen’s argument, beyond the ‘logically possible synthesis,’ something that can only be reached by a sudden transcendence of logic. To be precise, that third stage of apprehension *leaps* to us from the vestment of



appearance, instead of our approaching it step by step. Up to a certain point, we approach the formal attributes of an object with careful analysis. Beyond that point, Stephen argues, the blissful moment of illumination suddenly comes to us when the soul or ‘whatness’ of a thing, i.e. *quidditas*, shines forth. Stephen’s argument looks plausible when we follow his process of apprehension: *one* (integral) thing changes into *that* thing via *a* thing.

Why does he make such an abrupt leap from the second to the third prerequisite? What actually happens in the third stage? The first and second stages being over, the subject arrives at a final moment when the relation of the parts are so adjusted that he recognizes ‘the thing’ as it is. That’s the culmination Stephen suggests happens in the subject’s apprehension. Such a sudden jump in Stephen’s argument, however, fails to convince most readers. At this point, we need to consider *A Portrait* as a *künstlerroman* which portrays the whole trajectory of an artist’s development. As such, a would-be artist. As a young artist, Stephen starts to collect *Epiphanies* in order to fabricate his own fiction by using them. Stephen looks back to Thomas Aquinas to support his theory of epiphany. His long struggle with Thomistic idea of beauty, however, leads him nowhere because the concept ‘*claritas*’ simply baffles him. So Stephen hastily concludes that “*claritas* is *quidditas*,” and continues to connect it to his theory of epiphany. On the surface ‘*claritas*’ and ‘*quidditas*’ look similar because each shows ‘whatness’ of an object to some degree. But they are not the same, as Stephen would like to believe them to be. We need more detailed argument here.

Why is the object, passively contemplated, suddenly granted a positive status in the final act of cognition? To be consistent, epiphany should be a ‘spiritual revelation’ enjoyed by the subject, not by the object. Why does Stephen, then, attribute such a status to the object? Why should the subject-oriented perception give way to the object itself? (Peterson 427) In the radiant moment when a mutual interaction between object and subject occurs, Stephen proposes, the ‘whatness’ of the object shows itself, making it epiphanized. In such a moment of aesthetic unity, he believes, the sharp demarcation between subject and object is temporarily

suspended and a transcendental oneness is achieved. In the epiphanic moment, both the subject and object ‘imaginatively transcend the physical world,’ forgetting the tension-bound relationship between the thing contemplated and the subject who contemplates it. Yes, Stephen’s theory of epiphany appears attractive at first glance but lacks, I would say, serious logical coherence. His concept is very romantic, and far too idealistic.

Now, let’s examine Stephen’s theory of aesthetics in the context of Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy from which it is allegedly derived. Joyce worked quite freely on Aquinas’s ideas in his efforts to give coherence to Stephen’s aesthetical theory. For young Stephen, the Thomist texts have relevance as quotable sources at best in so far as they can be ‘applied’: “I need them [Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s ideas] only for my own use and guidance until I have done something for myself by their light” (*P* 218). The essence of Aquinas’s aesthetics is that the experience of beauty is an act of apprehension, which means beauty can satisfy the mind’s desire to know. The relation between subject and object, he suggests, is not only a positive constitutive of beauty but indispensable to the experience of beauty. Aquinas’s apprehension of beauty is a psychological experience, in counteraction to the Medieval objectivists’ idea of beauty: the ontological self-subsistence of object. Aquinas’s aesthetic subjectivism refers to two crucial factors in the experience of beauty: one, the pleasure the subject feels when he apprehends an object, and the other, the cognitive aspect which presupposes the formal properties of an object. The first element provides a starting point of his aesthetics. In a passage from *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas says ‘*pulcra enim dicuntur quae visa placent*’ [“those things are beautiful which please when they are seen”] (*Eco* 56). This is a definition of beauty in terms of its effect rather than in its essence.

Beauty, on the other hand, has to do with knowledge, for those things are called beautiful which please us when they are seen. This is why beauty consists in due proportion, for the senses delight in rightly proportioned things as similar to themselves, the sense faculty being a sort of proportion itself like all other knowing faculties. Now since knowing proceeds by imagining, and

images have to do with form, beauty properly involves the notion of formal causes. (Aquinas, part I, q. 5, art. 4)

Following Aquinas's explication of beauty, Stephen also posits intellectual pleasure as the organizing principle of his aesthetics: "In so far as it is apprehended by the sight, which I suppose means here esthetic intellection, it will be pleasing to the eye" (P 21). Stephen underlines that an aesthetic experience eventually has to do with intellectual pleasure induced in the perceiver by the *claritas* of an object. That Stephen tries to elaborate his theory of epiphany on the basis of Thomistic ideas of beauty is reconfirmed:

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic 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 aesthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart. (P 213)

Comparing the mind's state during the 'mysterious instant' of *claritas*—that is, the moment of epiphany—to the image of Shelley's 'fading coal,' Stephen, like Aquinas, emphasizes the psychological process of the apprehension. But Stephen has a long way to go because Aquinas's aesthetics are far too complicated for his simple, hasty generalization.

The second element of Aquinas's concept of beauty is the relationship between knowledge and beauty, since the delightful moment of perception is the very instant when the formal properties of an object are adjusted to give pleasure to the subject who perceives. Note: that the appreciation of beauty is a cognitive process that gives intellectual pleasure to the percipient. Also is the complicated relationship between intellect and the senses (Maritain 20) because intellectual pleasure can only be given through the mediation of senses, since human intellect cannot contact sense directly (Eco 49-63). Likewise, Aquinas distinguishes between two types of

knowledge: one, an immediate contact between the senses and the sensible, another, a contact between the intellect and the ‘phantasm’ given by the senses to the intellect, an act of abstraction. The intellect, according to Aquinas, acquires a certain degree of knowledge of particulars only after abstraction has taken place. It is after all this has taken place that the aesthetic judgment can occur at the very moment when the subject captures the *quidditas* of the object (Eco 60). Regrettably, Stephen calls the moment *quidditas* when the object is epiphanized, simply ignoring the intermediary stage of sensory perception as a prerequisite for intellectual abstraction.

What, then, is the ‘phantasm’? It is a cluster of images impressed by the sensory data upon the intellect. It is an intermediary in transition from sensible particulars to intellectual abstraction and, as such, is neither sensory data nor an intellectual abstraction because it is no less than the product of the imagination which mediates between the senses and the intellect. A reader of Aquinas, Stephen also recognizes the function of imagination in arresting the most aesthetically proportionate relations of an object, even if he does not mention Aquinas’s “phantasm” (*P* 225). Again, the narrator in *Stephen Hero* also underscores imagination as the trademark of the supreme artist who “could disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining circumstances” (*SH* 78). If the function of an artist is to derive images from messy surroundings, Stephen is mentioning clearly the image-making power of imagination as much as the instrumentality of the image in composing a work of art: “art [is] the human disposition of intelligible or sensible matter for an aesthetic end” (*SH* 77). Stephen thus tries to understand “the aesthetic image” (*P* 231) as a source of aesthetic pleasure achieved in the ‘spiritual state’ when the *quidditas* or the ‘whatness’ of a thing epiphanizes in the mind of an artist.

Clearly, Stephen’s theory of imagination seems similar to Aquinas’s, whose aesthetics consist of the dynamics between the psychology of the perceiving mind and the ontological properties of the perceived. On the ontological-psychological polarity, however, Eco and Noon diverge sharply. Eco culminates his interpretation

of Aquinas's aesthetics by proposing that beauty in itself is 'a state of equilibrium between a perfect object and intellect,' which does not mean that the apprehension of beauty simply *confirms* the aesthetic quality of the object, nor constitutes the object aesthetically satisfying. It means, rather, that everything has within itself the conditions of beauty but appears beautiful to us only if we concentrate on its formal structure. If Eco understands the perception of beauty as an aesthetic activation of an ontological potential, Stephen's theory of epiphany looks similar to Eco's interpretation of Aquinas. Going further, Eco grasps Aquinas as separating the three formal properties of beauty into two categories: integrity and proportion are related to something ontological while clarity to the significative (Eco 190-91). Eco comprehends Aquinas's *claritas* as something not strictly limited to formal properties but as something transcendent, thus achieving momentary 'splendour' by mutual interaction with the subject. Such a momentary erasing of boundaries between subject and object sets Eco apart from Noon.

Emphasizing the 'self-bounded and self-contained' nature of 'aesthetic image,' Noon assumes that it corresponds more to a Cartesian 'clear and distinct idea' than it does to the Thomist 'phantasm.' He naturally regards the three formal properties of beauty as objective or inherent qualities *in things*, denying any possibility of them belonging to the act of apprehension. He even denies dividing the act of apprehension into three 'phases,' which Stephen dares in his theory of aesthetics (Noon 45). The act of apprehension, no one denies, happens in an instant, and is therefore indivisible. Stephen, however, dissects the moment of apprehension into three separate but consecutive stages in order to explain the psychology involved in the act of cognition. Kenner also refutes the supremacy of subjectivism by saying, "it is radically impossible to understand what Joyce is talking about from the point of post-Kantian conviction that the mind imposes intelligibility upon things" (138). He goes on saying, "it is things which achieve epiphany under the artist's alchemical power, and not his own soul which he manifests" (141). However, Kenner partially admits the artist's subjective power in helping objects to achieve epiphany.

Even if Stephen's theory of art shares similarities with Eco's interpretation of Aquinas, more detailed explication regarding *claritas* is needed. Stephen understands *claritas* as something beyond the logically permissible 'synthesis' of formalities of an object, i.e. wholeness and proportion. When Stephen encounters Aquinas's suggestion of *claritas* as something integral to teleological divinity or generalizing force, revealing the proper conditions of an object (Noon 49), Stephen feels trapped in. Stephen wants to build up his aesthetics on 'Godless' Thomism, leaving God out while making the artist another surrogate-God, polishings his fingernails. Hence his abrupt assertion: "[c]laritas is quidditas" (SH 213). He simply substitutes the explication of *claritas* with the consequence of its working: *claritas* is a radiance that reveals an object as what it is and no other thing (Noon 49-52). Why does he challenge such a leap? The sudden disappearance of 'epiphany' in *A Portrait* is an indicator. Several explanations have been suggested. Rudd Flemming, pointing out the difference between Stephen's 'epiphanyzed' and Aquinas's 'symbolized,' underlines the subsequent necessity of omitting 'epiphany' from *A Portrait's* text. Stephen's proposal of a static art form, Flemming argues, is not compatible with the artist's active participation. So Stephen simply ignores the artist's working on his material up to a certain point until he could derive "aesthetic images" from the object, making it epiphanyzed (Flemming 289-90). Kenner, observing that the *Stephen Hero* manuscript was 'drastically pruned' in *A Portrait* text, suggests that Joyce, working on *Ulysses*, dropped the theory of epiphany because he wanted to "leave Stephen Dedalus unpropped against the ironic realities which were to overwhelm his soul in the epic" (Givens 153). Tindall points out the incompatibility between scholastic radiance and Stephen's epiphany, defining the latter as an experiential rather than aesthetical signifier (120). Likewise, Noon remarks on the necessity of the experiential, lyrical function of epiphany in *Stephen Hero* being changed to a more dramatic one in *A Portrait* in terms of the progressive development of the artist proposed by Stephen himself (Noon 66). As suggested by many critics above, Stephen's aesthetic theory, regarding the radiant, illuminating, epiphanic moment, leaves much to be elaborated, and such a hasty,

incomplete nature of his theory, Litz suggests, explains Joyce's ironic portrayal of Stephen as a young artist (41). True, Stephen's theory has been commonly interpreted as a device by which Joyce undercuts Stephen's artistic self-concept.

### III

Tracing the theoretical background of epiphany, we have shown how far Stephen's 'applied Aquinas' goes from the 'actual Aquinas' and in what degree they resemble each other. Despite its incompleteness as a theory, the concept of epiphany provides Joyce with an organizing narrative principle, enabling him to catch 'trivial errors and gestures' of Dubliners. They betray, Joyce believes, "the very things they were most careful to conceal." Joyce transforms them into radiant moments by incorporating them into his fiction (Ellmann 124). Joyce wanted to write "a chapter of moral history" (*Letters II* 134), and to forge "the uncreated conscience of my race" (*P* 76). The epiphanies strengthen his 'style of scrupulous meanness,' serving as an instrument to illuminate the symptoms of Irish paralysis. Hence Joyce's belief: "it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments" (*SH* 211).

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## Abstract

### (Mis)applied Aquinas: The Concept of Epiphany in Joyce

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This paper proposes first, to examine the theoretical background of the ‘epiphany,’ James Joyce’s basic aesthetics of fiction, by relating his earlier writings to Thomas Aquinas’s aesthetics. Perusing Joyce’s biographical facts and diverse critical debates, I trace the etymological origin of ‘epiphany’ and then, how Joyce, transforming the originally religious term into a literary signifier, employs it as a basic narrative tool for his work. Second, by comparing *Stephen Hero*’s Chapter XXV and *A Portrait*’s Chapter V, I trace how Joyce’s selective adaptation of the former into the latter transforms his theory of ‘epiphany.’ Stephen in *Stephen Hero*, defining ‘epiphany’ as ‘a sudden spiritual revelation’ or ‘a memorable phase of the mind itself’ shown by ‘the vulgarity of speech or of gesture,’ positively embraces Thomas Aquinas’s position and tries to understand the recognition of beauty as a psychological experience shared between subject and object.

Grasping human epistemology as a mutual penetration of the subject and object, he transfers his focus from the object’s three ontological elements of beauty, i.e. the object’s formal properties such as ‘*integritas, consonantia, claritas,*’ to the subject’s psychology. The first stage of the recognition of beauty is to allow the object ‘integrity’ by drawing a demarcation between the object and its background. Such an allowance of independent ‘otherness’ to the object is the preliminary task for the subject to realize the object. In other words, the object’s autonomy is *temporarily* realized in the subject’s consciousness. The second stage starts to analyze the object’s formal properties by spotting the relationship between the whole and its parts, thus hitting upon the object’s inner structural logic. When the first and second stages are completed, the subject and object reach a moment of

aesthetic unity, a radiant moment of transcendental oneness, when the object's 'whatness' is revealed. Stephen calls this blissful moment 'epiphany.' Thorough research, however, betrays Stephen's theory of epiphany as too hasty and incomplete.

In conclusion, Stephen, a young artist in the making, makes an abrupt logical jump in his assertion, "*Claritas is quidditas.*" Stephen's 'applied Aquinas' proves incorrect and incomplete, which ironically renders him to be an artist 'as a young man.'

■ **Key words** : epiphany, Thomas Aquinas, aesthetics, apprehension, integrity, harmony, radiance

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