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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EPIPHANIES IN JAMES JOYCE'S *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*

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Abstract

The principal object of the present study is entitled “The significance of Epiphanies in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.” In literature, an epiphany is typically referred to as a visionary moment when a character experiences a startling insight or knowledge that alters their perception of the world or oneself. The phrase also has a more specific meaning as a modernist fiction-specific literary trick. Such epiphanies are beautifully illustrated in James Joyce’s “*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” to represent the moment when the personae suddenly probe into the centre of things and encounter a startling spiritual manifestation. The roots of Joyce’s epiphanies can be found in the aesthetic tradition, of which James Joyce is a prominent representative. This tradition envisions the transformation of the ordinary into attractive art. This paper investigates the definition of the word “epiphany” and explores it in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, typically analysing the protagonist’s ordinary events that lead to such “revelations.” In addition, the study of this novel brings out different critics. A critical study is undertaken to seek and discover the several complexities, the effect of three principles of epiphanies on the growth of the protagonist, and the true meaning of life.

Keywords

Epiphany, Narration, Philosophy, Protagonist, Spiritual Manifestation, Artist.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EPIPHANIES IN JAMES JOYCE'S *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN* ARCHANA

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By an epiphany, he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phrase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they are the most delicate and evanescent of moments." (Joyce 210)

Epiphany, the word itself presents divinity it means a sudden manifestation of a deity. James Joyce used epiphany in certain short sketches which he wrote between 1898 and 1904, and the idea of the epiphany became the centre of his early published fiction. The theory of epiphanies is mentioned in *Stephen Hero*, the fragmentary first draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the theory of epiphanies, Stephen is presented and is bound up with the three cardinal esthetic principles. These three principles have a respectable philosophic origin in *Integritas* which Stephen explains in pseudo-scholastic language as "wholeness", an esthetic image as *one thing*, "self-bounded and self-contained." *Consonantia* is symmetry and rhythm of structure, the esthetic image conceived as complex, multiple, divisible, and separable, and the synthesis of immediate perception is followed by the analysis of apprehension. The third principle is *Claritas*, which gives the approximate meaning of "radiance" and with another Thomistic term, *quidditas* or the "whatness" of a thing. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* demonstrates such epiphanies to signify the moment of spiritual manifestation. The novel presents the journey of Stephen Daedalus from his tender infancy till he becomes an artist through certain epiphanies. Joyce's narrative style makes the novel interesting. Throughout the novel, we can see the attempt of a gifted younger growing into manhood to understand the world through his perspectives. Epiphanies play an important role in the novel where Stephen's life presents the individual spiritual manifestation because epiphanies provide him with rationalizations and frameworks so that he can deal with his sense of inferiority and with the pressures of his existence.

We can see Stephen as a man whose silence works more than his actions, his imagination overpowers his individuality. In chapter 5 when Stephen discusses with his friend Cranly we arrive at a moment analogous to the moment in *Stephen Hero* when *Claritas*, or radiance was explained as the achievement of epiphany:

"The connotation of the word, Stephen said, is rather vague. Aquinas uses a term that seems to be inexact. It baffled me for a long time. It would lead you...idealism, the supreme...

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the idea of which the matter is but the shadow, the reality of which it is but the symbol. I thought he might mean that *Claritas* is the artistic discovery and representation of the divine purpose...the esthetic image a universal one,...when you have apprehended that basket as one thing you make the only synthesis which is logically...you see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which he speaks in the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing." (Joyce 164)

Here, Stephen rejects the notion of the actual thing being entirely a symbol of some ideal thing. He shows that once he held that view, he no longer does. We can see that the concept of the epiphany (the spiritual manifestation) is not beyond Stephen; he is beyond it. The thing in itself is now sufficient for him. Epiphany may take either of two forms: (a) vulgarity of speech or gesture, (b) a memorable phase of the mind itself. In the novel, we see the process of esthetic apprehension from artistic creation. Stephen constructs a framework of literary allusion, history-ecclesiastical, and esthetics, national and experiential which he reforms into moments of truth which is connected with literary art. Stephen's artistic-priestly role as creator, sacrifice, savior, and sacrificed presents the experiences of his life and reformation of these into a portrait of himself as a young artist. Joyce's narrative style presents a continual series of meaning-laden, epiphany-like moments.

Joyce draws the reader's consciousness into Stephen's so that the epiphanies can be shared. We see throughout the novel that Stephen's epiphanies provide him with a different view of life where his consciousness works differently from others. At the end of chapter 4, Stephen's epiphany girl on the beach, who comes to him in a shape of a bird image makes him think about his Dedalean flight. Verisimilitude presents Stephen's epiphany which is confirmed by the narration and through our acquiescence and belief in it, we know that it has been Stephen's point of view that helps him to gain parallel maturity as he grows from his childhood.

"Diaries, after all, record only what their writers think is significant throughout the day...meaningful pattern of life. On looking back through such entries, ... the distance of time much less momentous and epiphany-filled." (Bowen 486)

In the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce presents a different narrative perspective. He ends his novel with a different narrative style which throws the entire novel into new relief. Diary, Stephen's diary, his successful poem, his imaginary conversations with Emma, and his epiphany. The entries start with a report of the previous day's talk with Cranly: "Long talk with Cranly on the subject of my revolt. He had his grand manner on. I supple and suave. Attacked me on the score of love for one's mother." (Joyce 191). As Bowen says that diaries are the only record of what their writers think is significant throughout the day. Same here, the account of Stephen's diary presents his judgments and epiphanic utterances which lead to doubt and disbelief. We cannot call Cranly's manner "grand", more than we can call Stephen's outbursts "supple and suave." The construction of the diary is the same as the construction of the rest book, epiphanies are the suspect, and Joyce wants the readers not to miss the point. There are a composition of the villanelle, quotations from Blake, the Gospels, and Monte Cristo, all of these twist and distort into questionable epiphanies and events which could make Stephen anxious if they did not fit his rationalizations for facing his loveless existence.

Eventually, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* presents the story of Joyce himself where the protagonist named Stephen Dedalus formulates his moments of truth. We can understand from the narrative voice or the direct descriptions how Stephen is shaping

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previous experiences and encountered words of his life into new perceptions of his status in the world.

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