

EPIPHANY

e·piph·a·ny

n. pl. e-piph-a-nies

1. Epiphany

a. A Christian feast celebrating the manifestation of the divine nature of Jesus to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi.

b. January 6, on which this feast is traditionally observed.

2. A revelatory manifestation of a divine being.

3.

a. A sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something.

b. A comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization: *"I experienced an epiphany, a spiritual flash that would change the way I viewed myself"*

epiphany [ɪˈpɪfəni]

n pl -nies

1. (Christianity / Ecclesiastical Terms) the manifestation of a supernatural or divine reality

2. any moment of great or sudden revelation

[via Church Latin from Greek *epiphaneia* an appearing, from EPI- + *phainein* to show]

epiphanic [ˌɛpɪˈfænik] *adj*

Epiphany [ɪˈpɪfəni]

n pl -nies

(Christianity / Ecclesiastical Terms) a Christian festival held on Jan. 6, commemorating, in the Western Church, the manifestation of Christ to the Magi and, in the Eastern Church, the baptism of Christ

epiphany

the appearance to man, in visible form, of a god or other supernatural being.

Joyce's Epiphanies

The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated in the Christian calendar on 6 January each year, and commemorates the revelation of Jesus' divinity to the Magi, the three wise men who had followed the star to Christ's birthplace. Derived from Greek, the word 'epiphany' means a sudden manifestation of deity. In Christian theology, it also means the manifestation of a hidden message for the benefit of others, a message for their salvation. Joyce gave the name epiphany to certain short sketches he wrote between 1898 and 1904, and the idea of the epiphany was central to much of his early published fiction.

Through his education at the Jesuit schools at Clongowes Wood and Belvedere College, Joyce was steeped in Catholic religious ideas. He even suggested that there was a certain resemblance between the mystery of transubstantiation in the Catholic mass and what he was trying to do as an artist, changing the bread of everyday life into something with permanent artistic life. In making this claim, Joyce envisaged himself as an artist/priest of the eternal imagination through whom the flesh becomes word. It's no surprise, then, that he adapted the idea of epiphany to suit his own artistic ends.

Joyce himself never defined exactly what he meant by epiphany, but we get some idea of what it means from the way in which the character Stephen Daedalus defines it in *Stephen Hero*, an early version of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen says that epiphanies are **a sudden and momentary showing forth or disclosure of one's authentic inner self. This disclosure might manifest itself in vulgarities of speech, or gestures, or memorable phases of the mind.**

Joyce's brother Stanislaus saw the epiphanies as something more like records of Freudian slips. Writing after Joyce's death, Stanislaus claimed the epiphanies were ironical observations of slips, errors and gestures by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal. Oliver St John Gogarty, a friend of Joyce's and one of the models for the character Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, thought that Fr Darlington of University College had told Joyce that

epiphany meant 'showing forth,' and that an epiphany was a showing forth of the mind in which one gave oneself away.

Nonetheless, the notion of the epiphany remains slightly obscure and even somewhat confusing. For instance, in the course of *Stephen Hero*, Stephen tells Cranly that he believes the clock on the Ballast Office is capable of an epiphany, but neither Stephen nor Joyce make clear how this might be possible. Also, the word epiphanic has been used by scholars to describe the kinds of revelations that occur at the end of Joyce's short stories in *Dubliners*, and these moments of revelation are often called epiphanies. However, it is not always clear just what such epiphanic moments reveal or just how these so-called epiphanies relate to what Joyce called epiphanies.

Though the epiphanies proper were written between 1898 and 1904, Joyce may have been developing the idea for some time before that. His brother Stanislaus mentions a series of short prose sketches written in the first person that Joyce began while still a sixteen-year-old student at Belvedere College. These sketches were called 'Silhouettes' and, though none of them are extant, they seem to have been similar in style to what Joyce later calls epiphanies. It may be that Joyce also got some of his ideas about epiphany from his reading of the Italian author Gabriel D'Annunzio. *L'Epifania del Fuoco* (The Epiphany of Fire) was the first part of D'Annunzio's novel *Il Fuoco* (The Fire) that Joyce almost certainly read while attending University College. D'Annunzio's writing also influenced the young Joyce's early ideas on aesthetics and the role of art and the artist in society.

The epiphanies reflect aspects of Joyce's life at the time when they were written, a formative period in Joyce's life. They are like snapshots, recording specific and minute fragments of life and they are presented without commentary. Often these fragments appear without a given context, making it difficult to determine Joyce's intention and meaning. Some of the epiphanies are rendered as dramatic dialogue while others are simple prose descriptions or prose poems.