

The Ecstatic Moment



Meaning of the Ecstatic Moment in the Anti-Victorian Reaction

- Anti-Victorian reaction: reaction against the self satisfying morality and the rigid orthodox of the age; it developed at the end of the 19th century.
- In Victorianism the whole literature became less didactic and poetry became more sensuous and less moralizing.
- One of the literary currents of the Anti-Victorian reaction was the **Aesthetic movement**: a movement which was moving art away from its traditional role as a teacher and moral guide. Its founder was Walter Pater.
- “**Art for art’s sake**”: was the motto of the Aesthetic Movement. Pater refused faith and any other ethical system; art was the only way of stopping time through the intensity of the **ecstatic moment**. These moments of ecstasy are the full comprehension of life and destiny, time and art, and all, in one single figure.

The poets' research of beauty of the ecstatic moment was the "*hard gem like flame*" (described as the real purpose of life); it was the aim of the aesthetic theory of the artists: the artist should care about form and technique and express himself freely.

This conception of art born as a consequence of the influence of the French symbolists poets (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmè).



- The aesthetes did not agree with Matthew Arnold or John Ruskin who thought that art should have a moral purpose and be useful.
- They shared with their predecessors, the Pre-Raphaelite poets, a belief in art for art's sake: **art only needed to be beautiful, to justify itself**. They rejected a simple type of realism: **art** in their opinion **should not just reproduce the world, but should offer an alternative to it**.
- They had no faith in reason, believing that true reality could only be found through senses and that beauty was the only thing that add any meaning.
- Walter Pater: *"Life is only a series of experiences and the way to give it meaning is to live these experiences as intensely as possible"*. The most important thing for Walter Pater was Beauty: life was usually ugly and sordid, only art could be really beautiful, so **"life should copy art"**.

The ecstatic moment in Virginia Woolf: Moments of being

Virginia Woolf distinguishes the ecstatic moments into: moments of being and moments of non-being.

- A ***moment of being*** is a moment of intense power and beauty, energy and awareness, when an individual is fully conscious of his experience; a moment when he is not only aware of himself but catches a glimpse of his connection to a larger pattern hidden behind the opaque surface of daily life.
- A ***moment of non-being*** is a moment when the individual lives and acts without awareness, performing acts as if asleep. He is not consciously aware of even as he experiences them.

The ecstatic moment in James Joyce: Epiphany

Codice religioso: festa durante la quale gli astrologi seguono la cometa per andare a trovare la culla di Gesù → **illuminazione**



Epiphany is twelfth night of January when Christ is visited by three wise men and his divinity was revealed to the world.

It derives from a Greek word "epiphainen" meaning "to manifest" and in pre-Christian times it was used to record appearances of Gods and Goddesses.

Traditionally the word has kept this specific religious association, but in our century it has been secularized to refer to other, non-divine forms of revelation.

James Joyce named these moments of prose, **Epiphanies**.

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation and one of the most delicate and evanescent of moments.

The work in which James Joyce introduces the concept of Epiphany is *Dubliners*, a collection of 15 tales in which everyone shows the interior universe of a citizen passing from the first person narrator to the third person narrator to underline the moment of estrangement of the subject from reality and the consequent immersion in his or her consciousness.



- The protagonists of the novel are the Dubliners; its aim is to show their everyday stories to focalize the reader's attention on two important aspects common to all tales: the **paralysis** and the **escape**. The paralysis is principally moral, caused by politics, by culture, by religion and it is represented in the novel through the physical and psychological paralysis of the characters or through the description of motionless places.
- The characters' acquisition of this paralysis is the culminating point of the tale: the **Epiphany**, a sudden spiritual revelation caused by a gesture, an object, an everyday banal situation which the character lives in a moment of crisis and for this reason it reveals of fundamental importance in his or her life.
- The Epiphany is considered **a point of non-return** because after this moment the character sees the world in a different way.
In Joyce's idea the epiphany reveals the most important meaning of existence; it brings people beyond things' appearance and it is the central point, the key of the novel.

→ The natural reaction to the oppression caused by the paralysis is the **escape**, the exile; almost all characters try to escape but without success because nobody is able to forget his world and begin another life in a different place: nobody is able to get free from oppression and paralysis.

- The narrative technique used by James Joyce in the novel is the **stream of consciousness**: it is used to represent characters' thoughts freely, in the exact way as they pass through their minds.

In the style there is no mediation of the narrator. Grammatically it is characterized by the absence of punctuation or conjunctions; moreover the text is not organized into paragraphs or phrases (an example is the last part of Joyce's Ulysses: the interior monologue of Molly Bloom).