

## Epiphany

Epiphany is twelfth night, the sixth of January, when Christ was visited by three wise men and his divinity was revealed to the world. It derives from a Greek word, **epiphainein**, meaning "to manifest" and in pre-Christian times it was used to record appearances of gods and goddesses. Traditionally the world has kept this specific religious association, but in our century it has been secularized to refer to other, non-divine forms of revelation.

### Joyce's epiphany

James Joyce named **these moments of froze impressionism** and **psychological revelation** in a famous passage in the fictional account of his youth, *Stephen Hero*, which subsequently became the basis of his first published novel *A portrait of the artist as a young man* (1916), a Bildungsroman.

Joyce wrote of what the idea of an epiphany meant to the hero (Stephen Daedalus) of that work. By an epiphany he meant

*"a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that 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".*

The result of such a use was a series of short prose fictions which achieved the unity of effect that E.A.Poe had identified as a characteristic of the new form, which employ an **impressionistic method** and which move not to sum defining point in a plot but to a **moment when the implications of all that has gone before in the story begins to suggest the psychological condition of a central persona**, or of the central personae.

Short story, impressionistic vignette and psychological sketch are combined in a **detailed fictional texture** which demands on a reader **to interpret what an epiphanic method is seeking to convey**.

Joyce's method in *The Dubliners* meant that he sought to work with impressionistic detail and with the complex contents of actual human speech to achieve his purposes rather than with striking incident and lengthy descriptions of characters which were the stock-in-trade of more conventional writers, whose models were 19<sup>th</sup> century realist novels.

Accordingly, *The Dubliners* is a book that **breaks fictional ground** as a work which reveals the capacity of prose to convey understanding of human situations through indirect and implicit significance.

For the combination of impressionism and epiphanic showing forth (the term Epiphany derives from the Christian thesis of the Epiphany which celebrates the adoration of the Magi, when the Incarnation was made publicly manifest) involves the writer in a close attentiveness to the telling detailed of setting and environment of an unusually precise kind. Simultaneously, he must consider how the value details in this text will supply an overall impression and achieve a unity of effect while maintaining a scrupulous regard for the way human speech is fragmentary and elliptical, meaningful only in

actual situations and in specific tones of voice and accompanied by specific gestures and bodily signals.

Let's consider Joyce's representation and use of dialogue in *The Dubliners*. Where in many 19th century novels the character speak in full sentences or even in paragraphs (in as conventional a discourse as any character in the Elizabethan tragedy who speaks in the iambic pentameter), the characters in these stories speak in a fractured, often ungrammatical way, people seem to do in real life.

The reader will often find himself in a situation where like the narrator in *The sisters* is seeking to interpret recorded conversations. Detail is crucially important in the short stories. Tails in which so little apparently happens and which depend on overall effect and on the haphazard revelations that come to us from fragmentary conversations to create significance must necessarily be read with careful attention to what is said and what does occur. We understand therefore that such plots as detail possess are carried by a subtle **interplay of often fragmentary speech** and dialogue with the details of setting and apparently unimportant actions.

Some stories like *Grace* and *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* are largely made up of **richly allusive conversations** in setting which give ironic significance to the talk we hear. Setting in details is serving a symbolic purpose: allow you readers to invest details with meanings which the conversations in and of themselves might not have been capable of communicating. Indeed the symbolic import of setting in these stories alert readers to the way in which throughout *Dubliners* Joyce uses details of setting and milieu to perform a symbolic function, adding a strata of implied meaning to tails which on first reading can seem so insubstantial.