

Contents

Introduction	5
1. The modern epiphany between the Christian conversion narratives and "moments of intensity" in Romanticism	9
1.1. <i>Metanoia</i> . The conversion and the Christian narratives	13
1.2. "Instants of intensity" in Romantic poetry	21
1.3. The new modernist spirituality	34
2. Dilemmas of critical interpretation	50
2.1. Religious approach. Epiphany and the catholic liturgy	51
2.2. Formal approach	58
2.2.1 Objective direction. „The spiritual eye” and the nature of the object	61
2.2.2 Symbolic approach	68
2.2.2.1. Epiphany and symbol	68
2.2.2.2 <i>Autosymbolising</i>	76
2.2.3 <i>Against</i> symbolising	85
2.2.4 Critical approach	89
2.3 Epiphany and the experience of time	91
2.4 Epiphany as compensatory world	95
2.4.1 Epiphany and the sublime	96
2.4.1.1 Empirical transcendence	98
2.4.1.2 The instances of empirical sublime	106
2.4.2. Epiphany and <i>mythos</i>	115
2.4.2.1 The neutrality of representation	124
2.4.2.2 The independence of <i>history</i>	124
2.4.2.3 The loosening of narrative	126
2.4.2.4 Narrative world: design and symbolic feature	130
3. Epiphany in linear and gravitational narratives	137
3.1 The new "Eucharist" of the epiphany in James Joyce's work	137
3.2. Thomas Wolfe and paradoxes of the epiphany	154
3.3 Virginia Woolf and the <i>moments of vision</i>	172
Conclusions	186
Bibliography	189

Summary

Key words: identity, temporality, epiphany, subjectivity, sensorial, narrative discourse, sublime, compensatory world, *mythos*

Starting with the 20th century, the programmatic texts, the essays, commentaries and the novels of the modern writers foreshadow the complexity of the phenomenon regarding the investment of the narrative with ontological value by virtue of rearticulating the identity. Among the numerous factors that contributed to the changing of the relation between the individual and the exterior world, causing him to become alienated and in perpetual search of himself, the concept of temporality, taken from the psychology of those times and confirmed later by phenomenology and existentialism, caused radical mutations in the literary domain. The convert of the traditional novel character into subjectivity and the dramatic epic into personal narrative was marked by the discovery of temporality as an essential dimension in defining the human subject. The modernists had been obsessed with the problematic of time reflected at a thematic level as well as by *poiesis*, engaging in finding solutions to resist the temporal flood of chaotic feelings and the down to earth descent of the evanescent subjectivity inherited from the empirical psychologists. The aim of these authors is a minimal constructive movement having enough power to reveal a sense of identity – which they shall find through the *praxis* of the narrative and through epiphany.

In *The Homeric Hymn to Hesiod*, Apollo learns divination from three winged virgins, three bee-women who fly around, creating things. What Apollo understands from their lesson is that prophecy and its word have a conciliatory *praxis* of the distance between word and deed. For archaic thinking, the magical religious power of the sacred narratives created the reality by means of the *praxis* and *aletheia*. The narratorial conscience of the modern novel invests the *epiphany* with a similar ontological power – a nostalgic sign, as well as a necessity of identity articulation.

In what regards the modern narrative, the term *epiphany* receives a new meaning in relation to the theological way of manifestation of the divinity in the world of human beings. Keeping the etymological form of the Greek word

“*epiphainein*” as “revelation” and “manifestation”, the poetic arts of the Anglo-American modern novelists offer an original interpretation of the epiphany by placing the source of the manifested and discovered spirituality not in the divine dimension, but in the psychological and sensorial one.

From a diachronic perspective, starting with the narratives of Christian conversion and arriving to the romantic poems, the concept of laic epiphany has known a number of prefigurations. The dynamic of ideas, which has traversed the paradigms, facilitated the transfer of meaning from the divine authority to the creator, emphasizing the idea that the epiphany experience does not bare the mark of a supernatural force any more, but of a spirituality anchored to organic. The conversion narratives catch the interiorisation of the phenomenon, the radical transformation of the subject and its identity, revealing altogether the daily character of the experience. The re-contextualization of the communication with the divinity, the transition from the official space of the temple to the spontaneous manifestation of the divinity in a random place suggests that the discovery is not relevant from the point of view of the ceremony, but what is important is the transforming effect it produces on the subject. Spontaneity, the radical effect it has on the subject and the daily context where it happens have been considered the three important dimensions of the laic epiphany anticipated by the Christian narratives – particularities which shall be attached to the aesthetic dimension (instead of the theological one) especially in Romanticism. The artist, now the master of his own creation, gave up the burden of his duty towards divinity and concentrated on his own creative powers.

Besides this new spirituality legitimated in the empiric domain, the epiphany has been considered a structural principle and an ordering mechanism of the dispersive narrative characteristic for the poetics of this literature. In their approaches, critics admitted that the laic epiphany, as it appears in Joyce’s work and the work of other novelists of the modern poetics, does not legitimate in the divine dimension, but in the sensorial one and, since it also involves a scriptural dimension, they called it *literary practice* and ordering principle.

But the novelty of the concept and the difficulty of being placed in an integrating theoretical system which shall explain the interference of the thematic dimension with the formal one, as well as the elements which support the ordering function of the epiphany, have paved the way towards critical dilemmas. Taking over

the terminology and the epiphany definition from Joyce's novels, critics have explained the scriptural dimension of laic epiphany by taking the concept of *beauty* from Tomas Aquinas' aesthetics. They guided themselves by the stages of the aesthetic experience expressed by him.

The literary practice anticipated by the Christian conversion texts and the poems of the Romantics received its official conceptual form starting with Joyce. The dilemmas of the critical mechanism encountered at the circumscription of the new concept were determined mainly by the absence of the theoretical references regarding the author's intention and the necessity of its launch. Except for the passages in the manuscript of the novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published with the title *Stephen Hero*, the concept of epiphany did not know a theoretical systematization. Its mentioning in the novel has been anticipated by the anthology of short poems with free verse called *Epiphanies*. Adopting a diachronic approach, the critic journey highlighted the correspondence between the epiphanies of the anthology – singular in comparison with any of the canonical literary genres – and the other occurrences of Joyce's fiction epiphany. The anthology poems contain scriptural recordings of a spontaneous illumination determined by a gesture or trivial object. They can be analyzed individually by the means of the same instrument used in the analysis of the lyric genre texts, but they were not chosen only because of the semantics they have as autonomous poems, but also because of the way Joyce has integrated them in the architecture of the other novels. The premises of the epiphany as a technique did not consist of the particular examination of the poems, but of the formal and semantic modulations, which they have received in the economy of fictional texts.

The literary critic did not establish without difficulty the technical parameters of the concept of *epiphany* set out in Joyce's literary workshop. Although it had all the instruments at hand, the critic was in an argumentative deadlock. The religious origin of the word, the new premises of fictional art legitimated in the psychology of creation, and the absence of punctual commentaries regarding the theoretical circumscription of epiphany gave rise to polemics and critical dilemmas. The effort to mark the border between the two states of the epiphany, *experience* and *technique* was the result of the perpetual move from *thematic* to *concept*, from epiphany as a manifestation of *something* to epiphany as a *narrative mechanism*. Since the term

became official with Joyce, an important part of the systematization attempts came from the work of the English author, judging all the other occurrences from other novels of the modernist poetics also by the filter of Joyce's view.

In contrast to the critic approaches focusing on Aquino's aesthetic *beauty*, the offer to legitimate the experience of epiphany in the *sublime* expressed by Thomas Weiskel and Alan Richardson and the concept of *mythos* from Ricoeur's narratology altogether may be considered a conciliation solution. Analyzing the novels of Joyce, Woolf, and Wolfe as symptomatic novels for the modern aesthetics of the Anglo-American space, the joining of the three concepts: *sublime*, *epiphany*, and *mythos* support the idea of epiphany as compensative form generated by the discourse figurality.

The analysis of the novels of the three authors highlights the ordering function of epiphany and the strong relationship with the experience of sublime. Launched by the elements of the trivial: a gesture, an event, a memory or a random object, the epiphany directs the subject towards a territory of a new spirituality. Being a concept with a sensorial and scriptural or organizational dimension, the critical interpretations tried to identify the element, which holds together the spiritual *manifestation* of epiphany and the discourse part of the experience. The fluid border between the two levels brought the critics to a dilemma.

As a solution, the evoking of the experience of sublime from Weiskel's, Richardson's, and Clayton's research and Ricoeur's concept of *mythos* altogether justify the effect the intensity of the experience has on the discourse and the particularities of the epiphany, which allow its investing with the ordering function. The analysis of the novels marked the repeat of the expressions and words from the semantic area of the sensorial and the fact that the synesthetic images were constantly accompanied by words from the semantic field of tension and unrest. The intense moments and those of tension of the narrative discourse betray the incommensurable power that governs the mind and its denial to be denominated. Suggested only by the stylistic elements, this power causes breakages and the epiphany appears as a *compensative universe* that brings the order back. In contrast to the critical opinions that considered the epiphany a technique of the fragment, of determining the breakage, the solution of the epiphany as *mythos* suggests that it has a structural role but its form combines with the breakage and tension that precedes it.

Although a clear identification of the transition from tension to epiphany is not possible, the way the narrative is organized in Joyce's, Woolf's and Wolfe's novels reveal the fact that the epiphany moment is characterized by a *relaxation* of the mind and of the discourse. Therefore the semantic realm of the tension contrasts with the verbs and expressions that suggest relaxation. Regarding the discourse "crisis", the epiphany appears as *a new event* in the narrative. It reveals the germinative figural structures of the discourse that support the genesis of a form apparently detached from the discourse, but which in fact is supported by stylistic elements.