

EPIPHANIES: JAMES JOYCE AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Joyce's texts, together with biographical data, have furnished Lacan with material for an advance in the approach to psychotic structure.¹ He shows that Joyce's writing had the function to make up for his phallic posture² and to stitch up his ego together. Lacan also insists on the centrality of his epiphanies³ thanks to which the unconscious and the real are knotted.⁴

Nevertheless, throughout the course of his development Lacan moves ahead with circumspection. Suspecting that Joyce was making himself a redeemer, he qualifies his assertions: "It is obvious that I don't know everything, and in particular I don't know by reading Joyce [...] what he believed himself to be. It is certain that I didn't analyse him which I regret. [...] Did he believe himself to be a redeemer, yes or no? [...] we are reduced to feelings about it because Joyce did not speak to us, he wrote, and when one writes, one might touch the real but not the truth".⁵ Lacan's method of study relies cautiously on biographical elements (his relations with Nora and Lucia), on his correspondence, on biographical elements extracted from his fiction provided one can consider that *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*⁶ accounts for Joyce's experience, on the way certain questions are specifically treated in the work of Joyce (notably regarding the father), on the analysis of traits that belong to Joycian writing and whatever comes out of it for the reader. A study of Joyce's texts nevertheless occupies a major part of his argument. Following Freud Lacan considers that psychoanalysis can add to its teaching from literature on condition that it respects its peculiarities and limits and keeps its bearings on the relation to the real. This fact invites us to a re-reading of the epiphanies for which we shall have to adapt our consideration to the particularities of the knotting produced there. The thorny question it raises is how to account for a text from which the imaginary is subtracted. The precious indications that he gives us on the function of Joycian writing, on the author's psychotic structure, such as he retrieves it from textual elements but also from extra-textual elements, open the way. Thinking that he has left behind him a naive psychocriticism, the critic is once again constrained to having recourse to extra textual elements in order to explore given writings without nevertheless forgetting that the indications furnished by Lacan come essentially from a reading of the texts.

To define literature not in its relation to truth but in its relation to the real implies more broadly the adaptation of new reading strategies which remain nevertheless conditioned by the specificity of each text. An attentive examination of epiphanic moments in Virginia Woolf's work confirms that these experiences, which have often been noted as similar to those of Joyce, are made of a different structure. Relying on the experience of authors, the epiphanic texts are shown to be based on their specific relation to enjoyment.

1. Place of epiphanies in the progress of Joycian work

In an initial phase Joyce attached an extreme importance to his epiphanies, to the point of placing them at the heart of his aesthetic project which he elaborated in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Nevertheless, in *Ulysses* Stephen ironises on the place that he had given them: "Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years, a mahamanvantara. Pico della Mirandola like. Ay, very like a whale. When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once...".⁷

The epiphanies certainly mark an inaugural moment in the work of Joyce, but they manage only imperfectly to fulfil the function assigned to them: to make up for Joyce's lack of a phallic posture. One has to examine the trajectory of these writings in Joyce's literary path. Before being considered as texts, the epiphanies were firstly notes that Joyce took in the wake of spiritual manifestations undergone in diverse circumstances. These short writings were composed between 1901 and 1904. They were not made to be read. Although epiphanies attest to a composition, the status of these texts remains unclear. Some critics consider they are preparatory fragments to a narrative work, but Joyce seems rather to assign to them the function of registering particular moments of experience of which it belongs to a man of letters, he will say later, to give an account. In so far as the definition of the epiphanies was posterior to their composi-

tion, one can doubt that these texts had suddenly such a vocation. In 1903 Joyce used the term epiphanies to speak of a collection of texts given to George

Russell to read. The epiphanies had acquired a name and recognition: they constituted thereafter strictly texts. In 1904 in *Stephen Hero*⁸ he described these epiphanic experiences, defining at the same time the nature of the texts that he placed at the heart of his aesthetic project, apparent by their insertion into a narrative work. The introduction of certain of them into *Stephen Hero* and especially into *A Portrait of the Artist* very

often provided the occasion for a rewriting which modified the import of these texts.

The definition that Joyce gives to these epiphanies indicates that writing was for him called for by such experiences, that his epiphanic texts are recordings, functioning to fix these moments in the letter and that their writing confers upon him an identity of a man of letters, with a mission. "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 those epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. He told Cranly that the clock of the Ballast Office was capable of an epiphany. [...]"

— Imagine my glimpses of that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached, the object is epiphanized."⁹

It seems that Joyce only made use of these texts as support for his vocation as writer in a second phase. He defines them only after their composition. Moreover, the definition corresponds to an intellectual elaboration which is not without discrepancy with some of the epiphanies. Lacan grasps their specificity in the knot they operate between the real and the symbolic. The missing link with the reader in his/her function as imaginary other is a supplementary sign of the retreat of the imaginary in the epiphanies. It has often been noted that the epiphanies present themselves to us as pure enigmas deprived of meaning, even allegorical, which Lacan characterises as the consequence of a badly stapled ego.¹⁰ The definition he gives of the enigma as the 'epitome of sense'¹¹ seems to indicate that the epiphanies present sense (that he situates at the junction of the symbolic and the imaginary), but they leave signification in the margin (compelling a choice while cutting out from the ambiguity of sense. Signification therefore rather comes under the imaginary register). The insertion of the epiphanies into a narrative structure had as function to articulate sense to signification by creating a context for these texts (even if the latter relies on memory). One has to admit in this case that the second version of the epiphanies does not clarify the first but that one connects the symbolic to the real whilst the second is relevant to an enterprise of semantisation and of articulation of the symbolic and the real to the imaginary. "Stephen", says Lacan, "is Joyce in so far as he is deciphering his own enigma."¹² Catherine Millot shows that the epiphanies "mark the heart [...] of Joyce's work with a radical non-sense", presenting at the same time an Obsolute density of sense, "ineffable, non-transmissible, totally enigmatic, on which Joyce bases the certainty of his vocation".¹³ There is only non-sense for the reader. The epiphanies participate in a double operation: one outside of sense, the knotting of the real to the letter, the other which concerns sense, the articulation of the real and the signifier. It seems that when Joyce gave his texts to be read, they presented for him the sense and the enigma of his enunciation. The missing dimension is that of signification. For Catherine Millot and Jean-Guy Godin, the context, that is the insertion of the epiphanies into *Stephen Hero* and into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* clarify these first fragments, indeed "provide them with the sense of which they appear [...] particularly deprived".¹⁴ It is more about, it seems, knotting sense to signification, restoring the Borromean property to the knot which is, then, well founded.

Inserting the epiphanies into a narrative structure inaugurates a particular trajectory. In the same way, *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* rely on other texts or founding signifiers (*The Odyssey* or Lewis Carroll's neologisms). In any case they knot the real, the symbolic and the imaginary in a different way. They hold the place of the phallic signifier, representing Joyce because they function like 'envelope-texts'. They play the role of S_1 ¹⁶ which generates all the significations that academics would like to give them for the next 300 years. It's otherwise when it comes to the epiphanies inserted in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The epiphanies hold down the place of the founding signifier which generates the narrative, and they assume an internal relation of exteriority in relation to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. They hold down a relation with the signifying chain similar to that of S_1 , as the signifier which represents the subject. Joyce's later procedure would be in some way more successful, for his texts are called upon to function as S_1 's since they are articulated to the imaginary and rely on other signifiers or founding texts. One can see there the traces of a more complex knot than the one in *A Portrait of the Artist*

as a *Young Man*. It is clear thereafter that the epiphanies were offering an inadequate stapling of the ego because of the retreat of the imaginary.

II. A reading of the epiphanies.

Recording experiences concerning enjoyment, the epiphanies had in an initial phase the double function of containing enjoyment in the letter and of transferring the real to the symbolic. Epiphany no.1 which presents a childhood memory specifies Joyce's relation to the letter. By the position he gives it, Joyce isolates it as an inaugural moment in his work of writing, then in his career as writer since it also constitutes the first page of *A Portrait of the Artist...* The text refers to an anguishing scene in which the child Joyce is reprimanded by Mr. Vance, neighbour and friend of the Joyce's, for a fault that we are ignorant of:

[Bray: in the parlour of the house in Martello Terrace]

Mr. Vance — (comes in with a stick). . . O, you know, he'll have to apologise,

Mrs. Joyce — O yes. . . Do you hear that, Jim?

Mr. Vance — Or else — if he doesn't — the eagles'll come and pull out his eyes.

Mrs. Joyce — O but I'm sure he will apologise.

Joyce — (under the table, to himself)

— Pull out his eyes

Apologise

Apologise

Pull out his eyes

Apologise

Pull out his eyes

Pull out his eyes

Apologise¹⁷

From this scene the text only conserves the child's frightened escape, an utterance of two worried sentences, as well as his mode of defence in playing on the letter of the two statements. The child takes the first sentence literally. Perhaps the second reinforces the position of sacrificial object lived by the child. One has to postulate a psychotic structure for Joyce to risk such an interpretation, which can only remain hypothetical

since it says too little about it. It has to be noted that no narrative commentary is provided that would explain the effect of this discussion on the child or evoke his anguish. Nevertheless, Joyce himself indicates that these writings were suggested to him by the intensity of the lived experience. This process is characteristic of the epiphanies which are operating like a cut-out from the experience without commenting on it as if

the enjoyment were inherent in the scene, that the anguish was contained in the statement. The absence of any narrative commentary participates in the strangeness of these fragments which seem to present sense without the support of signification. Let's also recall that the term epiphany characterises the experience as well as the text which tends to indicate

that the experience is present in the text, contained there and transported to the signifier.

Drawn from experience, the text has the function of isolating this moment of enjoyment, of localising it temporally and spatially, imposing on it the limits of a frame. In this way one can understand the phrases or the spatial and temporal notations which often introduce the epiphanies. In the first the temporal limits are furnished by the trim of the text itself, the term that the last word and poetic alternative offer him.

The scene evoked in this epiphany accounts for the mode of defence adopted by the child. Hidden under the table, seeking to put himself outside the reach of the Other, he repeats these two statements, trying to master his anxiety and to contain enjoyment in the signifier. At the same time he takes hold of the two statements which threaten him in order to empty them of sense and to reduce them to the letter, to their phonic structure. The phonetic closeness of these two statements constitutes the pivot of that manipulation and translates for Joyce the quasi-equivalence of these two injunctions. One can equally consider that the voice which threatens him, perhaps invading him, is at the same time contained in that phonematic frame. In his play of alternating between 'Pull out his eyes' and 'Apologise', he is acquiring a mastery of the letter which contains, bars

enjoyment. All the better that 'Pull out his eyes' and 'Apologise' contain the phoneme 'eyes', another possible incarnation of the *object a*. The letter tends in any case to turn into an object. By localising enjoyment in the letter, one passes to the enjoyment of the letter.

The play on the letter nevertheless does not remain completely indifferent to sense, it is articulated to the symbolic, since, in turn, 'Apologise' frames 'Pull out his eyes', and contains the ultimate threat brought back to its phonetic structure in the proximity of 'Apologise'. The threat seems to be hierarchised by degree, by way of that alternation. This permits an attenuation of the force of the injunction by introducing a combinatory, and so a possibility of a complementary manipulation. One might also think that this articulation of the letter to the signifier is only the product of a later elaboration permitted by the text. Writing seems, in effect, to contribute to a knotting of the real and symbolic. It blots out the real of *jouissance* of the letter in order to restore the signifier in its symbolic dimension, and operates a supplementary cut out by bringing a term to the alternating 'Apologise' and 'Pull out your eyes'. Indeed, one can doubt it was as neat in the moment he experienced it. This point of arrest is not indifferent to sense, for it contains the subject's choice to protect itself against castration, which threatens him in the real. Finally, writing gives form to that alternating by organising the page in a manner that recalls poetic writing. From enjoyment of the letter, one passes to aesthetics. This displacement is without doubt one of the phenomena that contributed to the fact that the writing of the epiphanies should have revealed to Joyce his vocation as writer.

Beyond this attempt to localise enjoyment in the letter (a mode of defence already adopted by the child), the epiphany as text knots the real to the symbolic. The re-transcription of the statement in its enunciative context is an index of it. The epiphanies are minutely constructed texts which restore a framework to experience, setting limits to it. The epiphanies are cut out from experience and at the same time frame that experience by an orientation on sense which is nevertheless independent of signification. As Jean-Guy Godin has noted: "These described scenes and their effects must have had for Joyce such an evidential character that it was not necessary to say more about it".¹⁸

Given to be read, then placed at the heart of his aesthetic project, these texts had the function of representing him as writer. Epiphany no. 2 bears witness to the attempt operated by Joyce to support himself with imaginary identifications and to correlate the pronoun which represents him with an image in order to give consistency to his being:

"No school tomorrow: it is Saturday night in winter: I sit by the fire. Soon they will be returning with provisions, meat and vegetables, tea and bread and butter, and white pudding that makes a noise on the pan... I sit reading a story of Alsace, turning over the yellow pages, watching the men and women in their strange dresses. It please me to read of their ways; through them I seem to touch the life of a land beyond them to enter into communion with the German people. Dearest illusion, friend of my youth! ... In him I have imaged myself. Our lives are still sacred in their intimate sympathies. I am with him at night when he reads the books of the philosophers or some tale of ancient times. I am with him when he wanders alone or with one whom he has never seen, that young girl who puts around him arms that have no malice in them, offering her simple, abundant love, hearing and answering his soul he knows not how."¹⁹

Joyce remembers that as a child he escaped from the family ambience by fiction as Jacques Aubert reports it in the notes of *The Pleiade*.²⁰ The narrator relives a scene in which as a young boy he crossed the frontiers of fiction by identifying with ideals incarnated by historical characters. The narrative present on which the text opens marks in parallel the narrator's process of identification to the character (himself a child). Still, the text establishes at the same time a distance between the 'I' and 'him', between the past and present, indeed, between the child and the fictional characters, as it is obvious in the expression 'Dearest illusion, friend of my youth!' The term illusion refers to the lure of identification, but it designates equally the image of himself, which he qualifies as friend of his childhood. The phrase that follows indicates in effect that Joyce supports himself with imaginary identifications: 'In him I have imaged myself'. To conclude that his alienation from himself does not involve a division of the subject, one has to, of course, appeal to a global examination of Joyce's psychotic structure such as Lacan presents it to us. In this case, the phrase emerges like a supplementary index of the stitching up of the ego which characterises Joyce's way.

This statement seems to refer to his attempt to constitute a unified and historicised image of himself on which he might rely as the sign of his being. The present perfect which is not established in the rupture between the past and the present marks the continuation of the process as indicated again by what follows. On the one hand the text presents an image of Joyce, child and reader, and, on the oth-

er hand, it indicates that the 'I' supports itself with that image: 'I am with him'. Writing shows up the radical alienation of Joyce's image from himself. It opposes 'I' to 'him' instead of 'myself'. The 'I' speaks of the emptiness of the imaginary, of the indifference of marks, 'I' becoming 'him' in the second part of the text. Certainly, if the text is seeking to bring about a semblant of division, it ends up in a paradox: 'I am with him when he wanders alone', logical impossibility unless we make of 'I' a spirit or mark without body. Moreover,

dominated by the frequency and fluctuation of the personal pronouns, the text renders the reader's task difficult. The sudden rupture between 'I' and 'him', between the past and the narrative present, rocks the established landmarks. It becomes almost impossible in the course of reading to correlate with certainty an image with a pronoun. It seems that even at the level of writing the imaginary drops out. Not only does the text speak of Joyce's failure to give consistency to the 'I', indeed to make any representation of himself by an image or a signifier, but it testifies to and reproduces the failure.

On the other hand, the texts of the epiphanies had as mission to represent him as trace, trait of his enunciation, as enigmas. They had to guarantee this function for his first readers but also for other texts (the books of the Alexandrine library where Stephen remembers that they had to be sent), indeed for other signifiers: those of *The Portrait of the Artist*. The insertion of the epiphanies into this text knot sense to signification, the real and symbolic to the imaginary. It has to be noted that in the process texts like epiphany no. 5 which underline the vacillation of Joyce's identifications, are emptied of all ambiguity. The epiphanies contribute to the portrait of the artist whose sign they become. This singular experience testifies to his destiny, revealing it, but equally one might think that the texts of the epiphanies represent him for other signifiers with which he enters into a relation of internal exclusion since they had to undergo modifications to take up a place in *A Portrait of the Artist*.

III. On the topic of visionary moments in Virginia Woolf's work

Virginia Woolf's experience is branded by an approach of the real that one has often assimilated to the epiphanies of Joyce. 'Shocks' coming from reality, these 'moments of being' testify to the existence of 'something real beyond appearances'.²¹ An encounter with an apparently banal object triggers an experience perceived as extremely intense, often taking on the value of a revelation. In *Moments of Being*, an autobiographical writing, she reports:

"If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills — then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive."²²

Nevertheless, she adds:

"But of course there was one external reason for the intensity of this first impression: the impression of the waves and the acorn of the blind; the feeling, as I describe it sometimes to myself, of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow — it was due partly to the many months we spent in London. The change of nursery was a great change. And there was the long train journey; and the excitement."²³

She ends up associating this memory with the balcony adjacent to the children's room on which her mother occasionally appeared.²⁴ It should be noted that this ecstatic moment, which could certainly evoke a primitive scene as some have indicated,²⁵ has for her an obvious reason (even if it is entirely relative), that it is correlated to significant associations (presence and absence of the mother), that Virginia Woolf situates this initial experience in the foundation of her existence, so that the ecstatic vision is mediated by a semi-transparent veil (that of the volet called 'blind' in English, the same signifier as *aveugle*). Whereafter, one can consider that it is not a matter of a vision similar to that of Joyce for whom the real presents itself without mediation but rather of a manifestation of the real where the object is more absence than presence and which does not cease to be taken up into the phallic veil (in so far as the phallus, signifier of lack, puts a screen over the real²⁶). An analysis of visionary moments in her writings shows a radical difference from Joyce's epiphanies.

No similar text figures in the journey of Virginia Woolf. The autobiographical writings comment and try to explain these experiences which plunged Virginia Woolf into an ineffable ecstasy. Her visionary writings are based on such moments with out in any case being directly inscribed in them. Vision in Woolf is a question of fiction. In this way she constructs similar moments so well that her writing not only has the task to account for the vision of its characters but equally to make itself visionary, to produce a similar effect in the reader. This perspective quickly parts company with that of Joyce. A study of the paragraph which introduces the short story called 'Kew Gardens'²⁷ shows how Virginia Woolf's writing seeks to reach

the real by attacking the phallic barrier. She testifies on that account to the impossibility of reaching the real due to an obstacle but also to the prism of which the phallic veil consists, which limits but allows vision.

From the oval-shaped flower bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface; and from the red, blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end. The petals were voluminous enough to be stirred by the summer breeze, and when they moved, the red, blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the intricate colour. The light fell either upon the smooth grey back of a pebble, or the shell of a snail with its brown circular veins, or, falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear. Instead, the drop was left in a second silvery grey once more, and the light now settled on the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of fibre beneath the surface, and again it moved on and spread its illuminations in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves. Then the breeze stirred rather more briskly over head and the colour was flashed into the air above, into the eyes of the men and women who walk in Kew Gardens in July.

Virginia Woolf's writing does not function to overly frame experience but on the contrary to cross the limits of the frame, to abolish forms. The weight of the flower-bed is described as an arrangement of structures with the help of a pictorial terminology. The repetition of 'shaped' emphasises the predominance of forms in this composition. The past participle used as adjective indicates at the same time that these forms are the work of the artist. The multitude of forms is associated with the image of a fragmented body. The detail of the flowers is observed by a look at the level of the ground, as is emphasised by the verb 'rose' and the preposition 'half-way up', referring to the scale of the human body, which adds to the magnification of their size. Threatening, erected, vertical lines, like that metallic bar emerging from the dark depths of a throat, abound. All of these elements contribute to conferring on that pictorial universe a disturbing atmosphere. The text is then emancipated from forms and frees itself from a predominance of passive forms to the benefit of verbs in the active voice, of movement, of an attempt to grasp the play of colours and of light. The text holds the reader spellbound. He is waiting for the film of the drop of rain to explode, for it to be given him to see the indefinable colour generated by the movement of petals, or to be invaded by the intensity of the light whose prism is revealed in favour of the meeting of a ray with the surface of a drop. The text suggests the impossible and tries to get us to glimpse it. The writing seeks to cross the limits of forms, to cross a phallic barrier which is an obstacle to vision. The writing creates movement

through the rhythm of long phrases, of embedded propositions, of sequences between commas; it creates poetry based on irregular cadences, alliteration, repetition (of 'red, blue and yellow' or of 'heart-shaped and tongue-shaped') which breaks the linearity of the narrative and calls for a paradigmatic reading. Poetic writing subverts the narrative form, the letter

opens for the text an access to the real. The writing, finally, goes against the limits of the ego, of the body. Language, heart, throat allude too directly to an anguishing sexuality for which Virginia Woolf seeks to substitute an ecstatic *jouissance* which tries to go beyond the phallic limit. Once the armour of the ego has been crossed, the voices converge, fusing like the subtle manipulation of points of view in the cited passage. The description is produced by a disincarnated narrative voice, which from above throws a downward look on the snail, the pebble or the drop of water. Nevertheless, the point of view sometimes slips imperceptibly so that the bank of flowers is described from below upwards, through the point of view that is going to become dominant, that of the snail. The change of focus takes place without transition, from one phrase to the next, only adverbs and prepositions testify to it. The narrator has the faculty to transmit what the snail sees. Their voices speak in unison, share the same look, although their

size, their position in space separates them. What is produced here is the inverse of the function of epiphany no. 2. Joyce's text tries to correlate an image of the self with the 'I', but the text is lost in the instability of pr nouns, of images, without any organising point of view managing to confer unity on it. It is quite different in Virginia Woolf's passage where beyond the separation of voices a look, a style and a common reference to a pictorial technique unify. Virginia Woolf's writing tends toward finding unity in disunity, reaching the real beyond the phallus.

Nevertheless, this passage does not cease to come up against the phallic barrier, and a vision never arrives. One expects to see the raindrop collapse, but it is re-silvered. The elusive nature of the light blocks the emergence of ecstasy, where upon the entire form is maintained, the film-prism has not given in. The light which stops on a leaf reveals its structure, the skeletal frame that founds its being. Rays try to invest the free space under the leaves but it forms a dome that limits this roaming zone. When, finally, the dome opens under the effect of the breeze, leaving the colour to burst out, the infinite expansion of the air ('the air above') is immediately filled with forms which stop this irradiation: the eyes of passers-by.

The paragraph finishes on a mention of the body as obstacle to infinite expansion. The eyes in this case are no longer the instrument of vision but are what stops it. The eyes of the passers-by do not see, but associated with the preposition 'into' they constitute a limit in space. They do not receive any sensible impression, but establish a barrier to the look which is situated at the height of the snail. The end of 'Kew Gardens' marks a new attempt to bring out vision. The text ends on this phrase:

"But there was no silence; all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air."²⁸

Vision is produced, expansion of colours takes place, but the voices can only try to elevate themselves above the noise of civilisation. Although it is covered by voices, the noise can still be heard. The upward surge of colours is this time limited from every side by the mosaic of forms of the city which surrounds the garden. This text is not unique. Françoise de Fromont recalls rightly that the end of *To the Lighthouse* is also not an epiphany: "The aim of the walk is not reached, for what might appear as the final moment in which the Ramsays reach the lighthouse is not an epiphany. On the contrary, on finding the lighthouse, the house of light evaporates".²⁹ One can always show that in opposition to the memory evoked above moments of being in Virginia Woolf are always mediated by the phallic veil.

If the writing of Virginia Woolf attacks the imaginary and the symbolic to reach the real beyond the phallus, it also indicates that the phallic veil is necessary in order for vision to emerge. This passage testifies to this through the evocation of the iridescent raindrop. The liquid film unveils the prism of colours beyond the uniformity of the light ray, it is responsible for that intensity. In the same way, the writing has recourse to poetic forms, to a vocabulary and to a pictorial technique, verily to an impressionist aesthetic, in order to produce a vision. The real is approachable only by the intermediary of sublimation, only by the intermediary of transparent words, which transform the horror into pleasure. Whilst looking at a flower-bed, it came to Virginia Woolf's mind: 'that is the whole' and "I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower".³⁰ She comments on her experience in such a way:

"The sense of horror made me powerless. But in the case of the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation".³¹ By means of words she turned this 'some real thing' beyond appearances into reality, 'I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together'.³² Virginia Woolf's writing is the veil which makes the encounter with the real bearable but also what makes her seeking the impossible supportable, this little bit of the real beyond appearances which spreads out under a thin, transparent film. The extract from 'Kew Gardens' is a success and not a failure, providing a glimpse into the impossible beneath the veil of beauty.

Testifying to the subject's relation to writing, if these texts are not enough for a structural approach, they are, nevertheless, an index of a function, for, as Lacan shows, they touch on the real. Each text articulates itself in its own way and compels our reading. Beyond an apparent similarity of experiences the epiphanic and visionary texts of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf reveal two heterogeneous processes:

Joyce tries to compensate for the phallus, Virginia Woolf attacks it, adorns herself with it in order to seek the real beyond it.

Translated by Richard Klein

1. J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire XXIII, Le Sinthome*, edited by J.-A. Miller in *Ornicar?*, No 6, March-April 1976, pp. 3-12 ; No 7, June-July 1976, pp. 3-17 ; No 8, Winter 1976-77, pp. 5-20 ; No 9, April 1977, pp. 32-40 ; No 10, July 1977, pp. 5-12 ; No 11, September 1977, pp. 2-9.
2. J. Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, seminar of 18 November 1975 in *Ornicar?* No 6, March-April 1976, p.6.
3. J. Joyce, *Epiphanies* in *Poems and Shorter Writings*, London: Faber and Faber, 1991, pp. 156-200.
4. The function of the epiphanies, according to Lacan, is to hold up Joyce's being which is not founded by the signifier of lack (the phallus) that comes into place correlative to the loss of an object of *jouissance*. The psychotic subject, according to him, remains encumbered with it. The consequences of this 'lack of the lack' is that the signifying chain is not founded in the case of the psychotic and that the three dimensions of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are not indissolubly knotted.
5. J. Lacan, *Le Sinthome* in *Ornicar* No 8, Winter, 1976-77, pp. 7-9.
6. J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916, London: Grafton Books, (1977) 1986.
7. J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 1922, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, p. 34.
8. J. Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, (posthumous, 1944) London: Grafton Books, (1977) 1989.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 188-189.
10. J. Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, seminar of 11 May 1976 in *Ornicar* No 11, p. 9.
11. J. Lacan, *Les Non-dupes errent*, unpublished seminars of 13 November 1973, p. 2.
12. J. Lacan, *Le Sinthome* in *Ornicar* No 6, p. 14.
13. C. Millot, *Epiphanies* in *Joyce avec Lacan*, Paris: Navarin, p. 87 and 91.
14. C. Millot, *Epiphanies*, p. 87.
15. J. Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*, London: Faber and Faber, (1939) 1989.
16. The S_1 , which represents the subject, is a signifier that is unpronounceable, repressed and deprived of sense, and its function is to generate other signifiers.
17. J. Joyce, *Epiphanies*, p. 161.
18. J.-G. Godin, *Du symptôme à son épure: le sinthome*, p.200.
19. J. Joyce, *Epiphanies*, p. 162.
20. J. Joyce, *Epiphanies*, French translation with notes by Jacques Aubert, Paris: Gallimard, col. Pléiade, 1981.
21. V. Woolf, *Moments of Being*, New York: HBJ Books, p.72.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 64-65.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
25. F. Defromont, *Vers la maison de lumière*, Paris: éditions des femmes, 1985, p. 76.
26. Recall that when the fantasy vacillates, when castration is not perfectly symbolised, and when an object of *jouissance* presents itself in the real, the subject is prey to anxiety in the face of what appears as an object of horror. This is Lacan's interpretation of the phenomenon of the uncanny uncovered by Freud.
27. V. Woolf, *Kew Gardens*, 1919, in *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, London: Triad Grafton Books, 1987, p. 119.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
29. F. Defromont, *Vers la maison de lumière*, p. 105.
30. V. Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past* in *Moments of Being*, p.71.
31. *Ibid.*, p.72.
32. *Ibid.*, p.72.