

HUMAN DESTINIES

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Today: William James Revisited (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

53. The mystical susceptibility of religious sensibilities here differs radically from that of artistic-aesthetic sensibilities. For many in religious mystical traditions, exercises involve the radical exclusion of “outward” objects of the world and their replacement by highly controlled and restricted objects of attention. The mystical susceptibilities of the arts, in contrast, delight in the objective world and in all that the arts add well to it, and in consequence delight in all that those additions contribute to constructing subjectivities in endlessly unfolding novelties. For a fascinating recent treatment of silence, see Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence* (London: Granta, 2008).

S E V E N T E E N

Eucharistic Imagination in Merleau-Ponty and James Joyce

Richard Kearney

Some of my best memories of Gerald Hanratty are of various conversations, when I was a student and later a colleague of his at University College Dublin, on the philosophy of religion. His passion for interdisciplinary research, spanning philosophy, theology, history, and the arts, was infectious, and I always guarded a deep admiration for his generous method and imagination. I offer the following reflections on the “eucharistic imagination” in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) and literature (James Joyce) in homage to such an inspiring mentor and friend.

Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of the Flesh

Husserl blazed a path toward a phenomenology of the flesh when he broached the crucial theme of embodiment in *Ideas II*, a theme largely ignored by Western metaphysics since Plato. This may seem strange

given that almost fifteen hundred years of the history of metaphysics composed what Gilson called the "Christian synthesis" of Greek and biblical thought. But metaphysics (with some exceptions) managed to take the flesh and blood out of Christian incarnation, leaving us with abstract conceptual and categorical equivalents. It would take Husserl and the modern phenomenological revolution to bring Western philosophy back to the flesh of prereflective lived experience.

Husserl himself, however, for all his talk of returning us to the "things themselves," remained caught in the nets of transcendental idealism and never quite escaped the limits of theoretical cognition. Heidegger took a step closer to the flesh with his existential analytic of "moods" and "facticity," but the fact remains that Heideggerian Dasein has no real body at all: it does not eat or sleep or have sex. It too remains, despite all its talk of "being-in-the-world," captive of the transcendental snare. While Scheler made sorties into a phenomenology of feeling and Sartre offered fine insights into shame and desire, it was really only with Merleau-Ponty that we witnessed a credible return to the flesh—and not just as cipher, project, or icon but as *flesh itself* in all its ontological depth.

Here at last the ghost of Cartesian and Kantian idealism is laid, as we finally return to the body in all its unfathomable *thiness*. It is telling, I think, that Merleau-Ponty chose to describe his phenomenology of the sensible body in sacramental language, amounting to what we might call—without the slightest irreverence—a Eucharist of profane perception. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1944) we read:

Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but *is* also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion.¹

This is a bold analogy for an existentialist writing in France in the 1940s, a time when close colleagues like Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus considered militant atheism as *de rigueur*. Merleau-Ponty goes on to sound this eucharistic power of the sensible as follows: "I am brought into relation with an external being, whether it be in order to open myself to it or to shut myself off from it. If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called just now a sacramental value, this is because the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds in them his momentary law."²

We shall have occasion to refer below to numerous idioms of eucharistic empathy in the work of James Joyce. Suffice it for now to note the curious paradox that precisely when Merleau-Ponty traces the phenomenological return all the way down to the lowest rung of experience (in the old metaphysical ladder, the *sensible*) he discovers the most sacramental act of communion, or what he also likes to call "chiasmus." What exactly is meant by this notion of "chiasmus"? The crossing over of ostensible contraries: the most in the least, the highest in the lowest, the first in the last, the invisible in the visible. Here we have a reversal of Platonism and idealism: a return to flesh as our most intimate "element," namely, that which enfolds and envelops us in the systole and diastole of being, the seeing and being seen of vision. Phenomenology thus marks the surpassing of traditional dualisms (body/mind, real/ideal, inner/outer, subject/object) in the name of a deeper, more primordial chiasmus where opposites traverse each other. This is how Merleau-Ponty describes the enigma of flesh as mutual crossing-over in his posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964): "The seer is caught up in what he sees. . . . The vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things"—so much so that "the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional

philosophy to designate it.”³ Here, I suggest, Merleau-Ponty gets to the heart of this nameless matter and descends—in a final return, a last reduction that suspends all previous reductions—to the incarnate region of the “element”: “The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some ‘psychic’ material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts ‘material’ or ‘spiritual.’” No, insists Merleau-Ponty: “The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we would need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being.”⁴

Returning to examples of painting—Cézanne and Klee—in “Eye and Mind” (1964), Merleau-Ponty expounds on this chiasmic model of the flesh as a mutual transubstantiation of the seer and the seen in a “miracle” of flesh: “There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted. . . . There is no break at all in this circuit; it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here. It is mute Being which itself comes to show forth its own meaning.”⁵

In *Signs* (1960), a collection of essays devoted to questions of language and art, Merleau-Ponty repeats his claim that the flesh of art is invariably indebted to the bread of life. There is nothing so insignificant in the life of the artist, he claims, that it is not eligible for “consecration” in the painting or poem. But the “style” which the artist creates converts his corporeal situation into a sacramental witness at a higher level of “repetition” and “recreation.” The art work still refers to the lifeworld from which it springs, but it opens up a second-order reference of creative possibility and freedom. Speaking specifically of Leonardo da Vinci, he writes:

If we take the painter’s point of view in order to be present at that decisive moment when what has been given to him to live as corporeal destiny, personal adventures or historical events, crystallizes into “the motive” [i.e., the style], we will recognize that his work, which is never an effect, is always a response to these data, and that the body, the life, the landscapes, the schools, the mistresses, the creditors, the police, and the revolutions which might suffocate painting are also *the bread his work consecrates*. To live in painting is still to breathe the air of this world.⁶

In short, the bread of the world is the very stuff consecrated in the body of the work.

We will return to this aesthetic of transubstantiation in the discussion of Joyce. But before leaving Merleau-Ponty I wish to mention one other intriguing passage in *Signs* where the author—no theologian and certainly no Christian apologist—has an interesting interpretation of Christian embodiment as a restoration of the divine within the flesh, a kenotic emptying out of transcendence into the heart of the world’s body, becoming a God beneath us rather than a God beyond:

The Christian God wants nothing to do with a vertical relation of subordination. He is not simply a principle of which we are the consequence, a will whose instruments we are, or even a model of which human values are only the reflection. There is a sort of impotence of God without us, and Christ attests that God would not be fully God without becoming fully man. Claudel goes so far as to say that God is not above but beneath us—meaning that we do not find Him as a suprasensible idea, but as another oneself which dwells in and authenticates our darkness. Transcendence no longer hangs over man: he becomes, strangely, its privileged bearer.⁷

This insight of “immanent transcendence” is not of course original to Merleau-Ponty. Many Christian mystics—from John of the Cross to Hildegard of Bingen and Meister Eckhart—said similar things, as did Jewish sages like Rabbi Luria and Rosenzweig or Sufi masters like

Rumi and Ibn'Arabi. Indeed, I am also reminded here of the bold claim by Teilhard de Chardin that God does not direct the universe from above but underlies it and "prolongs himself" into it. But what Merleau-Ponty provides is a specific philosophical method—namely, a phenomenology of radical embodiment—to articulate this "nameless" phenomenon of sacramental flesh. And it is arguable that a number of recent phenomenologists have followed Merleau-Ponty's lead (or parallel path) when seeking to inventory the sacred dimensions of the flesh—I am thinking especially of Jean-Luc Marion's writings on the "flesh" as a saturated phenomenon in *On Excess*, or Jean-Louis Chrétien's phenomenological commentary on the Song of Songs.⁸ But Merleau-Ponty has the advantage, in my view, of not only being the first phenomenologist to explicitly identify the sacramental valence of the sensible but also maintaining a certain methodological agnosticism with regard to the theistic or atheistic implications of this phenomenon. Indeed, his philosophy of "ambiguity," as he liked to call it, is particularly well suited when it comes to interpreting the sacramental idioms of eucharistic epiphany in Joyce.

Merleau-Ponty is no crypto-evangelist, as several of those belonging to the "theological turn" in phenomenology have been accused of being. On the contrary, he keenly observes the methodic suspension of confessional truth claims recommended by Husserl. And this chimes well, it seems to me, with the poetic license enjoyed by artists and writers when it comes to the marvel of transubstantiation in word, sound, or image. For poetic license entails a corollary confessional license from which no reader is excluded. In this respect, we could say that the phenomenological method—which brackets beliefs—is analogous to the literary suspending of belief and disbelief for the sake of all-inclusive entry to the "kingdom of as-if." And this suspension, I will allow for a specific "negative capability" regarding questions of doctrine, so as to better appreciate the "thingness" and *thereness* of our flesh-and-blood existence. The vigilance and attention that follows from such ex-ecriation of imagination" (the term is Husserl's) is to believe, from what certain mystics have recognized

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to be a crucial preparatory moment for sacramental vision, calling it by such different names as "the cloud of unknowing" (Julian of Norwich), the "*docta ignorantia*" (Cusa), or, in Eastern mysticism, the "neti/neti"—neither this nor that—which paves the way for the highest wisdom of reality. True belief comes from nonbelief. Or, as Dostoyevsky put it, real "faith comes forth from the crucible of doubt." In the free variation of imagination, indispensable to the phenomenological method, as in all great works of fiction and art, everything is permissible. Nothing is excluded except exclusion. All is possible. By allowing us to attend to the sacramental marvel of the everyday without the constraints of any particular confession, Merleau-Ponty offers fresh insights into a eucharistic character of the sensible.

What pertains to Merleau-Ponty also, I will now suggest, pertains to the sacramental imagination in Joyce. Whether we are concerned in his work with an aesthetic religion or a religious aesthetic—or both—is something I wish to bear in mind throughout.

Joyce's Priesthood of the Imagination

Joyce invokes idioms of transubstantiation to describe the writing process. Already in the *Portrait* Stephen Dedalus describes himself as a "priest of the eternal imagination," transmuting the "bread of daily experience" in the "womb" of art. This is more than irony. Taking his cue from the sacramental operation of transubstantiation in its liturgical formulation, Joyce treats the transformative act of writing as the "advent of new signs and a new body."⁹ In a discussion with his brother Stanislaus, he has this to say: "Don't you think, said he reflectively, choosing his words without haste, there is a certain resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what I am trying to do? I mean that I am trying in my poems to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own."¹⁰ The act of life-text transfiguration is echoed at several key junctures within Joyce's texts. I have written elsewhere of the pivotal role of

Rumi and Ibn'Arabi. Indeed, I am also reminded here of the bold claim by Teilhard de Chardin that God does not direct the universe from above but underlies it and "prolongs himself" into it. But what Merleau-Ponty provides is a specific philosophical method—namely, a phenomenology of radical embodiment—to articulate this "nameless" phenomenon of sacramental flesh. And it is arguable that a number of recent phenomenologists have followed Merleau-Ponty's lead (or parallel path) when seeking to inventory the sacred dimensions of the flesh—I am thinking especially of Jean-Luc Marion's writings on the "flesh" as a saturated phenomenon in *On Excess*, or Jean-Louis Chrétien's phenomenological commentary on the Song of Songs.⁸ But Merleau-Ponty has the advantage, in my view, of not only being the first phenomenologist to explicitly identify the sacramental valence of the sensible but also maintaining a certain methodological agnosticism with regard to the theistic or atheistic implications of this phenomenon. Indeed, his philosophy of "ambiguity," as he liked to call it, is particularly well suited when it comes to interpreting the sacramental idioms of eucharistic epiphany in Joyce.

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to be a crucial preparatory moment for sacramental vision, calling it by such different names as "the cloud of unknowing" (Julian of Norwich), the "*docta ignorantia*" (Cusa), or, in Eastern mysticism, the "neti/neti"—neither this nor that—which paves the way for the highest wisdom of reality. True belief comes from nonbelief. Or, as Dostoyevsky put it, real "faith comes forth from the crucible of doubt." In the free variation of imagination, indispensable to the phenomenological method, as in all great works of fiction and art, everything is permissible. Nothing is excluded except exclusion. All is possible. By allowing us to attend to the sacramental marvel of the everyday without the constraints of any particular confession, Merleau-Ponty offers fresh insights into a eucharistic character of the sensible.

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“epiphanies” of repetition in *Ulysses* where Joyce treats a remembered event as both past (separated by time) and really present (regained miraculously in the epiphany of the moment).¹¹ And yet there is a deeply deconstructive lining to many of Joyce’s sacramental allusions. Indeed, *Ulysses* itself may be read as a series of anti-Eucharists or pseudo-Eucharists leading, I will suggest, to a final eucharistic epiphany at the close of Molly’s soliloquy.

Let’s start at the beginning. The novel opens, significantly, with Buck Mulligan’s mimicry of Mass on the turret of the Martello tower. He is carrying a shaving bowl for a chalice and mockingly intoning the liturgical *Introibo ad altare Dei*. Holding the sacrificial bowl, he addresses Stephen as a “Jesuit” before adopting a priestly tone: “For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine Christine: body and blood and soul and ouns. Slow music please. Shut your eyes, gents. One moment. A little trouble with those white corpuscles. Silence all.”¹² Mulligan’s black Mass is followed, in the fourth episode, by Bloom’s morning feast of fried kidneys, during the course of which, as Molly later recalls, he delivers himself of “jawbreakers about the incarnation” before burning the bottom of the pan! Later again in the novel we witness Stephen’s parodic Mass in Nighttown and Bloom and Stephen’s failed Mass over a cup of cocoa in the penultimate “Ithaca” chapter, not to mention the mock-allusions to transubstantiation in the “Oxen of the Sun” and “Scylla and Charybdis” episodes.

This series of pseudo-Eucharists may be read as a long *via negativa* which eventually opens up the space for the “kiss” of the seedcake on Howth Head in the final chapter. This “long kiss” between Molly and Bloom when they first went out, as recalled by Molly in her soliloquy, is redolent with sacramental associations. It could be said, for example, to reprise not only the “kisses of the mouth” celebrated by the Shulamite woman in the *Song of Songs* but also the eucharistic Passover of Judeo-Christian promise. Molly’s remembrance of the “long kiss” where she gave Bloom the “seedcake out of [her] mouth” might be thought of as a retrieval of a genuine eucharistic gift of love after the various deconstructions of failed or parodied Eucharists—and loves—recurring throughout the narrative. And it is this kiss which triggers

off—in true kairological fashion—the earlier memory of Molly’s first kiss as a young woman in Gibraltar: a first kiss which becomes the final kiss of the novel itself, climaxing in the famous lines: “how he kissed me under the Moorish wall . . . and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.”¹³ This kiss may, of course, also be read as an epiphanic repetition of the particular moment on 16 June 1904 when Joyce finally went out and found pleasure with Nora Barnacle: the day subsequently known as Bloomsday on which *Ulysses* is set. Nor should we forget that the closing chapter in which Molly remembers times past (and future) is, according to Joyce’s notes, dedicated to the “flesh” and that it crowns a narrative which Joyce described as his “epic of the body.”

In repeating a past moment, epiphany gives a future to the past. It somehow transubstantiates the empirical *thisness* of a particular lived event into something sacred and timeless.¹⁴ So when Molly recalls her first kiss as a young woman, she does so—tellingly—in the future tense! “Yes I *will* Yes.” And we might be tempted to suggest that Molly’s promissory “yes” here epitomizes Walter Benjamin’s intriguing notion of “messianic time” as an openness to “each moment of the future as a portal through which the Messiah may enter.” This is, in short, epiphany understood as a transfiguring of an ordinary moment of secular, profane time (*chronos*) into sacred or eschatological time (*kairos*).

It is also worth noting that epiphany, in its original scriptural sense, involved witnesses who came as strangers from afar. This could be read, in terms of a sacramental hermeneutics, as an event of textual openness to new, strange, and unprecedented meanings through the textual encounter between *author*, *narrator* and, above all, *reader*. Such a sacramental reading epitomizes the “desire to open writing to unforeseeable effects, in other words, to the Other. It is a function of a responsibility for the Other—for managing in writing a place for the Other, saying *yes* to the call or demand of the Other, inviting a

response.”¹⁵ And here we might recall Derrida’s invocation of Elijah (also a favorite figure for Leopold Bloom) as a messianic model of the reader: the unpredictable Other par excellence who calls the text forth and is called forth in turn by the text. This notion of *Ulysses* as an open textual invitation to “refiguration” in the reader finds confirmation in Joyce’s repeated appeal to the “ideal reader,” a gesture somewhat akin to Proust’s appeal to his future reader who would discover in his book the book of his or her own life. One of Joyce’s most telling appeals (on the penultimate page of *Finnegans Wake*, and anecdotally on his death-bed) is “Is there one who understands me?” In other words, both Joyce and Proust invoke the sacramental idiom of transubstantiation to convey the miracle of textual composition and reception. In both cases, we are confronted with a miracle of *repetition* that recalls the past forwards and explodes the chronology of time.¹⁶

But how are we to read these novelistic “repetitions,” in Kierkegaard’s sense of *repeating forward* rather than merely recollecting backward?¹⁷ What is the particular genre, idiom, or style which performs such gestures? To borrow a phrase from Joyce himself, we might call it “jocoserious.” For it is a way of celebrating the eternal in the moment by bringing us back to earth. Molly, for example, is a mock-heroic parody of the elevated and aristocratic Penelope. She repeats her Homeric prototype forward by opening up new modes of reinscription. One needs only to compare Molly’s all-too-mundane musings with the following description of Penelope in the last scene of Homer’s *Odyssey*: “So upright in disposition was Penelope the daughter of Icarius that she never forgot Odysseus the husband of her youth; and therefore shall the fame of her goodness be conserved in the splendid poem wherewith the Immortals shall celebrate the constancy of Penelope for all the dwellers upon earth.” This is a far cry from Molly’s final cry. Certainly Penelope could never say of her beloved what Molly says of hers—“as well him as another”! And yet it is typical of Joyce’s irony that in turning Homer’s epic heroism on its head, his characters curiously maintain the truth of the situation in a kind of creative repetition. Bloom is strangely blessed with his wife (however unfaithful) and does manage to defy his rivals (Boylan, the Citizen), however indirectly

and passively; Molly does not forget Bloom, and her ultimate affirmation is “celebrated” by many “dwellers upon earth”! In short, by transliterating Penelope and Odysseus into Molly and Bloom, Joyce performs a daring act of eucharistic comedy. And, in so doing, he proves his conviction that the “structure of heroism is a damned lie and that there cannot be any substitute for individual passion.”¹⁸

Molly’s rewriting of Penelope conforms to the basic features of comedy outlined by Aristotle and Bergson, namely the combining of more with less, of the metaphysical with the physical, of the heroic with the demotic, of Word with flesh—and we might add, bearing in mind a central motif of comedy, the combining of death with love. (Recall that the novel begins with a series of death and burial themes, lived or remembered—Stephen’s mother, the Blooms’ son, Paddy Dignam—and that it ends with a call to love: eros defying the sting of thanatos.) Molly’s ultimate passing from thanatos to eros is prefigured several times during her soliloquy, from fantasies of being buried (e.g., “well when Im stretched out dead in my grave then I suppose Ill have some peace I want to get up a minute if Im let wait O Jesus . . . O Jamsey let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin”) to the climactic cry of eschatological bliss: “yes I will Yes.”¹⁹ And it is surely significant that Molly herself is “full with seed” as she records her fantasy of death and rebirth, just as Bloom himself is described as a “manchild in the womb.”

In her final memory of the kiss, Molly echoes the Shulamite woman’s celebration of wild flora in the *Song of Songs* as she affirms that “we are all flowers all a womans body.” Indeed, the culminating Moorish and Mediterranean idioms of sensory ecstasy and excess are deeply redolent of the Shulamite’s Canticle—itsself styled after the Jewish-Babylonian nuptial poem or epithalamium. And this impression is amplified, I think, by the multiple allusions to seeds, trees, waters, and mountains and irresistible passions between men and women. “What else were we given all those desires for?” Molly asks. If there is something irreducibly humorous in this replay of the Song of Songs, there is something deeply serious too. As always in Joyce, the scatological and the eschatological rub shoulders—as do Greek and Jew, Molly and

Bloom, life and death. And they do so without ever succumbing to some totalizing synthesis. Joyce's comic transubstantiations do not amount to Hegelian sublations (*Aufhebungen*), in spite of Derrida's one-time suspicions.²⁰ Joyce keeps the dialectic open to the end, refusing the temptation of metaphysical closure. The eucharistic transformation of death and rebirth is carried out on earth. Word is always made flesh of our flesh.

Elsewhere I have written about the importance of epiphany in Joyce.²¹ Epiphanies imply Magi; I have suggested that the three Magi who bear witness to the textual epiphany of meaning are Stephen, Bloom, and Molly and that each reincarnates a seminal moment in the author's own life. But, as suggested above, the Magi may also be interpreted more textually as *author*, *actor*, and *reader*. Thus we might say that while (a) the lived action of Joyce's world "prefigures" the text and (b) the voice, style, and plot of the actors (Stephen-Bloom-Molly) "configure" the meaning in the text, it is (c) the reader who completes the narrative arc by serving as a third witness who "refigures" the world of the text in his or her return to lived experience. Our own world as readers may thus be said to be enlarged by the new meanings proposed by the text.

This triangular model of epiphany—celebrated in the sacrament of word-made-flesh—always implies a rebirth. It constitutes something of a miracle of meaning, the *impossible* being transfigured into the *newly possible*. And here we might invoke those famous biblical epiphanies when, for example, the three angels appear to Abraham to announce the conception of an "impossible" child (Isaac) to Sarah, or, in Christian literature, when the three Magi bear witness to the "impossible" child Jesus in Bethlehem, or, again, when the three persons of the Christian Trinity herald the birth of an "impossible" kingdom, as in Andrei Rublev's icon of the Blessed Trinity. Indeed, this last Rublev example—featuring the three persons of the Trinity seated around a eucharistic chalice—could be said to foreground the pivotal role of the free space (*chora*) at the center of the triadic epiphany. The movement of the three persons/angels/Magi around the still womb—which the patristic authors named *peri-choresis*, or the dance around the open

space—may be read, hermeneutically, as the creative encounter of *author/narrator/reader* in and around the locus of the word. This suggests, moreover, that the triadic model of epiphany always implies a fourth dimension—namely, *chora* understood as the space of advent for the new (Isaac, Jesus, Pleroma). Eucharistic epiphany might thus be said to signal a miracle of reversible semantic innovation: of flesh into word and of word into flesh.

That the witnessing of the three personas is usually met with a celebratory "yes" (Sarah's "laugh" in *Genesis* 17, Mary's "Amen" in the Gospels, Molly Bloom's final "yes I will Yes") is itself a significant illustration of how *kairological* time cuts across conventional time and opens up a surplus of possible meaning hitherto unsuspected and unknown. The epiphanic event may be seen, accordingly, as one which testifies simultaneously to the *event* of meaning (it is *already* here) as an *advent* always still to come (it is *not-yet* here). And in this wise it reenacts the Palestinian formula of the Passover/Eucharist which remembers a moment of saving while at the same time anticipating a future ("until he comes").²²

So I repeat: Molly's final cry blends and balances past and future tenses in a typically kairological way—"I *said* yes I *will* Yes." Her scatological memories of all-too-human eros are repeated forward to the rhythm of eschatological time. Word becomes flesh as flesh becomes word. The secular and sacramental traverse each other.

At the beginning of *Ulysses*, the question is asked, "What is God?," to which Stephen replies, "A cry in the street." Perhaps the cry is Molly's and the Street is Eccles Street?

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How do the phenomenological investigations of Merleau-Ponty and the literary explorations of James Joyce complement or supplement each other? What phenomenology and literature share is a suspension of our habitual presuppositions and prejudices regarding what is real. Phenomenology, taking its cue from its founding father, Husserl, calls for the "bracketing" (*epoché*) of the natural attitude, while literature,

following Coleridge, speaks of the “suspension of disbelief.” Merleau-Ponty subscribed to Husserl’s bold claim that the phenomenological method shares with art an essential access to the ultimate life of experience. This is how Husserl put it in a famous passage in *Ideas*: “If anyone loves a paradox, he can really say . . . that the element which makes up the life of phenomenology, as of all eidetical sciences, is ‘fiction,’ that fiction is the source whence the knowledge of ‘eternal truths’ draws its sustenance.”²³ Thus phenomenology may be said to radicalize Aristotle’s statement in his *Poetics* that art and drama reveal the “essential” truths of human existence whereas history merely deals with facts. One of the “essential” dimensions of such existence is what Merleau-Ponty—and other phenomenologists like Gaston Bachelard, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Michel Henry—refer to as the sacred or sacramental: the disclosure of the ultimate in the ordinary, of the universal in the singular, of the “eternal” (in Husserl’s sense) in time. Even the ostensibly atheistic Heidegger saw phenomenological thinking and poetic thinking as close allies in their shared attention to the “sacred” (*das Heilige*).

The intimate affinity between phenomenology and fiction no doubt helps explain why Merleau-Ponty so frequently invokes the evidence of writers like Proust and Stendhal and of painters like Cézanne and Klee. He recognized that the “as if” perspective of the imaginary was, in fact, an indispensable path to the invisible depths of the visible—a position echoed by Paul Ricoeur when he speaks of narrative imagination as a “laboratory of possibilities” which reveal fundamental truths of being inaccessible to our habitual modes of so-called “naturalist” perception. Although Merleau-Ponty does not, to my knowledge, refer to Joyce explicitly, in his published work, I have proposed in my dual analysis above that there are profound analogies and supplementary insights in their respective approaches to the “eucharistic” metaphor of existence. Merleau-Ponty refers to the “little miracles” of Proust, while Joyce speaks of “epiphanies” of the “silver womb of imagination.” Both, in their different ways—one philosophical, the other poetic—provide privileged portals to the hidden truths of the real.

Notes

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 246. I am grateful to John Manoussakis for this reference. See his extended discussion of this theme in *God after Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
3. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 139.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *Continental Aesthetics*, ed. R. Kearney and D. Rasmussen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 292, 303.
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 64, emphasis added.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
8. See also Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), and Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics*. Nor should we omit reference here to Gabriel Marcel’s intriguing philosophical reflections on incarnation and embodiment, which exerted a considerable influence on the “religious” phenomenological writings of Ricoeur and Levinas.
9. See J. Kristeva, “Joyce the Gracehoper,” in *New Maladies of the Soul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 172–78. See in particular her opening statement, p. 173: “Joyce’s Catholicism, which consisted of his profound experience with Trinitarian religion as well as his mockery of it, impelled him to contemplate its central ritual—the *Eucharist*—which is the ritual par excellence of identification with God’s body and a springboard for all other identifications, including that of artistic profusion. This ritual is also prescribed by the Catholic Faith. It is likely that the cultural context of Catholicism—which Joyce had completely assimilated—was challenged by a biographical event that endangered his identity and enabled him to focus his writing on the identificatory substratum of psychic functioning, which he masterfully laid out against the backdrop of the grandest religion.” And she goes on, p. 174: “The obsession that Joyce the ‘Gracehoper’ had with the Eucharist theme is exemplified by his many references to transubstantiation or to Arius’ heresy, to the consubstantiality between father and son in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and between Shakespeare, his father, his son Hamnet, as well as to Shakespeare’s complete works in the sense of a veritable source of

inspiration. Let us recall, moreover, the condensation of 'trinity' and 'transubstantiation' in Joyce's umbrella word 'contransmagnificandjewbangtantiati-ality.'" Pointing out that Joyce had read both Freud and Jung by 1915, Kristeva offers many intriguing psychoanalytic readings of Joyce's eucharistic aesthetic, including the following: "In this way can Dedalus-Bloom achieve the plenitude of his text-body, and thus release his text to us as though it was his body, his transubstantiation. The narrator seems to say, 'This is my body,' and we know that he sometimes identifies with HCE in *Finnegans Wake*. As for the reader, he assimilates the true presence of a complex male sexuality through textual signs and without any repression. This is a prerequisite for enigmatic sublimation: the text, which restrains but does not repress libido, thereby exercises its cathartic function upon the reader. Everything is to be seen and all the places are available; nothing is lacking and nothing is hidden that could not indeed be present" (pp. 176–77). Other informative treatments of Joyce's sacramental aesthetic include William Noon, *Joyce and Aquinas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957); Robert Boyle, *James Joyce's Pauline Vision: A Catholic Exposition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); and J.-L. Houdebine, "Joyce, littérature et religion," in *Excès de langage* (New York: Denoel, 1984). Although Stephen Dedalus rejects the Eucharist of Jesus for the art of Icarus early in *A Portrait*, later in the novel he revisits an aesthetic of the sacred in his reading of Thomistic radiance (*claritas*): "The supreme quality is felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. . . . The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani . . . called the enchantment of the heart" (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [New York: Penguin, 1992], p. 231). It is typical of Joyce's incarnational aesthetic to link Aquinas' transcendental category of beauty here with the more physiological category of heart and flesh. Tellingly, we read in the concluding lines of *A Portrait* of the wish that Stephen "may learn in [his] own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. So be it. Welcome, O life!" (p. 275).

10. Conversation with Joyce recorded in Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), pp. 103–4.

11. See Richard Kearney, "Joyce: Epiphanies and Triangles," in *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays, 1976–2006* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2006), pp. 131–49, and "Traversing the Imaginary: Epiphanies in Joyce and Proust," in

Traversing the Imaginary: Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge, ed. Peter Gratton and John Manoussakis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007). On epiphany in Joyce, see also George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 112. On parodied, failed, or deconstructed Eucharists in Joyce's stories—"Sisters," "Clay," and "The Dead"—see the work of theologian Joseph O'Leary, e.g., "Enclosed Spaces in 'The Dead,'" *English Literature and Language* (University of Sophia, Tokyo) 34 (1997): 33–52.

12. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 3 (1.21–23).

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 643–44 (18.1604–9). On the subject of the eschatological kiss, see also my comparison between Molly and the Bride of the Song of Songs in "The Shulammitte's Song: Divine Eros, Ascending and Descending," in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). One might also compare and contrast this kiss with another moment of recollected love in Joyce's story "The Dead," where Gretta recalls her kiss with Michael Furey, her first love: a scene that is also associated with a sacramental feast, celebrating the Incarnation of the Word at Christmas.

14. See my discussion of Joyce's proximity to Duns Scotus' notions of *haecceitas* (thisness) and *ensarkosis* (the ongoing enfleshment of the divine in the world) in "Joyce: Epiphanies and Triangles," in Kearney, *Navigations*, pp. 133–36.

15. Rudolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 230. Gasché is here elaborating on Derrida's reading of Joyce in "Ulysses Gramophone," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992).

16. On this later point, see Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 3–22. For a eucharistic hermeneutics of reading, see also Valentine Cunningham, *Reading after Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 148–49: "Here is a body of text and the text as body, the body of the other, the text as other, to be consumed, ingested, in a memorial act, an act of testimony, of worldly witness. . . . In holy communion the believer is blessed and graced, signed as Christ's own, marked as sanctified. In reading on this [eucharistic model], the reader is, in some way or another, also graced, blessed, marked as the text's own."

17. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).

18. In a letter to his brother Stanislaus in 1905, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 54. Earlier in the letter Joyce had asked, "Do you not think the search for heroics damn vulgar?" (p. 53).

19. Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 632–33 (18.1103–4, 1128–29) and p. 643 (18.1608–9).

20. Derrida offers a useful gloss on the language of Molly/Penelope in an intriguing footnote to his commentary on the relationship between Greek and Jew in Emmanuel Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 320–21. Commenting on a phrase in *Ulysses*—"Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet"—Derrida not only attributes this to "woman's reason," as in Joyce's text but also identifies Joyce here as "perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists" (p. 153). The implication here seems to be that the discourse of "feminine logic," associated with Molly/Penelope, is one which, for Levinas at least, suggests an "ontological category" of return and closure: namely, Ulysses returning to Penelope in Ithaca, Stephen and Bloom returning to Molly in Eccles Street, where they may find themselves "atoned" as father-son, jew-greek, greek-jew, et cetera. It is not quite clear where Derrida himself stands toward Joyce in this early 1964 text, though it is evident that he thinks Levinas would repudiate the Joycean formula as overly Hegelian and Greek (that is, not sufficiently respectful of the strictly Jewish/messianic/eschatological need for a radically asymmetrical relation of self and other). In his later essay "Ulysses Gramophone," first delivered as a lecture to the International Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt in 1984, he makes it clear that the "yes" of Molly/Penelope marks an opening of the text beyond totality and closure to an infinite and infinitely recurring "other" (*Ulysse gramophone: Deux mots sur Joyce* [Paris: Galilée, 1987]). Even if it is a response to oneself, in interior dialogue, "yes" always involves a relay through an other. Or, as Derrida cleverly puts it, *oui-dire*, saying yes, always involves some form of *oui-dire* or hearsay: "A yes never comes alone, and we never say this word alone" (p. 300). With this relay of self through the other, this willing of yes to say yes again, "this differing and deferring, this necessary failure of total self-identity, comes spacing (space and time), gramophonizing (writing and speech), memory" (p. 254). And this "other" clearly implies a reaching beyond the text of *Ulysses* itself to the listener, the reader, an open call for our response.

In this sense we would say that *Ulysses* is a deeply anti-Hegelian book. Molly's finale represents, not some great teleological reconciliation of contra-

dictions in some absolute synthesis of Spirit, but an ongoing affirmation of paradoxes, struggles, contraries, contingencies, spoken in a spirit of humor and desire. "What else were we given all those desires for?," asks the polymorphously perverse Molly, a far cry from the Hegelian triumph of Identity. We may conclude, therefore, that the story of struggle and trouble does not end when Stephen follows Bloom out of the library, it only begins. And by the same token, Molly, when she finally arrives, does not put paid to Trinities as such but simply reintroduces us—along with Stephen and Bloom—to another kind of trinity, one without a capital T and more inclusive of time, movement, natality, and desire (all those things banned from the Sabellian Trinity of self-enclosed Identity parodied by Stephen in the National Library scene)—and, one might add, more inclusive of the reader. For like any epiphany, Molly's too calls out to an open future of readers.

21. See Kearney, "Traversing the Imaginary."

22. See my discussion of the eschatological temporality of the Palestinian formula in both Judaic and Christian messianism in "Enabling God," in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), as well as "Hermeneutics of the Possible God," in *Givenness and God*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). My own sketch of microeschatological possibility, temporality, and carnality is powerfully articulated in Denise Levertov's poem "The Annunciation," especially in these lines: "The engendering Spirit / did not enter her without consent / God waited," offering her the "astounding ministry . . . to bear in her womb / Infinite weight and lightness; to carry / in hidden, finite inwardness, / nine months of Eternity; to contain / in slender vase of being, / the sum of power— / in narrow flesh, / the sum of light. / Then bring to birth, / push out into air, a Man-child / needing, like any other, / milk and love—" (Denise Levertov, *Selected Poems* [New York: New Directions, 1969], pp. 162–63). Mother Teresa of Calcutta expresses a similar sentiment when she writes of the same reversibility of eucharistic giving: "In each of our lives Jesus comes as the Bread of Life—to be eaten, to be consumed by us. That is how he loves us. He also came as the Hungry One, hoping to be fed with the bread of our life, with our hearts that love and our hands that serve." *Total Surrender*, ed. Brother Angelo Devananda (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1985), p. 26. See also these lines by Yves Bonnefoy, "L'ange qui est la terre / Va dans chaque buisson et paraître et brûler." (I am grateful to Anne Davenport for this reference.)

23. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas* (New York: Collier, 1962), pp. 200–201.