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The Reinterpretation of Cézanne's the Large Bathers through James Joyce's Aesthetic Theory

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Abstract

This article assesses Paul Cézanne's modern style and technique in his The Large Bathers, but in light of James Joyce?s aesthetic theory that was his early pronouncements on beauty, goodness and truth, influenced by the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Cézanne's impressionistic art, together with his progressive style and method are all crystallized in the Large Bathers, making it too controversial a painting to analyze. Significantly, Joyce and Cézanne's works demonstrate a mastery of design, color, composition and draftsmanship, and that has made them both to be considered as forerunners of modern art and literature. Therefore, studying Cézanne?s thick layers of paint and undefined forms through the aesthetic theory of the controversial Irish writer leads us to a significant sense of ?aesthetic arrest? which both artists attempted to follow and epiphanize in their works.

Index terms— aesthetics, impressionism, modernism, cézanne, james joyce.
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I.

2 Joyce's Aesthetic Theory: Artistic Perceptions

The evolution of Joyce's aesthetic theories, rooted in Aquinas and Aristotle, can be traced from what he put in his Paris notebooks which initially formed Stephen Hero and finally formulated A Portrait. It was in November 1904, as Richard **??**llmann (196) writes, that Joyce came up with some new sections to add up to his aesthetic philosophy. He dealt with the role of morality in the creation of beauty. Joyce had this sentence by Thomas Aquinas in mind, "The good is that towards the possession of which an appetite tends." Joyce believed that since the good and the true and the beautiful are desirable, then the true and the beautiful are good as well. Though art is neither immoral nor amoral, it aims to transcend the conventional morality. "[Art's] purposes so far transcend conventional morality that it is better to regard the good as by-product of the pursuit of the true and the beautiful" **??**Ellmann 197).

Joyce also cherishes another sentence from Aquinas saying those things "are beautiful the apprehension of which pleases" (A Portrait 207); therefore, no matter if what beauty includes is considered ugly. The apprehension of a work of beauty consists of three parts: it has to be perceived, then recognized, and then it has to maintain satisfaction on its observer. This is an introduction to the theory which Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's agent, cultivates and develops in A Portrait. There, Joyce corresponds these three stages of apprehension to the three aspects of beauty clamed by Aquinas as integritas (wholeness), consonantia (harmony), and claritas (radiance).

Let me shed more light on this tripartite process quoting from A Portrait. The mental separation of the object from the non-object consequently leads to wholeness.

In order to see [a] basket your mind first of all separates the basket from the rest of the visible universe which is not basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended. An esthetic image is presented to us either in space or in time?temporal or spatial the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it. You apprehend it as one thing. You see it as one whole. That is integritas (A Portrait 212).

The perception of the relation of part to part is nothing but the harmony.

Then you pass from point to point, led by its formal lines; you apprehend it as balanced part against part within its limits; you feel the rhythm of the structure?Having first felt that it is one thing you feel now that it is a thing. You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made of its parts, the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious. That is consonantia (A Portrait 212).

The radiance of the object can be realized finally. Stephen continues.

When you have apprehended the basket as one thing and have then analysed it according to its form and apprehended it as a thing you make the only synthesis which is logically and esthetically permissible. You see that it is that thing which is and no other thing. The radiance of which [Aquinas] speaks is the scholastic quidditas, the whatness of a thing. 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 ( ) A luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its whole ness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure?the enchantment of the heart. (A Portrait 213)

In A Portrait, Stephen also talks about two types of arts: proper and improper. Improper art is kinetic exciting only feelings of desire and loathing. Proper art is static inviting contemplation. "The esthetic emotion is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing." (A Portrait 205) The desire and loathing that are kindled by improper art are unaesthetic mainly because they are basically physical. Beauty cannot awaken such purely physical sensations; on the contrary, it includes "an [aesthetic] stasis." What is art then? Stephen believes that "Art is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an esthetic end" (A Portrait 207). That is the truth that all people cannot admire the same object as beautiful, but if they all tend to be attracted to a beautiful object, each and every one of them has his own aesthetic apprehension in doing so. "The relations of the sensible, visible to you through one form and to me through another, must be therefore necessary qualities of beauty," continues Stephen (A Portrait 209).

There are also three modes of or forms of arts according to Joyce's theory: the lyrical, in which the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; the epical, in which he presents his image in immediate relation to himself and others; the dramatic wherein he presents his image in immediate relation to others.

The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion. The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself?The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak?The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails [Italics mine] (A Portrait 214-15).

Well, as Ryf (108) believes, "To Joyce lyric, epic, and dramatic seem to be less genres and more states of mind." Such states of mind are subject to fluctuations.

As a matter of fact, the "interrupted pulsations" of lyric, epic, and dramatic run through all Joyce's major works.

3 II.

Paul Cézanne: the Ambiguity of Perceptions Paul Cézanne's work laid the foundations of the transition from the 19th century conception of artistic endeavor to a new and radically different world of art in the 20th century. Cézanne is believed to form the bridge between late 19th century Impressionism and the early 20th century's new lines of artistic enquiry, namely Post-Impressionism and Cubism. Both Picasso and Matisse claimed that Cézanne "is the father of us all"; one should not take the statement easy.

Cézanne's work demonstrates a mastery of design, color, composition and draftsmanship. His often repetitive, sensitive and exploratory brushstrokes are highly characteristic and clearly recognizable. He used planes of color

and small brushstrokes that build up to form complex fields, at once both a direct expression of the sensations of the observing eye and an abstraction from observed nature. The paintings convey Cézanne's intense study of his subjects, a searching gaze and a resolute struggle to deal with the complexity of human visual perception. Paul Cézanne set out to restore a sense of order and structure to painting, to make of Impressionism something solid and durable, like the art of the museums. He achieved this by reducing objects to their basic shapes while retaining the bright fresh colors of Impressionism. Like most Post-Impressionists, Cézanne extended Impressionism while rejecting its limitations: he continued using vivid colors, thick application of paint, distinctive brush strokes, and reallife subject matter, but they were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, to distort form for expressive effect, and to use unnatural or arbitrary color. That is why Cézanne's work tends to add ambiguity to the observers' perceptions.

Merleau-Ponty, in the "Eye and Mind", says, "Painting awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself, for to see is to have at a distance." He continues.

The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognizes in what it sees, the "other" side of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing?it is visible and sensitive for itself. (qtd Brodsky 129) Marjorie Grene also argues that What the painter gives us is not just things-there but things-to-be-seen, and after seer-seeing, engaged in the effort to see, to evoke on canvas a kind of quintessence, for the viewer, of visibility. (qtd Brodsky 129)

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ambiguity of perceptions rests at the heart of Cézanne's task being its essence. Such a dilemma of perception can be a metaphor for modern man's way of being in the world; Cézanne's paintings record artistically that tension. We should not call this alienation or despair; it is a description of the ways one may confront nature, or things, or human beings.

Cézanne's art, as said before, is basically different from the work of the Impressionists. His art was rooted in his personal response to nature. He once said, "I paint as I see, as I feel -and I have very strong sensations" **??**Bomford, **??**t al 196). Cézanne could not be satisfied by mere imitation of nature; on the contrary, he was seeking a kind of balance between perceptual experience and individual temperament, between seeing and feeling. By using subtle nuances and combinations of color to suggest form and atmosphere, Cézanne realized that he could 'represent' rather than 'imitate', for example, the effects of sunlight, creating a harmony parallel to nature. Cézanne agreed that nature could only be expressed not imitated, that the multitude of unfolding impressions before nature called for a form of painting that is somehow responsive to these qualities.

Impressionists esteemed the static center of Renaissance scientific perspective, and the exclusive methods of optical color sensation; Cézanne denied it all. He was concerned with developing those frames and genres formulated by the Greeks and Romans reborn and amplified from then on. These conventions are rooted in the tensions between perception and conception and "they have been expressed in the western tradition namely by tonal color to suggest sculptural solidity, by rendering observed objects by means of the contour lines, and by constructing spatial complexities" (Brodsky 132). All this results in an order forming a system before the eyes of the observer so that he can believe he perceives the real.

4 III.

5 Cézanne's Nude Paintings: the Bathers

Nude painting was a genre mostly favored by Cézanne. He transformed the mythological gods and goddesses into numerous drawings, watercolors, lithographs, and oils of nude male and female bathers in the landscape. These gods of the classical mythology represent forces of nature in human guise. Cézanne's bathers are both part of and separate from nature. He structures the landscape in a way that it can respond to human order and the dialogue can continue. Cézanne controls the carnality of his figures to emphasize order, and order is established repeatedly in tradition through geometrical construction. Above all, in the large late bathers, Cézanne controls the whole composition, figures as well as trees, by forming them into a 'triangle' or 'pyramid' placed directly in the center of the panel. Other forms of geometric stability can also be found in all different media he used for his bathers in landscape. Erle Loran (qtd Brodsky 133) has discovered that linear geometry is at the heart of much of Cézanne's construction.

Cézanne's late nude, including the bathers, can be seen as a project of synthesis -of hues and colors. Contrary to existing views, Cézanne believed that form becomes strong where the color is strongest, so he tried to reduce as far as possible the role line played in conveying the structure of his paintings. In fact, Cézanne sought the reconciliation of Impressionism with the tradition of the nude. John Kear believes that "the elliptical features, the schematic, mask-like faces, illproportioned bodies, and ungainly poses of Cézanne's nudes, and the cursory delineation of the signs of gender which often result in an equivocation about their sex, point to how far removed these works are from the sensual feminine nudes of his contemporaries" (351).

Well, it has often been mentioned that Cézanne's bathers are not erotic, unlike most of his contemporaries'. Cézanne was primarily interested in the structural relationship between the many figures and the landscape. He was fully aware of the threedimensional world. Cézanne's bathers represent the full plasticity of the three-dimensional world of bodies in nature, both in addressing the single figure and in collecting the many poses. Although Cézanne learned to use the warm/bright and cool/gray properties of color to vivify the experience of nature, he was a modeler and used dark and light properties of color to make things round and solid. Brodsky

(141) says that Cézanne's "bathers are paradigmatic of the genre of the nude in the landscape because the intrinsic meaning of that genre is in imagining abundance and plentitude."

The Large Bathers

The Large Bathers (1899-1906) At first glance, Paul Cézanne's depiction of a gathering of female bathers may appear to be little more than an illustration of his adroit use of pose to portray an idyllic and beautiful scene. Painted towards the end of his life between 1899 and 1906, Cézanne's The Large ( ) Bathers may seem designed to carefully integrate the poses of nude female figures within a natural setting to impart a pleasant and serene aura. Unlike Cézanne's earlier works that incorporate a blatantly brutal eroticism, this painting shows delightful women playing on the riverbank who have nothing erotic about them. This idea about Cézanne's The Large Bathers is in agreement with the comments of most critics, who not only see Cézanne's female bathers as displaying "happiness and harmony" but also allude to a transformation in Cézanne's female nudes after about 1880. Moreover, Cézanne, himself, in a letter written about the same time he painted the bathers, insisted that his major goal during this time was to "create as rich a harmony as possible." For Cézanne, the bather paintings were his way of presenting an enthralling fusion of nature and women that would captivate the eye and please the viewer.

Cézanne had a great respect, as mentioned before, for the Classical painters of the Arcadian Idylls who sought to unite man and nature in perfect harmony. Such unity and harmony reach their zenith in The Large Bathers. The complicated color combination and the pale background of the paper create a very subtle composition. The two groups of bathers on either side of the picture are not isolated from each other; they are enclosed by a natural stage, and linked together by spots of sunlight filtering through the leaves on the trees. Ulrike Becks-Malorney (87) believes that "the isolated figure in the bottom center of the picture is reminiscent (but a mirror image) of the prostitute in Cézanne's The Eternal Feminine (1875-1877), so could it be a memory of the confused sensuality of his early nudes?

The Eternal Feminine (1875-1877)

The women in The Large Bathers are anonymous creatures, with no personality or expression. They are archetypes: to the artist, their form is more important than their individuality. Cézanne was primarily interested in the composition as a whole, the harmony between the figures and the nature, and between form and color. It can be noticed that Cézanne has focused on the shimmering leaves, but on the trunks which bear the weight of the trees forming a triangle. These create a framework which is both static and dynamic. The figures are also aligned in the same way as the trees. This is most apparent in the female figure on the far left whose upper body and left leg are inclined at exactly the same angle as the tree trunk. However, the contours and arms of other figures also echo the geometry of the framework.

The women also seem to be self-absorbed: they exist only for themselves. In the background, one can see a line of trees and two brightly lit figures on the other side of the river bank. Only the left-hand of the two figures at the center of the composition is apparent. It is man standing with his arms folded looking across the river at the women. Some critics believe that this faceless figure is the painter himself: Cézanne, standing beneath the protecting church tower, keeps looking at the scene of happiness and harmony from an unbridgeable distance, denying himself any place in this harmony.

It was said that women in this painting are anonymous creatures. By depicting them so crudely, and not making clear what they are doing, Cézanne has stripped them of their individuality and rendered them timeless. They are abstract beings that are re-created for artistic ends. Their incompleteness and lack of clear purpose challenge the established myths of the nineteenth century art. They paved the way for a new form of art in which composition, color, and form predominate. Cézanne's art follow only its only inherent rules.

IV. James Joyce and Paul Cézanne: from Aesthetics to Perceptions

After weighing the pros and cons of Joyce's and Cézanne's artistic concerns and aesthetics, what I will try to convey in this section is to show that a thorough examination of Cézanne's The Large Bathers appears to correlate remarkably with the aesthetic ideas of James Joyce. Both Joyce and Cézanne are considered the forerunners of Modernism in art and literature; it seems highly appropriate that James Joyce lived in Europe during the time of Cézanne, Gauguin, and Matisse, and knew Cézanne or saw his work. Throughout Dubliners, he sketches his characters in a style that could be characterized as Post-Impressionist. Joyce does not outline smoothly or delineate clearly every feature of his characters; instead, he concentrates on hinting at the emotional meanings of his depictions with a rich thick touch of paint here and there. Although Joyce warms up his descriptive muscles in the short story "Eveline", he leaves much to the imagination of the reader through calculated omissions and suggestive phrases.

6 ( )

A Back to Joyce's idea concerning 'beauty', we have to bear in mind again the three concepts of 'wholeness', 'harmony', and 'radiance'. Examining Cézanne's The Large Bathers carefully, we can find these qualities radiantly applied. The composition of the painting yields beautifully to harmony -part to part as well as part to whole. There are fourteen bathing figures that form two groups in various positions busy with different types of activity. One can observe that a great triangle, formed by tree trunks and bathers, arch over them while the pyramid-like trees seem to protect such monumental non-human figures. The combination and composition of the colors convey harmony as well: there are rhyming strokes of yellowish-browns, greens, and blues emphasized by the

shining whiteness of the unfinished canvas. The harmony perceived by the eye is a symbolic harmony between man and nature, and the real versus the imaginary.

Where does such a harmony lead to? When the observer's mind is captured by such integrated patterns of harmony, a sense of wholeness is appreciated. The painting can be seen as autonomous. Taken out of time and space, art seems self-sufficient now. Nobody seemingly has an idea who these anonymous and androgynous bathers are and what they are doing, neither does anyone know what time of the day it is for sure. With regard to Joyce's aesthetics, all that is significant about this painting is that it stands as autonomous and self-sufficient far from what its color may represent. The same applies to Finnegans Wake (or even Ulysses) where an ocean of words and puns and neologisms refers to something while as a whole the book itself, viewed as a work of art, stays away from all that suggesting a harmonic whole. As Ryf (111) believes, while reading A Portrait, wholeness or unity is achieved by the reader when his mind "draws a line or boundary" around the book and separates it from its background of time and space. To put it in other words, wholeness is achieved when the mind takes the book out of time and space and perceives it as an aesthetic object: as art, not life.

Wholeness and harmony contribute naturally to the third quality: radiance. Radiance pervades Joyce's works and it can be also felt in Cézanne's painting. Joyce's works are essentially circular, rhythmic, and harmonious all radiating the 'whatness' that refers back to itself and also to something mysterious beyond our understanding. Cézanne's idea that the artist creates "a harmony parallel with nature" indicates his conviction that this harmony must be formed from the elements entering into his work. His primary concern is to achieve color harmonies, although his interest in color relationships differs from the autonomy of color later championed by formalist critics. Instead, his color harmonies express a self-conscious interpretation of nature, which he learns to read in code. **??**ilmour (194) refers to a sentence by Cézanne, "to read nature is to see it, as if through a veil, in terms of an interpretation in patches of color following one another according to a law of harmony. These major hues are thus analyzed through modulations. Painting is classifying one's sensations of color." Cézanne interprets reality through "patches of color," but also through "the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone." And it is no different from Joyce's canon that are circular, rhythmic, and harmonious signifying with radiance.

Such a progression to a transpersonal consciousness in art makes us consider another preoccupation of Joyce discussed in the first part of this paper -three modes of artistic expression defined as the lyric, the epic, and the dramatic. Apparently, the lyric mode of expression dominates the early works of most of the great artists and writers; then through time and experience they gain maturity and progress towards more universal and dramatic form. Both Joyce and Cézanne have gone through this process.

The lyrical mode, in which the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself, is obvious in A Portrait (even in Dubliners). The Byron-worshipper and father-denier Joyce/Stephen's arrogance and egocentricity are obviously reflected in the novel. We reach the epical mode in Ulysses, in which the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself and others; Stephen is now disillusioned, fallen after his first attempt to rise and fly from the three nets of religion, language, and country. Now his identity and concerns are inevitably touched by encountering the father-figure Leopold Bloom and the arch-enemy Buck Mulligan. Eventually, the dramatic form of art in Joyce's career is believed to be occupied by Finnegans Wake: The dramatic mode wherein Joyce presents his (protagonist) image in immediate relation to others. At one end stand Earwicker and his family, and at the other end stand the whole universe. Here is where Joyce/artist "like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." (A Portrait 214-15)

We can study such a progression of style in Cézanne too. His early paintings are occupied with a predilection for violent and erotic subject matters which he rendered in forceful agitated manner with strong contrasts of light and dark. The second phase of his career began in mid-1860s when he became more interested in outdoor paintings. His themes became less personal often depicting still lifes or human subjects stripped of their personal attributes. It was in late 1870s and early 1880s that he started to impose more control on the spontaneity of his paintings. His art became a wholly pictorial one as he attempted to create an art that was a harmony parallel to nature, and which applies best to Finnegans Wake that encompasses all the universe contains, yet seems to return to itself repeatedly. He has endeavored to represent the harmonic complexities he observed in nature as color ( ) A relationships in his works; that was his lifelong obsession. His continuing interest in imaginary figure scenes found an outlet in large bathing compositions finally.

When reaching the end of Cézanne's artistic career which is concluded with the "Large Bathers", figures become less realistic as their androgynous bodies merge and blend into each other and all conventional modes of perspective and modeling are abandoned; just as the characters and the language get metamorphosed in Finnegans Wake and the conventional mode of the narrative seems disabled. But what brings Cézanne closer to Joyce is the fact that his works are tied to his native Province, just as Joyce's works remain significantly tied to Dublin. The man standing with his arms folded looking across the river at the women, who was said to be the painter himself, once again reminds us of Joyce/artist who stands far beyond his work "paring his fingernails".

In conclusion, we can say that both artists' gradually-achieved maturity led to the creation of remarkable works that powerfully evoke the phenomenon of aesthetic arrest and radiance. The personalities of the artists vanish through the highly dramatic modes of expression leaving the gift of their work behind. The art of both Joyce and Cézanne proves that a major work of art is as much about the viewer and the reader as it is of the creator. That is called the universality of art; everyone can be involved in the appreciation of the work of art

according to his own way of perception. So, as the work of art unfolds to everyone a different kind of meaning, they can be the re-creator or re-producer of the artistic work. But as Ryf believes, levels of meaning are not as important as the levels of perception (on the part of the observers of course). "The work of literature is all there, all the time. There are no levels of meaning as such. There are rather, levels of awareness on the part of the reader" (Ryf 13). [1]

Figure 1: The

[Ellmann and Joyce ()] , Richard James Ellmann , Joyce . 1959. New York: Oxford University Press.

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