

xxv, 294–295.

- 20 See François Annat, *Le libelle intitulé: Théologie morale des jésuites, contredit et convainçu en tous ses chefs, par un Père théologien de la Compagnie de Jésus*. 3^e édition (Paris: chez Henault, 1644; Cahors, 1648). [BJB 2297].
- 21 Speculation is that it was Philip of the Holy Trinity (1603–1671).
- 22 "Censura Tolosana" [Franciscus Annatus], in ACDF, *Censor Librorum* 1641–1654, File #13, 16 May 1646.
- 23 Paris: S. Cramoisy et S. Mabre-Cramoisy, 1666. 3 vols.[BJB 2318].
- 24 Margaret Harper McCarthy, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Predestination." S.T.D. diss., The Lateran University, 1994. Unpublished.
- 25 See for example Deely's "The Semiotic of John Poinset: Yesterday and Tomorrow," *Semiotica* 69. 1/2 (April 1988): 31–127.
- 26 Lyon: Aubier, 1965.
- 27 *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome* 44 (1974): 111–126. Reprinted in *Jansenistica Minora*, vol.12.
- 28 *Antonianum* 50 (1975): 483–529. Reprinted in *Jansenistica Minora*, vol.13

The Aesthetic: James Joyce and Wittgenstein

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Any reader of Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* with the slightest interest in beauty, the arts and literature must remember the conversation between Stephen Dedalus and the fatuous fathead, Lynch, on aesthetics, with special reference to the definition of beauty by St Thomas Aquinas. In this short piece I shall compare Stephen's interpretation of Aquinas's definition and succinct analysis with some notes on the aesthetic from Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914–1916*.

Aquinas's definition - *Pulchra sunt quae visa placent* - defies elegant direct translation. Literally it means 'Those things are

beautiful which give pleasure [merely on being] seen'. Joyce's translation (which involves interpretation) is as good as any: 'that is beautiful the apprehension of which pleases'. He expands the notion of *visa* from the visual to, as he (Stephen/Joyce) puts it: 'aesthetic apprehensions of all kinds, whether through sight or hearing or through any other avenue of apprehension.' This would include the beauty of floral smells, the taste of fruit, the taste of an imaginative cuisine, the feel of a hot bath in winter or a cool pool in summer. In Joyce's view all these would be, on his interpretation of Aquinas, aesthetic apprehensions.¹

There follows a good deal about aesthetics which is Joyce's own. Then he returns to Aquinas and his threefold analysis of beauty: *Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur: integritas, consonantia, claritas*.² This Joyce translates for his own purposes as: 'Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony and radiance.'³ In his original and personal interpretation—none the worse for the that—Stephen draws Lynch's attention to a basket which a butcher's boy 'had slung inverted on his head'!

In order to see the basket, said Stephen, your mind first of all separates the basket from the rest of the visible universe which is not the basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended.. [T]emporal or spatial, the aesthetic image is first luminously apprehended as self-bounded and self-contained upon the immeasurable background of space and time which it is not. You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*.⁴

As William T. Noon, S.J. has pointed out in his book, *Joyce and Aquinas*, Joyce/Stephen's interpretation differs from Aquinas's in two respects: first it is subjective and psychological whereas the terms *integritas*, *consonantia* and *claritas*, as used by Aquinas, refer to objective features of beautiful objects; secondly, Joyce regards these three objective features as stages on a progressive apprehension of the beautiful, culminating in *claritas*.⁵ Indeed, Noon deals Joyce (we may drop the fictitious Stephen) the ultimate insult by referring to him as Cartesian (p.44).

None of this need concern us (but it should be noted). We are not dealing here with a Thomist interpretation of Thomas. Joyce calls it 'applied' Thomism, but it is hardly even that. It is a modern aesthetic of Joyce's own invention built on a Thomist scaffolding. Take the elements of the analysis: (1) your *mind* separates the

basket from the rest of the visible universe; (2) a boundary line about the object is apprehended; (3) the aesthetic image (sic), whether visual or audial, is apprehended as self-bounded and self-contained; (4) this upon the immeasurable background of space and time that it is not; (5) it is seen as one thing; (6) as one whole; (7) its wholeness is apprehended.

With the possible exception of (7) none of this is Aquinas, though he would, doubtless, accept it. For him, integrity is wholeness, not apprehended wholeness, though, if the object is apprehended as beautiful, its wholeness *will be apprehended too*. All the rest is modern aesthetics. Yet it is modern aesthetics which, in spite its subjective approach, is compatible with the views of Aquinas on aesthetics, limited though they are (though rich). However, it is not with Aquinas that we are mainly concerned here, but with Wittgenstein.

Towards the end of *Notebooks 1914–1916* and of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein discusses value—ethics, aesthetics and God. Although the subject takes up a very small part of either book it is arguable that it is what they are both about—but this is not the place to argue this point. Very little is said about aesthetics. About a page in all. But not only is it very much *ad rem*, it is spectacularly similar to what Joyce has to say in his interpretation of *integritas* in *Portrait*. Here are the relevant remarks:

The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*...

The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside. In such a way that they have the whole world as background.

Is this it perhaps—in this view the object is seen *together with* space and time instead of *in* space and time...

As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one is equally significant.

If I have been contemplating the stove [a large, ornamental porcelain Austrian stove, presumably], and then am told: but now all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial. For this represents the matter as if I had studied the stove as one among the many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove, *it* was my world, and everything else colourless by contrast with it. (p. 83)

The first similarity between Joyce's account of art and beauty and Wittgenstein's is that they choose everyday objects as their examples, a basket and a stove, not cathedrals or the David of Michelangelo. The first point that Joyce makes is that the first step in the apprehension of beauty is to separate the basket from the rest of the visual universe which is not the basket. (One cannot help thinking of Van Gogh's shoes, chair and bed.) This draws a boundary line about the object to be apprehended. Wittgenstein says the same and elaborates it. He distinguishes between something seen as one thing among other things, as part of the furniture in the room or as part of a street scene, and that thing seen as a world of its own or, more precisely, my world, a world that momentarily absorbs me. Wittgenstein puts this in other ways: (a) the usual way of seeing objects being to see them in their midst while the aesthetic way (*sub specie aeternitatis*) is to see them from outside, that is as an object detached or, in Joyce's words, separate from the rest of the visual universe; (b) seen aesthetically, objects have the whole world as background; (c) everything else is colourless by contrast with them. Wittgenstein sums up:

For it is equally possible to take the bare present image as the worthless momentary picture in the whole temporal world, and as the true world among shadows. (*ibid*)

Wittgenstein implies, as Joyce does not, because he is concerned with value, which Joyce is not, at least not here, that studying a stove as a thing among other things is trivial, since each thing is equally insignificant.

The next point of resemblance is their treatment of the relationship of the object to space and time when apprehended or contemplated aesthetically. Joyce asserts that the aesthetic image, self-bounded and self-contained, is luminously apprehended against the immeasurable background of space and time which it is not. (It might have been clearer if he had said: 'which is not its [space or time]') This is surely what Wittgenstein also means when he says: (a) things seen aesthetically are not seen in the midst of other things but from outside; (b) thus they have the whole world as background (*Hintergrund*); and asks (c) if the object is not seen *together with* rather than *in* space and time.

Granted that Joyce and Wittgenstein are, in their different ways, saying the same thing here, someone may ask what it all means, so, perhaps, a pause for explanation might be in order.

Wittgenstein's *sub specie aeternitatis* might help. The Latin could be translated as 'under the aspect of eternity' or 'seen from an eternal point of view' where 'eternal' is taken to mean 'atemporal' and 'aspatial', and these terms, in turn, may be taken to mean 'taken out of a spatial and temporal context'. In the case of an object viewed aspatially, it is cut off either temporarily or, in a painting, permanently, from its surroundings, yet it remains in physical space and in time—it has to. But this physical space is not part of our aesthetic apprehension: it has been consciously cut off from it: it is its background, and we ignore it. In the case of an object apprehended atemporally, it is cut off from the here and now, and not affected by the passage of time, though, again, the passage of time flows past as a background and we ignore it. The medievals understood this when they invented legends that told of mystics who heard heavenly music and were so enraptured that they were oblivious to the passage of time. And Keats summed it up with those lines from 'Ode on a Grecian Urn':

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

For those unfamiliar with the poem, the urn depicts a lover pursuing his lass *ad aeternum*.

A third point of resemblance is the apprehension of the object as one thing, one whole, its wholeness. This is perfectly clear in Joyce but only implicit in Wittgenstein, in 'if I was contemplating the stove, *it was my world*'. However, if we turn to the *Tractatus* we find Wittgenstein more explicit. Admittedly he is not talking about aesthetics or about an object but about the world. He has just said (TLP 6.44): 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.' He then goes on to say (TLP 6.45):

To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.

This, as I say, is not about an object but about the world. However, if we return to the *Notebooks*, to the remark with which the quotation started and fill in the omission, the whole passage reads like this: 'The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie*

aeternitatis. Now, if seeing the world *sub specie aeterni* is to see it as a whole, a limited whole, it is not a monstrous leap to say that the object, the work of art, seen from an aspatial, atemporal, viewpoint, is seen as a whole, a limited whole'.

This leaves some loose ends to tie up. First, both Joyce and Wittgenstein use 'object' and 'image' seemingly indiscriminately. Wittgenstein, it is true, uses 'object' almost exclusively but he speaks of 'the bare present image' as Joyce speaks of the 'aesthetic image'. This effortless interchange of terms may carry a latent confusion. The word 'object' is a dangerous one. In the present context it may mean a physical object, such as a basket or a stove or an *objet d'art*. It may also, and in the context must, mean an object of attention or contemplation. This need not be a physical object; indeed, as an object of aesthetic attention or contemplation—a poem or piece of music—usually is not. Even as physical object it is not being regarded as such when apprehended or contemplated aesthetically, though some of its physical qualities may be the object of attention, as in sculpture and architecture, for instance. So, for Joyce to speak of the aesthetic image is not wide of the mark. But this too can lead to confusion. When we contemplate a statue it is not an image we are contemplating but a physical thing. However, there is no need to pursue this discussion here. Suffice to say that there is no discrepancy between Joyce and Wittgenstein in their use of terminology.

The second point, a minor one, which affects both Joyce and Wittgenstein alike, is the shift from beauty in general to everyday objects to acknowledged works of art. There is also a shift from a theory of beauty to a theory of art without acknowledging the difference. And finally a shift from beauty to aesthetic apprehension or contemplation. Whatever about the beauty of an Austrian stove, it is not an acknowledged work of art, though it may have high aesthetic qualities. At best it is a work of art *honoris causa*, a status to which a butcher's basket would hardly rise. And yet both can be apprehended aesthetically. That is what we do when we judge something to be ugly, dull looking, *kitsch*, garish, etc. This is not important but should be noted.

Finally, there is the question of the soundness of the account of the aesthetic that Joyce and Wittgenstein give. That is not within the scope of the present paper. It certainly is not the whole story, not even as told by the two authors, but it is surely part of the story. The very closeness of the thought of the two thinkers separated geographically and culturally, as well as temporally,

lends support to these ideas. It would appear that they came to Joyce in 1904 when he was teaching English at the Austrian naval base at Pola (today the Croatian town of Pula), but did not appear in print until 1915 when the last instalment of *Portrait* appeared in the *Egoist*, at a time when Wittgenstein was fighting on the eastern front. By the time *Portrait* was published in book form, 1917, Wittgenstein had already formed his own ideas, and in any event it is highly unlikely that Wittgenstein ever read *Portrait* or even knew about it. His own notebooks, three of them, were not published until 1961. They had accidentally survived the destruction ordered by Wittgenstein in 1950 and were not discovered until after his death.

In this note I have confined myself to Joyce's interpretation of *integritas* (whether it is a valid or even plausible interpretation does not concern us) because the similarity between it and Wittgenstein's ideas is obvious. Perhaps if one trawled through Wittgenstein's numerous other remarks on aesthetics one would find other similarities but none so dramatic; besides it would be an arduous task.

- 1 Aquinas actually uses '*apprehensio*' in the version in the *Summa* (ST I-II, 27. 1 ad 3). First version: ST I. 5.4 ad 1.
- 2 ST I. 39.8
- 3 Admittedly '*clarity*' as a translation of *claritas* is vague and misleading by today's understanding. But we have a rough, if unclear, idea what to expect of something beautiful. Negatively it should not be dull, mediocre in appearance, banal, ordinary, clichéd, trivial, feeble, anaemic. The opposites of these baleful qualities are numerous, and radiance is one. But, unless one uses '*radiance*' as a term of art to cover sombre and tragic beauty, '*clarity*' (properly understood, of course) might do as well as a term of art, particularly if confined to its Latin form.
For Neo-Thomist interpretations and their relevance to Joyce's see Maurice Beebe: '*Joyce and Aquinas: The Theory of Aesthetics*' *Philological Quarterly*, XXXVI (January 1957) pp. 20-35.
- 4 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, New York, 1916, p.248.
- 5 William T.Noon, S.J.: *Joyce and Aquinas*, New Haven, 1957, p. 45