

Image and Imagery

in Joyce's *Portrait*:

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A Computer-Assisted Analysis

The most widely discussed aspect of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has been the esthetic theory developed by Stephen Dedalus in Chapter V of the novel. Examinations range from considering Joyce's modifications of his Thomistic sources to assessing the utility of the theory as a basis for writing. Most critics agree that the theory is important for an understanding of Joyce's own art; some think it represents the esthetics he held the rest of his life.¹ But no one has demonstrated fully its applicability to the novel.

The second most widely accepted critical notion about the novel is the irony that accompanies the portrait of Stephen, particularly in the later chapters. It is unnecessary to mention very many specific examples; however, the most extreme irony of all may be that a young "poet" who has written only a handful of bad poems can seriously propose a complex esthetic theory. Perhaps Joyce intended the theory to be as ironic as the theorizer. I don't believe this to be the case, but even the possibility makes debatable the theory's applicability to Joyce and the novel.

My discussion will focus on the most fundamental aspect of the esthetic, the definition of image. From the theory presented in Chapter V, I shall derive a thesis that can then be applied to the whole *Portrait*. If confirmed, it will demonstrate that the theory is, indeed, Joyce's own. Possibly, it will also lead to new insights into the artistic structure and form of the novel itself.

The theory of image developed by Stephen during his conversation with Lynch is based on a sentence from Aquinas which he translates as follows: "Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony, and radiance."² Wholeness he identifies with *integritas*:

An esthetic image is presented to us either in space or in time. What is audible is presented in time, what is visible is presented in space. But, temporal or spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as self-bounded and self-contained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which

is not it. You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*. [212]

Several important points are implied in this passage. First, the image is related to the act or process of perception itself. Second, the mind which receives the sense impression, by reflex or intent, is an active agent in the process. It *distinguishes* the image from the non-image by separating a portion of the sensory input from the rest. Clearly, then, the image described here is part of the phenomenological level of experience and not the actual physical reality that induces the sensory response.

Phenomenological experience can be regarded as the interface between two components of the mind, the subjective and the objective. Subjective experience consists of the subconscious and part of the conscious mind. Together, these two aspects of the subjective form the continuity of personality. Objective experience, while originating in the sensory mechanisms, represents that aspect of the mind where sensory stimulæ accumulate. It is the interface between the subjective and the objective where perception takes place and where the image exists.

The next stage in the process, *consonantia*, Stephen identifies with harmony:

—Then said Stephen, 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 its structure. In other words the synthesis of immediate perception is followed by the analysis of apprehension. 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 up of its parts, the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious. That is *consonantia*. [212]

During this analytic stage, the perceiver discovers the relations among the various parts of the image as well as their relations to larger aggregates and to the whole image. These relations Stephen considers harmony, but he does not say where this harmony exists. Is it part of the physical world? is it solely within the mind? or is it part of the perceptual interface between the two? Stephen does, however, hint at an answer: "Having first *felt* that it is one thing you *feel* now that it is a thing." Since the sentence is at the center of the discussion of *consonantia*, the two uses of the verb *feel* suggest that the harmony is part of subjective experience. The danger in this interpretation is that if pushed to its extreme it could lead to misunderstanding. That is, if the stage of harmony takes place after conceptualization and is not subject to verification, that harmony could be illusory.

The relation between harmony and objective experience is suggested in the discussion of *claritas*. After rejecting the notion of a transcendental idealism for art as well as an art that is autonomous, Stephen goes on to define the term:

When you have apprehended that 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 it is and no other thing. The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. This supreme quality is felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal. 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, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart. [213]

On the most basic level the synthesis described above represents recognition. After distinguishing the image from the non-image followed by analyzing the relations among its parts, the perceiver recognizes what it is. Defined in this manner, the image exists in virtually all acts of perception, even the most mundane. But this reading ignores the affective dimension of the passage. In the discussion of harmony, the strongest terms used were *feel* and perhaps *harmonious*; this passage abounds with words and expressions that carry definite emotional overtones: *radiance*, *mysterious instant*, *fading coal*, *supreme quality of beauty*, *clear radiance*, *silent stasis of esthetic pleasure*, *spiritual state*, *enchantment of the heart*. However, not all images are of this intensity—esthetic images or epiphanies as they were called in the earlier *Stephen Hero*. Experiences vary in their intensity and importance for the individual. What Stephen is rejecting is the idea that art must concern itself only with certain themes or aspects of life. Thus, Stephen later in *Ulysses* can equate God with a shout in the street. Even the most seemingly trivial experience is capable of great, even religious-like, relevance for an individual. This difference in impact of various images can be explained in terms of synthesis and harmony.

Coincident with recognition is the synthesis of the objective experience as it becomes part of the subjective experience of the perceiver and merges into the continuity of personality. Both the individual parts of the image as well as the structural relation among them are synthesized in the perceptual act. An analogy suggested by A. D. Hope is helpful for understanding this process:

If we take the metaphor of the traveller pausing on the hill top and surveying the landscape before him with the help of a map it may be possible to give some idea of the nature of the conception that underlies Joyce's description of *claritas*. If we imagine the map as in the traveller's mind and as the work of his mind, such that instead of the formal signs of roads, houses, fields and hills the mind has constructed a map-picture, we shall have something like the phantasma, or in the case under discussion, the esthetic image. We can further imagine the map-picture to be a transparent one such that when it is held between the intellectual eye and the landscape the traveller not only perceives the landscape endowed with its formal meaning, he is also able to observe the exact correspondence of the details of the map with the details of the landscape before him. He becomes aware of the truth of his mental work.³

The harmonious relations among the parts felt or sensed by the perceiver are seen to fit, to be verified in the objective experience. In that instant when expectation is confirmed we might expect a rush of emotion, as if the individual has sensed among the components of experience a harmonious structure that actually exists in the physical world. He may feel a harmonious union between himself and the universe he perceives. That union, of course, is not between physical reality and epidermis, but between the subjective and objective components of experience. Furthermore, the magnitude of that emotional response is likely to be related to the number, variety, and personal importance of the components that are seen to come into conjunction, like the figures in the map that fall into place relative to the landscape; the greater the number of pieces that are seen to fit, the greater the emotional response. Stated another way, the intensity and importance of an image for a particular individual is likely to be directly related to both the number of components of an experience and some measure of their importance for him, personally. It is this thesis or expectation that I wish to evaluate for Stephen Dedalus in the novel. It suggests that the most important moments in the development of his personality should be related to those passages in the text where the heaviest concentrations of important images or image components occur. If substantiated, this argument will demonstrate the applicability of Stephen's esthetic theory toward Joyce's esthetics, at least in *Portrait*.

Before going on I should clarify the terminology that will be used. There have long been major differences of critical opinion concerning the term *image*. Frank Kermode, for example, has adopted Stephen's definition in its most intense form;⁴ Caroline Spurgeon, on the other hand, has used the term to refer to any word with sensory or thematic value, like *black, hot, or bitter*.⁵ I shall use the term *image* in the sense that Caroline Spurgeon uses it (earlier this was called an image component); for the more intense experiences, I shall use the term *epiphanal image* or more simply, *epiphany*, as Stephen did in *Stephen Hero*. My thesis asserts a fundamental quantitative relation in *Portrait*, at least, between the two poles of thought within literary criticism concerning the definition of images. If true for *Portrait*, the approach may have interesting applications in other works as well.

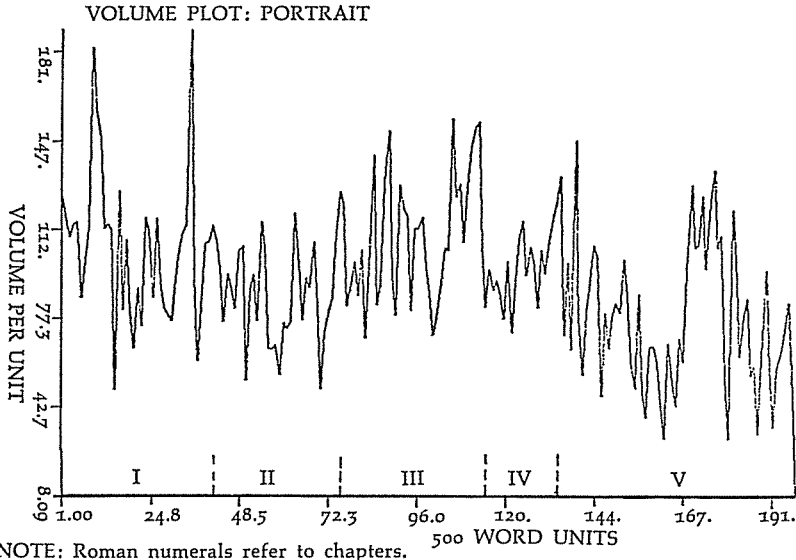
In order to apply the thesis uniformly and comprehensively to the novel, I used a high-speed computer. This involved two major steps: the first consisted of a series of rather mechanical operations that began with the complete, printed text and ended with a list of words selected as images and stored in a form that made them readily accessible for the computer; the second step involved translating the thesis, expressed in traditional literary critical terms, into a model that the computer could evaluate. Since my em-

phasis is on interpretation and not methodology, I shall pass over the first step except to point out that the selection of some thirteen hundred words that have sensory or thematic value represents my own judgment. I have shown my list to several other Joyce scholars whose opinions I respect highly; and we agree that it is a reasonable list, particularly for a study that is concerned with the larger, global patterns in the novel. Logically, then, this set of words selected as images represents an axiom on which the study is based.

The second step, the translation of the thesis into a form that the computer can apply to the novel, is more interesting and crucial to the study. The textual phenomenon of the number of images in a passage and the relative importance among these individual images I termed *richness of imagery*. That is, richness of imagery in a particular scene in the novel is related to both the numbers of images occurring in that scene and the degree or weight of importance of the particular images. From an affective point of view, then, it is possible for two scenes with approximately the same number of images to differ in their impact if the images in one scene carry strong connotations for the character and those in the other represent merely his impressions of the physical locale. For a measure of importance for any single occurrence of an image I used a weight of the total number of times that image occurred in the entire novel. Thus, more frequent images *tend* to have greater impact than less frequent images. I would not argue this assumption for pairs of images or even small groups of images—indeed, there are images that occur only once in the novel that are very important; however, in global terms, when applied to all of the imagery, the assumption seems reasonable.

The model was applied to each 500 word segment of the text (500 words represents slightly more than a page in the standard Viking edition) and a value representing the richness of imagery for that section was computed. As the number and importance of the images in these sections vary, so the value reflecting these factors varies. The results are plotted on the graph (p. 225). To read the graph, assume that the novel runs from left to right (first word, *Once*, occurs at the extreme left side and the last word, *stead*, occurs at the extreme right). The richness of imagery rises and falls as one proceeds through the novel.

An examination of the graph shows that the richest scene in the novel in terms of imagery is the pandybat episode at the end of Chapter I. This should not be surprising since virtually all major themes in the chapter focus at that point in the narrative; similarly, its impact affects Stephen throughout the rest of the novel and into *Ulysses*. If we look closely at the base of that peak, we can see that it tops a long, sustained buildup in intensity of imagery. This pattern suggests why some experiences reach epiphanal intensity while others subside before that point. One criterion for epiphany may be the necessity of sustaining the experience for a period of time. During this particular scene, more and more of Stephen's attention is on what is occurring around him; conse-



quently, he is aware of more factors of experience than usual. This stimulation leads to even greater concentration and awareness until the experience explodes into epiphany as the pandybat strikes. The interesting aspect of this particular epiphany is that it is highly negative connotatively; but, as suggested earlier, the basic criterion necessary for the "esthetic image" or epiphany is its emotional intensity for the developing personality. The other high point of richness in the chapter occurs during Stephen's fevered dreams in the infirmary when he confronts empathically for the first time the reality of death.

The general level of richness in Chapter II is low relative to the other four chapters. The chapter ends, however, with the most intense scene in it where Stephen has his first sexual experience. That the richness and intensity of this scene are low relative to the others discussed here perhaps reflects the lack of sustained buildup in the passage. Thus, some epiphanal experiences appear to be richer on an affective level than others.

Chapter III has two clusters of peaks. The first deals with the frightening sermons of the retreat in which the horrors of hell are presented in graphic and sensuous detail. The emotional impact of these experiences is realized in the subsequent dream of the goatish figures and Stephen's headlong flight to confession. The latter marks an epiphanal experience of extreme religious ideality.

In Chapter IV there is a sequence of three peaks culminating in the

epiphany on the beach in which Stephen sensed that the girl's image has merged with his own. Earlier, it was suggested that the sense of dissolution of the gap between subjective and objective experiences would mark moments of epiphanal intensity. This seems to be explicitly the case here: "Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy." (p. 172) The beach scene is most important since it represents the turning point in Stephen's search for a vocation. At this point, having left the priesthood behind, his dedication of himself to esthetic creativity is consummated.

Chapter V is interesting because it contains, in addition to a scene of sustained richness, the passage with the lowest level in the entire novel. That scene concerns Stephen's walk with Lynch during which he develops his esthetic theory. There the emphasis is on the intellect as opposed to the senses. The scene that follows the conversation and which appears on the graph to be of definite epiphanal intensity shows Stephen waking and composing the villanelle. After dedicating himself to art at the close of Chapter IV, Stephen here realizes the first creative product of that decision.

In summary, the thesis derived from a consideration of the esthetic theory of Chapter V suggested that there would be a close correspondence between the sections of text richest in imagery and the moments of major importance in the development of Stephen's personality. The model, when applied to the text, draws our attention to the pandybat episode, Stephen's first awareness of death, his first experience with sex, a retreat marked by frightening descriptions of Hell, a nightmare and subsequent confession, the esthetic experience on the beach when he decides that his destiny is to become an artist, and, finally, the composition of this first respectable poem. Clearly, these are the experiences that are most influential in the development of his personality. One implication which I will mention only in passing is that the personality of Stephen progresses by stages and remains relatively stable between experiences such as those listed above. It should be possible, therefore, to define the structure of his mind by noting the exact changes in associations among images that take place at these moments.

Secondly, the thesis suggested that there should be differences in intensity among these epiphanal experiences as well as between them and "everyday" acts of perception. A difference among epiphanal experiences is particularly apparent in the pandybat episode and the experience with sex. As we might expect, the former is much more influential in the long run than the latter. Continuity exists among all acts of perception; but because some experiences are sustained and culminate in epiphany while others are interrupted and dissipate to the level of ordinary awareness, a difference in degree may appear a difference in kind. Consequently,

even the most trivial event—such as a shout in the street—is capable of extreme, even religious significance for an individual.

Finally, the thesis suggested that the rush of emotion accompanying an experience of epiphanal intensity is related to the perceiver's feeling that he has in some way merged with the physical reality around him. This phenomenon has been shown to exist explicitly in the esthetic experience on the beach at the end of Chapter IV and it could doubtlessly be found in other scenes.

By using the computer, I have sought to demonstrate from a logical basis what is taking place on the affective level both within the fictive world of Stephen and in the phenomenological world of the reader as he progresses through the novel. This reconciliation of logical abstraction with affective response is, ultimately, the function of esthetic theory for the artist and of literary interpretation for the reader.

Notes

1. A. D. Hope, "The Esthetic Theory of James Joyce," *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, XXI (Dec., 1943). Reprinted in Thomas Connolly, *Joyce's Portrait: Criticisms and Critiques* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), p. 183.
2. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 212. All future references to *Portrait* are from this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.
3. Hope, pp. 200-201.
4. Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 1.
5. Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 5.