

**An Introduction to Literature      Final-term Essay**

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**Topic : My interpretation of Carl Phillips's poem referring to "luncheon on the grass" of Edouard Monet and the gender image on the painting itself between.**

As I got the book named "An Introduction to Literature", its chapter 27 caught my attention immediately since its printings not only more subtle but also with some famous paintings in it. Being an Arts teacher in junior high school, I have to admit that it is relatively difficult for junior high school students to understand Modern Art works, not to mention postmodern Art works. However, since impressionism, plays a revolutionary role in Art history, in which is more reachable to students' comprehension on the contrary. On the other hand, among a dozen of impressionist artists, Edouard Manet is one of my favorite impressionism artists. That's why I have chosen the topic as my final-term essay to the course.

In spite of both art and literature are both the heritage of human beings, studying the connection between them is a absolutely new experience for me. Thus, in this short essay, would like to divide the essay into two parts: one is my interpretation of the poem of Carl Phillips on Manet's "Luncheon on the Grass" ; another part is my personal interpretation of the impressionist master piece itself.

Firstly, I do believe for most of us would agree with that saying that one's life background and personality do have influences on ones' work, which is obviously a true in both art and literature. Because of Carl's sexual orientation, some lines in the poem named Luncheon on the grass, is showing his attention on the two men themselves instead of women's image. The poet use both narrative way to explain his interpretation on Manet's Luncheon on the Grass. There are several interesting clues that I've found from the poem, one is he tried to pull readers' attention and in order to follow his feeling by using first person , Take "We are two to Manets' main group of three" (Carl Phillips, Luncheon on the Grass, page 854 of An introduction to literature) this poem for example. At the beginning , the main focus is on the scenes of the painting itself, then Carl invited readers to join his feeling. Another way is draw readers' attention is using dialogic narration which make we-readers become one of the image setting roles on the painting. As the following lines.

*"I don't seem especial hungry, partly because its 'difficult eating naked when everyone else is closed, partly because you didn't remember I hate chicken salad. The bear you opened for me sits untouched, going flat in the sun. I stroke the wet bottle fitfully, to remind myself just how far we've come or more probably have always been from the shape of romance."*

Apart from the special skills of writing, I also think his sexual orientation also could be found by some lines of the poem. Take the following lines for example.

*Watching you, in clothes, remove one boot to work your finger toward an itch in your athletic sock, I look for any similarities between art and our afternoon here on abandoned property.*

Obviously, the poet pays more attention on men's gesture and the setting of the two men than the nude woman in the painting. And the nude woman is supposed to be the vision focus point in whole painting. Other expression such also see the poet's sexual orientation effect the description of the poem.



*“ Watching you, in clothes, remove one boot to work your finger toward an itch in your athletic sock ”*

Writing to here, I stop can't help but think about how an Artist or poet view the world with different their sexual orientation. As a heterosexual, I sometimes, feel uncomfortable with homosexual. Before knowing the poet's background, I instinctively feel the poem is involved with implication on sex. Despite the painting is regarded as the beginning of impressionism nowadays, it brought Édouard Manet countless critique and abuse at the time. The conflict was started with “dress” and “undressed” problem. The nude female looks at readers with confidence, she acts as if she was an invisible spirit in the scene. The back part of the painting beyond the three people is a woman as well. We can see Manet adopted a lot of contrast in his work then, both on the subject themselves and background details. With black and nearly white color, eyes contact among the

characters in the painting. We could see how good Manet's design is. However, in Carl Phillip's interpretation on this Manet's work, Carl which At Furthermore, Carl left his opinions on the world on the last line with "*My dear, this is not art; we're not anywhere close to Arcadia*" He seems pessimistic toward romance in the world, which I think it implied his frustration of his sexual orientation. He hid his passion in poem, which is not as courageous as Edouard Manet-the French painter.

Edouard Manet, a French painter is considered to be the senior among impressionist artists. He liberate the contents by his brushstrokes on his paintings. With energy and verve brushstrokes, he provided as new thinking way for audiences. Many young impressionists even followed his Manets' step and created more creative artistic style after then. His work helped provide a transition from realism to Impressionism. This trend served as beginning for modern art.

When we see Manet's work, we could see his effort of working on his art work and trying to be accepted by the Salon. Manet hold a traditional view on the value of the Salon, he think the only way that could prove he is a successful artist is admitted to the Salon. In 1861, one of his work, named "Theophile Gautier" was admitted by the Salon. However, the master piece, name Luncheon on the Grass was rejected in 1863. We could see here Manet had been looking for new characters to express his passion toward art. In spite we would think Manet is one of impressionist artist, Manet himself doesn't enjoy the title at all.

Actually, the following impressionists then developed specific skills in painting. For

example, use the primary colors-red, blue and yellow. Other mixed colors such as black and white are banned colors, as impressionists view it was not natural. However, Manet used black to contrast in his works.

In Manet's "luncheon on the grass", all the characters are arranged in a classical triangular composition. With two fully clothed seated males, one nude female sitting between them and another partially undressed bathing in a back pond. Furthermore, the remnant of their picnic is put in front of them. On the other hand, we could also see Manet portrays women as they really are, which is totally different at the time.

When I first saw the art work, what comes to my mind is sort of strange feeling. That is why these two women are either nude or barely undressed? Why the artist doesn't arrange the other two men either nude or barely undressed? Taking off clothes means discard their disguise, Manet tries to make the conflict on the composition. As far as I am concerned, I would put more attention on the relations among all the characters. These two men seem to be having a conversation in the scene. However, none of them are really concentrated on each other. The most controversial character is the nude female. She is looking at audiences calmly as if she is asking us. What are you doing here? What are you looking at? As for another female, she seems enjoying her bath in a pond; she doesn't care for the others at all.

As John Berger mentioned in "ways of seeing"- *We are always looking at the relation between thing and ourselves.* (John Berger, p 9). As I saw the painting, I feel that

same gender as I am , women is degraded in the painting. I think it's unfair for women undress and even nude are viewed as innocent and beautiful symbol. And seldom of us could appreciate nude male in artists' work. If we look back the development of Art History, we shall find the interesting part. After understanding Carl Phillips' background and Edouard Manet's background, we could see the diverse views on the world. Edouard Manet's "luncheon on the grass" does break the tradition thinking way at the time which led me an self-examination on my view toward Art history. Same as reading Carl Phillips' poem this time, I think I should hold a boarder view to accept his homosexual perception on the world.

### Referances

- 1 John Berger , Ways of Seeing . The Viking Press, 1972. p7-154.
2. An Introductiob to Literature by Sylvan Barnet, William Burto , and William E. CainPearson Longman. P854-855.
3. **Art Journal**, Winter, 1993 by Steven Z. Levine  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0425/is\\_n4\\_v52/ai\\_14970157/pg\\_3](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_n4_v52/ai_14970157/pg_3)
4. [http://www.essentialart.com/acatalog/Edouard\\_Manet\\_prints\\_Luncheon\\_on\\_the\\_Grass.html](http://www.essentialart.com/acatalog/Edouard_Manet_prints_Luncheon_on_the_Grass.html)
5. <http://sunsite.tus.ac.jp/wm/paint/auth/manet/>
6. <http://www.redflag.org.uk/frontline/ten/10manet.html>
7. [http://www.artandphysics.com/c\\_main2b.html](http://www.artandphysics.com/c_main2b.html)