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Omnipotence of Thought and the Poetic Imagination: Blake, Coleridge, and Rilke

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And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Genesis

The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Comparisons between poetry and pathology can lead to a most uneasy alliance. Where, for example, does one draw the line between a symptom and an aesthetic convention, or between a symptom and a poetic expansion of ordinary reality? And if a poet uses certain modes of response that resemble neurotic symptoms, but transmutes them into something else in the course of the poem, how does he effect such a transformation? Not least of all, how do we as readers judge whether the poet has merely duplicated a pathological response, perhaps disguising it with alluring turns of phrase, or whether he has indeed shaped his illness into art?

Promising beginnings have been made along the lines of the foregoing questions, particularly in regard to the relationship between poetic language and the language of schizophrenics,¹ and in regard to an analogous problem in the visual arts—e.g., the distinctions between an artist's use of blank space as part of his pictorial content and the schizophrenic tendency to “see” nonexistent objects.² In this paper, I shall consider the similarities and distinctions between the pathological concept of “omnipotence of thought” and certain aspects of the poetic imagination.

The problem has been surprisingly neglected despite Freud's recognition that omnipotence of thought, which he defines as an “over-accentuation

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of psychological reality in comparison with material reality”³ and as “a narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes,”⁴ is legitimately employed only in the act of artistic creation:

In only a single field of our civilization has the omnipotence of thoughts been retained, and that is in the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects—thanks to artistic illusion—*just as though it were something real.* (Italics added.)⁵

Freud is speaking here, of course, of the artistic *process*, not of the use of omnipotence of thought as an element of artistic *content*. Yet many poets, especially those who worked within a romantic frame of reference, have alluded to the omnipotence of thought in terms of both content and process, sometimes making direct statements on the value of favoring “psychical reality” and at other times indirectly using the concept as an aspect of their creative method.

Our task will consist first of noting some specific instances of the concept in the work of three poets—Blake, Coleridge and Rilke—and then of considering ways in which the poet succeeds, or sometimes only partially succeeds, in shaping pathology into art. For the sake of space, I have deliberately chosen poems which reflect a marked concern with subjective processes over phenomenological reality.⁶ Of course, not all poetry reveals a marked preference for mind over object, and a more complete study would have to consider as well the implications of poetry which leans strongly toward a keener apprehension of objective reality. Examples of the latter would be eighteenth-century nature poets like Dyer, Thomson, and Smart; Keats; much of Hopkins; Rilke's *Dinggedichte* (“thing-poems”); and possibly contemporary writers of concrete poetry.

“A Poison Tree”

Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Blake's preference for the subjective response over the world of material objects becomes so marked at times that some have considered

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this a sign of madness, or at best as an only marginally successful expression of the more extreme versions of philosophical idealism.⁷ Though I would claim that Blake does not neglect objective reality as much as some readers have assumed, particularly in those works written through the 1790's,⁸ obviously subjective response plays a major role in his overall aesthetic. In the *Prophetic Books*, for example, he indicates that truly creative perception can actually alter the contours of nature, just as acts of the human will, as projected onto the various allegorical figures of his personal myth, can at times profoundly effect the pattern of natural processes. (Yet even in those passages that most derogate material reality, Blake qualifies his own fantasies about the omnipotent power of mind by working them out through the projective figures of his myth; likewise, he avoids the dangers of direct self-confrontation by further projecting his own ego onto the supra-ordinate Self of the mythic system.)

A remarkably succinct example of his use of an all-powerful subjective fantasy—one that is relatively free from the rampant projections and displacements of the *Prophetic Books*—occurs in the well-known *Song of Experience*, “A Poison Tree”:

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.
And it grew both day and night.
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine.
And he knew that it was mine.
And into my garden stole,
When the night had veild the pole;
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretchd beneath the tree.⁹

Revealing, incidentally, one of Blake's rare uses of the direct first person, the poem clearly demonstrates and resolves a hostile wish-fulfillment fantasy.¹⁰ The “I” of the poem first claims that he has

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become angry with two people, identified only as a friend and a foe. In the first case, free expression of the anger has presumably been permissible to the point where the emotion was able to run itself out, requiring no further action on either a symbolic or pragmatic level. In the second case, however, the anger must be repressed. This leads in turn to an intensification of its power, a process which the poet does not find to be totally deficient in rewards of its own:

And I sunnd it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

Clearly he is highly conscious at this point of both the source of his anger as well as the possibility of vengeance. Between stanzas two and three, however, he shifts from a straightforward description of his emotional state into the realm of fantasy: he will not act out his revenge in the “real” world, but will confine it to a hostile fantasy, one which will in the end achieve the same result (the death of his enemy) that might have occurred had he directly confronted the object of his rage.

Omnipotence of thought becomes, then, an unequivocal aspect of the poem's content; indeed, it becomes the source of its major symbol, the “apple bright,” and thus may be said with only minimal hyperbole to *become the poem itself*. As an objective correlative of both the poet's anger and his potential revenge, the apple literally pushes itself out from his hostile thoughts until it assumes an independent existence: within the microcosm of the poem, the thought becomes a thing. What is more, the objectively realized thought attains the magical power of manipulating the actions of another person: The unnamed foe sees the apple, identifies it as belonging to the poet, and through the happy illogicality of fantasy, proceeds to walk directly into the trap created by the poet's hostile wish. Like, a dream, the fantasy then rapidly shifts to the desired conclusion: a vision of the foe “outstretchd” and presumably dead beneath the poet's tree. The whole action is accomplished with a remarkable economy of effort. And once again, as in a dream, the ego of the poet is skillfully protected, indeed doubly protected. Not only is the aggressive wish channeled into a successful fantasy, but the fantasy itself clearly limits the hostile wish to the poet's enemy, thus avoiding the guilt that might accrue from an unqualified or generalized state of rage, one which might injure friend as well as enemy. (Or, in

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psychoanalytic terms, might injure the “good” parental imago as well as the “bad.”)

If we have established the fact that Blake's poem is a clear example of the omnipotence of thought, we have yet, however, to determine how such a clinical category is shaped into art or what distinguishes our response to Blake's poem from our response to an interesting bit of pathological fantasy. It is possible, of course, that we respond to the poem simply out of identification—i.e., the poem brilliantly states and resolves a type of aggressive fantasy familiar to all of us, and in the process momentarily legitimizes such fantasies. Such an interpretation is no doubt plausible, but, I believe, it only partially explains the power of the poem. For Blake not only legitimizes the

omnipotence of thought, with all the narcissistic pleasures that accompany such a process, but in the act of expressing his fantasy he succeeds in creating a whole new object, one which both contains and transcends the original fantasized object of the lethal apple. Part of this re-creation involves a tempering of the primary-process thinking involved in the creation of the apple with the more conscious mental processes involved in the writing of a poem: as the omnipotence of thought is to the apple, so the imagination is to the poem itself. In the former case, an object was “created” in response to a hostile wish, but the object itself remained wholly private and mental; in the latter case, a viable aesthetic construct, marked by the ordering devices of rhyme, metaphor, linguistic affect (short slashing words, largely monosyllabic), and a relatively strong degree of metrical control, is created to the point where it becomes a new reality, one that is far more visible than the fantasized apple.

Tentatively one might assume, then, that a key difference between the omnipotence of thought as a symptom and the use of subjective fantasy in poetic creation lies in the nature of the object that is eventually created. While the neurotic might assume the reality of the fantasized object created by his subjective need, only he can attest to the “existence” of such an object. On the other hand, the poem which contains such a fantasized object as part of its content becomes real to all who would respond to it.

“Dejection: An Ode”

Because the fantasy, the metaphor, and the poem are so economically overlapped with one another, Blake's poem represents a relatively

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clear-cut case of how a fantasy involving omnipotence of thought can be transmuted into an aesthetic construct. The problem is more complicated when we approach works that allude to the omnipotence of thought as one part of their philosophical argument, without necessarily shaping such statements into new objects, or only partially achieving the kind of secondary or re-creation demonstrated by “A Poison Tree.” Coleridge's “Dejection: An Ode,” for example, refers at times to the primacy of psychic over material reality but fails to offer the fully realized transformation of Blake's poem. Indeed, failure to accomplish this end may be due in part to the fact that Coleridge does not allow himself to express the fully drawn fantasy demonstrated by “A Poison Tree” but wavers between a conviction that such subjective responses are the very stuff of creative experience, and the possibility that they might not be. If this is true, we have an ironic situation where the very concern with reaching beyond subjective fantasy to external objects may prevent Coleridge's poem from attaining the viable object-status of the Blake poem.

One of the first impressions created by “Dejection” is its overall lack of unity. On a formal level, we may grant that the poem's range in subject from literary allusion and natural observation to more or less overt self-reference, as well as its range in style from direct statement to metaphor, allegory, and philosophical abstraction is perfectly legitimate within the loose contours of the “conversation poem”—a consciously mixed poetic genre traceable to Cowper and perfected by Coleridge. More significantly, however, nearly every stanza suggests one or more conflicts of attitude toward the chosen subject matter, conflicts that cannot be brushed aside in terms of the formal openness of the genre. Serving as an envelope for Coleridge's ambivalent attitude toward such matters as passivity versus action and cognition versus feeling is the overall conflict between self and nature, or between subjective and objective reality. It is in his attempts to transmute this basic conflict into metaphor that Coleridge confronts, but ultimately evades—at least in poetic terms—the problem of omnipotence of thought.

In the first two stanzas there is a continual shift from natural observation to self-reference, based at times upon a *discrepancy* between self and natural world and at other times upon a real or fantasized *correspondence* between self and nature. Coleridge first creates a link between the dreary natural calm before the expected storm and his own feelings of sterility:

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This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,
Which better far were mute.¹¹

The self-reference is underscored by allusion to a favorite romantic metaphor for the role of the poet, the Aeolian lute or wind-harp, a metaphor which Coleridge himself earlier used to refer to the poetic imagination as it is swept over by the “random gales” of fantasy.¹² Here the suggestion that the lute were “better far” silent strongly hints at a suicidal wish, though in terms of the poem's therapeutic import for Coleridge, it is interesting that such a relatively overt suicidal wish is never again expressed, despite later indulgences in self-pitying nihilism.

This initial reference to a correspondence between self and nature is followed by an implied comparison between the brightness and objective containment of the external world, exemplified by the “new-moon winter-bright” which is bound by a “silver thread,” and the poet's own state of free-floating melancholy, a comparison which would now underscore the *separation* between self and natural object. Coleridge then brings the two together once more, fantasizing that the anticipated natural storm might simultaneously arouse his own wasting powers:

And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,

And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
 Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed, And sent my soul abroad,
 Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
 Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!¹³

But such desires for a fusion of self and object are futile even on a fantasy level, for the poet can no longer effect an emotional relationship between himself and the world that he sees:

All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
 Have I been gazing on the western sky,
 And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
 And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
 And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
 That give away their motion to the stars;

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I see them all so excellently fair,
 I see, not feel, how beautiful they ate!

Despite a fleeting correspondence between his own *acedia* or spiritual dreariness and the “peculiar” yellow-green tint of the prestorm sky, the stress is upon the impossibility of bringing the self into consonance with that which lies outside its bounds.

It is after this recognition that Coleridge displaces the entire conflict between self and nature onto the idealist conviction that true passion resides within the subjective world alone:

I may not hope from outward forms to win
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

On a psychological level, he shifts from consideration of the reciprocal relation between self and other to a belief in the omnipotence of thought:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
 And in our life alone does Nature live:

The shift is both a regression and a progression: in psychoanalytic terms it suggests a reversion to a narcissistic overevaluation of the self, yet such a reversion offers the intellectual compensation of aligning the self with a philosophically acceptable frame of reference which would derogate material reality in favor of spiritual response. (Cf. Berkeley, Kant, and the German romantic idealists.) Unfortunately, however, Coleridge does not succeed in transferring this philosophical compensation into lucid aesthetic form. (Though this is not to deny the possibility that the overall creation of an often powerful, but still ambivalent and uneven poem may be said to offer a therapeutic compensation of its own.)

The aesthetic failure is most cogently revealed in the confused nature of Coleridge's attempt to supply a metaphor for either the primary matter of omnipotence of thought or the secondary matter of philosophical idealism. First he claims that our subjective response can be either a “wedding garment” or a “shroud” for nature. That is, we can with projected pleasure consider nature as a bride, or we can project our own depression onto the natural world and consider it as a corpse. Yet even this initial attempt at metaphor is strained

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and ambiguous. As Marshall Suther has noted, the mere assumption that nature can be a bride presupposes that she must have some life of her own, since one would not normally wish to marry something dead.¹⁴ Of course, one could merely project this life onto nature prior to the “wedding” if one is feeling in a particularly amorous mood, but this would raise once more the possibility of a union between self and natural object and would thus contradict the absolute conviction that “in our life *alone* does Nature live.” Belief in such a strong projective possibility would, moreover, involve the hybristic conviction that the human mind can create like a god—that is, it can grant life to what is cold and inanimate. The inappropriateness of the wedding metaphor is further underscored, as Suther also notes, by the ambiguity of a later reference to it:¹⁵

Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
 Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower A new Earth and new Heaven,

If we resolve the ambiguous syntax of these later lines to read that Joy (evolving from the subjective confines of the individual soul) weds us to nature, we are back with the basic contradiction between the absolutely inner quality of truth and the possibility that external nature may yet have something to contribute to our spiritual well-being. And if we take the alternate position of reading “wedding Nature” as the subject of the verb “gives,” we are in the even worse position of assuming that the previously rejected natural world can attain sufficient ontological status to effect a union between ourselves and the spirit or power of Joy.

Coleridge's other attempts to supply a metaphor for the omnipotence of thought fare little better. In line 54, he equates the power issuing from the self first with light, then with the more abstract term “glory,” and then with the ambiguous possibility of a “luminous cloud,” one which would presumably illuminate as well as conceal or envelop.¹⁶ The same pattern is repeated in lines 62 and 66: inner joy is likened to “This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist” and to “Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower.” In the latter case,

Coleridge seems to be consciously aware of his extreme difficulty in finding the appropriate metaphor. Is the inner spirit something that will effuse outward in order to *reveal* an enhanced object world, or—because of the psychological dangers of the latter possibility—

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will it serve to *conceal* that world and thus preserve the omnipotence of subjective reality? The narcissistic desire to maintain the omnipotence of thought as opposed to a too-keen awareness of the power of objective reality may have been one of several factors responsible for Coleridge's artistic ineptitude at this point. It is a conflict that Blake managed to circumvent by giving full play to his narcissistic fantasy, and in the process creating the new and unified object of the poem. It is particularly hard to avoid a brief indulgence in the “biographic fallacy” at this point, given our knowledge of the painful circumstances surrounding the composition of the poem and its antecedent, a long verse letter to Sara Hutchinson written on April 4, 1802. Coleridge had to face the hopeless nature of his unrequited love for Sara and the unhappy situation of his marriage at the same time that his friend Wordsworth was marrying the sister of Sara Hutchinson and attaining the full poetic power of the “Immortality” ode. Coleridge's wish to avoid objective reality is understandable not only on these grounds, but on the further grounds of physical illness and the strong conviction that he had lost—as a result of the unhappy circumstances of his private life—his “shaping spirit of Imagination.” Beverly Fields greatly distorts the psycho-biographical case, however, when she claims that “the whole poem is, like his addiction to opium, a form of oral gratification demanded by his essentially undeveloped sexuality.”¹⁷

Coleridge's difficulty in finding an appropriate metaphor is not eased by either his parallel efforts to perceive the self-nature situation in musical terms:

And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

or by his crescendo attempt to provide an all-or-none synaesthetic metaphor in lines 74-75:

All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

The restatement of conflict, no matter how lyrically charged, simply does not resolve conflict.

This is not the place to comment at length on the numerous

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other psychological conflicts revealed in the poem, such as the conflict between philosophical speculation and poetic creation suggested in stanza VI; the splitting of self into active force (wind) and passive recipient (lute) in stanza VII; or the regressive fantasy of the lost child alluded to in lines 120 ff. In terms of our specific purpose, what is significant is that Coleridge succeeds in *stating* the possibility of omnipotence of thought as one means of resolving the overall self-other conflict, but he does not effect a strong aesthetic modification of the concept. It thus remains on a pathological level, or at best its pathology is extended or diffused through his ambivalent efforts to create a forceful metaphor which would in turn lead to the aesthetic compensation of a newly created object to replace the rejected material world. It is sadly ironic that Coleridge, a major pre-Freudian spokesman for the possibility of a secondary imagination, a concept which resembles at points the psychoanalytic notion of the secondary elaboration of primary-process material, should fail to achieve the necessary re-creation in so probing a poem as “Dejection.” Keeping in mind the Freudian distinction between primary-process thinking and conscious secondary elaboration, Coleridge's famous statement on the two types of imagination bears examination yet another time:

The Imagination then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a[n] [unconscious?] repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. [Narcissistic assumption of creation ex nihilo.] The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. ...

The Seventh “Duino Elegy” and “Eingang” (“Initiation”)

If Blake succeeded in transmuting the concept of omnipotence of thought into a single powerful metaphor, ultimately creating a new poetic object, and Coleridge at least attempted such a modification, two works by Rainer Maria Rilke demonstrate, respectively, the use

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of omnipotence of thought as pure philosophical content and the possibility of fusing statement and metaphor in a poem that comments on (and celebrates) the very process of creating objects out of the subjective imagination. In the Seventh “Duino Elegy,” Rilke makes as direct a statement about the omnipotence of subjective reality as one might hope to find:

Nowhere, beloved, can world exist but within.

Life passes in transformation. And, ever diminishing,
 vanishes what's outside. Where once was a lasting house,
 up starts some invented structure across our vision, as fully
 at home among concepts as though it stood still in a brain.
 Special garners of power are formed by the Time Spirit, formless
 as that tense urge he's extracting from everything else.
 Temples he knows no longer. ...
 ... Nay, even where one survives,
 one single thing once prayed or tended or knelt to,
 it's reaching, just as it is, into the unseen world.
 Many perceive it no more, but neglect the advantage
 of building it grandier now, with pillars and statues, *within!* ¹⁸

Psychologically, the passage is interesting because the recourse to hyperevaluation of subjective experience (“Nowhere, beloved, can world exist but within”) is not conceived in terms of a narcissistic regression, but offered as a means of spiritual progression, a means which later reaches out to encompass a sociohistorical as well as a personal *modus vivendi*. Through the transformation of outward object to inward vision, one can not only sustain the experience of love—which else is fleeting and deceptive—but preserve spiritual structures, presumably both systems and actual buildings, which are being annihilated by a materialist society. The inward apprehension, moreover, is not simply a free-floating fantasy or memory, but a quasi-artistic process where the object is endowed with “still recognisable form” (“noch erkannten Gestalt”) even though removed from the usual spatial and temporal contexts. The theoretical grounds for such a possibility lie in Rilke's somewhat Blakean notion of a creative perception, one which would “interiorize” an object, thereby freeing it from accidental encumbrances and catching its inward being within the new space of the subjective world, or *Weltinnenraum*.¹⁹ Fundamental to such a conception is the belief that space is not a lifeless void, but rather a malleable substance:

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It is something that can enclose, that is felt, that can expand and extend, taking at times its shape from the person ... at other times, it absorbs or dissolves one's being in its fluidity ... [or] forms itself around an object, which the person then seems to enclose.²⁰

Though there are unmistakable similarities here to the mechanisms of projection and introjection, the qualified nature of such a way of viewing the world, and particularly its aesthetic orientation, would seem to preclude the hybristic overevaluation of projection that Coleridge touches upon in his reference to the animistic powers of the self.

Lest we have strayed, however, let us admit at once that the significant feature of Rilke's apprehension of the subjective in his Seventh “Duino Elegy” is for our immediate purpose essentially a negative one: because they are so close to prose statement, the lines function almost completely as a descriptive “message.” The ideas are not, except tangentially, shaped into metaphor, and thus do not reach toward any recreation of object. What we have, then, is an eloquent but undemonstrated celebration of the omnipotence of thought, one which remains on a content level despite Rilke's efforts to expand the progressive rather than the regressive possibilities of the concept.

Such is not the case, however, with another Rilke poem, the earlier “Eingang” (“Initiation”):

Whoever you are, go out into the evening,
 Leaving your room, of which you know each bit:
 your house is the last before the infinite, whoever you are.
 Then with your eyes that wearily
 scarce lift themselves from the worn-out door-stone
 slowly you raise a shadowy black tree
 and fix it in the sky: slender, alone.
 And you have made the world (and it shall grow
 and ripen as a word, unspoken, still).
 When you have grasped its meaning with your will,
 Then tenderly your eyes will let it go.²¹

The significant fact here is that while it is assumed that the person can create external objects through his imagination, the assumption is not on the level of magical hallucination at all, but wholly sublimated to aesthetic experience, both visual and—above all—verbal.

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The subjective eye “creates” the tree, but, as implied by the outdoor setting of the poem, it really creates its own *experience* of an already existing tree through a reciprocal process of subject and object. The suggestion of such a confluence or interchange between subjective and objective reality is reminiscent of Wordsworth's belief in the imagination's ability to “half-create” natural objects, i.e., to perceive, respond, and then transform such objects inwardly. The tree itself maintains an independent existence; the creative eye “fixes it in the sky,” providing new contours and a new locus for the tree, and thus in a sense creating another world. But the essential matter is that the new subjectively charged world of the tree will “grow and ripen” not as a corporeal object, but as a *word*. And unlike the tree and apple of Blake's fantasy (but not the poem through which they are eventually subsumed), the created world of Rilke's tree is not directed toward some pragmatic action, nor does it exist in order to be possessed. Once its meaning is grasped, it can be relinquished: “then tenderly your eyes will let it go.”

Psychologically, then, we have a powerful evocation of the possibility of sublimation. The responsive person can exert his subjective desires to hold, shape, and manipulate an outside object even while making the necessary recognition of that object's independent existence outside the bounds of the self. He cannot possess the object literally, but can, in an interesting inversion of the logos-object process ("And God said, Let there be light: and there was light") transmute the object into a word which becomes uniquely his. Ideally, the next step is to further transmute the word into the fully realized object of a poem.

The question of whether Rilke achieves that further transmutation must remain open. While he does achieve a strong evocation of one step of the poetry-making process through the image of the tree, his completed poem falls midway between metaphor and statement. Unlike Blake, he does not allow his potential metaphor to stand alone, but draws back, as it were, to comment on its possibilities. Because he gives "directions" to the reader, telling him how to respond and what to do with his response, the poem is in the end not so much about the tree as it is about the poetic process itself. As such it is less direct than Blake's outright re-creation and even Coleridge's strained attempts to forge a metaphor for the fantasizing process. In compensation, however, it offers a succinct guideline on how the

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omnipotence of thought can be brought into creative consonance with external reality.

While the act of artistic creation may, as Freud indicated, indeed involve the otherwise pathological phenomenon of over-evaluating psychological reality, such a phenomenon represents only one step in the creative process. A poet can allude to the omnipotence of thought as an article of his content, but he has then merely restated the problem, as in parts of "Dejection" and the passage quoted earlier from Rilke's elegy. He can also, however, effect a shift from his subjective perception to metaphor. The more he is able to allow the metaphor to function as a microcosmic object, with its own contours and attributes, its own locus in a new "environment" of rhythm, language, and tone, the more he has transcended pathology. Finally, the more disinterested his ultimate stance, the more he has also surmounted any pathological implications of the fantasizing process.

A neurotic may indulge in omnipotent fantasies in order to communicate, with the inverted logic of neurosis, either his own superiority or a hostile wish against someone whose fate he wishes to control. One might assert, for example, that the mere fact of calling a curse on someone, or even speculating about his death, can somehow bring about that death. The tenacious belief in the efficacy of such fantasies is a common feature of obsessional neurosis. Or a neurotic might attempt to modify or even annihilate unpleasant objects (or persons) by an extreme use of projection: the world is hostile to me, or simply does not exist, because I wish to think so for my own protection. Always the fantasized re-creation involves some ulterior motive; for the artist, on the other hand, the re-created object is all there is and all there needs to be.

Notes

¹ See Harold Vetter, Ed., *Language Behavior in Schizophrenia: Selected Readings in Research and Theory* (Springfield, Illinois: Thomas, 1968).

² See Meyer Schapiro, "Style," *Anthropology Today*, Ed. A. L. Kroeber (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1953), pp. 287-312. Also, Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1965), ch. 3.

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³ **"The Uncanny,"** transl. James Strachey, Vol. 17, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: 1960), p. 244.

⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 240.

⁵ **"Totem and Taboo,"** Vol. 13, *Standard Edition*, p. 90.

⁶ Some other promising poems along these lines include Shelley's "Mont Blanc," and Wallace Stevens's "Man with a Blue Guitar" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

⁷ The relationship between philosophical idealism and omnipotence of thought as a pathological concept is a knotty one. Suffice it to say at this point that Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley, and Kant could not have been completely mad; moreover, the damnation of idealism as mad opens up the alarming possibility of having to consider materialism as "sane." Ernest Jones at one point links the omnipotence of thought with Eastern philosophy (**The Nature of Auto-Suggestion, Papers on Psychoanalysis, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, p. 293**), but his distinction between Eastern and Western philosophy is quaintly invidious.

⁸ For a provocative discussion of Blake's naturalism, see E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964).

⁹ *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, Ed. David Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), p. 28.

¹⁰ Other levels of interpretation are, of course, possible. See, for example, Kathleen Raine, *Blake's Debt to Antiquity*, *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 71 (1963), pp. 352-450, for a theological reading of the poem which concentrates on the Edenic imagery.

¹¹ *English Romantic Writers*, Ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), pp. 432-434.

¹² See *The Aeolian Harp*, especially lines 40-44.

¹³ There is a secondary conflict here between the desire for annihilation of the senses, expressed earlier, and the wish for their arousal.

¹⁴ Marshall Suther, *The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 137.

¹⁵ Marshall Suther, *The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 138.

¹⁶ Marshall Suther, *The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 137.

¹⁷ Beverly Fields, *Reality's Dark Dream: Dejection in Coleridge* (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 127.

¹⁸ Transl. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: Norton, 1939), pp. 61-63.

¹⁹ See Priscilla Washburn Shaw, *Rilke, Valery, and Yeats: The Domain of the Self* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 86-87n.

²⁰ Priscilla Washburn Shaw, *Rilke, Valery, and Yeats: The Domain of the Self* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1964), p. 60.

²¹ Transl. C. F. MacIntyre, *Rilke: Selected Poems with English Translation* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 21.

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