Symbols in Psychotherapy

"Feelings, Words and Visions"

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From

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“FEELINGS, WORDS and VISIONS”

The Use of Symbols in the Late Series Paintings of Thomas Cole with Links to Changes in Cole’s Personality.

> “An invincible diffidence led him to avoid society and to wander alone in woods and solitude, where he found that serenity which forsook him in the company of his fellows.”

“Funeral Oration for Thomas Cole” by W.C. Bryant (1849).

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Cole (1801-1849) was the founder of the Hudson River School of American art. The literature of his time makes reference to his intense shyness and his tendency to become depressed. He earned his living through the sale of landscape paintings. He dreamed of painting inspirational tales that required a series of pictures to depict cause and effect in the context of the passage of time. Such a series was the “Voyage of Life” Commissions for such paintings were few. Often he planned and designed such works in vain. In the last years of his life, Cole overcame his psychological symptoms for the most part. Concomitantly, he became active in organized religion, and chose to become independent of patrons by becoming the sponsor of “The Cross and the World”, his last great allegorical series of paintings.

His shift from shy dependence to independence was paralleled by a change in the personal cryptic symbols he used in his paintings. There was a shift from oral dependent to phallic assertive symbols. His preference for religio-cultural transcendent symbolic contexts, which traced the transit of a mystic toward unity with Deity remained alive for him. They continued to serve as a source of inspiration with an important change in form. He split the tale he told. The single dedicated voyager of his early works was split into the two assertive pilgrims in his later series who chose their ways. One chose the mystic way that promised pain on the way to paradise. The other selected a road with a promise of many pleasures from which to chose, each of which lead to perdition.

Transitions in the Art Life of Thomas Cole

The vicissitudes that befell the cryptic symbols that changed in Cole's paintings, as he grew older and became more assertive, reflected Cole's life adjustment. The changing nature of these symbols can be traced in the drawings and verbal sketches that formed an ongoing and direct bridge between his basic mystic series "The Voyage of Life" painted in 1839 and the "The Cross and the World", Cole's final statement about the mystic way, on which he was working when he died in 1849.

"The Voyage of Life" consists of a four painting series. Each was accompanied by a poem by Cole, which explained the meaning of the painting. First there was Childhood. (Figure 16)

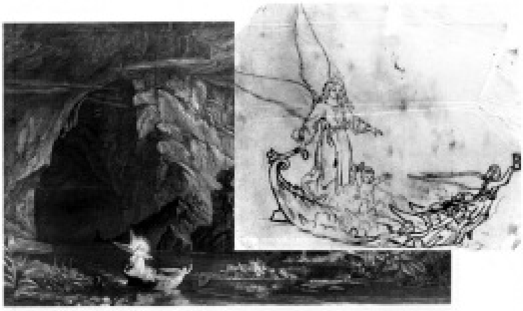

Figure 16
"Childhood" after the "Voyage of Life"
by Thomas Cole. (See P 275.)

This picture depicts a child in a boat with an hourglass on the prow. He is watched over by a guardian angel. The boat was driven by the wings of smaller angels set on either side. Second there was Youth. (Figure 17) The angel, out of sight, watches over the voyager as he steers toward a castle in the clouds, which we are told in Cole's poem represents imagination and ambition. An halo about the castle extends beyond the upper border of the painting. It is a symbol of the limitlessness of fantasy.

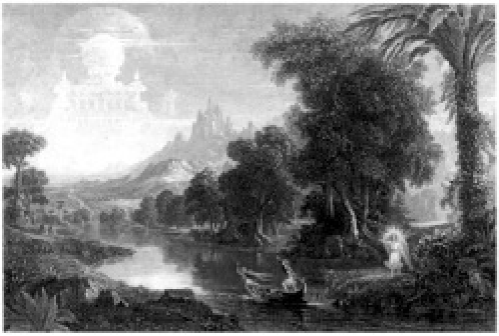

Figure 17
"Youth" after the "Voyage of Life"
by Thomas Cole. (See P 275.)

Third there is Manhood. With the angel watching from afar, the voyager sails his rudderless craft through treacherous waters. Fourth there is Old Age. (Figure 18) The hourglass is gone and the ever-present guardian angel guides him toward the hereafter. In "The Voyage of Life" the voyager travels through life accompanied by a maternal guardian angel who guards and guides him.

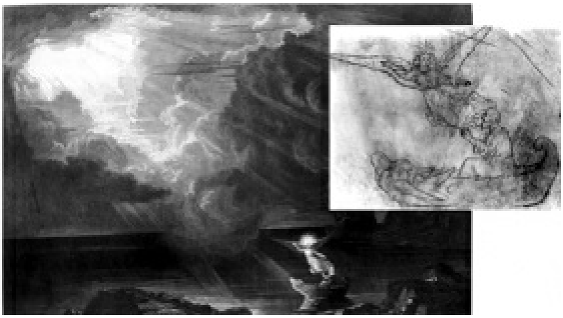

Figure 18
"Old Age" after the "Voyage of Life"
by Thomas Cole. (See P 275.)

Cole kept notes and conveyed his feelings in sketches letters and notes. These have been retained by the Albany Institute of History and Art and the Detroit Institute of Art. The evolution of Cole's concepts can be traced in them.

Cole continued to be occupied with thoughts about the series “The Voyage of Life” from 1839 until 1844. In early 1844, he turned his attention to a new series to be called “The Mortal Pilgrimage”. With this began the transition that by 1846 had converted the “Voyage of Life” into “The Cross and the World”

Cole conceived of “The Mortal Pilgrimage” as a series of four pictures. First there is “A child in a flowery land ascending a pleasant valley with its staff enwreathed in flowers”. Second, there is a youth in a magnificent scene, a rainbow in the distance. Third, “ . . . there is a man in a broken scene in a tempestuous weather, a mountain current.” Fourth there is an old man with tottering steps descending into a dark valley. As one can see, the pictures parallel the “Voyage of Life”. There are a number of important differences, which depict the pilgrim as a more self-reliant person. He carries a staff. He climbs a landscape rather than being carried by a boat. The angels and the distant visions are gone. The voyager has become his own guide on a voyage in which he is carried forward on his own two feet. There was no sponsor for this series.

Late in 1844, Cole turned his attention to planning for a series called “Life, Death and Immortality”, which was to have consisted of three pictures. It is described in a letter to Daniel Wadsworth, who was a possible patron. (See Noble 1853 p266.) In this series, there still is a single male character. A guiding male figure, replacing the angel from the “Voyage of Life” is introduced in the first picture as he later appears in the first picture of the final version of his concept, the “Cross and the World”. A cross in the sky is introduced into every picture in this series. This cross is to be found in each picture in the final form of the “Cross and the World”. In the third and final picture, “Immortality”, there is depicted once again a greeting by an angelic creature at the gates of heaven. To explain the message of the third picture, Cole offers one of his typical explanatory poems. “Angels conducting a spirit through the gates of heaven. An angel on either side of the spirit gazing upward. The spirit bewildered with astonishment and delight—a flood of light bursting on the ascending figures—through the opening gates of heaven and piercing the troubled gloom that lies behind them.” “Life Death and Immortality” found no sponsor.

Cole’s imagination sped ahead to yet another series, which reflected a new insight that required the splitting of the tale of the Voyage of Life into a tale of two lives. Its title was “The Pilgrimage of Life and the Pilgrimage of Death”. In two pictures, Cole presented mankind’s ambivalence about delayed reward for sacrifice. The split in motivation was expressed through two voyagers. Each in his own picture conveyed one arm of the ambivalence. There is expressed in the “Pilgrim of Life” an acceptance of Christian salvation. There is expressed in the “Pilgrim of Death”, a willingness to decline it. In the “Pilgrimage of Death” the protagonist turns his back on the angel and the cross and choses to take a course that leads down a deep valley, which at first glitters but at length is wrapped in darkness.

One of the contributions of Cole’s life experience to the shape of the “Cross and the World” was his religious conversion under the guidance of Louis Noble, his Catskill pastor. Cole had little in the way of a formal association with a church in his early years. During his last years in Catskill he found the comfort that the promise of salvation offers. He had reason to use it as a reward for living an arduous life, marked by depression and all the pain that accompanies an ambition that exceeds the willingness of the world to join in the celebration of his talents. The introduction of a perdition bound hedonist as the second protagonist in The “Pilgrimage of Life and the Pilgrimage of Death” appears to reflect this change in Cole’s life. In the “Voyage of Life” the presence of despair in adult life (Manhood) was presented as an expected event based on the life template of the Mystic Way. (See Underhill 1910.) Cole interpreted life and painted the Voyage of Life according to this philosophy. Once he was introduced to the idea of choosing between two life courses he was impelled to introduce into his paintings two separate histories pursued by two separate men with contradictory ambitions, which determined one’s fate,

The concept of two protagonists was carried forward into a five picture series, which Cole called “The Two Pilgrims”. It is the penultimate form in the transition from the “Voyage of Life” to “The Cross and the World.” In figure 19 one can clearly see the image of a lone pilgrim following the directions of a sage to seek salvation.

Figure 19
Thomas Cole 19th century “Pencil Sketch for the Cross and the World”

The close relationship between the two series can be seen when we compare Cole’s description of the fourth picture of the “Two Pilgrims” with his description of the fourth picture of “the Cross and the World”. In the fourth picture of the “Two Pilgrims” Cole tells us, “The first pilgrim, (who followed the road to salvation,) is now an old man. He has left the tempest behind. In the company of angelic beings, he approaches the cross, which now sheds a glorious light on all the scene.” In this picture, Cole evolved a derivative of “Old Age” (the fourth picture—figure 18) of the “Voyage of Life”, which depicts angels greeting the voyager of life on his way to heaven. This image was carried into the fourth painting of “The Cross and the World”. In this picture, titled the “Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey” (See figure 22.) the pilgrim approaches a heavenly brightness where angels wait.

No step in the evolution of these pictorial concepts found a sponsor for a translation to canvass. Cole’s conceptual peregrinations came to an end when he decided to complete his own journey by sponsoring the paintings himself. By this time (1864), he had matured and had taken the helm of his own life. He was the father of children and had engaged in investments and a real estate venture.

In its final form, there were five parts to the projected series “The Cross and the World”. In the first painting, titled “Two Youths Enter Upon a Pilgrimage—One to the Cross, the Other to the World”, the beginning of the journey is shown. (See figure 20.) A patriarchal guide stands in the center of the painting before a mountain, which divides the terrain into two plains. The guide holds a holy book and directs two young pilgrims to go to the plain to the left of the picture, where a cross in the sky surmounts a depiction of darkness, storm, and travail. The pilgrim of the cross is shown walking to the left to traverse this "dark night of the soul"[1], this "slough of despond"[2]. The guide ignores the plain to the picture's right, towards which the pilgrim of the world is shown walking in pursuit of brightness dominated by a phantom pleasure palace. (See figure 20.)

Figure 20
Steel Engraving after Thomas Cole "Two Youths Enter Upon a Pilgrimage—One to the Cross, the Other to the World"

The second and third paintings depict the two pilgrims as young adults on their chosen paths. The second painting shows "The Pilgrim of the Cross on His Journey". He confronts riven trees, and a plangent stream that courses across his way. The third painting, which exists as an oil sketch, (See figure 21.) details the adventures of "The Pilgrim of the World on his Journey". A lush landscape offers the pilgrim three choices as he traverses the world. The choices are a fantastic castle in the sky, a temple to Mammon, and a bucolic woodland grove filled with dancers. Three boats wait to transport him toward the goal of his choice.

Figure 21
Thomas Cole Oil Sketch for “The Cross and the World—The Pilgrim of the World on His Journey”

The fourth and fifth paintings depict death, the end of the pilgrimage. The fourth painting follows the “Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey” (See figure 22.) Having weathered a storm, he approaches the bright light of heaven where angels wait to greet him in a replay of the painting, “Old Age” from the “Voyage of Life” series.

Figure 22
Oil Sketch by Thomas Cole of “The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey”

The fifth picture, which exists as an oil sketch, depicts the “Pilgrim of the World at the End of his Journey” facing a deserted shore, with demons threatening and ruins all about. The third picture was left unfinished at Cole’s death. The fifth picture was never begun.

Cole died during the painting of the third picture. The incomplete series was honored and exhibited until 1870, after which it was lost from view. There is an oil sketch for each of the five paintings. There are photographs of the three completed paintings in the collection of The Long Island Historical Society in Brooklyn.

There are two choices in the first painting of “The Cross and the World”. They are the road to salvation and the road to perdition. There are three choices in “The Pilgrim of the World on His Journey.” These are wealth, fantasy, and carousal. The “Voyage of Life”‘s story of a single voyager who experiences both youthful ambition and life’s rapids, is converted in the “Cross and the World” into a tale of two men. The first, the “Pilgrim of the Cross”, chooses to follow the guide’s directions to take the mystic way through pain to salvation. The other, the pilgrim of the world chooses of his own free will to march through pleasure to a perdition that is dimly seen beyond a voluptuous world.

In the transition from the “Voyage of Life” to “The Cross and the World”, a caring angel, who accompanies a single voyager in all the pictures, gives way to a stern guide who directs two pilgrims on their way at the beginning of their journey. He leaves them to choose and pursue their destinies alone. Oral dependence on a guardian angel gives way to phallic self-sufficiency. The fixed fate that befalls the voyager in the “Voyage of Life” is an arduous journey through the “slough of despond”. This kind of fate continues for the pilgrim of the cross once he has decided to embark on the mystic way. In contrast fixed fate is replaced by choice in pursuit of rapture for the pilgrim of the world. Independence carries risks.

THE PERSONAL LIFE OF THOMAS COLE

Early Years In England

Thomas Cole was born at Bolton-le-moor, Lancashire, England, Feb. 1, 1801. Though English by birth, his family was of American origin. Dunlap (1834) tells us that Cole’s grandfather was a Maryland farmer. (P 139) Lanman (1844) reported that his parents lived in the United States before their marriage and their ensuing departure for England where Cole was born. (P 4)

The finest source of the framework of information here presented on Cole's early years comes from George Washington Greene (1859). He was Cole's good friend while he painted the second (Rome) set of the "Voyage of Life". Greene was the U.S. ambassador to Rome at the time. According to his essays, he and Cole spoke at length over a period of many months. His information is most likely derived from these conversations with Cole.

Greene described Thomas Cole as the youngest but one of eight children. Yet Dunlap (1834) described Cole as the youngest child of a family consisting of parents, three sisters and Thomas. The discrepancy may relate to changes in the family structure that occurred when they moved to United States in search of a new start after Cole's father, a wallpaper manufacturer proved a financial failure in Britain.

A Lifetime of Moods

Cole himself was a lonely child who kept to himself. As Dunlap (1834) described it, "An excessive bashfulness, joined to this love of the combination of land water and sky, caused him to avoid the society not only of adults, but of children his own age.—he sought and found in nature the pleasure which seemed denied to him elsewhere." (P 140) Noble (1964) confirms this stating, "his moral sense, which from earliest childhood, was most delicate and lively, forbade him to form any intimate acquaintances with those of his own age." (P 4) Whatever the cause may have been, young Tom Cole was a loner.

When Cole was ten and his father's business in Bolton failed. The family moved to Chorley. At that age, young Thomas was sent away from home to a school in Chester where the children were treated with harshness worthy of a Dickensian setting. Greene describes Thomas as a delicate and sensitive boy. It is not surprising that the hard fare and bad treatment which he met with in that school during his first separation from home should have made a lasting impression on his mind. As Nathan (1940) tells us, he could never shake off the memory of his unhappy youth. Greene (1859) reports that he didn't stay long in the school. He was recalled to join his parents in Chorley and sent to child labor. He was put to work in a calico factory to draw figures for prints. While he drew, a fellow workman artist "an old Scotchman used to repeat ballads to him while they were plying their task together, and who gave him a relish for those simple and touching stories, which are so stimulating to a young imagination.” At ten years of age, in the time period within which psychological latency occurs, youngsters have the capacity to master the stresses of their lives through the creation of fantasy or the use of the content of ballads. Such stimulation of imagination can become a way of mastering loneliness and disappointment. Latency age fantasy sets the stage for the adult to be to develop the capacity to salve his emotional wounds and master stresses through cultural sublimations. Greene describes a childhood mechanism to be used often by Cole as a youth and as a man in dealing with sadness. Typically Cole created fantasies and philosophies, pursued music and poetry, and withdrew within himself rather than address the stings of reality.

The First Years In America

Cole’s adolescence was spent in England. He pushed the family to come to America when he was in his late teens. They arrived in Philadelphia on July 3, 1819. Here his father set up shop. Again as they had in England, his fortunes faltered and failed. Shortly after, the family made its way to Steubenville, Ohio. Thomas Cole remained in Philadelphia, where he was employed making woodcuts for textbooks and for Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress”, a tale of the mystic way. He lived with a family, sharing a room with a law student. The student is quoted as saying “I had good opportunity of studying his character. I had not been long with him before I discovered that his was a mind of no common order, and his morals pure and spotless” (Tuckerman 1847,1867). After a sojourn in the Caribbean, Cole took leave of Philadelphia, and walked to Steubenville, Ohio, where he rejoined his family.

An unidentified source, Anon. (1898) writing during the nineteenth century provides us with the following verbal picture of Cole during his years in Steubenville. The Coles arrived there about 1819. They were a cultured family. Two daughters, Annie and Sarah are mentioned. They taught school in Steubenville. The influence of the family on the tastes of the local populace was marked. The good impression made by them was lasting. It is told that they had the only piano in the entire region. The instrument was played in the evening to positive public response. It was considered to be a wonderful thing to hear a piano played. Each evening a listening crowd would fill the street outside their home from curb to curb as far up and down the street as the “sweet strains” could be heard.

Thomas Cole's father continued to work as a wallpaper maker, the trade he had followed in England. On the site of a former paper mill stood the Cole wallpaper factory. Here "The elder Cole displayed wonderful genius in the manufacture of beautiful wall hangings." Thomas Cole worked for him. His first work was to create "old fashioned but beautifully decorated window shades."

"Cole was a sedate young man, caring nothing for the sports of his day, and he was never known to be in any of the "scrapes" laid to the door of his contemporaries. He was a member of the Thespian Society, which gave dramatic entertainments." "Cole created quite a sensation by appearing on the street on a velocipede—an old fashioned bicycle—propelled by the feet striking the ground."

Greene (1859) gave us the following striking insight into Cole's emotional life in Steubenville. (P 80) "Meanwhile new thoughts began to rise in his mind, and his breast was agitated by feelings which he was unable to express. The world was changing for him, and as it were under his very eyes, and yet he knew not how. The sunshine grew brighter and more full of promise. There were softer voices in the murmuring leaves, and a deeper meaning in the pensive hours of twilight. At times he would take his flute and try to give vent to his feelings in music. Then again, he would seek relief in poetry, and endeavor to explain the scenes, which moved him so strangely. But the world without him and the world within had become blended and intertwined in a way that neither music nor poetry could interpret."

Cole had the good fortune, at the time of this disquieting awakening, to meet an itinerant painter of portraits who happened upon the town and opened the way for young Tom to enter the world of art. It was in Steubenville that Cole found in art a way to express his inner experiences. The year was 1820. The artist, named Stein, gave him a technical book on art in which Cole found the key to his future. He found he could express the unrest within himself through the enhancement of a skill that he had learned at his father's knee. Into this, he later blended the conjuries of an imagination set to flame by his Scottish companion of old, who had woven ballads into Cole's creative ways. Here may be the key to Cole's unique and driven striving to proceed beyond the limits of painting portrait and landscape to limning on canvass, stories of his own design.

Landscape painters paint a momentary mood upon the land. A single painting can accomplish this. This was not enough for Cole. He used multiple canvasses in support of his wish to convey the passage of time in the service of story telling. Greene (1859) described Cole's discovery of art as a means for self-expression. He noted: As Cole began to paint "the nervous tremulousness with which he always approached a new pleasure, gradually changes, as his thoughts grow clearer and his conceptions more vivid, into a serene earnestness—the calm and majestic consciousness of power." Uncertainty and doubt gave way to a self-reassuring sense of power. With the successful translation of an idea into art there is a fixing of a concept. The evocative tensions transposed into a representational form are stilled when they are encrusted with communicative symbols and attention is directed toward an external object such as a painting. There is acquired a skill that permits the blending of personal adjustment with a socially adaptive activity. Greene, in the presentation of Cole's experience, quoted above gives an excellent description of the phenomenon of sublimation. This is the mental mechanism by which conflicts are resolved through creativity. The flurry of bewilderment that Cole experienced is not rare in adolescence. His sublimative means of dealing with it was to become a characteristic of the man. It was typical of Cole's style to find a way to adjust through an inner play of symbols instead of confronting the burr that bites in the world beyond the self. Dunlap (1834) reported a related impact by the itinerant artist Stein on young Cole, the frightened and the diffident. His presence stoked Cole's sublimations and countered his low self-image vis-à-vis the world. Cole responded to Stein's book with the creation of grandiose fantasies about himself, through which he mobilized aggression in his secret inner world. He expanded his hopes to include ambitions based on newly learned horizons. In these fantasies, Cole perceived himself to be a giant. He envisioned himself as a painter of renown. In phrasing that presaged the painting "Youth" in the "Voyage of Life" series, Cole said, "My ambition grew and in my imagination I pictured the glory of being a great painter" "The names of Stuart and Sully came to my ears like the titles of great conquerors and the great masters were hallowed above all earthly things." Cole had forged a channel for the expression of his talents and a use for his years.

Dunlap (1834) reports that when his interest in art became known in the town, a judge lent Cole a palette. His shyness interdicted an expected polite response when the palette broke. Says Cole of this, "This kindness I repaid ungratefully, for I most unfortunately broke the palette; and although I often met him on the street, my excessive bashfulness prevented me from making any explanation or apology for keeping it so long. The circumstance gave me much pain, and although it may appear trivial, it marks my common conduct in those days, and is one of the thousand follies of that nature committed through diffidence. Indeed, it is only of late years (1834) that I have surmounted this weakness. I long endeavored to conquer it, and often when I knew my folly, and struggled with it, I have heard my heart beat and felt myself incapable of utterance, in the presence of persons neither distinguished nor talented. This weakness perhaps might be dignified with the title of nervousness; be that as it may, I have in great measure conquered it or it has cured itself." Cole was aware of the changes of character that I describe.

Cole's passivity extended to fear of the subjects of his portraits. Nothing delighted him more than to have his sitters (when he was a portrait painter) fall asleep. He then felt that he had them in his power. (Letter from Cole quoted by Dunlap 1834).

From Steubenville To Philadelphia

Cole set out from Steubenville intent on earning his way as an itinerant portrait painter in nearby Ohio villages. The field was crowded with artists. He repeatedly found himself in towns whose faces had already been transferred to board or canvass. The journey led to one disappointment after another. As he traveled, the hopelessness of the situation became more and more apparent. Greene (1859) tells of one particularly poignant episode that sums the impact of these days. Cole had been hired to paint portraits and pictures in an inn. He began to paint. His understanding was that in exchange, his room and board would be free. This was not the case. When Cole learned that he had to pay for the room he felt despair. He was saved when friends spoke up for him. (P 84) He left town, taking the road to Chillecothe. As he neared the end of his three days journey he said of himself, "Here goes poor Tom, with only a sixpence in his pocket" The tears started to his eyes but instead of giving way to the sudden depression, which the sound of his voice reflected, he drew out his flute and seating himself on the trunk of a tree, played himself into tranquility again. Note that Cole's sublimative coping mechanisms were here used to deal with depression.

The pickings were so lean in the area roundabout Ohio that Thomas Cole decided to seek his fortune in a big city. First he went to Pittsburgh, then to Philadelphia. It was winter and, Cole having nary enough to pay his way, could not afford a warm coat for the voyage. He took from home a cloth table cover to protect his shoulders from the rainy cold weather on a journey of days. (Greene 1959 P 89) The coach in which he rode, was driven by a rough sort of man, who used profanity excessively. In spite of the bad weather for which he was ill prepared, Cole left the coach during the day to walk the muddy turnpike in order to "(escape) from this moral pestilence (blasphemy and bad language) by walking ahead." (See Dunlap (1834a, 1918 p 147).

On entering Philadelphia, " . . . he felt oppressed, and in the midst of a crowd of strangers his spirits sunk under a sense of solitude greater far than the forest." (Dunlap 1834a p148) As we know from the descriptions of Cole's personality in his childhood and youth, the only thing in Philadelphia that was not a stranger to Cole on that day was the familiar sense of solitude. He obtained meager employment. He lived in a little garret room with a bare floor. He kept warm by putting his limbs on the stove and threshing his hands about to get the blood to circulate (Greene).

Nathan (1940) considered this period to have been the dark one, which cast a gloom over Cole's later years. He noted that "the dark outlook on life and the feeling of despondency found within him in these disastrous years tinged all his later work." "Perhaps these sufferings help to explain why he loved the dark sides of nature, thunderstorms and deluges, and why his evening landscapes with all their loveliness almost invariably make us sad." (P 30) Perhaps this explains the origin of Cole's sad mien. I think however that despondency and passivity were in evidence much before this and that the die had been cast long before Cole crossed the Schuylkill. He remained in Philadelphia from 1823 till 1825, when he moved to New York where he rejoined his family.

COLE'S ADULT YEARS

Cole's first step to fame came in New York with the recognition of his landscape skills by the artists Trumbull and Durand, and the writer Dunlap. Cole's shyness and "nervousness" were not lost on Trumbull (see Lillie (1890), who noted on first meeting him that Cole was a "Slightly built young man, apparently not more than one and twenty; fair with large blue eyes, and an expression of keen though reserved intelligence; speaking with some nervousness of manner, but always to the point, timid but not awkwardly so, and when embarrassment wore away, quite brilliant in his style having hope and a certain epigrammatic way of putting things." (P 207) Thenceforth, he was well enough known to attract commissions and earn a living. At no time did he earn enough to support himself and satisfy his obligations and have money left over for him to be able to paint as he pleased. He saw this as a deprivation. Thenceforth, his feelings of depression focused on this. He was well rewarded for his landscapes. Yet he longed to paint allegories in multiple scenes. Though he planned and sketched and kept small paintings around as samples, such commissions were distressingly few.

As an adult he was well liked and championed by his friends. His contemporaries spoke well of him. He married, had children, and became a well-known figure who was mourned nationwide at his death. He produced “Youth” from “The Voyage of Life”, which was the most popular picture in America at the time. He was proud. He is described as bald (by 33 years of age) and covering the fact by combing his hair up from fringes over the top. (Dunlap, 1834) His attention tended to wander. This is described by Noble, who was Cole’s friend and biographer, in a letter sent to Charles Lanman, an artist and writer. Lanman and Noble had met as students in 1839 and correspondence between the two was customary. Noble took offense at something unspecified that Lanman had said of Cole. Noble wrote to Lanman that—

“You do Cole real injustice. He is a man of the most delicate feelings imaginable—a singular man in many things. He moves much in a world of his own; meditates sublime things, which once in a while he uncovers for a moment.” (Lanman 1886)

Cole was described by Nathan (1940) as a person of refined manners with “a reserved and shy nature—of a somewhat feminine disposition”. How Nathan knew this is not clear, since he wrote in the twentieth century. This comment may be a reflection of Clement’s (1874). description of Cole as “of an extremely sensitive temperament, (with) much taste for music and fully appreciated beautiful scenery.” (P 214) The adult Cole was best described as amiable. (Dunlap 1834, Lanman 1844) He reacted to rejection with depression. He told Dunlap (1834) of his experience when he first arrived in London on his first return to Europe, which took place after the completion of his early series painting “The Course of Empire” “The gloom of the climate, the coldness of the artists,—threw a tone of melancholy over my mind that lasted for months” (P 150). He had much to buoy his spirits. Yet, he continued to be depressed. The main theme of his complaints centered about the failure of patrons to recognize value in his allegorical series pictures and to order them. He could only dream of these creations, sketching them, reworking them and hoping that someone would support him in this work. Even the “Voyage of Life was accompanied by circumstances that were painful to Cole. It should be remembered that their sponsor died while he was still working on the paintings and that the heirs wished to cancel the contract. Cole held fast. When the paintings were completed, Cole made a second trip to Europe. While Cole was in Rome with Greene, the original pictures of the "Voyage of Life" stood neglected on the floor of the home of the heirs. In Rome, Cole painted a second set of the "Voyage of Life" in response.

Greene (1859) spoke plaintively of Cole's feelings after the misfortunes that beset the final moments of painting the first "Voyage of Life" "Hard work and still more, necessity of adapting himself to the spirit of the times, and painting little pictures in order to live, when his mind was teeming with great compositions, had broken his health. Few think what a wasting power this longing for better things has, and how the mind constrained to live in an atmosphere not its own, exhausts its strength in little efforts, loses the relish of present enjoyment because it sees nothing to look to in the future, strives, struggles, resists; escaping now and then to its own world, to shudder and shrink as cold reality comes and forces it back again to its dungeon; and dragging on through life, wearied and disheartened by the bitter consciousness that it has the capacity to do great things which it will never be permitted to do." Greene continues, "But there are evil spirits that walk the earth which wantonly deride the earnest mind." "Cole's health and spirits were drooping under these evil influences, and he resolved to try the effect of another trip to Europe. Elasticity of mind returned with change of scene." (P 103) Here we have the age old long journey as therapy for depression.

Cole devoted the period from 1841 to 1847 to bemoaning the fate of himself as the creative artist, so well described by Greene, who could not obtain sponsorship for the series paintings of which he dreamed. Cole never ceased to create and transform them into new images and he dwelled on their translation to canvass.

As years passed, the transitions were invaded by new elements. The symbols of the paintings no longer told of men guided by angels who watch over their every step, which characterized the "Voyage of Life". Alone and without regard for the fact that they strive without companionship or guide, his new pilgrim images penetrated the unknown alone in pursuit of their fates.

Actualization of this change in his fantasy life into his active life pattern happened when Cole gave up the inward turnings of his aggression, his dependence on others, and his passive hope for a guide and patron. He made an active step, which was presaged by changes in the symbolism of his late series. He sought the expression of his inner needs in reality when in 1846 he began to paint a five part allegorical series (1846) "The Cross and the World" under his own patronage.

This might not have been only a move that expressed a change of personality. It may have been an act of courage as well for his series paintings and the lives of his sponsors had had an uncertain destiny. His series paintings did not fare well in the market place. He had to repaint the "Voyage of Life" to preserve its image for the world in fear that the first set would be lost to view, since its current owners had turned their faces to the wall of their gallery. In Europe he was unable to find a buyer for the second set of the "Voyage of Life". He had to carry the four large oil paintings home to America sans either funds from their sale or from the more saleable paintings that he could have painted in their place. Cole's repetition of the "Voyage of Life" caused concern that uniqueness would not be guaranteed in his paintings. This slowed sales and dissuaded potential sponsors. (Cole Letter to Thomas Crawford 1844) Eventually he sold the second set of the "Voyage of Life" to a Mr. Schoenberger of Cincinnatti, who placed them quietly in his home "Scarlet Oaks". Eventually the mansion became the Bethesda Home for The Aged. Unheralded, these antique paintings hung in an old age home until they were rediscovered in 1966. The details of the rediscovery of the hidden series were described by Dwight and Boyle (1967) in "Art In America" as a mystery unraveled by detective work.

> "The tale of the disappearance and eventual rediscovery of the second series of *The Voyage of Life,* painted in Rome in 1842 by Thomas Cole, has all the makings of a *roman policier.* In the words of the Prefect of Police in "The Purloined Letter" by Edgar Allan Poe, "The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."
>
> "The case involves the disappearance of four huge oil paintings, an artist's financial difficulties and a "Gothick" mansion built on a hill overlooking a cemetery. Playing the role of detective C. Auguste Dupin is Doctor Charles A. Sarnoff of New York City, whose lifelong interest in Thomas Cole led to the painstaking research on which much of this article is based." (P 60)

The Shadow of a Jinx

The patrons of Cole's series paintings did not fare well. As Clement (1874) and Tuckerman (1867) have both observed, "There is a touching coincidence connected with Cole's three series of pictures." The patrons who commissioned new works each died before his series was completed. "The "Course of Empire was painted for Luman Reed, who died just before the completion of the last of five pictures. The

"Voyage of Life" was painted for Samuel Ward, whose own voyage of life was over before Cole had brought his traveler safely through to the ocean of eternity. The third series, "The Cross and the World," was painted with Cole as the sponsor in spite of the shadow of a jinx that trailed them. The picture representing the pilgrim of the cross entering heaven was scarcely finished, when his own soul took flight toward those regions of bliss whose contemplation had filled the meditations of his soul. Cole Died in Catskill, New York on Feb. 11, 1848. The series of which he dreamed and which he sponsored himself was left unfinished.

Descriptive and Functional Symbols in Art

Individual symbols like individual people tend to have characteristics that distinguish them as well as characteristics that permit them to be grouped with others. The two most important of these groupings for the understanding of Cole's series paintings are the descriptive and functional groupings.—

Grouping of a given representation into a *descriptive symbolic form* is identified by the structural, non-content, characteristics of the manifest symbol. Into descriptive groupings fall such symbolic forms as visual symbols, verbal symbols, simple generic symbols (those whose referents are known), poetic symbols and transcendent symbols. Repression of the link in meaning between artistic representations and referents may be a facultative structural characteristic of any descriptive symbolic form. When such repression happens, there are created psychoanalytic symbols (those whose referents are unknown to the viewer and artist alike). That which makes the psychoanalytic symbol important in art is its ability to permit personal content and its affects to slip stealthily from secret referents into representations that stir empathy. As a result an additional level of meaning is mingled with consciously available manifest symbol content. Such mingling enhances the import of otherwise neutral culturally determined themes in paintings. The result is a work of art in which manifest content reflects both hidden evocative and communicative socio-mythic meanings. Because of the dynamic function that results from the structure of the psychoanalytic symbol, it can serve as a functional symbol.

Functional groupings are recognized by the roles played by their symbols in the personal and cultural life of the user. Into functional groupings fall the symbols in whose affect content are found the affinity characteristics by which they are gathered into panels, nets, and webs to define reality, truth and that which is comfortable and acceptable in consciousness. They are used as guides in the selection of manifest symbols that have less affect. Their effect in producing comforting altered representations neutralizes the affects associated with the troubling awarenesses and experiences that sensitive minds down through the ages could neither put to rest nor forget. Culturally shared mythic symbols of religion belong in the functional grouping that resolves uncertainty about existence and the life hereafter. An example of such a symbol would be one contained in a narrative which preserves ideas that are stored in readiness for use in the resolution of awesome thoughts about "generations yet unborn." For instance, the thought of a higher power that stands ready to guarantee eternal life, when contained in the tale of the life of a hero, offers help to those who fear the unknown in areas of existence after death. In an early epic, the hero Gilgamesh searched for the key to eternal life. This theme of eternal wonder was picked up by the story of the biblical flood centuries later. Recently the vitality of this theme and its appeal to audiences was demonstrated by its appearance in a movie about Superman, in which the hero speeds around the earth so quickly that time turns backward and Lois Lane returns to life. In early nineteenth century America, hunger for symbols of a guardian angel to comfort men through the uncertainties that dot the way on life's voyage toward eternity evoked the great acceptance of Cole's "Voyage of Life". (Cole took the second set on a city tour. They were received well. After Cole's death, The American Art Union awarded the first set to a member. Seven sets of engravings and many oil copies followed. The "Voyage of Life" became the most popular work of art in America.) In a similar vein, the organization of life around a reassuring pattern in the style of the mystic way dominated the concept of the "Voyage of Life". It explained and made acceptable life's pains with the promise of a reward in heaven. The "Cross and the World" offered a different functional symbolic template. It described salvation through a hard road for those who chose it, and perdition for those who chose pleasure.

Structural Symbolism in Cole's Works

Symbolism in art involves a multitude of symbolic forms. Through these Cole rendered evoked concepts, such as preoccupation with man's fate, into paintings. Some of the forms of symbols Cole used had deficiencies that required remedies. To an unusual degree for the subjects depicted in paintings, Cole's concepts were cautionary tales, which told of cause and effect over time. The appearance of a symbol in a moment in time could not convey this. He solved the problem of depicting time's passing by creating sequential paintings in series.

Cole used ordinary images such as a tree, a torrent, a castle, or a storm in his paintings. Such symbols as they appear in art are often viewed as a sort of simple shorthand for conveying obvious meaning. If one takes this stance, it is possible to lose sight of the fact that there are available to the symbolizing function of the artist manifest symbolic forms, which represent two or more meanings simultaneously. Through interpretation the viewer can distort manifest symbols, both cryptic and occult, into meanings that extend long beyond their obvious definitions. An element of a painting can present a concrete thing at the same time that it carries a culturally understood implication and the influence of the repressed unconscious. Thus a torrent can serve at one time both as a concrete representation of an active stream, an emotional state of harassment and a moment in the flow of life. Often only the addition of verbal commentary can remedy this dispersal of meaning. The special quality of Cole's work derives in good measure from this use of a rare blending of verbal and pictorial symbolic forms. Words provide an orienting context for visual symbols, such as those chosen by Cole to evoke concepts. Clarification in verbal form makes meaning clear. Cole chose verbal descriptions in the form of poems attached to each picture to do this. The technique was not unknown at the time or in the history of art. The most telling challenge to the concept that symbols have power within themselves to transmit meaning as though they were self-powered flares is the required use of poems and commentaries to explain the meaning of religious symbols. The most striking historical example of visual symbols coupled with commentary occurred during the Protestant reformation. Poulsen (2002) has described the workshop of Lucas Cranach, which produced pictures for both Catholic and Protestant worshipers. "Luther (like Cole) had his reservations about the openness of the visual language. Its ambiguity and lack of semantic precision contrasted poorly with the communicative potential of the verbal language, which he considered in principle to be unambiguous. (P 77) Martin Luther's teachings were affixed in verbal form to pictures to lock their meaning to his beliefs. Through appended commentary the creative interpretation of the viewer was preempted by meanings locked in print. Even transcendent symbols that deliver awe arouse only affect. Commentary is needed for the uninitiated to understand them. Chinese landscapes are often accompanied by explanatory poems. (See De Silva 1968)

Functional Symbolism in Cole's Works

In dealing with the transmutations of symbolic forms that occurred during the developmental steps between Cole's late great series works, we will follow two functional symbolic forms. The first of these forms are the manifest symbols developed as the result of repression. These are the *psychoanalytic symbols*. They are psychoanalytic symbols in structure, yet their dynamic capacities permit placing them in the functional symbolic group. Their form and content shadowed the change in Cole's modality of personality response from passive to active. The second of these forms is the functional group of *symbol nets* (e.g. the mystic way and the road through choice to salvation) that universally is used to give expression to the awareness of religious men that suffering lies in wait to harass the pilgrim on his way to salvation.

Psychoanalytic symbols are organized into dreams and creative acts that are reflections of individual experience. The repression that produces them is a private experience geared to a dreamer's personal affective responses to referents. Though some manifest forms may occur universally, the contexts in which they appear are unique to the dreamer. Psychoanalytic dream symbols are the evocative signatures of a personality, uniquely experienced on a single night. Their unique quality is that they are so personal that their meaning cannot be easily shared. Their referents are not easily recognized. Their manifest forms are easily scoffed at as representations. Around them there swells no popular movement or flow of tradition that crosses and connects the centuries. As a result they are distractingly bound to concrete and superficial meanings and hide their true latent meanings.

Such inaccuracy in symbolic communication is increased when the form of the symbol is modified to suit the limited evolved cognitive grasp of the individual who perceives it. The intellectual level of communication may be lowered as a result. In the process, the intrinsic abstract nature of the referent (latent content) is lost and the concrete external aspect of the manifest symbol becomes the reality to which the viewer responds. For instance the abstract universe became manageable when reduced to the concrete form, understandable to early astronomers, of crystal spheres or balls floating in space. Such symbolization can create a tendency towards simplification through concretization and distortion. Full and real meaning is lost. For instance the wheel above the temple of Mammon in Cole's "Cross and the World", was called by him, a wheel of fortune. This obscures the possibility, implied in its context that the wheel represents monetary temptations or the Hindu symbol for fate, the chakra.

Cole's Use of Psychoanalytic Symbols

One typical grouping of psychoanalytic symbols used by Cole consisted of caves and boats, flowing streams that carry a wanderer, a journey whose way is predefined so that the traveler has no choice but to follow a stream to its end, ever watchful guardians on the way, and flights of angels to guide one to one's rest. Combined, this web of symbols carries the meaning of being borne, cared for, and kept in a situation in which the outcome is not in doubt. Someone is always there to protect one from harm. One does not have to fend for himself. Such symbols frequented Cole's early sponsored work, "The Voyage of Life". The term oral dependent describes such symbols. It describes too the ways of a man who is dependent on sponsors.

By way of contrast, place a guardian at the beginning of a road to do no more than point the way. Make this guide a patriarchal male instead of a feminine angel. Place walking staffs in the hands of wanderers and let each make his own choice of the way in life he will take. Include plangent streams, freed of the streambed's guidance, that burst out of hidden places and flow through air with force and direction derived from an inner surge, and have the pilgrim stand on his own. The group of symbols, which consists of such elements, carries a message that may be defined by the term phallic assertiveness. Such evocative symbols dominate Cole's late self-sponsored series, "The Cross and the World". They reflect his ascent to self-sufficiency and his choice of a way to salvation through byways that promise grief.

Cole's Use of Communicative Symbolism

Personal Symbols can fit into communicative contexts. The stories in which they appear are part of one's cultural heritage. Without the mythic context, personal symbols are too evocative to convey meaning to others. These symbols are interpreted by transcendent theorists to be transcendent. On general principles they can be recognized to be poetic in form by non-believers. They are mutually shared and easily recognized because they are encased in well-known myths. They can be used to communicate with the sure knowledge that viewers have been tempered by experience or education to recognize and comprehend their meanings in context. Psychoanalytic symbols (personal) are derived from elements of individual experience. They evoke inner needs. They have more implications for the artist than the viewer (albeit unknown to the former). Manifest communicative symbols are selected from general knowledge. They are derived from the mythologies of mankind and are part of the shared cultural heritage and experience of the artist and viewers for whom he paints. Communicative symbols carry messages, inform, and instruct. The artist who uses them dips into the flow and heritage of culture for his sources. Most of these symbols are shared and had their origins in the distant past. They began as responses of mankind to the mysteries unveiled by the evolving and expanding cognitive arenas of reflection, bewilderment, and fear that accompanied the widening of man's conscious awareness. This awareness encompassed a sense of man and the world around him as elements in an interaction played out within the context of time's passage. Questions such as "Why do lives take on the patterns that they do?" arose. Men came to ponder their impotence before the strengths of chance. They wondered at inconstant harvests, the seasons, depleted herds and the movements of the firmament. They railed at temptations of the flesh, of alcohol, suicide and murder. They pondered why the most devout of men encountered pain on their way to salvation. These preoccupations with the fruit of a broadened awareness called forth a basic response. This was an impulse to reduce the unknown to simple propositions and to create questions about them that could be answered by words, which reflected a blend of observations and hopes. Words with incomplete reference to their original meaning became the first masking symbols. These symbols expressed in series became the myths that locked answers to evolving questions. An example of such an explanatory guiding myth was the "Mystic Way", which explained the trials of manhood as necessary precursors to entrance into eternal life. For the culture in which such guides dominated, there was no need for other explanation and no room for challenge. Another example is the myth of the right to choice that permits one to seek salvation knowing that the way is hard, and that there is another way through life that joins pleasure with the way to perdition. The former myth requires an initiating guide backed by a religious tradition.

Cole chose the mystic way as a pattern for his searching voyager in the "Voyage of Life". In Cole's depiction, the righteous traveler negotiates a vale of traumas on the road to redemption as preordained in the "Pilgrim's Progress" and epitomized by the "Dark Night of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross. Cole's acquisition of a new explanation of the way of the world is reflected in the "Cross and the World". His ongoing conversion to the teachings of Louis Noble introduced the concept of choice of discomfort found in the pattern of life to be expected by the pilgrim who actively selects salvation. The passive dependency in the personal symbols of the “Voyage of Life” find expression in the myth of a guardian angel that guides and watches through all of the mystic way. The phallic aggressive personal symbols of Cole’s later years shaped the choice of a context of choice and independence to be found in the existing myth of a way to salvation based on one’s own resources.

The Limits of Visual Symbols in Conveying Meaning

When one uses visual psychoanalytic symbols to convey one’s meaning, one runs the risk of displacing the interpretation of personal meaning from its source in the artist’s mind to the meaning of the manifest symbol in the eye of the beholder. Psychoanalytic symbols like many visual symbols are ambiguous in meaning. The characteristic loose association between the meaning of the manifest symbol and that of the symbolic referent that is produced is both the weakness and the strength of the contribution of visual symbols to man’s adjustment.

A weakness in visual psychoanalytic symbols is the loose relationship of manifest symbols to referents. Through it truths can be hidden and a required resolution of problems can be avoided. Associated vagueness can interfere with communication as in the case of the visual symbols of painting, which have a limited capacity on their own to convey an artist’s intentions with accuracy. The more that psychoanalytic symbols are involved in a creative act, the more serious becomes the potential for dissimilitude. Cole’s use of visual symbols in his series paintings produced a blurring of the meaning he had hoped to convey in his images. Incorrect interpretations of the visual symbols in the “Voyage of Life” on the part of the viewer were generated. As a result, the meaning implied by the artist’s work can be lost. I recall hearing a father, who was unfamiliar with Cole’s poems of explanation of the “Voyage of Life” tell his son that the castle in air in “Youth” was the Taj Mahal. Cole tried to maintain clarity by adding verbal descriptions to his paintings. Dressed in an unfathomable cloth of mystery, the strength of cryptic symbols lies in their meaning masking action. Their form and content takes source from historical roots as well as from meanings given to them by artists such as Cole when they put them into the context of a painting. As such, they are a source of comfort. They anchor inexplicable living affects by way of fantasy into “rational” sources. The web of symbols created from this process are sustained because they give sympathetic responses to needs, moods and mysteries that cry for expression from within the bewildered and overwhelmed psyches of earth's fragile master, man.

Rumor, fame, and symbols share in common the capacity to represent without responsibility to bear true witness. In the words of Virgil/Dryden (1968) "Things done fame relates, not done she feigns, and mingles truth with lies." (P 94) Through this "flexibility" symbols can be used to confirm questions of faith with infused truths that are difficult to confront directly.

Because cryptic symbols represent parts of referents, interpretation is required to provide the symbol with a complete and useful meaning and create new meaning for representations. Interpretation of manifest symbols can be drawn upon as a tool in constructing faulty explanations out of partial data in support of old legends. Rationality may be bypassed by this means in support of the construction, maintenance, and transmission of resident cultures. This can be a source of strength since it has the potential to free him to do useful work by establishing ideas and institutions through which a man can adjust to stresses beyond his control that threaten his traditions. In this way magical thinking can be applied to pre-established explanations and parochial and ethnocentric schools of thought. For instance, on a mild level a will o' the wisp flaring in a forest glen can be interpreted to be a Willi, which is understood to be the soul of a girl, who died before marriage. If one learns to fear and avoid the Willi one need no longer wonder about those poor girls. On a more severe level, placation of a god who controls volcanoes allays stronger fears.

Another strength comes from the malleability offered by cryptic symbols. They can be channeled to support a given meaning through the addition of commentary. This aspect provides a political role for symbols. So used, they can help man to master and express that, which bothers him, and of which he dare not speak. These include challenges to political beliefs and religious axioms. Cryptic symbols, which have been expanded in meaning through verbal descriptions, can become agents of the power of established authorities. Verbal elaboration of symbols creates cultural boundaries within which a culture can introduce concepts that answer, and master the stresses generated by fearsome confrontations with mysteries invoked by the power of the unorganized unknown. A sharing of mythic concepts identifies membership in a boundaried social group. Their existence supports a culture in the face of the challenge of questions and doubts for which no other answers are available or possible.

The Mystic Way The Cultural Belief that Shaped Cole's Choice of Communicative Symbols

Mysteries came into view as the result of gradual increases in the awareness of man. This resulted from cognitive and philosophical evolution. Seemingly inexplicable patterns of events were explained by comparing them through the use of panels of mythologically organized symbols as referents. There were answers to new questions fit to echo unchallenged the patterns of the past. How could one explain the fact that good men seemed condemned to suffer, while profligate ones found rewards and lived choices? How could it be that a continent man need trudge before a coach, while a foul mouthed incontinent drover sits comfortably high above the road and drives? An answer near at hand could be found in the symbol series encompassed by the "mystic way", a concept, which told of rewards in heaven for those who weathered storms and suffered in this life as a natural fate.

In Cole's experience an arduous course was routinely traversed by people who were gentle, sensitive, and artistically inclined. The way seemed to him to be especially harsh for those embarked on a voyage to salvation. Pain was linked to salvation. Cole expressed this reassuring personal inspiration and interpretation of the mystic way on canvass in the "Voyage of Life Series".

As Underhill (1910) has described it, the mystic voyage to salvation and union with higher spirits typically begins with bright hopes. This was depicted by Cole in "Childhood". Voices and visions are seen early on the way. This is depicted in "Youth". It is the lot of the pilgrim too, to pass through travail in the form of "a dark night of the soul" or "a slough of despond". This was described by Cole in "Manhood". For the voyager of the spirit, no sure and easy way should be expected. The Mystic Way to paradise has long been bound up in a symbol net that obviates any challenge to itself and precludes the need for explanation. Its myth says that the way of the faithful is hard and that this is to be expected. The well-intentioned, passive, gentle, seeker after truth suffers. The experience of suffering is part of the "right" path that leads to salvation. Sufferers on the way can take comfort from this.

Cole conceived of a series of works, (described above) each consisting of multiple paintings that showed time's passing. The series format was a codification of his ongoing search for a way to express and to master his own experiences of ever renewed hope followed by despair. Repeatedly, he created new organizations of symbols through which he brought a reassuring message to others of the faithful who shared his bewilderment and his search to understand. A well-known set of basic symbols was that of the “mystic way” to be found in the story of Bunyan’s (1678) “Pilgrim’s Progress”. Cole had in his youth illustrated this book. He organized and reorganized its themes in his works as he moved from one conception of a series painting after another.

Cole’s soul as we have seen, experienced many a “dark night” Essentially all of his early series painting concepts contained at its core the path described in the mystic way. This consisted of childhood hope and isolation, voices and visions, the dark night of the soul, and finally the reward of salvation and enlightenment. By the time Cole reached the “Cross and the World”, he had added a second path, a cautionary tale, which described descent into perdition for the unwary sinner. The latter had been limited to a set of temptations offered in the picture “Manhood” of the “Voyage of Life” in figures depicting murder, suicide and alcoholism. The latter may reflect the thought of Mr. Ward, the sponsor of the set, who was one of the founders of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

Cole and Symbolic Expression

Cole’s personal symbols formed the details in the depictions of the voyagers and the pilgrims. In these details, one can see reflected his own personal growth, which changed in time with the changing rhythm of his personality. There is clear evidence that Cole was one of those for whom symbolic expression was a talent. Cole was gifted in the production of metaphor, analogies and symbol formation and responded to the world continually through this skill. In Cole’s own words (Noble (1853) Feb. 26, 1843).—“A strain of music, a single tone of voice, wings the mind into the distant past. A mountain here sends one, in a thought to a mountain in a foreign land”

G.W. Greene (1859) observed that

> “The greatest pleasure of all was to walk with him (Cole) at sunset, and through the long twilight till the stars came forth and the moon rose. Then would all the fervor and earnestness of his mind awaken and his beautiful fancy sport with exhaustless fertility. How happily would he trace the analogies of the moral and physical world. What delicate similes would he find in the objects that lay before us, for feelings and thoughts within.” (P 106)

That Cole used symbols to express his inner feelings seems established without doubt. As such he may be seen as one of those men who have had both the choice and the skill to find comfort in the symbolic processing of disturbing elements of memory. In addition, he had the rare opportunity to provide for others in the symbol starved Protestant world of early nineteenth century America, new organizations of symbols with which to do the same.

Like the mystics of old, (e.g. St Bridget (see above) whose vision transformed the portrayal of St. Joseph in art) he placed at the disposal of his fellows, new symbolic means to resolve questions of faith. (Seaver 1955) A creative mystic artist such as Cole has a role in society that transcends that of other artists. The artist can capture only a momentary mood and image. At times he can portray a moment from literature or history that is so well known to the viewer that the image of the moment is all that is needed to awake the total concept. The mystic carries a heavier burden. His mythic message is so personal and of such newness that its dream like symbols must be accompanied by verbal interpretation and explanation. The requirements of a content so constructed exceed the capacities for representation provided by the visual symbols of graphic art. The context of time's passage within which the myth is set is unknown to the viewer and cannot be inferred from a single frame. Cole needed words to guarantee the conveyance of meaning. Passage of time requires both verbal explanation and pictures in series.

Cole's need to add words to his creations points to the fact that he himself experienced the inability of the visual symbols in his paintings to convey his total message. In addition single pictures did not suffice to convey time's passage or explain motivating causes. His works had a lesson to teach. His conceptions were not those of single scenes that carried a momentary mood or experience. They were morality tracts, whose cause and effect admonitions required the depiction of the passage of time. Only multiple scenes accompanied by explanations would suffice. The undependability of visual symbols as communicative tools forced Cole to add verbal commentary and symbolism in order to clarify the meanings in his works.

DISCUSSION

The Role Of Symbols in Human Adjustment

Cole's art illustrates the roles of symbols in human adjustment. Symbols can be used to process and settle on an unconscious level the inner conflicts of a man. Symbols can also free energies by organizing groups that cooperate in sponsoring and settling cosmological and related doubts, so that men may apply themselves to the business of life. In Cole's art two such symbolic functions can be seen. Both take advantage of the amorphous nature of visual symbolic representations. One role of symbolism is served by psychoanalytic symbols, which help to deal with unconscious personal stresses in an occult manner. This permits conflicts to be dealt with in a removed fashion without confronting directly problems and affects at their source. The second role is served by communicative visual symbols. They function by transforming difficult universally shared problems and conflicts into a form that can be handled through illustrating and giving teachable form to the beliefs of social organizations. In essence problems are cut down to chewable size by converting them into familiar communicative symbols in forms that give rise to belief or discussion.

The Use of Words to Enhance The Communicative Value of Cole's Paintings

Individuals may be either actively or passively involved in the use of and creation of symbols. Visual symbols tend to carry a preordained message for those with infused knowledge of them. This is based on prior experience and education. The idiosyncratic historical and personal origins of symbols contribute a source to this failure of visual symbols to communicate universally and reliably to all men. There is always a danger that the observer will call upon his own experience and distort the meaning of the artist when he views the artist's symbols. To be certain that his meaning is not lost, an artist has to add a verbal commentary. As Rosenthal (1914) has pointed out "There is in the works of graphic artists, an effort to render thoughts tangible. There is a dissociation between the composition of the picture and a true reflection of that which the artist seeks to represent. (When the artist fails,) (h)is error lies in the fact that he pursues an ideal of representation, which painting is incapable of rendering." Nathan (1940) also commented on this state of affairs—"The romantic artist knows it will forever lie beyond his powers to convey the full measure and intensity of his vision." Romantic artists try to do more than record an image. They have a story of their own to tell for which visual images are only tools. Other romantic artists who used paint to tell stories of their own creation include Goethe, Blake, and Fuselli. Amongst these, Cole was unique in that he served the needs of a symbol needy early nineteenth century Protestant culture, much in the way that mystics offered symbols for worship in the middle ages.

Visual thinking is less abstract than verbal thinking. There is a way of codifying what is experienced in the visual mode that is less locked into cultural formats than is the verbal area of recall. Visual thinking therefore offers an arena for inherently unbound creativity.

Stained glass windows and rupestral carvings can be locked into meaning for the uninitiated by providing an explanatory comment. Kekule's dream of a snake, that solved the riddle of the structure of benzene, provided a new concept because it opened the door to thinking in a less culture bound visually dominated mode of expressing memory, concept, and thought organization than can be reached by using words to solve problems.

Of the two systems of memory organization, verbal (auditory) and visual, Thomas Cole rejected a purely visual expression of abstractions in painting. Specifically he rejected the limits of the single visual image, which cannot tell of the passage of time or give specific information about the words that depicted characters were thinking. He included the missing words in order to make his meanings clear. At first he had intended to include words written on pictured rocks. Later he divided the representation of his ideas into a picture and an accompanying poem. Frederick Church, Cole's student, on the other hand represented God's transcendent presence in pictures without words in accord with the infused generally accepted concept that all things on earth sing of God's glory. His works were silent sermons. Church was at peace with the limits of the visual. He did not as did Cole and Blake feel the need to go beyond the visual by adding abstractions conceived in words.

Verbal memory organizations provide for shared abstractions within the limits of belief. Visual memory organizations support the originality discovered through the unique interpretations allowed by visual images. Visual memory, which is not organized in viewer interpretation by infused belief, is similar to wordless thought in that it frees creativity. It is difficult for two people to share their visions or to create a shared visual image whose meaning can be agreed upon. Once a new image is presented, an explanation may be needed. Cole found this to be so.

Mystic artists are confronted with a conflict. The amorphous potentials of the visual symbol permit the artist in paint to plumb the depths of the unconscious and express the latent referent in manifest form without evoking distraction or ire in the audience. The addition of words may overcome this fault by sharpening communication. This introduces a problem that is common to all symbolic communication.

Incomplete representation achieved through symbolization loses content in terms of the shadings that characterize abstraction in depth. Donnington (1975) quotes Richard Wagner as expressing this situation thus " . . . (using) the suggestive value of the mythological symbols' for their deep and hidden truth', in such a way as 'to bring the unconscious part of human nature into consciousness. (Would) "make my intention too obvious (and) would get in the way of a genuine understanding. (P 4) Cole's series paintings conveyed meaning on this deeper level. However, his intent to educate caused him to try to limit the freedom of the implications of his symbols, which he obviously did not trust, by creating verbal descriptions so that the viewer would not be led by Cole's visual symbols to concepts other than Cole's conscious intent.

SUMMARY

Cole rejected the purely visual means of presenting his personal myths in his series paintings. The visual symbol provided too little ability in presenting unambiguous content in the portrayal of his ideas. He was forced to add words to accompany his pictures by the amorphous nature of symbolic visual imagery and by innate deficiencies inherent in the non-motile time stood still visual representations available to be used as symbols for the graphic artist. Individual visual images poorly depict cause and effect and the passage of time. They do not give specific information about what protagonists are thinking. Cole devised a technique for adding clarity to the meanings of his communicative symbols. He added a defining poetic description to each picture.

Unbeknownst to the viewer, should one view Cole's mystic paintings as a progression of cryptic symbols through series of paintings over time, one could detect shifts in symbols that reflect ongoing changes in Cole's personality. As he matured in life from a painterly poet in need of support to a creative artist capable of directing his own footsteps and of paying to support his own decisions, maturer symbols entered Cole's paintings. The dependent voyager under the guidance of a guardian angel, who hovers over both him and the boat that carries him, is transformed into two lone pilgrims, guided by a wise man with a rod or book, who take life's paths and walk their ways alone.

Notes

1 Bunyan

2 St. John of the Cross