

THEORIES OF SYMBOLISM

Poetic

Symbols

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POETIC SYMBOLS

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POETIC SYMBOLS

Poetic symbols are verbal, visual or musical expressions that fit latent concepts and abstractions to representations that evoke awareness and clarify meaning. Poetic symbols are found in works of art (e.g. poems, paintings and other visual depictions, as well as music, dance and mime).

Shakespeare (Midsummer Night's Dream V. 1) reflected on this process when he noted,

"... as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

Nabokov (1959) described poetic symbols as "the mysteries of the irrational as perceived through rational words." (p 55) Poetic symbols clarify and improve the communication of latent concepts that are new and obscure. By way of comparison, the function of Psychoanalytic symbols is to obfuscate the obvious.

Poetic symbols, once formed, can be recruited by the symbolizing function for additional duties as carriers of psychoanalytic, transcendent or play symbol function. When so used they may appear on the surface to be indistinguishable from the latter symbols. However the intrinsic characteristics of poetic symbols override any such confusion and make it possible to recognize in poetic symbols an underlying pure form. They are a distinct entity, which is subject to invasion by pathologies in their formation. (see below "Symbols and Thought Disorder" (Unit Three Sect C Chapt 7)

Poetic symbol formation in pure form has been the subject of insightful writings by a number of artists, who are gifted with introspective self-awareness. A description of poetic symbols and their function will be presented through quotes from the writings of these artists. Germane commentary by poets (T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Rupert Brook, Vladimir Nabokov, and Ernest Hemley) and by writers such as Emerson and Thomas Mann, as well as the views of the painter Andrew Wyant and the musicians Gustave Mahler and Felix Mendelsohn, will be presented.

POETIC SYMBOLS EXPRESS PERSONAL INSIGHTS

Poetic symbols are used by writers and poets to convey subtle awarenesses, affectively charged insights, and moods and concepts. This is achieved through a conscious choice of representations. They provide fresh insights into human experience through enhancing access to consciousness for new ideas. Poetic symbols make communication of the otherwise unknowable possible.

When simple representations are felt by a poet to lack the ability to convey insight with affect, symbols are sought for the enhancement of communication. This is achieved when the poet places established affect-loaded words into unique contexts. When selected for subtle facets of meaning, these contexts can express thoughts that have never reached consciousness. (see Jung 1964, p38).

Poetic symbols codify the expanding boundaries of a culture, creating a milieu and conduit that bring into the mainstream of thought, ideas that would otherwise have hovered imperceptibly on the horizons of possible expression. The goal of poetic symbol formation is communication and clarification of meaning for consciously perceived insights into relationships and awarenesses. Such symbols light a pathway, which gives access for ordinary minds to the key to awareness that is genius. That which exists beyond the ordinary mind's grasp and would be otherwise unknown are brought into range and illuminated by poetic symbols. The frontiers of cultural growth expand through enhanced awareness of human potentials and behavioral possibilities.

When newly established awareness has strayed far from precedents, preexisting verbal usages fail to deliver their meaning. New shadings of meaning, provided by the contexts of poetic symbolism, need be invoked. They serve as the first communicative access to consciousness of insights, wide of established ways that generate the evolution of culture. The poetic symbol can link psychoanalytic symbols to abstract reductions of word meanings. The manifest forms that are produced are viewed as approximations of numinous occult and eldritch unknowns.

POETIC SYMBOLS ARE THE ESSENCE OF LIVING LANGUAGE

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1844) perceived poetic symbols to be the tools through which poets forge new meanings for old words and find new words for new meanings. "The poet, by an ulterior

intellectual perception, gives (words) power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes, and a tongue, into every dumb and inanimate object." (p 456) This fountain of poetic symbolism has brought forth language for "Language is fossil poetry." (P 457) "Every new relation is a new word." (p455) and "Every word was once a poem." (p 455) "The world being thus put under the mind for verb and noun, the poet is he who can articulate it." p456

A byproduct arises with the creation of poetic symbols. The transmuting contexts of the poetic reuse of the established words of a language give form to new meanings and ideas that had been hovering on the brink of awareness. Words and usages that are created through poetry serve to codify new customs, insights, and awarenesses.

The presence of such a medium for transformation and codification is a sign of vitality in a language. When recruited to serve as poetic symbols, words themselves take on new meanings. A living language must have an active poetry that stretches its words to cover new concepts and customs in the evolving culture of which the living language is a part. The creation and existence of poetic symbols is a sign that the languages to which they belong are alive and flourishing. The history of a people is imbedded in their language. "The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history,..." (p 457)

Old usages cling to words that have taken on new meanings. An example of this would be the word melancholia. In antique Greek this literally means Black Bile, the ancient Greek hypothesized marker for depression. Today melancholia means simply depression. The relationship of the word to the liver persists only as an historical curiosity.

T.S. Eliot (1937)¹ defined the quality of a poet by the extent to which the poet uses poetic symbolism in the creation of poems. The role of the poet in the discovery of new meanings for words is, to Eliot, the essence of poetry in its role as the lifeblood of living language. Eliot judged a poet by his ability to take an active role in contributing newly discovered latent meanings to existing vocabulary (i.e. the creation of poetic symbols). Byron's status as a poet, in Eliot's eyes, is reduced because "He develops nothing in the meaning of individual words" (McConnell (1978) p378) Elliot implies that this is something which the poet must do if a language is to live as a flexible means of expression for emerging

ideas and changing forms and customs. As life pursues new ways, language must follow or die.

SIMPLE SYMBOLS ARISE FROM POETIC SYMBOLS

New cultural uses for simple symbols are created through the manipulation of obscure or alternative definitions associated with established and ordinary vocabulary. Poetic awareness is ordinarily expressed through the use of preexisting simple symbols. New ways of thinking and insight come from the small alterations of awareness that arise during the emulation of well defined and established patterns of word usage. How are such new meanings developed for already existent words so that they can take on expanded new meanings and enter a life beyond the limits of the poem? The poet creates a context of imagery that draws attention to new meanings inherent in and related to past usages experienced in the etymological roots of the word. The poet's art creates expanded meanings for extant words. This is achieved by placing words in contexts that emphasize or expand usages and meanings that were formerly little applied. Past meanings and associations are recruited to express expanded awareness. At first these awarenesses are too newly formed to have a name. The concept has no way to become a verbally codified memory, unless a symbol is created to represent it.

At first personal use of a poetic symbol finds expression for meanings and associated affects that are so personal that they cannot be communicated in the form in which they arise in the awareness of the poet. Faced with this limitation, poets expand the use and meaning of the words of existing vocabulary to suit their needs through a process of scanning words for nuances of meaning. Through this search, they seek new implications and implied affective colorations in old words. Eventually in this process, poetic symbols are consciously selected for their ability to convey an original percept and its accompanying affect in a single representation whose meaning the reader can comprehend.

Nabokov(1989), for example, invoked his own experience to illustrate the process of symbol selection based on recollected word usage. In the image of a flower petal falling towards the reflecting surface of a stream, he saw a metaphor for the audience seeking activities of a writer in the process of creating a poetic symbol.

He noted "Now and then, shed by a blossoming tree, a petal would come down, down, down, and

with the odd feeling of seeing something neither worshiper nor casual spectator ought to see, one would manage to glimpse its reflection which swiftly—more swiftly than the petal fell—rose to meet it; and, for the fraction of a second, one feared that the trick would not work, that the blessed oil would not catch fire, that the reflection might miss and the petal float away alone, but every time the delicate union did take place, with the magic precision of a poet's word meeting halfway his, or a reader's, recollection." (Page 271)

An active though unsuccessful search for poetic symbols to express a memory and its affect is described by Hemley (1963) in his poem "Orpheus". (Quoted with the permission of Prof. Robin Hemley.) Here Hemley tells of the failure of Orpheus in an attempt to transmute a memory of Euridice into a musical image. Memory linked to a powerfully evocative affect had drawn Orpheus' attention to his inner self. Energy for the search for a symbolic form that could communicate content is instead turned toward mourning.

ORPHEUS

"I must find her;
Here in some meadow of myself the song of an imaginary bird
May be her speech,
Or a flower growing in the shade
Of a thought
May have roots that reach
Through the ambiguous shadows
Into the night.
It is my destiny to fracture time
And climb
To silence through the breach,
to touch a memory
And with a word
Kiss it awake.
I sing and as the music
Glistens,
Others see her shape
I listen but I know
The face is only mist.
The chord I need
Is hidden in my grief."(p34)

This poem (as quoted above) is remarkable in that it contains self-reflective awareness, on the part

of a poet, of the role of music and poetry as manifestations of symbolic form ("representations which are not reproductions"). The process of a failed search for such a poetic symbol is illustrated. Note however the successful use of the poetic symbol "meadow" in the second line to describe a dwelling in the heart beyond the reach of memory.

An effective search for a poetic symbolic representation can be found in "Dust", a poem by Rupert Brooke (1915). As in "Orpheus", the poet's quest is to find a symbol to represent lost traces of love, at a time when quickening in memory has dwindled under the pressure of time's passing and the still long silence of death.

DUST

 " When the white flame in us is gone,
And we that lost the world's delight
 Stiffen in darkness, left alone

To crumble in our separate night;

 When your swift hair is quiet in death,
And through the lips corruption thrust
 Has stilled the labour of my breath—

When we are dust, when we are dust!—

 Not dead, not undesirous yet,
Still sentient, still unsatisfied,
 We'll ride the air, and shine, and flit,
Around the places where we died,

And dance as dust before the sun,

And light of foot, and unconfined,

Hurry from road to road,

And run about the errands of the wind.

And every mote, on earth and air,

Will speed and gleam down later days,

And like a secret pilgrim fare

By eager and invisible ways,

Nor ever rest, nor ever lie,

Till, beyond thinking, out of view,

One mote of all the dust that's I

Shall meet one atom that was you.

Then in some garden hushed from wind,

Warm in a sunset's afterglow,

The lovers in the flowers will find

A sweet and strange unquiet grow

Upon the peace; and, past desiring,

So high a beauty in the air,

And such a light, and such a quiring,

And such a radiant ecstasy there,

They'll know not if it's fire, or dew,

Or out of earth or in the height,

Singing or flame, or scent, or hue,

Or two that pass, in light, to light,

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Out of the garden, higher, higher . . .

But in that instant they shall learn

The shattering ecstasy of our fire,

And the weak passionless hearts will burn

And faint in that amazing glow,

Until the darkness close above;

And they will know—poor fools, they'll know!—

One moment, what it is to love." (p 50)

One of the glories of this poem is the poet's ability to tell of an evocation in the garden dwellers of things numinous while stirring a like feeling in the reader. Poetic representations become here the means by which that which lies beyond one's grasp and the mind's recall, can be made vital, transmitted, and used by the reader as media for the resolution of loss through cathartic re-experiencing.

POET AND THE PLOUGHMAN

The poet has a role in the transmutations of a living language. New symbols are introduced by artists and taken up by the masses. In swiftly measured moments, the poetic mind imparts intuitive meanings to words. This process underlies the evolution of words.² More slowly wrought than in the mind of the poet, the evolution of a language is also the province of the ploughman.

EVERYMAN AS POET

Redefinition of words can evolve as well out of the associations and verbal usages of those who traverse ordinary lives. There is a role for "everyman" in the process of enhancing language through the semantogenics of poetry.

Language evolves through shared changes in the use of words by everyday men in society, as they traverse the ever changing pathways that open the way to tomorrow. This poetry of the masses provides newly found

meanings for words by focusing on facets of meaning unearthed through emulations³, (i.e. inventive everyday word usage). Reworked words are generated in response to the need to find names for evolving ideas and potentialities. Symbols of lasting worth are developed when words are found whose prior usages conveyed intellectual content that could be adapted to help one convey new ideas and constructs. Yeats (1961) described the everyman poet as ". . . himself mingled with the procession." which creates new word meanings ". . . out of the dreams of one poet and of a hundred generations whose hands were never weary of the sword." (P 64)

"EVERY WORD WAS ONCE A POEM"

Every word has an history and each new usage betrays a turning point in a culture. In this regard note again Emerson's comment "Every word was once a poem." This process occurs repeatedly through centuries until each word comes to represent a matted agglomeration of overlapping meanings. This is a rich ore, from which new word meanings can be forged. Each word becomes a palimpsest containing a thousand maps, with each map offering a meaning that can be called up through the word itself to reshape language and serve future awarenesses. Poetic symbol formation offers to shadows from the past the power to set in order the semantic stepping-stones that lead to the future.

POETIC SYMBOLS AND AFFECTS

Yeats (1961) described an aspect of poetic symbolism that is allied with the underpinnings of Psychoanalytic symbols. A poetic symbol can be used as a cushioning substitute that expresses otherwise affect rich latent contents, which could not otherwise be confronted directly. Yeats tells of poetic gestures that convey meanings, which cannot be made accessible to the mind by means of direct description. (i.e. ". . . the whiteness of the moon and of the wave, whose relation to the setting of time is too subtle for the intellect. . . ." (P 61)

POETIC SYMBOLS IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND TRANSCENDENCE

One can differentiate the adherents of transcendence from those who recognize psychoanalytic symbolism by their use of poetic symbols. For the acolytes of transcendence, the symbol is a representation of the comforting or threatening numinous. The numinous becomes fixed for recognition through the forms of poetic symbolism. They carry the

characteristics of abstract power and the affects of awe. These are amongst those elements of thought and comprehension, which are too subtle for the intellect to grasp. They offer handles for controlling fate and the powers of deity. For the adherents of Psychoanalytic symbols, poetic symbols are

recognized to be representations of affect rich latent content that is so strong that it cannot be addressed directly. Such symbols help to make unbearable reality bearable. The child, who cannot accept his small role as a tyke and reacts by making himself a king in fantasy, symbolically converts his own image into something acceptable. This for a fragile moment makes life tolerable.

THE SLOW EVOLUTION OF WORD MEANING IN SOCIETY

At this point let us examine examples of evolution of word meaning, which establish the symbolic linkages along which symbols are formed. We start by identifying some unrelated root words in antique languages.⁴ The words we will study are

[A] *Scutum* (Latin), [B] *Cild* (Old English) and [C] *Cniht* (Old English).

In the beginning:

- (A) SCUTUM (Latin) for shield was derived from the Greek word SKUTOS meaning leather, the material from which shields were made in ancient Rome. Apparently in late Roman times it became a term of respect when applied to the makers of shields for warriors. (P 329)
- (B) CILD—(Old English) was derived from the Gothic word KILTHEI meaning womb. This provided the meaning "That from which man emerges." Cild became child in the sense of "The child is father to the man." (P 93)
- (C) CNIHT—(Old English) means boy. Later it depicted youth. In time it came to describe an attendant at Court or to a noble house. A brief jump in meaning caused the word to describe a military follower of a king. (p 329)

Scutum, Cild, Cniht began their journey as a part of a common stock of related concepts when chosen to fill a need for words to express elements in the training of horse borne knights. Let us observe how these unrelated words came to be bound to each other by an affinity derived from usage. The first affinity was produced when these unrelated words were fused into a concept cluster related to the acquisition of knightly power during the age of chivalry. Through this arbitrary link, coloration of meaning conveying the idea of power came to be shared in common by these words. By the time that knighthood's flower had wilted and its authoritarian structure had faded with the passage of time, or

had dwindled through custom, coloration denoting respect for power persisted in the use of these words. It became possible to impart dignity in later times to the image of men simply by using modern derivatives of these words to describe them. The use of these words endow persons and circumstances with a sense of dignity and respect derived from the initial aura that they had acquired through association with antique individual acquisition of knightly power.

In the middle ages these words or their derivatives took on meanings that implied sovereignty, power and respect. During the days of chivalry, derivatives of these words were used to identify the stages of ascent to knighthood. These derivatives were:

- (A) SQUIRE—this word, derived from SCUTUM refers to a knight in training. His assigned duties emulated those of the leather workers of Rome. They had risen in position from shield makers to become those who attended the knight.
- (B) CHILDE—this word, derived from CILD was the name given to the fully trained squire, who awaited elevation to knighthood. In essence it was the stage from which the knight emerges.⁶
- (C) KNIGHT—this word, derived from CNIHT described a fully qualified warrior in service to honor and the king.

Now let us look ahead to the time when chivalry had declined and the world had become a wasteland devoid of knights errant. Though a close link to knighthood had been lost for these words, their link to respectability persisted. Today in everyday usage, derivatives of these words have become symbols of respect. This has colored their meanings for us in the present day and may be seen in the following current usages.

- (A) SQUIRE has become ESQUIRE, a title of respect applied to a gentleman, often appended to the names of lawyers.
- (B) CHILDE has come to mean a well-born youth. In the context of a term of respect this word was used symbolically by Byron to impart to the protagonist in one of his poems ("Childe Harold's Pilgrimage"⁷) a sense of wealth and nobility.
- (C) KNIGHT continues as a term applied to people who have made outstanding contributions. It serves as an honor granted by a king.

Note how the simple words of the root stage were transformed into titles of respect as a result of having been linked to the acquisition of power during the days of chivalry, producing a shared level of meaning that persists today in the coloration implied by former usages of these words. Coloration such as this can be emphasized by a poet to create a new symbol or metaphor.

SYMBOLS AND VERBAL POETIC SENSIBILITY

Poetic symbols express new usages for words. These usages are often based on antique meanings, which are evoked anew to illuminate poetic insights for the reader. (Examples follow)

Kalidasa (@200 A.D.) in his poem "The Cloud Messenger" uses the phrase "the bow bearer's color" in place of the word 'blue', (verse 46) when telling his wife to draw water from a sacred river. He tells her she will take on that color and be seen by sky dwellers to be like an emerald strung on the river. Blue alone would not convey this concept. "Blue of the bow bearer" implies godlike power. The phrase is a sort of a kenning, a phrase which, known to all who are educated to a given cultural symbol net, bundles a host of meanings into a few words. In this case the symbol is part of the network of symbols that supports Hindu religious lore. Specifically in the "Mahabharata", the blue skinned Krishna, who is a manifestation (avatar) of the God Vishnu, becomes the bearer of the bow of Arjuna one of the leading warriors. By the use of this phrase, ("Color of the Bow Bearer") heavily weighted with ancient meanings, the poet's wife is elevated to an image that expresses the otherwise inexpressible regard with which her husband beholds her.

Thomas Mann (1911) described poetic symbol formation in the quotes that follow.

"... the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols." (P 63)

"... symbols, associated with ideas that are more than fragments of the shadows thrown upon the intellect by the emotions they evoke, are playthings of the allegorist or the pedant, and soon pass away." (P 64) This refers to the distorting effect of affects—which forces people to substitute symbols for reality. (p 64)

"Form as divine thought, the single and pure perfection which resides in the mind, of which an image and likeness, rare and holy, was here raised up for adoration." (P 44)

Things are "... secret before they cry out in the market place." (P 63)

POETIC SYMBOLISM AND SENSIBILITY EXPRESSED THROUGH MUSIC

The addition of musical underscoring enhances the telling of tales. Auditory symbols manifested in musical rhythms and melodies serve as external stimuli, which awaken the empathic inner response readiness of listeners. Music evokes emotion through adding affect to a symbol, which is extrinsically much removed from a dangerous referent.

"Beethoven had an extraordinary capacity to effect audiences with his use of the power of musical auditory images to evoke emotion. This was described by his student Carl Czerny (see Solomon M. [197])

"In whatever company he might chance to be, he knew how to produce such an effect upon every hearer that frequently not an eye remained dry, while many would break out into loud sobs; for there was something wonderful in his expression in addition to the beauty and originality of his ideas and his spirited style of rendering them. After ending an improvisation of this kind he would burst into loud laughter and banter his hearers on the emotion he had caused in them." (P 59)

A number of poets and musicians have described the symbolic representation that finds form in the rhythms and melodies of music.

Yeats (1961) wrote of the musical qualities of poetic symbols. ". . . call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were one sound, one color, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion." (p 62)

Thomas Mann (1911) spoke of the musical relation of sound shaped to convey emotion. Things both feeble and strong ". . . would have been a little different if some mind long ago had not given itself to some emotion . . . and shaped sounds or colours or forms, or all of these, into a musical relation, that their emotion might live in other minds." ⁸ (p 62)

Pushkin (see Galie When Co—1989) in his poem, "Do Not Sing For Me Fair Maiden", tells of the ability of song to represent former lives and distant places.

"Do not sing for me fair maiden,
The songs of sad Georgia;

They remind me of
Another life and the distant shore.
Alas they remind me
Your cruel melodies
Both steppes and the night, and in the moonlight,
The features of the faraway, poor maiden! . . ."

George Du Maurier (1894) was both one of the foremost sketch artists of the late 19th century and one of its foremost novelists. His drawings for Punch held the awe and the attention of the English-speaking world. His novel "Trilby" inflamed the passions of a vaster audience. In "Trilby" Du Maurier described music as a symbol. If anyone could have told of the varied incarnations of human experience that shape symbolic forms and are available through semblance, metaphor and symbolic forms, it was Du Maurier.

In his novel "Trilby" Du Maurier (1894) described a graphic artist's view of music as a symbolic key to inner feelings

"He had never heard such music as this, never dreamed such music was possible. He was conscious, while it lasted, that he saw deeper into the beauty, the sadness of things, the very heart of them, and their pathetic evanescence, as with a new inner eye—even into eternity itself, beyond the veil—a vague cosmic vision that faded when the music was over, but left an unfading reminiscence of its having been, and a passionate desire to express the like some day through the plastic medium of his own beautiful art." (Page 24)

According to Felix Mendelsohn (see Kupferberg (1978) though words may appear to some listeners to clarify meaning while music seems to introduce ambiguity, to him ". . . entire sentences . . . <and> . . . individual words . . . <are> . . . so ambiguous, so vague, so unintelligible when compared to genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand things better than words . . ." (p 14)

Reik (1953) seemed to agree. He wrote, "Music is the language of psychic reality. Language is at its poorest when it wishes to grasp and communicate nuances and shades of feelings, the very area in which music is most efficient and expressive."

Hemley's poem "Orpheus" (see above) reveals the poetic and musical processes, which poems and music serve as symbol contexts to be used for the exploration and expression of otherwise inexpressible concepts, memories and feelings. The expressive manifest contexts of art, (pictures, music, and poems) are more ambiguous than prose and therefore far more apt to yield up the pathos of the soul rather than

its secrets. The latent content dealt through poetic symbols is outside of consciousness but not necessarily repressed.

Schwaller de Lubicz (1978) dealt directly with music as a poetic symbol. He noted that "When an image, a collection of letters, a word or a phrase, a gesture, a single sound, a musical harmony or melody have a significance through evocation, we are dealing with a symbol. This presupposes that the meaning of the determined aspect of the symbol must be known, so as to be able to evoke a non-determined aspect in the consciousness of the observer. This is the common nature of the symbol—somehow its rallying effect is like the effect that a few notes of a national anthem may have on patriots under an invader's yoke." ". . . a melody evokes moments experienced, producing gaiety or sadness just as a symphony can transport an audience into a spring or autumn landscape. Here it is a matter of an emotive evocation, and the music is its symbol." P. 45

Gustave Mahler applied these principles directly to musical forms. "My symphony (third) will be something the world has never heard before! In its nature herself acquires a voice and tells secrets so profound that they are perhaps glimpsed only in dreams!"⁹

Psychoanalytic symbol formation attenuates affect. Entry into consciousness of representations, original concepts, and memories is facilitated by the removal from consciousness of affect. As a result stories can tell of Oedipal longings devoid of original feelings. Declared and displaced manifest story and dream elements offer the chance to achieve catharsis or working through using benign surrogates as substitutes for personal antagonists. Music becomes a symbol for repressed affects. Music can inject strong affect into pale symbolic forms. When this effect produces an experience sensed to be complete and real, a simulacrum of idea and affect results. The listener lends the affects of his own life experience to complement a singer's words. The completed unit, sounding like reality's song, brings forth emotional responses as though the work of art were real. Thus is explained the tears that are shed by opera audiences in response to scenes and plots of fantastic illogicality.

ETA Hoffmann thought of music as a powered image, which evokes feelings in the listener, which are related to the realm of the spirit. In his review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, he noted "So also does the instrumental music of Beethoven open the realm of the colossal and the immeasurable for us. Radiant

beams shoot through the deep night of this region, and we become aware of gigantic shadows which, rocking back and forth, close in on us and destroy all within us except the pain of endless longing . . . Only through this pain, which while consuming but not destroying love, hope, and joy, tries to burst our breasts with a full-voiced general cry from all the passions, do we live on and are captivated beholders of the spirits." [10](#)

SYMBOLS IN DREAMS AS POETIC SYMBOLS

There are symbolic forms in dreams that have roots not related to the dynamic unconscious. Such dream symbols can be categorized as poetic symbols. Their roots are something unknowable because they are as yet too subtle for the mind or time. The appearance of such newly encountered referent ideas that find expression in dream symbols was described by Jung. In (1964), he noted that ". . . the capacity of the human psyche to produce . . . new material is particularly significant when one is dealing with dream symbolism, for I have found again and again in my professional work that the images and ideas that dreams contain cannot possibly be explained solely in terms of memory. They express new thoughts that have never reached the threshold of consciousness" (P 38).

Aristotle ("On Prophecy in Sleep II") in his description of the process by which dream symbols are formed noted that "(In Dreams) . . . Mental pictures are like reflections in water . . . If there is much movement the reflection is not like the original, nor are images like the real object." One can derive from this a definition of dream elements as distorted representations not unlike the simple symbol.

Poetic symbols are not the product of a search to quiet affect but arise from man's search to know. They are not experienced as a metaphor, but as a concrete representation of the referent, much in the style of the Ancient Greeks who concretized their concepts of love and creativity through tales of their gods (i.e. Eros & the muses), and the Hindus who concretized Siva's rage in the fearsome head of Kirtimukha.

When there is not an abstract relationship between a referent and a representation, a repression based psychoanalytic symbol is not possible. Concrete symbolic linkages enable the creation of conscious representations built on traditions, social events and close familial networks of meanings that convey

new-found experiences and insights.

SYMBOLS OF THE GRAPHIC ARTIST AS POETIC SYMBOLS

Wyant, the nineteenth century American landscape painter described (1866) the internal process by which his artistic sensibilities selected visual symbols to use to express, through a painting, an impression of a sunset conflated with the feelings and the thoughts that accompanied its viewing.

"I saw an effect of evening over the little lake or pond from which they get ice, and which is a meadow in summer. Now, that evening picture grew upon me so that I only had one day to rest, then by a sort of force which is to me almost incomprehensible, I was dragged down to my easel & down was jotted my remembrance of that simple, but most grand effect of nature. For the pond, I submitted the calmest sea; for the walk on which I stood—a desert island on which is no vegetable thing that ever lived, except the bit of seaweed cast up on the sand. Lying and leaning on one elbow, his hand supporting a feverish head, is one lonesome man taking his last hopeful look into the joyous space of heaven, and then into the gloom which rolls like ghostly giants of another world, . . . thickening the air, mocking the sun by their deepening pall. It is the moment, when the sun has not yet set, but when the conflict between light and darkness is to me of all their conflicts the grandest." (P 8) Note that the reaction of the observer has added an affect to the facts of the scene. Exact photographic representation is inadequate to convey the artist's experience. This spiritual consonance between artist and twilight's blending of image and illumination (German-Stimmung) requires that the artist create a metaphorical representation, which adds affect to a representation. The seen scene is transmuted till it represents an image other than the referent, an image that was felt, not seen. The painted scene bathed in its special light is a product of a transmutation of the original view through the medium of the artist's sensibility into a communicative codification. This medium makes it possible for the artist to share his affective experience with the viewer.

THE ONTOGENESIS OF POETIC SYMBOLS

The creative use of words changes as a child develops. The prelatency child has the greatest latitude in spontaneous creativity. He finds new uses for words by extending and generalizing meanings. He has access to poetic and original concepts in using words. Rare usage is common in young

children who have not yet been exposed to the superimposition of the rule that shared meanings of words have priority. The latency child has less latitude. Learned cultural limitations include socially dominated boundaries that are imposed on creative word use. There is in the latency child greater use of repression related symbols, which distort meaning as they represent. Latency age drive discharge is achieved predominantly through creative fantasy formation. In the latency state, inhibition of physical discharge of fantasy is a general characteristic. Normally discharge in masking fantasy that evokes inner feelings without influencing the world takes priority over direct communication and open assertion. The latency state child's fantasy achieves the discharge of the hidden and the forbidden through emphasis on symbolic expressions that hide meaning. Such symbols are effective in achieving drive discharge, though often they are porous to affect. The latter occurs in the persecutory fantasies that characterize the age of latency.

Maturation of primitive sublimations, which had been manifested during the latency years, is a characteristic of the cognitive changes that introduce adolescence. Then symbolic forms become more communicative and serve the articulation of drives with reality. Projection associated with repression and symbol formation persists from the latency state, but appears in less obtrusive form. Symbols are selected which mask meaning so well that they may be used without creating anxiety. These symbols become the expression of sublimative artistic forms when the mechanisms that once supported the structure of latency and its evocative goals are freed of the task of creating fantasies that serve as the primary pathways for the discharge of drives.

Fantasy forming latency structures persist into early adolescence with a shift of emphasis away from evocation toward communication. This change underlies adolescent sublimative creativity. Culturally influenced aim-inhibited fantasies of latency are transmuted into object and discharge oriented socially encouraged fantasies. Such fantasies serve culture by binding peoples through shared stories and experiences. In addition, old myths and traditions are refreshed through retelling in modern modes. Beyond story telling, the next step is the inclusion of reality and real objects as manifest symbols in shaping the scenarios that involve drive discharge. This step provides the infrastructure for reality oriented future planning. An example of a transition that marks the changing form of poetic symbols from personal to communicative as a child makes the transition from latency to adolescence follows.

When R.B. was ten, she brought in the following poems. They are typical of the poems of latency.

That House is Really Haunted

That house is really haunted.
Ghosts come out at night.
Their howls and screams are scary.

My New Puppy

My puppy is very scared.
He was behind the chairs.
His mother is not with him.

These poems, which describe personal involvement, show displacement but no masking or dulling of the affects associated with conflicts involving aggression and separation, both of which are projected into the content of the poem. They are typical of the poems she wrote at the time.

At the age of thirteen she brought in a different kind of poem. Note here the absence of direct personal involvement.

The sun rises shedding her golden light over hill and dale.
She called out man and animal.

Birds take wing.

A new day begins full of sunlight and happiness.

She also began to write plays for school. The plays were similar in context to the dreams and fantasies that had caused her so much anxiety during the latency years. Yet now they were fun. Sublimation had begun in this area. In one play, Rat Fink Freddy is one of a band of robbers. He gets a woman to tell him where jewels are hidden while having sexual relations with her. The woman says, "You want money, I'll show you so much, you'll drown in it." The robbers are captured and go to prison where they are forced to exercise.

She continued to write poems. Some were hopeful; others continued the theme of attack.

A hopeful example, "The Morning Sun":

The sun rises and sheds her graceful rays upon the trees,
In the distance, the rooster crows to let everyone know
that the sun has opened the day.

Sublimative projection transmutes personal fear fantasies into a poem depicting attack in the following example.

"They're Coming":

"They're coming! The British are coming over hill and dale.
They're coming! The British are coming to leave a trail of blood
and death to show their hate.
But no, no, we will withstand. Each man will make his stand.
Every man is his own sergeant when bloodshed is at hand."

In the latency years, projection had contributed to the formation of the young poet's fear fantasies. As she approached adolescence, with subtle changes her fantasies continued. They differed in that she herself ceased to be involved in the attack. The symbols from which her fantasies were constructed became sufficiently masked that they were no longer sources of anxiety for her. She was premenarchic. Her fantasies and fears about menarche became the source of the symbolized content of her poems and plays. Creative activities (sublimations) involving people and elements in the world became the phase-appropriate zone for the manifestations of projection associated with her use of repression in the production of her poetic symbols.

In the transitions of late latency-early adolescence, this shift of the objects in her fantasies from psychoanalytic internally derived symbols to reality objects as symbols is of primary importance. It prepares the way for future planning and the articulation of drive discharge with reality figures in the world. In adolescence, socially demanded inhibition of the aim of physical discharge of drives requires sublimation. Sublimation reproduces the contents of the creator's psyche in a symbolic form that obviates the need for direct expression of drives with a real object. This is achieved in poetry when projection of impulses to others in the service of the creative process seeks objects with an apparent reality that removes these objects from the characteristics and core affects that make them identifiable with the personal experiences of the poet.

In the sublimatory creativity of early adolescence, reality populated fantasies with their verbal or plastic representations become templates that will be used in later years for selecting love objects. Drive discharge through fantasy about objects with reality potentials creates models for object seeking. Sublimative creativity, manifested in fantasy, poetry, prose, art, and song about objects in reality settings eases the transition to future planning and falling in love, when the latter activities involve intent to communicate in place of evocation of inner needs.

The latency age child tends to use sublimation in creativity as a means of creating object representations to be used as targets for aim inhibited evocative drive discharge. Adolescent symbols have transitional

characteristics that presage adult ones with their preoccupation with reality content and the intent to please (see Reinach, 1903, p. 265).

NOTES

- [1](#) Berry, F.(1965) "The Poet of Childe Harold" pp 35-51 in Jump, J.D. (1965) Ed. "From Byron: a symposium", London: Macmillan, as quoted on (p 376) of McConnell, F.(1978) Ed. "Byron's Poetry" Norton, N.Y.
- [2](#) See Unit 3, Section C Chapter 8 Re: Thomas Cole and the introduction of new symbols in society.
- [3](#) See Hindle, B.(1981) P 13
- [4](#) The etymological source for this material is Partridge (1958) except where otherwise noted.
- [5](#) See McConnell, Frank (1978) (p 24).
- [6](#) Ibid.
- [7](#) Compare Milton's "Life beyond life" for words, in his Areopagitica.
- [8](#) Letter to Anna Von Mildenberg dated July 11?, 1896.
- [9](#) Vivian Ueng -from program notes Sunday Evening Page 8, March 17, 1996 for Juillard Pre-College Symphony. This quote illustrates the use of music as a poetic symbol -note the highly personal internal response which is used as a basis for "truth".