

## The Unbound Symmetry of the Beautiful and the Sublime in *The Pleasures of Imagination*

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(1)

In the tenth chapter of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) which provides a famous expression of neo-classical or Johnsonian theory on poetry<sup>(1)</sup>, we rather unexpectedly encounter several passages where Imlac looks like a Romantic poet. Imlac reminds us of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) when he says "To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination: he must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little."<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover, Imlac looks ahead to a Shelleyan poet toward the end of the chapter: "He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind."<sup>(3)</sup> Conceptual and verbal similarities here are so striking that we are not sure if we are reading Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* or Imlac's "Dissertation upon poetry." An important question which arises here is whether we should be struck by "an unexpected coincidence of Augustan and Romantic" or by an invisible subterranean water vein whose recondite origin is in the Augustan period and which comes up to the surface in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>(4)</sup>

The mid-century is a transient period in which several new voices, decidedly different from a neo-classical one, are in embryo, waiting to be heard. Even in the crucial chapter concerning the definition of poetry in *Rasselas*, a Romantic voice is mingled. However, it is only when we take a backward glance that the period can emerge as a preliminary state of Romanticism, and a risk which involves us here is to

fuse the diverse tendencies of the period into a new trend toward Romanticism.<sup>(5)</sup>

Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) suffered most from this retrospective bias that tempts us to find a figure of a Romantic poet in the mid-century poets, mainly because it was originally based on Addison's *Spectator* essays on imagination and then revised according to Burke's *Enquiry* and republished as *The Pleasures of the Imagination* in 1757. The direct source of the original poem is *Spectator* No. 412, the second paper on "The Pleasures of Imagination" where Addison discusses that the pleasures of imagination are drawn from the great, the uncommon and the beautiful.<sup>(6)</sup> Akenside refers to Addison's three categories in the "Design" prefixed to the poem as "greatness, novelty, and beauty," but in the poem he employs the word "sublime" instead of "greatness": "The poet's tongue confesses: the sublime, / The wonderful, the fair" (I, 145-46).<sup>(7)</sup> Though the sublime and the beautiful were to be put in more direct contrast in the revised version based on Burke, even in the first poem Akenside effectively established the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful out of Addison's three categories and was more interested in the human mind as a creative source than Addison:

Mind, mind alone, (bear witness earth and heaven!)  
The living fountain in itself contains  
Of beauteous and sublime. (I, 481-83)

James Engell states that a new stream which has a keen interest in the subject of imagination starts with Akenside and leads to high Romanticism.<sup>(8)</sup> Engell's

view is supported by many passages in the poem. For example, in Bk. III the poet, repeating Fancy's creation,

blends them [the rising phantoms], now  
divides,  
Enlarges and extenuates by turns;  
Opposes, ranges in fantastic bands,  
And infinitely varies. (III, 392-5)

And he breathes a "fair conception" into the form with his "Promethean art" (III, 411, 410). As fancy is synonymous with imagination in Akenside, we are inclined to find Coleridge and Shelley here because of noticeable verbal similarities between Akenside and Romantics. However, there is an important conceptual difference between them: the earlier poet's indulgence in "Fancy's dazzling optiks" which generates "kind illusion" one after another is opposite to Keats's reluctant departure from fancy as a deceiving elf (III, 153, 491). A view of Akenside as a premature Romantic poet prevents us from locating him among his contemporary mid-century poets and writers. Due to this retrospective distortion at least two things which reveal his "un-Romantic" aspects are overlooked. First, Hazlitt is the only exception in regarding the revised poem as an improvement though it is generally accepted that much of fresh imagery of the original poem is lost to elaborate the metaphysics.<sup>69</sup> Second, it is only immature works of Romantics such as Coleridge's "The Destiny of Nations" and Keats's early poems which strongly remind us of Akenside's long poem.

There are many features in Akenside which are not simply estimated by the extent to which he heralds the Romantics. Marshall Brown's statement on the pre-Romantic elements in the literature between 1750-1790 is worth quoting:

Pre-Romantic traits are undoubtedly present throughout the eighteenth century. . . . But these traits are oppositional features of the Enlightenment itself, not glimmerings of a new dawn; they need to be referred to their contemporary context in order to be understood.<sup>70</sup>

The text of *The Pleasures of Imagination* is woven by different threads which refuse to be reduced to one Romantic voice. From this perspective I hope to discuss how Akenside's long poem shares the concerns, metaphors and styles of mid-eighteenth century poets in its treatment of poetic values.

(2)

*The Pleasures of Imagination* was published anonymously by Dodsley in January, 1744, a few months before Pope's death. According to Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*, Dodsley was reluctant to pay the price demanded for it and carried it to Pope, who advised him not to make a niggardly offer, saying that "this was no every-day writer."<sup>71</sup> Immediately after its first appearance, the work received much applause and raised the author to a distinguished place among the contemporary poets at the age of twenty three.

Despite its great popularity, however, the poem's metaphysical subject and stylistic obscurity perplexed many contemporary readers. Gray was disturbed by the poem's difficult philosophical aspects. In the letter of April 26, 1744, he writes that "It is often obscure and even unintelligible, and too much infected with the Hutchinson-jargon."<sup>72</sup> Johnson simply said that "Sir, I could not read it through,"<sup>73</sup> but he detailed his troubled fascination with its "luxuriance of expression" in the *Lives of the English Poets*:

they [his images] are displayed with such luxuriance of expression that they are forms fantastically lost under superfluity of dress. . . . The words are multiplied till the sense is hardly perceived; attention deserts the mind and settles in the ear. The reader wanders through the gay diffusion, sometimes amazed and sometimes delighted; but after many turnings in the flowery labyrinth comes out as he went in.<sup>74</sup>

Johnson's remark indicates the difficulty characteristic of the long poems written in the 1740s. John Sitter, using terms similar to Johnson's,

convincingly discusses that the obscurity and difficulty in the mid-century long poems marks a departure from Pope and is caused by the “conflicting appeals” of the poets’ indulgence in “the leisure of length” and their desire for “intensity or momentary sublimity.”<sup>(15)</sup> Applying Sitter’s argument to *The Pleasures of the Imagination* in the light of Akenside’s use of the sublime and the beautiful, I would like to take the “conflicting appeals” as arising from the poet’s desire for simultaneous realization of the sublime and the beautiful. The contradictory coexistence of indulgence in length and an intense moment of sublimity is an expression of his attempt to achieve the sublime through the beautiful, which is different from Burke’s stance. At the stylistic level, this causes delay in the poetic quest whose completion is the goal of the poem, making the protagonist’s quest more like a Spenserian romance than a Romantic quest.<sup>(16)</sup>

The poem allegorizes the creative process from the reception of inspiration by the mind to the creation of the sublime and the beautiful by depicting many episodes such as Beauty’s journey from heaven, Fancy’s creation, and a quest of the lonely young poet. Bk. I begins with the invocation to the poetic muse Fancy. The speaker sings of his solitary poetic task in the first person and his audience is also a lonely wanderer like himself whose “candid bosom the refining love / Of Nature warms” (I, 133-34). Sitter argues that in the mid-century when retirement has hardened into retreat many poems are not epistles addressed to an explicit audience with social engagement but “soliloquies or lyrics, usually blank verse musings or odes addressed to personifications.”<sup>(17)</sup> In Akenside, the poet’s adventure is set in “sacred” and “untrod” paths and he is guided by personified poetic values which appear only to the youth “whom solitude inspires” (I, 50, 559).

The poet’s guiding spirit Fancy is introduced in the poem as a transcendental female being; the “smiling queen of every tuneful breast, / Indulgent Fancy” (I, 9-10).<sup>(18)</sup> Fancy’s “rosy fingers cull / Fresh flowers and dews to sprinkle on the turf / Where Shakespeare lies” (I, 11-13). The relationship of the indulgent queen to her favourite poet is soft and

protective. Smiling Fancy belongs to the beautiful, and it is with her aid that Fiction becomes the mother of new “wild creation”:

with thee  
Let Fiction come, upon her vagrant wings  
Wafting ten thousand colours through the air,  
Which, by the glances of her magic eye  
She blends and shifts at will, thro’ countless  
forms,  
Her wild creation. (I, 13-18)

Her “wild creation” is repeated in Bk. III by the poet who

with loveliest frenzy caught,  
From earth to heaven he rolls his daring eye,  
. . . . the eternal heavens  
Disclose their splendours, and the dark abyss  
Pours out her births unknown. With fixed gaze  
He marks the rising phantoms. Now compares  
Their different forms; now blends them, now  
divides,  
Enlarges and extenuates by turns;  
Opposes, ranges in fantastic bands,  
And infinitely varies. (III, 383-395)

And he produces the “lovely phantoms of sublime and fair” out of the “rising phantoms” from chaos when “Lucid order dawns” (III, 461, 391, 398).

The “wild creation” of Akenside’s muse, which puts the imagination on a cosmic scale, is a reworking of *Dunciad*’s “wild creation.” Pope writes:

the cloud-compelling Queen  
Beholds thro’ fogs, that magnify the scene.  
She, tinsel’d o’er in robes of varying hues,  
With self-applause her wild creation views;  
Sees momentary monsters rise and fall,  
And with her own fools-colours gilds them all.  
(I, 79-84)<sup>(19)</sup>

Both Pope and Akenside associate sublimity with the wild and the vast, but the latter attempts to bring order out of the “wild” creation. Pope’s “cloud-compelling

Queen" who gilds her "momentary monsters" shows that the sublime resides in chaos and monstrosity. On the other hand, Akenside's "wild creation," when repeated by the poet, calls "Lucid order" and generates the "lovely phantoms of sublime and fair." Thus what is created is not momentary monsters but forms which reflect the "eternal origin" through the "unbound symmetry of things" (I, 478, 480), whereas Pope's queen only mocks the first creation. In eighteenth century texts, "symmetry," which is inherent in beauty, is the terrestrial mark that reflects the Creator. By adding an adjective usually incompatible with orderliness and pattern associated with the concept of symmetry, Akenside's "unbound symmetry" contains both the sublime and the beautiful and suggests that the sublime can be linked to order and symmetry as well as chaos and darkness, which is a remarkable departure from neo-classical poetics. It is only one step from here to Blake's fearful symmetry, but what needs to be remembered is that even phantoms which rise from the dark abyss are given order and pattern by Fancy and that the depth is not the abode of the wild and the grotesque:

Virtue, rising from the awful depth  
Of Truth's mysterious bosom. . . .  
And dress'd by Fancy in ten thousand hues,  
Assumes a various feature, to attract,  
With charms responsive to each gazer's eye,  
The hearts of men. (I, 548-54)

In Akenside both the sublime and the beautiful, which are to be thrown in direct opposition by Burke, coexist rather harmoniously within the realm of the imagination.<sup>(20)</sup> Indulgent and smiling Fancy assists a cosmic wild creation, producing forms which are sublime and beautiful. Accordingly, the poet's mind is a living fountain containing the sublime and the beautiful. The mind is a "fair poetic region" full of "unfading flowers" where the poet, who disdains to rest his "heaven-aspiring wing," searches Virtue (I, 51, 53, 184).

When he personifies the abstract concept of poetic imagination, Akenside splits it into two transcendental female beings; Fancy and Beauty.

Personified Fancy is above heaven, while poetic inspiration, sent from heaven to the human mind, is addressed as maiden Beauty. A holy triangle is completed by adding personified Nature who is referred to as "the indulgent mother" (I,358). Behind these three goddesses is "the Almighty One" or "the Sire Omnipotent" (I, 64, 99), but he seldom appears in the poem. He is retired in the deep recess after the first creation:

then deep-retir'd  
In his unfathom'd essence, view'd the forms  
The forms eternal of created things. (I, 59-61)

The coexistence of a desire for the beautiful and a drive for the sublime within the human mind makes Akenside's image of the soul interesting. The "love / Of Nature and the Muses" bids the poet to explore

Through secret paths erewhile untrod by man,  
The fair poetic region, to detect  
Untasted springs, to drink inspiring draughts,  
And shade my temples with unfading flowers  
Cull'd from the laureate vale's profound recess,  
Where never poet gain'd a wreath before.  
(I, 48-55)

The words associated with the fair poetic region such as "secret," "untrod," "my temples," and "profound recess" suggest a mental landscape as well as Keatsian indulgence and luxury, but the passion for beauty is counterbalanced by the desire for infinity, not dismissed as is seen in Keats. The poet's "high-born soul"

Disdains to rest her heaven-aspiring wing  
Beneath its native quarry. Tir'd of earth  
And this diurnal scene, she springs aloft  
Through fields of air; pursues the flying storm;  
Rides on the vollied lightning through the  
heavens;  
. . . . Then high she soars  
The blue profound, and hovering round the sun  
.....  
She meditates the eternal depth below.  
(I, 183-208)

As the soul is slightly feminized by being referred to as “she,” the “heaven-aspiring” desire avoids Satanic overreaching and her journey to heaven is treated approvingly.<sup>(21)</sup> Her upward journey, enriched by eighteenth-century scientific discoveries as is usual with the poetics of the sublime<sup>(22)</sup>, is matched with the descent of poetic inspiration as a grace from heaven. One hundred and fifty lines later, Beauty, a female embodiment of the “flame of genius,” “love and beauty and poetic joy / And inspiration,” is sent from Heaven. The poetic ambition inside the male poet is conceived as a sky-born virgin muse:

Thus was Beauty sent from heaven  
The lovely mistress of Truth and Good  
In this dark world; for Truth and Good are one,  
And Beauty dwells in them and they in her,  
With like participation. (I, 372-376)

This passage establishes a Shaftesburian trinity of the good, true, and beautiful whose visual symbol is beauty. The link Shaftesbury forms between beauty and truth makes imagination crucial to moral action and considerably extends the boundary of imagination. By having two poetic muses, Fancy and Beauty, the young poet in this poem is able to wander through Nature to “the eternal shrine” (I, 414) where Truth, Good and Beauty reside, guided by Beauty and then repeat Fancy’s cosmic creation. In the following two books key episodes about his wanderings are embedded in the vast speculative musings.

In Bk. II, Akenside tells a vision in which he saw a youthful poet standing between Aphrodite and Euphrosyne. His vision is preceded and induced by the “awful tale” of the sage who speaks of the moment of sublimity:

A flashing torrent of celestial day  
Burst thro’ the shadowy void. With slow descent  
A purple cloud came floating thro’ the sky,  
And pois’d at length within the circling trees,  
Hung obvious to my view; till opening wide  
Its lucid orb, a more than human form  
Emerging lean’d majestic o’er my head,

And instant thunder shook the conscious grove.  
Then melted into air the liquid cloud,  
And all the shining vision stood reveal’d.  
(II 221-230)

Despite his resistance to the power of the sage’s eloquence which consists of a typical contemporary style of the sublime in which horrible darkness is combined with sudden excessive light, Akenside is dazzled and sees “A solitary prospect, wide and wild, / Rush’d on my senses” (II, 273-274). However, the poet’s vision changes when “the voice / Of that celestial power” talks of the “vast harmonious frame” ascending from the mute shell-fish to the Creator (II, 301-302, 343). He sees “on the flowery turf there stood / Between two radiant forms a smiling youth” (II, 399-400). The poet’s vision has both the beauty and the sublimity of light. One of the “radiant forms” is Euphrosyne, who is compared to the evening star. She is the essence of beauty:

Eternal youth  
O’er all her form its glowing honours breath’d;  
And smiles eternal, from her candid eyes,  
Flow’d like the dewy lustre of the morn  
Effusive trembling on the placid waves.  
The spring of heav’n had shed its blushing spoils  
To bind her sable tresses: full diffus’d  
Her yellow mantle floated in the breeze.  
(II, 409-416)

The other one, Aphrodite, is “More sublime” and associated with the sun:

The presence of a god  
High on the circle of her brow enthron’d.  
From each majestic motion darted awe,  
Devoted awe! . . . .  
Free in her graceful hand she pois’d the sword  
Of chaste dominion. A heroic crown  
Display’d the old simplicity of pomp  
Around her honour’d head. A matron’s robe,  
White as the sunshine streams through vernal  
clouds,  
Her stately form invested. (II, 420-433)

Marjorie Nicolson states that Euphrosyne is symbolic of the beautiful and Aphrodite of the sublime.<sup>(23)</sup> However, although Aphrodite is depicted in the mode of sublime, she is also dressed in the robe of cloud which lessens the painful effect of excessive light.

The composition in which a youth stands between two beautiful women comes directly from the mid-century vogue of the "Choice of Hercules" where the young Hercules chooses between Virtue and Pleasure.<sup>(24)</sup> The entire section can be regarded as Akenside's version of the Fall, where the youth, whose poetic task is to seek Virtue, makes a wrong choice and loves Euphrosyne, attracted by the "pleasing error" (II, 560). However, Akenside's sympathetic interest in Miltonic (Satanic) digression from duty into love renders the image of Aphrodite unconventional and the youth's mistake retrievable. God sends the son of Nemesis to the youth in order to punish his "error" when he hears from his daughter Aphrodite that the young poet does not lend his ears to her directing voice, overlooking his duties. Aphrodite is usually regarded as the Greek equivalent of Venus. It seems odd that the goddess of erotic love symbolizes Virtue and Duty here, but considering that many muses in the mid-century are denied sexuality and appear either as virgin maids or mothers, it might be said that even Aphrodite can be reformed according to the figure of female personification in this period.<sup>(25)</sup>

The poet is forgiven and re-oriented by Aphrodite, who drives the avenging spirit away. The virgin muse heals the wounded poet as a mother:

the sovereign maid  
Folds with a mother's arms the fainting boy,  
Till life rekindles in his rosy cheek. (II, 541-543)

The image of benevolent mother used for Fancy and Nature appears again. The maternal care offered to the young poet by virgin muses in this poem is different from the relationship between "The Mighty Mother, and her Son" in *The Dunciad* (I, 1) or the filial bond between Nature and the poet in the "Blessed the infant babe" section in Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

The muse urges the youth to begin his quest

again, but a "pleasing error" is considered as a necessary part of the quest. For at the end of Bk.II when the youth pleads to return Euphrosyne, she is sent immediately back from heaven and she emphasizes their necessary reunion:

thou, celestial maid!  
Howe'er that grisly phantom on thy steps  
May sometimes dare intrude, yet never more  
Shalt thou, descending to the abode of man,  
Alone endure the rancour of his arm,  
Or leave thy lov'd Euphrosyne behind.  
(II, 654-659)

Surprisingly, Akenside's Hercules can have both Virtue and Pleasure despite his wrong choice. When the same theme is treated by Romantics, the hero is guilt-stricken and compensates for his mistake by his own painful labour. In Blake's *Jerusalem*, Albion's fall is caused by his rejection of Jerusalem in favour of Vala, which leads him to a further disaster. Albion's wrong choice is indicated by Plate 47 which can be considered as a reversed version of the choice of Hercules. After killing his male emanation, Albion asks Vala to come "with knife and cup: drain my blood / To the last drop" (22: 29-30).<sup>(26)</sup> Marton D. Paley states: "Thus his maimed sexuality makes Albion a willing candidate for the Romantic Agony, graphically depicted in the human sacrifices of [plates] 25 and 69."<sup>(27)</sup>

Corresponding to the poet's reunion with Pleasure, Bk. III tries to justify the delightfully deceiving quality of fancy which tends to lead man to a "pleasing error". Akenside fully recognizes fancy's deceptiveness:

her[Fancy's] report can never there be true  
Where Fancy cheats the intellectual eye,  
With glaring colours and distorted lines.  
(III, 28-30)

Though Fancy responds to "imperfect," "faint," and "confused" sight, there is a moment when fancy acts like reason which always sees clearly.

so haply where the powers  
Of Fancy neither lessen nor enlarge  
The images of things, but paint in all  
Their genuine hues, the features which they wore  
In Nature; there Opinion will be true,  
And Action right. (III, 18-23)

Nevertheless, Akenside neither pursues this happy moment, nor bids farewell to the deceiving elf as Keats does in his "Ode to a Nightingale." Instead he prefers to be "deluded long / By Fancy's dazzling optiks" (III, 152-3). The indulgently long narrative section which depicts the youth's error in Bk. II is one example to show Akenside's preference to be deluded by fancy. In this episode Aphrodite changes her identity incessantly. She is a sublime goddess, a virgin muse, and a caring mother. The reunion of the three at the end of the section takes us back to the beginning of the episode and suggests the possibility that an error may be made again.

Emphasis is on the ability to achieve a new vision. The lessening and enlarging of images by fancy is reported with excitement. The poet

blends them [the rising phantoms], now  
divides,  
Enlarges and extenuates by turns;  
Opposes, ranges in fantastic bands,  
And infinitely varies. Hither now,  
Now thither fluctuates his inconstant aim,  
With endless choice perplex'd. (III, 392-397)

The verbs which appear here are similar to those employed by Coleridge's definition of the secondary imagination, but Akenside's fancy acts more like Coleridge's primary imagination which is "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of in the infinite I AM."<sup>(28)</sup> Out of the innumerable possible choices a form is selected and the poet breathes a "fair conception" into it with his "Promethean art" (III, 411, 410). He is raised to the status of the second maker.

Akenside does not dismiss "fancy's dazzling optiks" as hindrances in the way of the poetic quest. The delusion caused by Fancy is considered as

"Kind," because Fancy is a grace sent by the "source divine of ever-flowing love" and "unmeasure'd goodness" to make the poet's quest less painful (III, 491, 498-503). Illusory or not illusory, fancy creates "kind illusion" one after another which brings a sudden and new discovery to the poet who is chosen by Fancy and fostered by Nature. The poet's long quest is finally rewarded by a vision or illusion given by fancy. Towards the end of Bk. III there is an abrupt entrance of a visionary moment told in a way suitable for a tale of a knight-errant. The episode is introduced by the phrase "So fables tell" (III, 507) and recounts that the youthful poet perplexed in doubt is suddenly and wholly brought into a realm of harmony where Virtue and Pleasure are reconciled.

The adventurous hero, bound on hard exploits,  
Beholds with glad surprise, by secret spells  
Of some kind sage, the patron of his toils,  
A visionary paradise disclos'd  
Amid the dubious wild: with streams and shades,  
And airy songs, the enchanted landscape smiles,  
Cheers his long labours and renews his frame.  
(III, 508-14)

(3)

Sitter compares the opening lines of *The Pleasures of Imagination* with Wordsworth's "Prospectus" attached to *The Excursion* and discusses that "*The Pleasures of Imagination* is in fact an extremely ambitious philosophical consideration of the 'fitting' of the individual to his immediate and cosmic surroundings."<sup>(29)</sup> Akenside writes:

With what attractive charms this goodly frame  
Of nature touches the consenting hearts  
Of mortal men. (I, 1-3)

Akenside's life-long unfinished revision of the poem and the poem's movement in which the poet is led to the "eternal shrine" through the love of nature invite us to juxtapose this long poem with *The Prelude*. Unlike Wordsworth's spots of time, however, Akenside's key episodes are structured as a narrative

retold in the third person with no personal experience felt behind them. Nowhere in *The Pleasures of Imagination* except in the final fragmentary Bk. IV of the revised version can we find the poet's own youthful lonely wanderings in Northumberland.<sup>60</sup> These personal experiences, which strongly anticipate Wordsworth, find their way into his lyrics and odes.

In "Ode X: To the Muse" Akenside writes of the crucial moment when his poetic muse returns to him:

The Muse, the Muse herself returns.  
Such on the banks of Tyne, confess'd,  
I hail'd the fair immortal guest,  
When first she seal'd me for her own,  
Made all her blissful treasures known,  
And bade me swear to follow Her alone. (22-27)

The last three lines of the ode are extended in a telling way in Bk. IV of *The Pleasures of the Imagination*:

— O ye dales  
Of Tyne, and ye most ancient woodlands; where  
Oft as the giant flood obliquely strides,  
And his banks open, and his lawns extend,  
Stops short the pleased traveller to view  
Presiding o'er the scene some rustic tower  
Founded by Norman or by Saxon hands:  
O ye Northumbrian shades, which overlook  
The rocky pavement and the mossy falls  
Of solitary Wensbeck's limpid stream;  
How gladly I recall your well-known seats  
Belov'd of old, and that delightful time  
When all alone, for many a summer's day,  
I wander'd through your calm recesses, led  
In silence by some powerful hand unseen.  
(IV, 31-45)

A young boy who is sealed for his muse and "led / In silence by some powerful hand unseen" in his solitary wanderings makes us wonder if the young Wordsworth, who was fostered by beauty and fear, was also fostered by reading, the same suspicion that occurs to us when we come across a school boy frantically running away from some invisible presence coming after him in Shenstone's *The School-Mistress*

(1742).

It is clear that these two passages are behind the opening part of *The Pleasures of Imagination*, but what is at stake is that neither lyrical confessions nor autobiographical elements enter into the main body of the poem. Instead the wanderings of the youthful poet are described in a descriptive style strongly associated with the mode of romance, which is the mode of another long poem of the 1740s, Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* (1748), and which makes the poem remote from Romantic self-confessional long poems. Focus is as much on the strategy of delay as on the completion of the task. Akenside tries to make the Satanic maze of endless wandering, which is usually considered as misleading, something positive. Errors are regarded as "pleasing" and moreover they are "kind illusion[s]." Every "kind illusion" is introduced by the moment of the sublime but painted in a way associated with the mode of the beautiful. Then the earthly wanderings lead to the celestial with the "visionary paradise" still depicted in the mode of the beautiful. Thus the end is both deferred and acquired as Akenside is devoted to fancy's modifying power to adorn truth with colour and light. The beautiful is a process to reach the sublime, but it is both a ladder and an obstacle to it.

#### Notes

- (1) Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed., D. J. Enright, (London: Penguin Books, 1959), 60-2. References to *Rasselas* are to this edition.
- (2) *Ibid.*, 61. D. J. Enright mentions Johnson's likely indebtedness to Burke's *Enquiry* in a note to this edition. 152.
- (3) *Ibid.*, 62.
- (4) Enright comments on this passage: "On the face of it an unexpected coincidence of Augustan and Romantic; but unexpected only on the face of it." 153.
- (5) For example, James Engell's *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981) traces one critical thread running over

- seventy years which culminates in Coleridge's definition of imagination in the light of values later established by Romantics. A different and more fruitful perspective is taken by Virgil Nemoianu's *A Theory of the Secondary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) and Marshall Brown's *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) in order to discuss the latter half of the eighteenth century in its own context.
- (6) Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, ed., Donald F. Bond, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), III, 540-44. "The Pleasures of Imagination" continues from No.411 to No.421. Addison's "greatness" is synonymous with the sublime, but he does not adapt the word "sublime" probably because of its rhetorical implication.
  - (7) All quotations from Akenside are from *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, ed., Alexander Dyce, (1845; New York: AMS Press, 1969) and reference is to book and line.
  - (8) James Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 45. A similar view is expressed by Samuel H. Monk in *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVII-Century England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1935). Monk gives a first detailed analysis of the aspects of the sublime in Akenside's poetry in relation to various philosophical works treating the sublime and the beautiful, but nevertheless he says that the poem is "confessedly based on Addison's essays on the same subject" (70).
  - (9) William Hazlitt, "On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins, etc.," in *Lectures on English Poets, and The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits*, ed., A.R. Waller, (London: Dent, 1955), 119.
  - (10) Marshall Brown, "Romanticism and Enlightenment" in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed., Stuart Curran, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30.
  - (11) Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed., George Birkbeck Hill, (New York: Octagon Books, 1967), III, 412.
  - (12) Thomas Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, eds., Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), I, 119.
  - (13) James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson, Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, ed., George Birkbeck Hill, (1934, rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), II, 164.
  - (14) *Lives of the English Poets*, III, 417.
  - (15) John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England*, (Ithaca: Cornell university Press, 1982), 158-61.
  - (16) I use the term "romance" in the way it is elucidated by Patricia Parker in *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
  - (17) Sitter, 85-86.
  - (18) The words "fancy" and "imagination" were interchangeable throughout the eighteenth century. Though generally fancy was regarded as more transient, brilliant, and unstable and an effort to distinguish between them was made as is seen in William Duff's *Essay on Original Genius* (1767), the two terms remained synonymous until Coleridge's distinction in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817).
  - (19) All references to Pope are to *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One-Volume Edition of The Twickenham Text*, ed., John Butt, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).
  - (20) It is generally accepted that the revised poem, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, was heavily indebted to Burke's *Enquiry*. However, a good deal of material in the original version goes beyond Addison, which makes Marjorie Nicolson suspect that "Akenside's poem might well have served as a point of departure for the young student at Trinity College." Nicolson thinks that Burke's original draft was written in about 1748, four years after the appearance of Akenside's first version. Given a short period between the publication of Burke's *Enquiry* and Akenside's second poem and the poet's continuous revision of the poem, her assumption is worth considering. See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse: Newton's Opticks*

and the Eighteenth Century Poets, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 123.

uncompleted was probably written between 1765 and 1770 when he died.

- (21) For an interesting view of the passage (l, 185-211) as a reversed version of Satan's journey to Eden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, see Sitter, 135-136.
- (22) See Nicolson's *Newton Demands the Muse*, 117-122 and *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (1959; New York: Norton, 1963), 363-367.
- (23) *Newton Demands the Muse*, 122.
- (24) Relevant accounts of the mid-century vogue of the "Choice of Hercules" appear in Earl Wasserman's "The Inherent Value of Eighteenth-Century Personification", *PMLA* 65 (1950), 437-439 and Ronald Paulson's "The Simplicity of Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness*", *ELH* 41 (1974), 308-311. The image finds its way into Romanticism. For example, see plate 5 of Blake's *Europe* where a male figure stands between two angelic women. W. J. T. Mitchell's example is *Jerusalem* Plate 46. See his *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 28.
- (25) The mid-century poets usually do not attribute sexuality to their muses. The erotic relationship between the poet and the muse often seen in Keats and Shelley is not implied in this poem or Collins's "Ode to Evening."
- (26) *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed., David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 167.
- (27) Marton D. Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 200.
- (28) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds., James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 304.
- (29) Sitter, 160.
- (30) The revision of the remodelled version published as *The Pleasures of the Imagination* in 1757 was begun in the same year and the second book of the revised version was dated 1765. Therefore the fourth book which was left