

A BOOK OF IMAGES

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A book of images by W. T. Horton & W. B. Yeats

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W. T. HORTON & W. B. YEATS

**A BOOK
OF IMAGES**

THE UNICORN QUARTOS, NUMBER TWO. A
BOOK OF IMAGES. DRAWN BY WILLIAM T.
HORTON, INTRODUCED BY W. B. YEATS,
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“A Book of Images.”—Page 14, Line 4.

The Publishers are asked to state that “The Brotherhood of the New Life” claims to be practical rather than visionary, and that the “waking dreams” referred to in the above passage are a purely personal matter.

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DRAWN BY W. T.
HORTON & INTRO-
DUCED BY W. B. YEATS

LONDON AT THE UNICORN
PRESS VII CECIL COURT ST.
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INTRODUCTION.

I N England, which has made great Symbolic Art, most people dislike an art if they are told it is symbolic, for they confuse symbol and allegory. Even Johnson's Dictionary sees no great difference, for it calls a Symbol "That which comprehends in its figure a representation of something else ;" and an Allegory, "A figurative discourse, in which something other is intended than is contained in the words literally taken." It is only a very modern Dictionary that calls a Symbol "The sign or representation of any moral thing by the images or properties of natural things," which, though an imperfect definition, is not unlike "The things below are as the things above" of the Emerald Tablet of Hermes! *The Faery Queen* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* have been so important in England that Allegory has overtopped Symbolism, and for a time has overwhelmed it in its own downfall. William Blake was perhaps the first modern to insist on a difference; and the other day, when I sat for my portrait to a German Symbolist in Paris, whose talk was all of his love for Symbolism and his hatred for Allegory, his definitions

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were the same as William Blake's, of whom he knew nothing. William Blake has written, "Vision or imagination"—meaning symbolism by these words—"is a representation of what actually exists, really or unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is formed by the daughters of Memory." The German insisted in broken English, and with many gestures, that Symbolism said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way, and needed but a right instinct for its understanding; while Allegory said things which could be said as well, or better, in another way, and needed a right knowledge for its understanding. The one gave dumb things voices, and bodiless things bodies; while the other read a meaning—which had never lacked its voice or its body—into something heard or seen, and loved less for the meaning than for its own sake. The only symbols he cared for were the shapes and motions of the body; ears hidden by the hair, to make one think of a mind busy with inner voices; and a head so bent that back and neck made the one curve, as in Blake's *Vision of Blood-thirstiness*, to call up an emotion of bodily strength; and he would not put even a lily, or a rose, or a poppy into a picture to express purity, or love, or sleep, because he thought such emblems were allegorical, and had their meaning by a traditional and not by a natural right. I said that the rose, and the lily, and the poppy were so married, by their colour, and their odour, and their use, to love and purity and sleep, or to other symbols of love

INTRODUCTION.

and purity and sleep, and had been so long a part of the imagination of the world, that a symbolist might use them to help out his meaning without becoming an allegorist. I think I quoted the lily in the hand of the angel in Rossetti's *Annunciation*, and the lily in the jar in his *Childhood of Mary Virgin*, and thought they made the more important symbols,—the women's bodies, and the angels' bodies, and the clear morning light, take that place, in the great procession of Christian symbols, where they can alone have all their meaning and all their beauty.

It is hard to say where Allegory and Symbolism melt into one another, but it is not hard to say where either comes to its perfection ; and though one may doubt whether Allegory or Symbolism is the greater in the horns of Michael Angelo's *Moses*, one need not doubt that its symbolism has helped to awaken the modern imagination ; while Tintoretto's *Origin of the Milky Way*, which is Allegory without any Symbolism, is, apart from its fine painting, but a moment's amusement for our fancy. A hundred generations might write out what seemed the meaning of the one, and they would write different meanings, for no symbol tells all its meaning to any generation ; but when you have said, "That woman there is Juno, and the milk out of her breast is making the Milky Way," you have told the meaning of the other, and the fine painting, which has added so much unnecessary beauty, has not told it better.

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2. All Art that is not mere story-telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which mediæval magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence. A person or a landscape that is a part of a story or a portrait, evokes but so much emotion as the story or the portrait can permit without loosening the bonds that make it a story or a portrait; but if you liberate a person or a landscape from the bonds of motives and their actions, causes and their effects, and from all bonds but the bonds of your love, it will change under your eyes, and become a symbol of an infinite emotion, a perfected emotion, a part of the Divine Essence; for we love nothing but the perfect, and our dreams make all things perfect, that we may love them. Religious and visionary people, monks and nuns, and medicine-men, and opium-eaters, see symbols in their trances; for religious and visionary thought is thought about perfection and the way to perfection; and symbols are the only things free enough from all bonds to speak of perfection.

Wagner's dramas, Keats' odes, Blake's pictures and poems, Calvert's pictures, Rossetti's pictures, Villiers de Lisle Adam's plays, and the black-and-white art of M. Herrmann, Mr. Beardsley, Mr. Ricketts, and