

## GREEN IMAGINATION

Nicola Masciandaro

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only  
a Green thing that stands in the way . . . to the Eyes of the Man of  
Imagination Nature is Imagination itself.

– William Blake

Inside the horizon of every line, green is looking for green.  
The eye of eye is green. Closing my eyes, I gaze out looking  
for you through myself, and I grow green. Greenness of the  
eye of the heart.

It is not a simple thing to think this greenness. The matter  
of color is so mysteriously specific, an appearance stronger  
than its own fact. How to grasp green without following  
thinking into falling for seeing it as *color of*, without losing  
its real quality among the vines of association? It is a  
question of understanding greenness according to its own  
literality, of reading it like a letter, of spelling it like a word.

This one may do by staying with the hyperliterality and  
non-arbitrariness of Blake's image, its itself-ness. Here,  
where truth is seen right on the surface, the tree is not  
simply an example of nature as imagination, but its very  
likeness, its species. Nature is a green thing that stands in  
the way because imagination *is* green. Thus we approach  
inversely a properly intellectual vision, that which "touches  
on things which do not have any images that are like them  
without actually being what they are."<sup>1</sup> Such hyperliteral  
seeing may be conceived as a vision through no one, via  
the deep-flat immediacy of a paradoxically questioning  
presence 'who' apparently already understands, as per  
Augustine's well-known reflection on time: "What *is* time?

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(1) Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 470.

If no one [*nemo*] asks of me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone asking, I do not know.”<sup>2</sup> This *nemo* (from *ne + homo*) is the inhumanity of a too-close vision that touches, plant-like, what it cannot see precisely by simply seeing it. It is an order of understanding requiring precisely that *no one* ask the question, a non-asking asker ‘who’ is the presence of imagination itself, its species. So we find in Michael Marder’s fortuitous formulation of our blindness to plant intelligence the perfect corollary to Blake’s tree of imagination: “Imagine a being capable of processing, remembering, and sharing information—a being with potentialities proper to it and a world of its own . . . most of us will think of a human person, some will associate it with an animal, and *virtually no one’s imagination* will conjure up a plant.”<sup>3</sup>

Species: image-growth of the entity, face of an essence, appearance of true self-imitation—the spice of being. Image (from the root \**aim-* ‘copy’) and greenness (from the root \**ghre-* ‘grow’) converge in the auto-mimetic nature of growth. Thus Goethe begins *The Metamorphosis of Plants*: “Anyone who has paid even a little attention to plant growth will readily see that certain external parts of the plant undergo frequent change and take on the shape of the adjacent parts—sometimes fully, sometimes more, and sometimes less.”<sup>4</sup> Green is the species of imagination,

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(2) “Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio” (Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.14.17, <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/conf/>).

(3) Michael Marder, *Grafts: Writings on Plants* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2016), 41, italics mine.

(4) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, trans. Douglas Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

its spice. Imagination tastes green.<sup>5</sup>

To observe more clearly the verdant idea of the image, consider Augustine's description of the three levels of vision (corporeal, imaginal, intellectual) as a picture of plant-like growth: "When you read, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mark 12:31), three kinds of vision take place: one with the eyes, when you see the actual letters; another with the human spirit, by which you think of your neighbor even though he is not there; a third with the attention of the mind, by which you understand and look at love itself."<sup>6</sup> Vision greens, sprouting forth in three unified orders not unlike the form of a plant. Corporeal, objective vision, that which sees surface or what cannot be seen through, touches the image as *leaf*. Imaginal, mediated vision, that which sees transparently via the subtle lines seen by seeing through, touches the image as *stem*. Intellectual, immediate vision, that which sees the very form of the seen, neither without seeing through it nor with seeing through it (or both), in other words seeing the thing directly through itself, touches the image as *root*.

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(5) Cf. Marder's discussion of the vegetal nature of imaginal freedom in terms of 'crude taste' of first play: "The material freedom of imagination is the echo of vegetal freedom in human beings, but so is the formal aesthetic play-drive, indifferent to the real existence of its object. To let the plant in us flourish, to give free reign to imagination in its materiality, we should forget the formality of 'high culture,' which corresponds to the upper tier of play, and to abandon ourselves to what Schiller decries as crude taste: 'first seizing on what is new and startling, gaudy, fantastic and bizarre, what is violent and wild.' Nietzsche's Dionysian art, itself linked to the intoxicating power of a plant (the fermented grape), is no doubt crucial to this appeal, as is Deleuze and Guattari's take on 'drunkenness as a triumphant irruption of the plant in us'" (Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* [New York: Columbia, 2013], 146).

(6) Augustine, *On Genesis*, 470.

Once again the specific example—the second part of love’s ‘double law’<sup>7</sup>—is more than example, being specularly paradigmatic of vision as the movement and manifestation of will. The love seen in seeing *love* mirrors and is mirrored by love’s seeing per se. Likewise, the three levels of vision are themselves conceptually evident in the conspicuous text: in the objective fact of the neighbor (from the root *\*bheue-* ‘to be, exist, grow’) or one who dwells near (*plēsion, proximus*), in the meditating fact of the likeness (from the root *\*lik-* ‘body, form; like, same’) between oneself and neighbor, and in the immediate fact of self-love.<sup>8</sup> The neighborliness of seeing reflects vision as a force occurring through the mirror of love, via the first unseen image of itself—like the gap between *conatus* and *connatus*, twixt one’s inborn gravity for oneself and the non-autonomous witness of one’s birth.<sup>9</sup>

The unitary, divine fact of love—“Love is the reflection of

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(7) “Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no greater commandment than these” (Mark 12:30-1).

(8) Cf. “There can . . . be no bodily vision without the spiritual, seeing that the moment contact is made with a body by a sense of the body, some such thing is also produced in the spirit, not to be exactly what the body is, but to be like it; and if this were not produced, neither would there be than sensation by which extraneous things present are sensed” (Augustine, *On Genesis*, 492).

(9) William Desmond addresses this dimension—and the separation it inspires—in terms of porosity: “The conatus essendi takes shape as the will to self-determination, but in doing so forgets its own more original passio essendi which is itself as more intimately and vulnerably porous . . . The selving on the surface of self-determination thus tries to snip the umbilical cord that ties it to its own soul—and no nourishment from the womb of the porosity comes up to it, even though in this, all its endeavor is still an affair of being ‘birthed with’ (con-natus)” (William Desmond, “Soul Music and Soul-less Selving,” in *The Resounding Soul*, eds. Eric Austin Lee and Samuel Kimbriel [Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2016], 377).

God's unity in the world of duality. It constitutes the entire significance of creation"<sup>10</sup> —is imaginably present through the law of love in plant form. Seen in this way, in the moment of Augustine's *picking* of this example, the three-fold order of vision becomes a revelation of the second commandment as graft of the first. As image grows mimetically via the cut-and-splice process of self-copying into the very synthesis of vision that sees a thing all at once in gross, subtle, and mental dimension, so does the image's verdant structure here expose the second part of love's double law as a cutting of love itself, the living image of the will to love the One as love. "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5).

And in the original articulation of the first commandment, we see a similar representation of the various levels of being synthesized by the power of a unifying force: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Likewise, Dante's account of the double necessity of love of self and love of God conspicuously deploys the locution of cutting (division, decision) to express the *indivisibility* of amorous vision: "Or, perché mai non può da la salute / amor del suo subietto volger viso, / da l'odio proprio son le cose tute; / e perché intender non si può diviso, / e per sé stante, alcuno esser dal primo, / da quello odiare ogne effetto è deciso" (*Purgatorio* 17.106-11).<sup>11</sup> Impossibility of self-hatred is the

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(10) Meher Baba, *Discourses*, revised 6th ed., 4 vols. (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Foundation, 2007), I.169.

(11) Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977. [Now, because love cannot turn its sight from the well-being of its subject, all things are safe from self-hatred; and because there is no being that can be conceived as existing all by itself and severed from the first, every creature from hatred of that one is cut off.]

(12) "No one hates himself. And, indeed, this principle was never questioned by any sect" (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson [New York: Macmillan, 1958], 20).

identical, unquestionable twin of severance from hating God.<sup>12</sup>

Love as the rhyme (from root \**sreu-* ‘to flow’) flowing between sight and color: “No white nor red was ever seen / So am’rous as this lovely green.”<sup>13</sup> Love as greenness of beauty’s eye, of the image that sees, seizing one by its look, the color of the species as flower of imagination: “The plant that achieves only stunted flowers in the relentless struggle for existence, having been released from this struggle by a stroke of good fortune, *suddenly looks at us with the eye of beauty.*”<sup>14</sup> Or as Meister

(13) Andrew Marvell, “The Garden,” lines 17-8, in *Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), I.48. Thanks to Tom Haviv for reminding me of this poem.

(14) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36. Marder comments: “The absence of a conceptually mediated meaning does not signal the voiding of sense in the flower that represents nothing, but conversely announces a shift in the directionality of sense . . . The beautiful flower ceases to be an object of human regard, instead looking at us with the de-subjectivated and impersonal ‘eye of beauty’ because we do not exactly need it” (*Plant-Thinking*, 141). Cf. Narcissus as bound by the impossible actuality of the image’s love of him: “Admit it, the gaze is really too much. Who can withstand it? No one shall see me and live. That must be why Narcissus never stops spontaneously lying to himself about his reflection, never ceases to fall in love with his own image, seeing neither that it is an image nor his . . . How eternally precious those passing moments, when the gaze opens itself a little more and sees, by some unfathomable magic or trick of the abyss which if you gaze long into it gazes back into you (N), that the image is no less in love with Narcissus” (Nicola Masciandaro, “On the Gaze,” in *Dante | Hafiz: Readings on the Sigh, the Gaze, and Beauty*, eds. Masciandaro and Tekten [New York: KAF, 2017], 59).

(15) “The prophet says, ‘God will lead His sheep into a green pasture.’ The sheep is simple, and so are they who are simplified to one. One master says that heaven’s course can nowhere be so readily observed as in simple animals: they guilelessly accept the influence of heaven, as do children with no minds of their own. But those folk who are clever and full of ideas, they are carried away in a proliferation of things. So our Lord promised to feed his sheep on the mountain on green grass. All creatures are green in God” (Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, trans. Maurice O’C Walshe [New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2009], 459). Observe how the passage performs the unifying simplicity of vision by immediately transferring the color of the pasture to the creature partaking of it. This is a good example of what I have elsewhere termed “animal mysticism,” wherein the stupid immediacy

Eckhart says, also with respect to the extrahumanity of vision, “All creatures are green in God.”<sup>15</sup> Being the alternative of pink or rose, the generic red-cum-white of living beauty and non-spectral color perceived as if between the high and low ends of the rainbow (white light minus green equals pink),<sup>16</sup> green is the presence of the absence of the spectrum’s unity within itself, the index of the will that curves it into infinity.

The self/world-annihilative power of love’s vision—“Annihilating all that’s made / To a green thought in a green shade”<sup>17</sup>—concerns an absolute and unendurable interfaciality, the divine revelation of universe as mirror. At the intolerable summit of Narcissus’s specular torture, finally liquifying in the fire of love—“sic attentuatus amore / liquitur et tecto paullatim carpitur igni”<sup>18</sup>—the lover surrenders into the green to become a flower: “ille caput viridi fessum submitit in herba, / lumina mors clausit domini mirantia formam” [he laid down his weary head in

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of animal awareness is used to figure the depth of apophatic illumination; see “Unknowing Animals,” *Speculations: Journal of Speculative Realism* 2 (2011): 228-44.

(16) See, “There is No Pink Light,” <http://youtu.be/S9dqJRyk0YM>.

(17) Andrew Marvell, “The Garden,” lines 47-8.

(18) Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), III.489-90.  
.489-90.

(19) Where others prefer the past tense here—e.g. Mandelbaum’s “eyes that had been captured by the beauty of their master” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum [New York: Harvest, 1993], 97)—I translate ‘mirantia’ in the literality of its present so as to capture the total liminality of this moment wherein Narcissus’s eyes, still gazing upon themselves in the mirror of imagination, hold open the possibility of his soul’s attainment, via death to his identity, of a higher self-knowledge and more continuous vision of beauty. So the greenness that receives his dying head touches the vitality of death itself, its being an inherent mode and instrument of life rather than its opposite. As Rudolf Steiner observed, “green is the lifeless image of life,” in the sense of the qualitative visibility of the invisible life living through lifeless matter: “Life itself we do not perceive. We perceive plants because they contain the lifeless substances. And because of this they are

the green grass and death closed the bright eyes marveling upon their master's beauty].<sup>19</sup> In the end everyone follows their heart, dies into the reality behind beauty's dream. As Klima writes in *Glorious Nemesis*, "But what the mind does not believe, the heart does. And in the end the intellect does, too; what else is left for it to do?"<sup>20</sup>

Green is the color of man's most properly eyeless neighbor—the manifest appearance of vision as a naturally *missing* power: "We speak of privation . . . if something has not one of the attributes which a thing might naturally have, even if this thing itself would not naturally have it, e.g. a plant is said to be *deprived of eyes*."<sup>21</sup> Being somewhere in the middle of the rainbow, in the midst of the spectrum visible to humans, green reflects the heart as the omnipresent medium or general line of being: "my heart, where I am whoever/whatever I am."<sup>22</sup> It is the spectral aura of the ghostly eros of all things, their being ( ) here in all the creaturely fullness of uncircumscribable restlessness and indeterminacy: "For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until

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green" ("Colours as Revelations of the Psychic in the World," <http://wn.rsarchive.org/>). Vital and deathly, green is sign of the life that lives through what lacks it, the tint of soul elevating itself from matter, the tone of animal growing itself through mineral. So is it the color of love as will refusing the boundary—or encompassing the continuity—between life and death. Like Criseyde nearly dying of love-sorrow in Troilus's arms: "O Jove, I deye, and mercy I beseche! / Help, Troilus!" And therewithal hire face / Upon his brest she leyde and loste speche - / Hire woful spirit from his propre place, / Right with the word, alwey o poynt to pace. / And thus she lith with hewes pale and grene, / That whilom fressh and fairest was to sene" (Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.1149-55, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987]).

(20) Ladislav Klima, *Glorious Nemesis*, trans. Marek Tomin (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2011), 64.

(21) Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1022b, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II.78, italics mine.

(22) "[C]or meum, ubi ego sum quicumque sum" (Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.3.4).

it rests in you.”<sup>23</sup> So in the impressional order of experience, green corresponds to the intensity of *longing*: “All thoughts, words and acts cause sanskaras or impressions on one’s mind. Sanskaras are of seven different colors, the same as those of a rainbow . . . Intense spiritual longing gives rise to sanskaras of the green color. Just as red sanskaras are the worst, so the green ones are the best.”<sup>24</sup> As if seeing with eyes one naturally misses, longing grows through the distance of its own missingness towards the presence of what would only be missed more were it present.<sup>25</sup>

“*Seek his face always* [Psalm 104.4], let not the finding of the beloved put an end to the love-inspired search; but as love grows, so let the search for the one already found become more intense.”<sup>26</sup> The search that never ends is green—the looking of imagination itself or that which stands everywhere in the middle with an eye for the whole. The gravity of green corresponds to the color spectrum’s vital center, a location at once for the above and of the below. So is the weight of every image double. Image, forever undecidably inside and outside the eye, *looks* simultaneously into and beyond one’s vision. Seeing no one, lacking the eyes whereby it sees, the green life of imagination searches through every face, growing beyond

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(23) “[Q]uia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te” (Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1).

(24) Meher Baba, *Meher Message*, 2:7, p. 8 (July 1930), quoted in *Life Eternal*, “Sanskaras,” [http://www.meherabadnyana.net/life\\_eternal/Book\\_One/Sanskaras.htm](http://www.meherabadnyana.net/life_eternal/Book_One/Sanskaras.htm). See Nicola Masciandaro, “The Inverted Rainbow: A Note on the Spiritual Significance of the Color Spectrum,” [https://www.academia.edu/10834707/The\\_Inverted\\_Rainbow\\_A\\_Note\\_on\\_the\\_Spiritual\\_Significance\\_of\\_the\\_Color\\_Spectrum](https://www.academia.edu/10834707/The_Inverted_Rainbow_A_Note_on_the_Spiritual_Significance_of_the_Color_Spectrum).

(25) “Longing does not diminish when the subject is present to what is missing, but rather increases” (David Appelbaum, *The Delay of the Heart* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001], 143).

(26) Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, 6 vols. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 5.186.

all someone ever seen.

As the radically individual fact of one's human form gives too-literal witness to its being envisioned by one without eyes to see it,<sup>27</sup> so does the green reality of imagination, this actual reflection of our missing eyes, lure one to outgrow the fantasy of identity and rest in the limitlessness of a will freer than one's own—that most ancient love alone capable of creating the unimaginably new.

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(27) "The prehuman forms through which it [the soul] has to pass before it can incarnate in the human form are innumerable. Strictly speaking there is only one form—the human form—which is latent in all of the previous forms. The mineral, the plant and the animal forms actually contain the human form in its latent state, and this is gradually and increasingly manifested until it is at last completely expressed as a human being in a human body" (Meher Baba, *God Speaks: The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose*, [New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973], 188).