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Climbing Jacob's Ladder: A Hierarchical Approach to Imagistic Mysticism

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Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: A Hierarchical Approach to Imagistic Mysticism

**Abstract**
Discusses a number of poets and writers (including Lewis and Williams) related by similar philosophical and mystical traditions. Demonstrates how their work relates to Rudolph Otto's definition of the Imagistic Way and its stages.

**Additional Keywords**
Mysticism in literature; Mysticism in poetry; Otto, Rudolph. Mysticism East and West; Valerie Protopapas
DOROTHY L. SAYERS, in her essay "The Poetry of the Image in Dante and Charles Williams," speaks of them as belonging "to a particular philosophical and mystical tradition." Likewise, Charles Williams in The Figure ofBeatrice: A Study in Dante makes clear that he considers Dante and William Wordsworth as belonging to the Way of Affirmation of Images. In the study which follows, I wish to apply to this view a framework which I found in Rudolph Otto's Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism. Perhaps this sounds like a dry exercise of the sort which is usually called academic, maybe it is. But I have found this particular exercise valuable in establishing a framework within which I can understand what a number of my favorite writers, including three of the Inkings, are saying. It enables me to see them better, to compare their statements one to another, to clarify their thought in my mind. I can ask no more of an academic exercise.

Since I am being academic, let me start with two clarifications of my intentions. First, since professionally I teach literature in a state college, no doubt this secular background influences my approach to these writers; therefore, I do not claim that the material I discuss has any necessary religious meaning. The writers often think it has, but they may be wrong. Lionel Trilling, for example, in his essay entitled "The Immortality Ode," discusses Wordsworth's poem in terms of Freudian psychology: Wordsworth thought he had a visionary gleam reflected from Heaven because his ego had not reached the point of not identifying the whole world with himself. Perhaps this is true. Perhaps these religious moments which I will discuss are simply moments in which the ego is lost in the unconscious mind. I like to think otherwise, but being an academician in a state school, I carefully point out to my students when I teach Wordsworth that a secular reading is quite possible—and has been done.

Second, let me remark that my title may be slightly misleading in two ways. "Jacob's Ladder" sounds as if I wanted to refer to visions of angels; this is not correct, as I will make clear in my next paragraph. But I could not resist the phrase about a religious ladder, since it may be thought to echo Plato's Ladder of Love in The Symposium, which is another example of a hierarchy of experiences—one that ends, at least, in mysticism. Second, "Climbing" in my title may suggest that the mystic works his way up this ladder (whether or not he kicks away the lower rungs, as Plato's lover does); this also is not quite accurate: the scale is usually a sequence, but some mystics seem to grasp onto the top rung without climbing up the steps. However, we, as students of the subject, will certainly climb up rung by rung.

Proceeding academically, I next propose a definition of this Imagistic Mysticism. Rudolf Otto, in the book which I am following, spends some space distinguishing types of mysticism. Particularly, two distinctions should be made. First, the visionary experience should be separated out—such visions as St. Teresa or William Blake saw. These mystics are called the Illuminists by Otto. And since I am the angel who is climbing up and down from Heaven, which Jacob saw, was similar, my earlier comment about my title is pertinent here. Second, a distinction should be made between the two types of mysticism which ultimately seek identification (or union):

(1) The Inward Way: The Way of Rejection. Here the mystic withdraws from outward things, empties his mind from all images, ideas, and emotions, and waits for the Spirit to enter. With this discipline of negation we are not concerned.

(2) The Imagistic Way: The Way of Acceptance or of Unity. Here the mystic unites himself with God through, or by means of, one or more images from the world. I shall outline the steps of the process for those who process up it, or the levels of awareness, below.

In what follows, I should make clear that I am not following Rudolph Otto exactly; my first step he does not mention, but I find it in Wordsworth and others. Also, I consider nature mysticism to be part of the second step, although Otto spends some space attacking nature mysticism as not being the same thing as he is discussing, although he admits some similarities; correctly or incorrectly, I believe he is wrong at this point. At any rate, for my purposes of comparing descriptions of mystical experiences, the descriptions are enough alike that the comparisons should be made at that point, whether or not the similarities signify identities; however, I follow Sayers and Charles Williams in believing they do.

I The Experience of Joy

I SHOULD LIKE TO BEGIN with a text from Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," out of the second verse paragraph. Wordsworth is describing the effect his memory of the natural scenery of five years earlier has had on him during the time between his visits; he writes:

...I have owed to them [the beauteous forms he has remembered],
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration...

Pleasure from the memory of beauty is no surprise, nor Wordsworth's next comment, that he may have been influenced morally by his memories—the man who is at peace with himself, who is not bothered by tension, may well be politer to others, more responsive to their needs, than another. Then Wordsworth adds another way in which his memories have influenced him:

Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen [burden] of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
is lightened—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

The two points I wish to emphasize in this passage are (1) the loss of bodily awareness and (2) the feeling of joy. (I shall return to what Wordsworth says about "seeing into the life of things" later.) The first of these is an obvious part of the mystical experience; the second seems to be a common concomitant (I find Evelyn Underhill mentioning it). I believe in Joseph Wood Krutch one finds a man who never went much beyond this simple feeling of joy. In his autobiography More Lives than
One, he writes:

... recreation, pleasure, amusement, fun, and all the rest are poor substitutes for Joy; and Joy, so I at least am convinced, has its roots in something from which civilization tends to cut us off.

Are some at least of the animals capable of teaching us this lesson of Joy? Some biologists deny categorically that they feel it. But by no means all and by no means the best. If I listen to one carding a sunflower in a sunflower field I do not feel I am convinced. The gift for real happiness or joy is not always proportionate to intelligence as we understand it, even among the animals. As Professor N.J. Berrill has put it: "To be a bird is to live in a world of nature more intensely than any other living creature, man included. Birds have hotter blood, brighter colors, stronger emotions...They are not very intelligent...but they live in a world that is always the present, mostly full of joy." Similarly Sir Julian Huxley, certainly no more sentimental "nature lover," wrote after watching in Louisiana the love play of heroes who, with loud cries of ecstasy, twist their necks into a lover's knot: "Of this I can only say that it seemed to bring such a pitch of emotion that I could have wished to be a heron that I might experience it."

Thirdly, his if Krutch felt this Joy to be simply emotional intensity, based on a physical nature, but his account of his own experiences of Joy, in the essay "The Mystique of the Desert," suggests something less physical in basis: I happen to be one of those, and we are not a few, to whom the acute awareness of a natural phenomenon, especially of a phenomenon of the living world, is the thing most likely to open the door to that joy we cannot analyze. I have experienced it sometimes when a rabbit appeared suddenly from a bush to dash away to the safety which he values so much, or when, at night, a rustle in the leaves reminds me how many busy lives surround my own. It has also come almost as vividly when I suddenly saw a flower opening or a stem pushing out of the ground.

But what is the content of the experience? What is it that at such moments I seem to realize? Of what is my happiness compounded?

First of all, perhaps, there is the vivid assurance that these things, that the universe itself, really do exist, that life is not a dream; second, that the reality is pervasive and, it seems, unconquerable. The future of mankind is dubious. But one knows that all does not depend upon man, that possibly, even, it does not depend upon this earth. Should man disappear, rabbits may well still run and flowers still open. If this globe itself should perish, then it seems unreasonable to suppose that what inspires the stem and the flowers may exist somewhere else. And I, it seems, am at least part of all this.

From my point of view, Krutch is here experiencing a low-grade mysticism which he does not understand. The feeling that life is somehow unified is a hint of the Perception of Unity which I claim he is desiring the perfect beloved. if he falls upon hillsides he at once thinks 'if only I were there'; if it comes to a child while he is looking at a far off hillside he at once thinks 'if only I were there'; if it comes when remembering some event in the past, he thinks 'if only I could go back to those days'. If it comes (a bit later) while he is reading a 'romantic' tale or poem of 'perilous seas and faerie lands forlorn', he thinks he is wishing that such places really existed and that he could reach them. If it comes (later still) in a context with erotic suggestions he believes he is desiring the perfect beloved. But he falls upon literature (like Maeterlinck or the early Yeats) which speaks of spirits and the like with some show of serious belief, he may think that he is hankering for real magic and occultism. When it darts out upon him from his studies in history or science, he may confuse it with the intellectual craving for knowledge.

But every one of these impressions is wrong. The sole merit I claim for [The Pilgrim's Regress] is that it is written by one who has proved them all to be wrong. There is no room for vanity in the claim: I know them to be wrong not by intelligence but by experience, such experience as would not have come my way if my youth had been wiser, more virtuous, and less self-centered than it was. For I have myself been deluded by every one of these false answers in turn, and have contemnplated each of them earnestly enough to discover the cheat. To have embraced so many false Florinels is no matter for boasting: it is fools, they say, who learn by experience. But since they do at last learn, let a fool bring his experience into the common stock that wiser men may profit by it. Since my purpose in this paper is not a study of mistakes about mysticism, I will leave Lewis's details to those who wish to search out his book. But the passage I have quoted does clarify by a negative definition what this paper is discussing. For a positive example from Lewis, let us turn to the first one recorded in his autobiography; he says that Traherne and Wordsworth have described the experience better, but then goes on:

The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation that came over me; Milton's "enormous bliss" of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to "enormous") comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire:
but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit—tín filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my past. 'Joü lov roha! [Oh, I desire too much]—and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, and whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.

Here the experience comes through the double means of the sight of a flowering currant bush (like Krutch's experiences of nature) and the memory of a toy garden (as Wordsworth's experiences tended to be based not on scenes present but scenes remembered). The particular images are not important to us as analyzers (although they are of course important to the mystic himself); as Lewis says, the experience is basic, the images are a means—but in the Imagistic Way, a necessary means. Lewis's negative definition of some of the images through which this experience of *Samaelauk* may come; before going on to the next step in my scale, I would like to turn to John Heath-Stubbs' account of a discussion by Charles Williams of the most important of these means for poetry, which necessarily omits such things as the study of science or history which Lewis mentions:

In a lecture which I heard him deliver at Oxford in 1943 [writes Heath-Stubbs], Charles Williams distinguished five principal modes of the Romantic Experience, or great images, which occur in poetry. They are:

(a) The Religious experience itself. Having posited this, Williams proposed to say nothing further about it. Obviously, in a sense, it is in a category apart, and includes the others.
(b) The Image of woman. Dante's Divine Comedy is the fullest expression of this way of seeing, and its potential development.
(c) The Image of Nature. Of this Wordsworth's The Prelude was the great exponent.
(d) The Image of the City. Had Williams not been addressing an audience composed of English Literature students, I have no doubt the images that would have cited Virgil, the *Aeneid*, as the great exponent. As it was, he pointed to 'what were, until recently, known as our younger poets' as expressing, in their vision of the Unjust City, a negative aspect of this experience. [Heath-Stubbs adds in a footnote: 'An even better, and positive, example from modern poetry would have been provided by Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, but Charles Williams had not read this poem.]
(e) The experience of great art. Of this, Keats's Ode on a *Grecian Urn* was a partial expression.

Heath-Stubbs hesitates at the last of these, saying that it, "like the first, seems to stand in a special category. It is, it might be said, included by the others, just as the others are included in the first. And it also seems to me doubtful whether it could ever lead to a more than partial expression..." So much so that Heath-Stubbs; from my point of view, the reason it cannot serve as a means is that the images and conceptions are human-made, cannot (or cannot often) lead beyond its finite creator. Keats was able to mediate on the paradoxes of eternal art by the anonymously created urn, but the escape outside of time altogether by means of art would logically seem rare.

Of the last two, flashes of Joy he found in Nordic art; perhaps it is important that the art which so moved him involved gods and symbolic adventures (whether in the original myths and legends or in later treatments of them). This question of art as a means of mysticism need not be decided here. It is enough to say that art is a means here (in contrast to the Imagistic Way) because (I hope) the images (if they are), and so thought he could dismiss sublimation as a cause of his Joy since it was not what he found in physical consummation. Perhaps so. As Kierkegaard said, belief is a leap in the dark; in the modern world, there are many who know what is there without leaping, for Freud or someone else has given them a map.

II The Perception of Unity

AFTER THE FIRST STEP comes the perception of unity; based generally on Otto's summary, we may distinguish three characteristics of this state: (1) all the individual things of experience are seen as somehow unified or identical—despite their differences, or (2), less often, all things are transformed as the result of being perceived (or seen) as somehow unified; (3) the mystic is unified with the things he perceives. The first and third of these have already been suggested by Krutch in his meditation on the life which imaged his Joy was pervasive in the universe, whether or not mankind or this world continued to exist, and that at the moment he was part of that pervasive life. But this step, and the combination of its first and third aspects, can also and more clearly (because less confused with their image) be illustrated from another passage in Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey":

I have felt-
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the place of light.

Since I have been admitting possible secular interpretations, let me here add a secular experience. Alan W. Watts, in his book *The Joyous Cosmos*, describes his experience of taking L.S.D. and reports it in terms which suggest a perception of unity also:

I am looking at what I would ordinarily call a confusion of bushes—a tangle of plants and weeds with branches and leaves going every which way. But now that the organizing, relational mind is upset, I see that what is confusing is not the branches but my clumping of thinking. Every twig is in its proper place, and the tangle becomes an arabesque more delicately ordered than the fabulous doddles in the margins of Celtic manuscripts. In this same state of consciousness I have seen a woodland at fall, with the whole multitude of almost Erica flowers, the others so like one another that the incredible jewelry of such unicellular creatures of the ocean as the radiolaria, the fairy architecture of seeds and pods, the engineering of bones and skeletons, the aerodynamics of feathers, and the astonishing profusion of eye-forms upon the wings of butterflies. I have been fortunate enough to see many things carved out with infinite patience and skill.

A journey into this new mode of consciousness gains one a marvelously enhanced appreciation of patterning in nature, a fascination deeper than ever with the structure of forms, the formation of any universe. One's eyes become the camera, and they begin to see the incredible jewelry of such unicellular creatures of the ocean as the radiolaria, the fairy architecture of seeds and pods, the engineering of bones and skeletons, the aerodynamics of feathers, and the astonishing profusion of eye-forms upon the wings of butterflies.

More and more it seems that the ordering of nature is an art akin to music—fugues in shell and cartilage, counterpart in fibers and capillaries, throbbing rhythm in waves of sound, light, and nerve. And oneself is connected with it quite inextricably—anode, a ganglion, an electronic interweaving of paths, circuits, and impels that stretches through the whole of time and space. The entire pattern swirls in its complexity like smoke in sunbeams or the rippling networks of sunlight in shallow water. Transforming itself endlessly into itself, the pattern alone remains. The crosspoints, nodes, nets, and curlicues vanish perpetually into each other. The baseless fabric of this vision. It is its own base. When the ground dissolves beneath me I float.

Let me move directly from this drug-induced vision to C.S. Lewis's description of Ransom's vision near the end of *Perelandra*; it is not clear if a vision going out of an image of this world, yet it is obviously related to what Watts described:

He thought he saw the Great Dance. It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light,
leaping over and under one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it came to mind of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity—only to be itself entangled when he looked to what he had taken for mere marginal decorations and found that there also the same hegemony was claimed, and the same reign of vision. Here, for better or not it is fully typical of the Affirmative Way, it does allow the type of comparisons I am interested in.

Let me begin with a vision (if it can be called such) which seems perhaps more poetic elaboration than inspiration; it is from Dante's La Vita Nuova, as translated by Barbara Reynolds:

"...I saw approaching me a gracious lady, renowned for her beauty, who for a long time had been the beloved of my closest friend. Her name was Giovanna, but some say that because of her beauty she was nicknamed Primavera, that is, Spring, and this was what she was in and corresponded to her, as I looked, I saw the miraculous Beatrice. They passed by quite close to me, one behind the other, and Love seemed to say to me in my heart: 'The first is called Primavera, and the sole reason for this is the way you see her walking today, for it inspired him when he gave this name of Primavera, which means that she will come first (prima verra) on the day Beatrice appears... If you also consider her first name, it too signifies "she will come first", for Joan comes from John, who preceded the True Light, saying Ego vox clamantis in deserto parce viro clare... I am the Lord of the wilderness: prepare ye the way of the Lord.""

And afterwards Love seemed also to say these words: 'Anyone who thought carefully about this would call Beatrice Love because of the great resemblance she bears to me... If we assume this procession of Giovanna and Beatrice actually took place on the streets of Florence in the Middle Ages, then the description which Dante gives us seems to be an archetypal description. As John preceded Christ, so Giovanna precedes Beatrice—in fact, all of Giovanna's nominal history to that point was simply to be a form of that for the Primavera, which means that she will come first (prima verra)."

Thus Beatrice reveals Christ within her. In my second example, from Watts' book on his drug experiences again, the archetypes are much more pagan:

At some time in the middle of the twentieth century, upon an afternoon in the summer, we are sitting around a table on the terrace holding dark and drinking homemade wine. And yet we seem to have been there forever, for the people with me are no longer the humdrum and harassed little personalities with names, addresses, and social security numbers, the specifically dated mortals we are all pretending to be... They appear more as archetypes within themselves without, however, losing their humanity. It is just that their differing characters seem... to contain all history; they are at once unique and eternal, men and women but also gods and goddesses. Now that we have time to look at each other we become timeless...

Ella, who planted the garden, is a beneficent Circe—sorceress, daughter of the moon, familiar of cats and snakes, herbalist and healer—with the youngest old face one has ever seen. She is entirely white-haired and with empty eyes that are bright. Robert is a manifestation of Pan, but a Pan of bulls instead of the Pan of goats, with frizzled short hair tufted into blunt horns—a man all sweating muscle and body, incarnation of exuberant glee. Beryl, his wife, is a nymph who has stepped out of a moonlit dream, a mere creature with swinging hair and a dancing body that seems to be naked even when clothed. [Like Sarah Smith in C. S. Lewis's The Great Divorce.] It is her bread that we are eating, and it tastes like the Real Sheaf Bread of which mother's own bread was a bungled imitation. And then there is Mary, beloved in the wilderness: prepare ye the way of the Lord.

According to Rudolph Otto, most nature mystics—such as, in the East, Jelal, or as, in the West, Joseph Wood Krutch —do not get much beyond an ecstatic identification with nature. However, I need now to consider the second of the points I took from Otto concerning this level of perception of unity; he suggests that the seeing of the archetypal in the individual is a method of such perception. I must admit that I am somewhat uncertain about this, for it seems to me that this vision often becomes very like, or perhaps part of, the Illuminist's type of vision—those of St. Teresa, William Blake, and Jacob, mentioned at the start of my paper. However, it is worth considering the archetypal visions of the Orphic, whether or not it is fully typical of the Affirmative Way, it does allow the type of comparisons I am interested in.
Thus Watts is able to evoke not only archetypes for the persons but also for the bread. Interestingly, Watts goes on in the next paragraph to suggest the unity of the people, and since a unity despite differences was the first point of this stage, I shall quote the passage:

"I try to find words that will suggest the numerous, mythological quality of these people. Yet at the same time they are as familiar as if I had known them for centuries, or rather, as if I were recognizing them again as lost friends whom I knew at the beginning of time, from a country begotten before all worlds... All of us look at each other knowingly, for the feeling that we knew each other in that most distant past conceals something else—tacit, awesome, almost unmentionable—the realization that at the deep center of a time perpendicular to ordinary time we are, and always have been, one. We acknowledge the marvelously hidden plot, the master illusion, whereby we appear to be different."

Rather than spend time discussing Watts' vision, I am satisfied in having presented two archetypal passages, one Christian and one pagan. I now wish to tie this into the Inklings—Charles Williams, to be specific. For my purposes, I shall not use the most obvious example, the archetypal animals of The Place of the Lion, but rather an archetypal policeman in Chapter Four of The Greater Trumps:

A policeman's hand held them up [while he controlled the flow of traffic]. Henry gestured towards it. "Behold the Emperor," he said to Nancy.

"You're making fun of me, my dear," she half protested.

"Never less," he said seriously. "Look at him."

She looked, and, whether the hours she had given to brooding over the Tarots during the last few days, partly to certify her courage to herself, had imposed their forms on her memory, or whether something in the policeman's shape and cloak under the lights of the dark street suggested it, or whether indeed something common to Emperor and Khalif, cadi and magistrate, praetor and alcalde, lictor and constable, shone before her in those lights—whichever it was, it was certainly true that for a moment she saw in that heavy official barring their way the Emperor of the Trumps [in the Tarot deck], helmed in a white cloak, stretching out one sceptred arm, as if Charlemagne, or one like him, stretched out his controlling sword over the tribes of Europe, pouring from the forests, and bade them pause or march as he would. The great roads ran below him, to Rome, to Paris, to Aix, to Byzantium, and the emblazoned emblems of cities upon them. The noise of all the pausing street came to her as the roar of many peoples; the white cloak held them by a gesture; order and law were there. It moved, it fell aside, the torrent of obedient movement rolled on, and they with it.

Here the archetype is in terms of the Tarot cards, since Williams is using them (and particularly the Fool) in his novel as the basic symbols of the universe. The Tarot Emperor sums up the principle of rule, of order, in the world: both the policeman and Charlemagne are particular manifestations of the archetype. Thus, within the fictional world of the novel, Henry and Nancy perceive the universal through the individual. Is Rudolph Otto right that this is connected to a perception of unity? Perhaps, if we consider that the particular policeman and Charlemagne, as well as all the Emperors and Khalifs, and other archetypals which are used in the novel, are supposed most Christian theologians would call this archetypal principle God the Father. But it is far easier to see a unity through the archetype here than it is in Watts' book, where the mythological archetypes suggest individuality of personality rather than generality of function, of office. I am not certain, therefore, that Otto is correct in assuming that archetypes necessarily suggest an underlying unity.

III The Perception of The One

Rudolph Otto turns to the writings of Meister Eckhart in medieval Germany for four steps moving from the Perception of Unity to the Perception of the One:

The Many [the things of this world] are seen as one [and only this rightly seen].

The Many are seen in the One (where the One is still a form of the Many).

The One is seen in the Many (as supporting and conditioning reality).

The One is seen.

As often with mystical theologians, the description is somewhat lacking; but the general movement is clear. Obviously "the One" is often called God (by Christian mystics, for example), although Emerson can write of going out into nature as a naked eyeball which eventually perceives the Oversoul. But it is one Spirit which is found (or so writers on mysticism usually assume), whether the mystical refers to it as God, the Godhead, the One, or the Oversoul.

In this procession from one level to the next, the passage from "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" with a spirit whose dwelling was in nature seems at the third step: "The One is seen in the Many." I have already alluded to Emerson's Nature and "The Over-Soul!" Let me give two brief examples from the former: near the end of the next-to-last chapter, Emerson writes, "Idealism sees the world in God. It beholds the whole circle of beings, of actions and events, of country and religion, not as painfully accumulated, atom after atom, act after act, in an aged creeping Past, but as one vast picture which God paints on the instant eternity for the contemplation of the soul." In this, Emerson suggests more than just the notion of unity in nature; he seems to be at the second of the four steps which Eckhart listed: "The Many are seen in the One." Again, like Wordsworth's passage, a sentence or two from the last chapter suggests the third step: "...the noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which Nature speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it."

For my purposes of illustration, these passages are enough; after all, Emerson and Thoreau continue the Nature Mysticism of Wordsworth; in my terms, they equally represent the Imagistic Way, here by means of images drawn from nature.

Examples of actual perception of the One—where the mystic has completely penetrated through the Many (the images from which he began), and, leaving them behind, sees the One as completely as he is able—are rare in the material with which I am dealing. Alan Watts has a description at the end of his L.S.D. experiences which resembles it against his closed eyelids, and it involves so much imagery that it seems to be more part of the visions of the Illuminists; nevertheless, I will quote it here:

Time to go in, and leave the garden to the awakening stars.

Again music—harpichords and a string orchestra, and Bach in his most exultant mood. [These are records.] I lie down to listen, and close my eyes. All day, in wave after wave and from all directions of the mind's compass, there has repeatedly come upon me the sense of my original identity as one with the
very fountain of the universe. I have seen, too, that the foun-
tain is its own source and motive, and that its spirit is an
unbounded playfulness which is the many-dimensional dance
of life (like Ransom, in Perelandra). There is no problem left,
but who will believe it? Will it return to normal consciousness?
Yet I can see at the moment that this does not matter. The
play is hide-and-seek or lost-and-found, and it is all part of the play that one can get
very lost indeed. How far, then can one go in getting found?
As if in answer to these questions there appears before my
closed eyes a vision in symbolic form of what Eliot has called
"the still point of the turning world." I find myself looking
down at the floor of a vast courtyard, as if from a window
high upon the wall, and the floor and the walls are entirely
surfaced with small tiles with red, green, blue, and white
mosaics. A scene might be the inner court of some Persian palace, were it not of so much
proportions and its colors of such preternatural transparency.
In the center of the floor there is a great sunken arena,
shaped like a combination of star and rose, and bordered with a
strip of tile that suggests the finest inlay work in vermil-
ion, gold, and obsidian.
Within this arena some kind of ritual is being performed in
time with the music. At first its mood is stately and royal,
as if there were officers and courtiers in rich armor and
many-colored cloaks dancing before their King. As I watch,
the mood changes. The courtiers become angels with wings of
golden fire, and in the center of the arena there appears a
pool of dazzling flame. Looking into the pool I see, just for
a moment, a face which reminds me of the Christos Pantocrator of
Byzantine mosaics; I feel that angels are drawing back with wings over their faces in a motion of reverent
dread. But the face dissolves. The pool of flame grows
brighter and brighter, and I notice that the winged beings are
drawing back with a gesture, not of dread, but of tenderness—for
the flame knows no anger. Its warmth and radiance—
"tongues of flame infolded"—are an efflorescence of love so
endearing that I feel I have seen the heart of all hearts.
I should add a note to this passage from Watts: I have been
taking his descriptions as literal ones of his experiences; he
does say in the last paragraph of his "Prologue" that he has
combined a number of experiences into that of a single day for
artistic purposes; I suspect also that the ending of his experi-
ence with this vision against eyelids is a deliberate climax in
his attempt to fuse his experiences in symbolic form. As Watts
had looked upwards, as he wished me to.
But, as I suggested before the quotation from Watts, his
vision of the tiled courtyard seems more an example of the
Illuminists' type of mysticism than of the Imagistic Way; let
me set up another example, partially as a contrast—that of
Dante's vision of the end of La Divina Commedia. As we saw earlier, had a vision of Christ within Beatrice, which
he recounted in his New Life. Later, at the first of La Divina
Commedia, he has gone astray from his original vision and was in
danger of damnation: Beatrice, in Heaven, had piny on him and
was the image which caused Divine Grace to be extended to him,
though to the Right Way, to Salvation. At the end of the poem,
after Beatrice has guided Dante up the spheres of Heaven,
he is allowed to gaze at the Godhead.
[St.] Bernard conveyed to me what I should do
By sign and smile, as he wished me to.
I had looked upwards, as he wished me to.
For now my sight, clear and yet clearer grown,
Pierced through the ray of that exalted light
Wherein, as in itself, the truth is known.
Dante pauses at this point to say that language is inadequate
for what he is to describe; he prays for aid in recalling what
he saw at that moment—and then he continues:
The piercing brightness of the living ray
Which I endured, my vision had undone,
I think, if I had turned my eyes away.
And I recall this further led me on,
Wherein my gaze more boldness yet assumed
Till to the Infinite, as the images of the
In that abyss I saw how love held bound.
Into one volume all the leaves whose flight
Is scattered through the universe around;
How substance, accident, and mode unite
Fused, so to speak, together, in such wise
That this I tell of is one simple light.
Yes, of this complex I believe mine eyes
Behold the universal form—in me,
Even as I speak, I feel such joy arise.
As, according to Ernst Haeckel's biogenetic law, Ontogeny
recapitulates Phylogeny, so one notices here a recapitulation of
the earlier steps in the process: as Dante looks
at God, he perceives the Unity which ties together the universe,
and he feels Joy. (In the original Italian, the phrase is oh'tio
god.)
Dante continues, with a passage which foreshadows the
Union with the One, which will be the fourth and final step of
my analysis:
That light doth so transform a man's whole bent
That never to another sight or thought
Would he surrender, with his own consent;
For everything the will has ever sought
Is gathered there, and there is every quest
Made perfect, which apart from it falls short.
(For those of us who are much involved in mythopoetic
literature, the statement that in the Godhead "is every quest / Made perfect,
which apart from it falls short" is one which almost demands
another paper, and one far longer than this which I am writing—
and probably a less secular essayist. The word quest, I should
add, is not in the Italian, but I can only consider it an
inspired translation!)
To continue:
Now, even what I recall will be express
More feebly than if I could wield so more
Than a babe's tongue, yet milky from the breast;
Not that the living light I looked on wore
More semblances than one, which cannot be,
For it is always what it was before;
But as my sight by seeing learned to see,
The transformation which in me took place
Transformed the single changeless form for me.
That light supreme, within its fathomless
Clear substance, showed to me three spheres, which bare
Three hues distinct, and occupied one space;
The first mirrored the next, as though it were
Rainbow from rainbow, and the third seemed flame
Breathed equally true, each so fair
Eternal light, that in Thyself alone
Dwelling, alone dost know Thyself, and smile
On Thy self-love, so knowing and so known!
The sphere thus begot, perceptible
In Thee like mirrored light, now to my view—
When I had looked on it a little while—
Seemed in itself, and in its own self-hue,
Linned with our image; for which cause mine eyes
Were altogether drawn and held thereto.
The first of these steps, the seeing of the Eternal Light, is the
experience of the Christian mystics (and perhaps others as well); the second step, the seeing of
the three spheres of different hues which occupied the same
space, is a Christian vision of the Trinity (Dante seems to
follow the Western version of the Nicene Creed in which the Holy
Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son jointly, rather than
just from the Father, as the Eastern [and original] version has it;
here, "the third seemed flame / Breathed equally true from each of
the first pair"); the third step, the seeing of "our counten-
ance"—that is, a human face, Christ's face—indicates the Mystery of the Incarnation, in which God became Man. It is at the point
that Dante is unable to comprehend any more of God, by himself;
As the geometer his mind applies
To square the circle, nor for all his wit
Finds the right formula, how'er he tries,
So strove I with that wonder—how to fit
The image which I see to him and me.
Thither my own wings could not carry me;
But that a flash my understanding cloue,
Whence its desire came to it suddenly.
So grace provides the answer which understanding could not give.
At this point, The Divine Comedy ends.
High phantom lost part in his matchless flight;
Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free from jars,
My will and my desire were turned by love,
The love that moves the sun and the other stars.
There are three notes which I would like to add to this
discussion of Dante's poem. First, I am uncertain as to how well
it illustrates my thesis. Obviously, Dante did not see Beatrice,
see her inner, Christ-like character, and somehow pierce through
to the God behind the figures of this world: there is a time lag
here. It was not until a number of years later that Dante, by means of Beatrice's guidance, was able to have his ultimate vision. No doubt those who wish to draw parallels to the Inner Way, the Way of Negation of Images, will say that Dante's period of apostasy is equivalent to the Dark Night of the Soul. Perhaps so. Perhaps this delay is inevitable; Dante returned to his Image of Beatrice and saw God, while Wordsworth could not (or, at least, did not) return to his image of Nature, and so his poetic life dwindled. (This is the comparison made by Dorothy L. Sayers, in her essay "The Beatrician Vision in Dante and Other Poets." Even so, Beatrice was dead by the time Dante returned to the True Way; as she appears in The Divine Comedy, she is an image in a dream-vision. Thus is she an image of this world (as she clearly was in The New Life), or is she an Illuminist's vision? She is obviously somewhere in between: she was a person, she is now a ghost (a saved one, of course, but not yet in her resurrected body); on the other hand, she is also part of a dream. Yet she remains an Image, in the Williams-Sayers interpretation of Images. Where am I left? She is not exactly an image of the world, being dead; yet she is an image which was in the world, and which appears in her human appearance to Dante when he finishes his climb of Mount Purgatory. Further, she is not exactly an image through which Dante sees God, or at least such a vision is not literally so described. (Sayers argues, in her essay "The Poetry of the Image in Dante and Charles Williams," which I cited earlier also, that Beatrice on her appearance at the top of the mountain is literally herself but is allegorically the Sacrament—that is, morally, she is the manifestation of God as he appears to each individual, Beatrice being His manifestation to Dante; historically, she is the Sacrament of the Altar, and in a larger sense the Church; and mystically, she is "the whole doctrine of the Way of Affirmation—the union of the soul with God in and through all the images.") However that may be, at the literal level, Beatrice is not an image penetrated by Dante as his vision of God; yet she guides him up the ranks of Heaven to his ultimate vision. Therefore, although her image does not work precisely the same way here that images have worked on other levels, yet there is obviously a nearness to the tradition I am concerned with.

The second note I wanted to add to my discussion to Dante's poem returns me to a problem I have raised before: in this case, are the three spheres with three different colors which occupy one space and which also, somehow, contain Christ's face—are they a true picture of the Godhead, or are they the vision of an Illuminist? Or—a third possibility—are the spheres an intellectual attempt by Dante to create a picture for the reader of something which cannot be described at all? I cannot answer this question, for, to begin with, I do not know how much fictionalizing there is in The Divine Comedy. Did Dante really have any such dream vision? All we have is the poem; all we can trust is the poem. I suspect that most readers take the three spheres as symbolic, but whether they were a symbol that Dante's mind created for him in a vision, as a limited means of comprehending something incomprehensible, or whether they were a symbol which Dante invented for his reader, in order that he might have something more specific to grasp than an emotional rhapsody on Dante's part, I do not know.

The third and last note is a simply a promise to return to Dante's poem at the end of this paper, at the fourth step, to suggest an application there. Dante's level of mysticism has taken us far beyond C. S. Lewis, with his personal moments of Sehnsucht, who is far down the scale now, and even Charles Williams' archetypal policeman is left behind; my commentary on this level is logically at a close. However, I would like to digress for a moment on an idea which I do not find in Rudolph Otto. It seems to me that if the perception of the Archetype in the objects of this world is typical of the previous level, so also the perception of the Archetype by itself should logically appear at this level. No doubt this could be illustrated by the perception of the pure Ideas in the Platonic scheme; however, I have in mind another passage from an Inkling—this time from Owen Barfield.

**Vision**

This deals with the quotation of the vision of Alan Watts, which mentions several iconographic references (the Christ Pantocrater and seraphim). The head of Christ is produced in the iconographic way, sans halo, as are the eyes and the eye-nose and flames. The seraphim are usually represented as six wings with faces in the middle (sometimes by just a single eye in the middle, but it was felt that this was already esoteric enough!)

The face in the second eye is representative of the dreamer, hence the closed eyes. The Christ figure, angels and over-all eye are shown against the reclining profile, again representative of the passive nature of the visionary; the further and diminishing profiles with the flame of vision receding show the debilitating effect of the method this individual uses in order to obtain his imagery (LSD).

—Valerie Protopapas
The mystical's soul can unite with God only to the extent that the soul is prepared to experience the Omni-Aspected One: Šankaṅa finds the static joy, Plóntinus finds the aesthetic eros, and Échhart finds the moral agapee, of God. If we consider this problem another secular interpretation—to demonstrate, in the language of the next-to-last sentence of Pilgrim's Progress, "that there is a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven," although I hardly extend my illustration as seriously as Bunyan intended his reader will not notice that the first three steps of the Mystic Ladder I have been climbing are steps in the direction of a this-worldly experience of joy, to a half-this-worldly, half-other-worldly discovery of unity, to a wholly other-worldly vision of the One; but this final step, the Union, does not rise above the One; instead, it seeks a merging with the One. Now then, since Barfield's suggestion does not tell us that the rhythm of climbing ladders is a symbol of sexual intercourse, may we not suspect this whole structure I have developed is simply an intellectual sublimation of the sexual drive: a three-step rhythm followed by a mental orgasm? Since I am a confirmed archetypalist, I would prefer to put it the other way around: sexual intercourse may be simply a physical imitation of a spiritual truth—yet I suspect that few in the modern world would agree to such an interpretation. Still, whichever way a reader or critic wishes to take the parallel, he should not deny the similarity of spirit.

Indeed, C. S. Lewis, in discussing Psalm 45 in his book Reflection on the Psalms, makes a comment which reflects both my language of the bride and bridgework in the first paragraph of this section and which prepares for my final examples in this paper. The critic will predict that it does not deny the Freudian interpretation, although, like my archetypal suggestion, it looks at the matter from what is, from Freud's point of view, the wrong way around:

Few things once seemed to me more frigid and far-fetched than those formulations, whether of this Psalm or of the Song of Songs, which identify the Bridge with Christ and the bride with the Church. Indeed, as we read the frank erotic poetry of the latter and contrast it with the edifying headlines in our Bibles, it is easy to be moved to a smile, even a cynically knowing smile, as if the pious interpreters were feigning an absurd innocence. I should still find it very hard to believe that anything like the "spiritual" sense was remotely intended by the original writers. But no one now (I fancy) who accepts that spiritual or second sense is denying, or saying anything against, the very plain sense which the writer intended. The Divine Bridegroom, who wins a rich, festive Epithalamium, the Song remains fine, sometimes exquisite, love poetry, and this is not in the least obliterated by the burden of the new meaning. (Man is still one of the primates; a poem is still black marks on white paper.) And later I have come to see that the new meaning is not arbitrary and springs from depths I had not suspected. First, the language of nearly all great mysteries, not only in a common tradition, some of them Pagan, some Islamic, most Christian, confronts us with evidence that the image of marriage, of sexual union, is not only profoundly natural but almost inevitable as a means of expressing that union between God and man. The very word "union" has already entailed some such idea.

Lewis goes on to discuss pagan mysteries, the Jewish "marriage" of God and Israel, and the similar Christian "marriage" of Christ and the Church; but this is not his purpose. I quote from Lewis instead of Evelyn Underhill (for example) because I want to prepare for a passage which hints at this type of union; it appears in Lewis's fictional retelling of the myth of Psyche and Cupid, Till We Have Faces. Near the end of the book, Orual, Psyche's brother, has a vision in which she is reunited with Psyche; the passage continues:

Suddenly, from a strange look in Psyche's face (I could see she knew something she had not spoken of), or from a glorious and full meaning of the blue sky above us, or from a deep breath like a sigh uttered in profound silence, or from a deep, doubtful quaking and surmise in my own heart, I knew that all this had been only a preparation. Some far greater matter was upon us. The voices spoke again; but not as I had thought. They were not from the dead. "He is coming," they said. "The god is coming in to his house. ..."

Lewis continues:

While I cannot go into these matters in much detail, I can perhaps indicate some of their binding points. For this purpose I quote what I regard as the most interesting and the most representative of all the theories that I have investigated. It is the "genetic" theory of marriage, which is the basis of the passage just given. This theory is based on the fact that marriage is a symbol of union. In the first place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the second place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the third place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the fourth place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the fifth place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the sixth place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. 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In the forty-eighth place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the forty-ninth place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge. In the fiftieth place, the symbolic character of marriage is a matter of common knowledge.
air was growing brighter and brighter about us; as if something had set it on fire. Each breath I drew let me into new terror, joy, overpowering sweetness, and thirst for battle through and through without any desire of it. I was being unmade. I was not one. That's little to say; rather, Psyche herself was, in a manner, no one. I loved her as I would once have thought it impossible to love, would have died any death for her. And yet, it was not, not now. (if that really counts. Or if she countered--oh, greatly she did) it was for another's sake. The earth and stars and sun, all that was or will be, existed for his sake. And he was coming. The most dreadful, the most beautiful, the only dread and beauty there is, was coming. The pillars on the far side of the pool flushed with his appearance. I cast my eyes away. I looked there. In Lewis's work, Orual awakens a moment later.

It would have been nice to have found an actual description of sexual intercourse, symbolizing spiritual union, to conclude this paper. But I am afraid that poets more reserved than that: the very thought brings me. The heavenly Bridgegroup together and allow us to imagine the rest. Unfortunately, most of us have what in Christian terms would be called fallen imaginations. I keep therefore return to Dante for a moment. I used his poem as an example of seeing the Godhead, not of becoming one with it. Yet, intellectually, he certainly tries the latter. First, he is pierced by "the living ray" of the light of God (which in Freudian terms also suggests God's masculinity and the individual soul's femininity); then, as he writes, "I recall this..." Wherefore my gaze more boldness yet assumed Till to the Infinite Good it last had won. Since the medieval position on eyesight was that it was carried by rays, Dante (again, in Freudian terms) can be said to become masculine by this process (perhaps a spiritual exchange of sexual roles is why Christ said that in Heaven there was no marriage or giving in marriage.) However that may be, Dante's actual imagery is chaste enough; yet this winning of "the Infinite Good" may be the best way of expressing in Christian terminology the Union of God and man's soul. It is the spiritual climax of the Imagistic Way.

Bibliography

AUGEN, W. H. "Introduction" to The Protestant Mystics, edited by Ann Freeman, pp.3-37. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964. [Auden's introduction is an interesting survey of four types of mystical experience: The Vision of Dame Kind (nature mysticism), The Vision of Eros (the Beatrician experience, with some negative comments at Plato), The Vision of Agape (the experience of sudden charity felt for others or among members of a group), and The Vision of God. I did not read Auen's work until the above essay was finished.]

BARFIELD, Owen A. (under the pseudonym of G.A.L. Burgeon). This Ever Diverse Pair. With an Introduction by Walter de la Mare. London: Victor Gollancz, 1950. [The various passages quoted in the above essay concerning "The Vision of Agape" (which in Barfield's view is not properly spiritual exchange of sexual roles) appear in this translation, pp.90, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96-97, and 98.]


DANTE ALIGHIERI. La Vita Nuova: Poems of Youth. Translated by Barbara Reynolds. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969. [The passage describing Dante's vision of God appearing in Section XXIV, pp.70-71 of this translation, appears in Chapter One, p.92-95. I wish to thank Balfour S. Whitney of Norman, Oklahoma, who introduced me to this book and who gave me the copy I here cite.]

FEUER, Sigfried. "Symbolism in Dreams," The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, translated and edited by James Strachey, pp.149-169. New York: W.W. Norton, 1966. ["Ladders, steps, or, more precisely, walking on them, are clear symbols of sexual intercourse. On reflection, it will occur to us that the common element here is the rhythm of walking up them—perhaps, too, the increasing excitement and breathlessness the higher one climbs." (p.159).]


LEWIS, C.S. "The Weight of Glory." In Transposition and Other Addresses, pp.21-33. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947. [Important for its identification of Heavenly Glory, or the energy of God, with—at distant remove—Sehnsucht; its discussion of a few of the problems of dismissing the religious meaning of Joy, p.24, is tied to my final paragraphs above step one first step.]

LEWIS, C.S. "William's and the Arthuriad." In Arthurian Torso, containing the Posthumous Fragment of "The Figure of Arthur" by Charles Williams, and a Commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams by C.S. Lewis. London: Oxford University Press, 1948. [A discussion of Williams' concept of Broceliande appears on pp.99-102.]

MILLER, James Whipple. "English Romanticism and Chinese Nature Poetry." Comparative Literature, 24:3 (Summer, 1972): 216-236. [I add this item to the bibliography in lieu of footnote in my paper. Miller's essay provides an interesting contrast of the English and Chinese approaches to nature, for one of the basic elements in the discussion is the Chinese refusal of any transcending of the self or of the world.]


SAYERS, Dorothy L. "The Beatrician Vision of Dante and Other Poets." In The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement, and Other Posthumous Essays on Literature, Religion, and Language, pp.45-68. London: Victor Gollancz, 1963. [The four poets most thoroughly compared are Dante, Wordsworth, Blake (to a lesser degree), and Traherne; the loss of the first Visions of Dante's poem, and the sense of C.S. Lewis' failure to return to it (as contrasted to the other three poets' return) on pp.61-67. Parallel to my citation from Alan Watts in the essay above is Sayers' quotation from Aldous Huxley's Doors of Percepcion on p.47. In fact, Sayers' essay is close to my thesis throughout, except that she is not working with a Mystical Scale.]


The balloon-pricking type of person might say that the Celts were still closer than most people. In his essay on Magic, he preferred to look upon them as part of what he called the Celtic myth itself, and about the comments made on it and its plenty of others to point it out. Too many of them, in my opinion, and if Yeats ignored their grossness, there'll always be becoming familiar with folklore we must admit that the ancient influence by the Celtic-born authors who can be said to have in nature appears on pp. 58, 61-62; that of the archetypal nature of other people, on pp. 50-51, and of their central unity, on p. 53; and the vision of the tiled courtyard, on pp. 83-84.}


WATTS, Alan W. "The New Alchemy." In This Is It, and other essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience, pp. 125-153. 1960. New York: Collier Books, 1967. (A description of the results of seven experiences of using LSD over a several-year period. A forerunner to the book discussed in this essay (listed above); a few comments on the drug are included. [I wish to thank Thom Christopher of Chicago, Illinois, for allowing me to find this essay in his collection of Watts' books.)

WILCOX, Stewart C. [In the spring of 1955 at the University of Oklahoma, I heard Professor Wilcox read a paper on the last verse paragraph of "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" which I still believe the best explication I have found. Although the paper was never published, Professor Wilcox has given me permission to summarize it in this note. He began from the phrase "For thou art with me" (spoken by William Wordsworth to his sister, Dorothy, in L124), noting the echo of Psalm 23. He pointed out both the imagistic and phrasal echoes of this psalm in other parts of this paragraph, including Wordsworth's reference to "this green pastoral landscape" in L150. Religious language not derived from the psalm includes "this prayer I make" (L121), "Our cheerful faith" (L133), "my exhortations" (L146), "a worshipper" (L152), "service" (L153), "with far deeper zeal Of holier love" (L154-155). The series of negatives in L170-173 may echo Romans 8:36-39, and the phrase "Shall e'er prevail against thee" (L152) in comparison to Jeremiah 1:19 and 15:20. This use of a Biblical tone explains the sudden introduction of the capital n on Nature (contrast the lack of a capital in L170, 72, 89, 108 with the capital in L112, 152); thus in the last paragraph the personification of Nature, or more than that, the deification of Nature, is clearly from my point of view in this paper, Wordsworth, after discovering a spirit in nature (L100), fails to penetrate through nature to perceive the spirit clearly, and instead identifies the spirit with nature. (That the Romans refer to Natura at times in their poetry would give Wordsworth precedents, and perhaps a rationalization, for his use.)


Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century

By Evangeline Walton

To revert to Yeats himself: having always been fascinated by forests I am particularly interested by his remarks about the different social approaches to forestry, to the English, the Romans, and even the Ancient Greeks, "see nature without ecstasy," with the affection a man feels for his garden, where nature has faded and is only friendly and pleasant, while in Matthew Arnold's felicitous phrase, Celtic love of nature "comes almost more from a sense of her mystery than from her beauty." This is brought out even more strongly by Heinrich Zimmer when he speaks of the forest as a place of initiation "where demonic presences reveal themselves...a terrifying abyss, full of strange forms and whispering voices."

It is this sense of mystery, of unseen or half-seen lurking things—of terror somehow transmuted into beauty—that seems to me to be the Celt's greatest contribution to literature. It is what makes your blood leap with delight as well as fear when Tolkien's Gandalf is leading the Fellowship of the Ring down into the black mysteries of Moria. The scenes that follow—the fight in the cavern, the dreadful meeting with the Balrog, etc.—are necessary and tremendously dramatic, but I never enjoy them one tenth as much as the weird journey itself. During the fighting the reader can only wait and watch, but during the descent into the abyss with its awesome sense of unseen watchers and gathering forces—the horror made all the more real by the little ordinary human touches, such as hobbits' inquisitiveness and Gandalf's snappiness—you too use your imagination. You keep wondering: "What are they going to find?" or "What is going to happen next?" while waiting. Even the reader is not passive, but thoroughly alive.

This invasion of the hells of darkness is the only part of the Ring in which I myself see much Celtic influence upon Tolkien, who to me seems primarily the Beowulf scholar. He uses a few names with Welsh corruptions, such as Arwen, but a whole pack of

*The manuscript is titled simply "Lecture"; the present title is editorially supplied. —LK