



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 3  
Number 3

Article 5

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1976

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### Recommended Citation

Christopher, Joe R. (1976) "Climbing Jacob's Ladder: A Hierarchical Approach to Imagistic Mysticism," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 3: No. 3, Article 5.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol3/iss3/5>

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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

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# CLIMBING JACOB'S LADDER



a hierarchical approach  
to imagistic mysticism



BY

JOE R. CHRISTOPHER

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 of Beatrice: 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 Inklings, 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 certainly 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. Rudolph 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 the vision of the angels 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 united 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 beautiful 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,  
And 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*

\* Full references are found in the Bibliography at the end of this paper.

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 a cardinal singing outside my window as I write 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 be alive 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 mere sentimental "nature lover," wrote after watching in Louisiana the love play of herons who, with loud cries of ecstasy, twine 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." This sounds as 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 not unreasonable to suppose that what inspires the stem and the flower 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 shall take as the next step. (By the way, I do not imply that Krutch did not intellectually understand what mysticism is; his references elsewhere make clear that he understood what Wordsworth was claiming—he simply was not certain that his experiences meant religiously what Wordsworth claimed.)

Another person at this level of mysticism is C. S. Lewis. His experiences of Joy, of *Sehnsucht* (since he refers to the German Romantics), are discussed most clearly in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* (the title is a phrase from a sonnet by Wordsworth); in his sermon "The Weight of Glory"; and in his allegory of his conversion, *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Perhaps his clearest discussion of Joy (as contrasted to recounting his experiences of it) is to be found in the Preface to the Third Edition of the latter title. Lewis comments that this Desire is distinguished from other desires by two characteristics: first, that it is a pleasure even if no relief of it is forthcoming ("For this sweet Desire cuts across our ordinary distinctions between wanting and having. To have it is, by definition, a want: to want it, we find, is to have it."); second, that the object of this Desire is unknown:

Thus 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. If he falls upon literature (like Maeterlinck or the early Yeats) which treats 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 contemplated each of them earnestly enough to discover the cheat. To have embraced so many false Florimels 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;



#### IMAGISTIC CREATIVITY

This is intended to summarize Man's imagistic creativity. The "star" represents the creative image, either emanating from a Greater Source into the mind, or originating in the mind itself, depending upon whether the religious or secular connotation of creativity is used. Secondary to this is the Mind which makes use of this "gift." In conclusion, the eye and hand are the tools which translate the image into our understanding.

—Valerie Protopapas

## 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 the world are seen as somehow unified or identical-despite-their-differences, or (2), less often, all things are transfigured (or seen as part of their Idea, in Platonic terms), and (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 meaning of his experiences; he felt that 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":

And 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 light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

The earlier passage from Wordsworth mentioned "the power of harmony" which allowed him to see "into the life of things"—a description of this second step of the perception of unity; likewise, insofar as he perceives "a spirit," not just "a motion," he approaches the third step. (Also the pronoun "whose" and the anthropomorphic use of "dwelling" suggest the next stage.) But the description of a unifying "something," "a motion," which underlies the ocean, air, sky, and mind of man; which drives both life and thought; which "rolls through all things," seems to clearly unify at some level the individual things of this world, including mankind.

Since I have been admitting possible secular interpretations, let me here add a secular experience. Alan W. Watts, in his book *The Joyous Cosmology*, describes his experience of taking L. S. D. 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 uppermost I see that what is confusing is not the bushes but my clumsy method of thinking. Every twig is in its proper place, and the tangle has become an arabesque more delicately ordered than the fabulous doodles 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 bare branches and twigs in silhouette against the sky, not as a confusion, but as the lacework or tracery of an enchanted jeweler. A rotten log bearing rows of fungus and patches of moss became as precious as any work of Cellini—an inwardly luminous construct of jet, amber, jade, and ivory, all the porous and spongy disintegrations of the wood seeming to have been carved out with infinite patience and skill...

A journey into this new mode of consciousness gives one a marvelously enhanced appreciation of patterning in nature, a fascination deeper than ever with the structure of ferns, the formation of crystals, the markings upon shells, 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 and birds...

More and more it seems that the ordering of nature is an art akin to music—fugues in shell and cartilage, counterpoint in fibers and capillaries, throbbing rhythm in waves of sound, light, and nerve. And oneself is connected with it quite inextricably—a node, a ganglion, an electronic interweaving of paths, circuits, and impulses that stretch and hum 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 clearly a vision growing out of an Image of this world, yet it is obviously related to what Watts discussed:

He thought he saw the Great Dance. It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light,

but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit-tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my past. 'Ioü λ'αυ μο&#963; [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 has listed some of the images through which this experience of *Sehnsucht* 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 mode, and its potential development.
- (c) The Image of Nature. Of this Wordsworth in *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 that he 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 about 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 says Heath-Stubbs; from my point of view, the reason it cannot serve as a means for the Imagistic Way is that the art, being man-made, cannot (or cannot often) lead beyond its finite creator. Keats was able to meditate 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.

Yet Lewis, in his autobiography, reports the 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 (the use of icons would be involved in a full discussion): art is, let us say, a lesser means—and perhaps one which is more common at this first level of mysticism, with its flashes of Joy, than at the later stages. (But there will be exceptions to this in some of the works discussed in this paper.)

If the mystical experience goes only as far as Joy, or only a little ways into the next step, then it is often called an aesthetic experience if the object is some form of art, or a reaction to the sublime (in eighteenth-century terminology) if the object is rugged nature, or a sublimation of the sexual drive (in Freudian terminology) if the object is a person—and thus this low-grade mysticism is easily dismissed. And, as I said when I started, perhaps these explanations are correct; Lewis, who tried a number of these paths, thought not—but he may have mistaken: perhaps he found simply that a sexual experience and the sublimation of one are two different things (as indeed 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.

leaping over and under one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it became the master-figure or focus 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 claim made good, yet the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it had abdicated. He could also see (but the word "seeing" is now plainly inadequate) wherever the ribbons or serpents of light intersected, minute corpuscles of momentary brightness: and he knew somehow that these particles were the secular generalities of which history tells—people, institutions, climates of opinion, civilisations, arts, sciences, and the like—ephemeral coruscations that piped their short song and vanished. The ribbons or cords themselves, in which millions of corpuscles lived and died, were things of some different kind. At first he could not say what. But he knew in the end that most of them were individual entities. If so, the time in which the Great Dance proceeds is very unlike time as we know it. Some of the thinner and more delicate cords were beings that we call short-lived: flowers and insects, a fruit or a storm of rain, and once (he thought) a wave of the sea. Others were such things as we also think lasting: crystals, rivers, mountains, or even stars. Far above these in girth and luminosity and flashing with colours from beyond our spectrum were the lines of the personal beings, and yet as different from one another in splendour as all of them from all the previous class. But not all the cords were individuals: some were universal truths or universal qualities. It did not surprise him then to find that these and the persons were both cords and both stood together as against the mere atoms of generality which lived and died in the clashing of their streams: but afterwards, when he came back to earth, he wondered. And by now the things must have passed altogether out of the region of sight as we understand it. For he says that the whole solid figure of these enamoured and inter-animated circlings was suddenly revealed as the mere superficies of a far vaster pattern in four dimensions, and that figure as the boundary of yet others in other worlds: till suddenly as the movement grew yet swifter, the inter-weaving yet more ecstatic, the relevance of all to all yet more intense, as dimension was added to dimension and that part of him which could reason and remember was dropped farther and farther behind that part of him which saw, even then, at the very zenith of complexity, complexity was eaten up and faded, as a thin white cloud fades into the hard blue burning of the sky, and a simplicity beyond all comprehension, ancient and young as spring, illimitable, pellucid, drew him with cords of infinite desire into its own stillness. He went up into such a quietness, a privacy, and a freshness that at the very moment when he stood farthest from our ordinary mode of being he had the sense of stripping off encumbrances and awaking from trance, and coming to himself. At this point in the book, Ransom does awake; the unity he has perceived is a literary description of this step on the mystic scale; the stillness beyond the unity hints at the next step—but does not describe it fully.

What can we say of these two descriptions, one of an L.S.D. experience (presumably accurately reported) and one a fictional account of a vision? Obviously both are fuller than Wordsworth's account of a motion uniting natural objects, yet both are in the same tradition. If I had set myself up as an arbiter of the truth of these accounts with which I am dealing, I would have to pass on how much truth was embodied in drug experiences. But I have not, and I decline to do so. In Charles Williams' Arthurian poetry, the region of Broceliande stands for the unconscious mind, and both madness and divine inspiration lie in different parts of it. This is perhaps the Christian answer; others will offer other answers. I only suggest that, if one accepts Williams' view, he had best add that the borders of many of the regions are difficult (with human eyes) to discern.

So much then for the first and third aspects of this second step, for the perception of unity in nature and for the realization of the self's participation in this unity. Wordsworth has shown a motion in all things, including the mind of man; Watts has described a drug experience which centers on the patterns in nature, including "oneself"; and Lewis invents, presumably on the basis of others' descriptions, a vision of the Great Dance, the universal harmony, which includes in its weaving patterns streamers of personal beings "flashing with colours." According to Rudolph Otto, most nature mystics—such as, in the East, Jelal, or as, we might add, 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 vision here, for whether 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; a passage 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 is what she was usually called. And coming after 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 I inspired him who gave her this name of Primavera, which means that she will come first (*prima verrà*) 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: parate viam Domini*.' ["I am a voice crying in 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 seems simply to be a preparation for this momentary epiphany. Beatrice is seen as Christ for at least three reasons, one assumes: first, because her name means *beatitude*, which is the salvation Christ offers; second, because Dante is in love with her (a sublimated love, we would call it), in a way analogous to the Christian's love of God; and third, because as is revealed in Dante's sequel, *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice saves him from his sins, in a way analogous to Christ's more general salvation of all mankind. Love, which in this passage speaks in Dante's heart, might be Cupid if we were dealing with a usual love affair; but since we are perceiving a spiritual love affair, he is God—perhaps in the person of the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Scriptures affirm that "God is love", and here Love is God (with a capital G); Beatrice, in her Christ-like way, is also Love (with a capital L).

Thus Beatrice reveals the archetypal 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, eating dark homemade bread and drinking white 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 rather as immortal archetypes of 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. For 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, exquisitely wrinkled, silver-black hair rippled like flames. 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 forest, a mermaid of the land 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 Original Bread of which mother's own bread was a bungled imitation. And then there is Mary, beloved in the usual, dusty world, but in this world an embodiment of light and gold, daughter of the sun, with eyes formed from the evening sky—a creature of all ages, baby, moppet, maid, matron, crone, and corpse, evoking love of all ages. [Perhaps like Robert Graves' White Goddess.]



The Mirror  
of  
Galadriel

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 numinous, 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, cadí and magistrate, praetor and alcalde, lictor and constable, shone before her in those lights—whichever was true, 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 nations established themselves in 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 others of the passage, are unified in the Archetypal Ruler; I suppose 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 thus 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 mystic 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 persons and things, 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 perception 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 the universal spirit 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, but it is seen 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 fountain 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 I believe it myself when I 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 my question 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 ceramic tiles displaying densely involved arabesques in gold, purple, and blue. The scene might be the inner court of some Persian palace, were it not of such immense 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 tiles that suggest the finest inlay work in vermilion, 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, and I feel that the 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 experience with this vision against eyelids is a deliberate climax on his part—L.S.D. can lead to a vision of God, he suggests. He goes on to suggest also that these hints be followed up with meditation; since Watts is within the tradition of Zen Buddhism, his final suggestion is obvious enough—but I'm not certain what a Zen priest would say about that vision of "Christos Pantocrator."

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 God at the end of *The Divine Comedy*. Dante, 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 pity on him and was the impulse which caused Divine Grace to be extended to him, to lead him 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; already on my own  
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,  
Wherefore my gaze more boldness yet assumed  
Till to the Infinite Good it last had won.  
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.

Yea, of this complex I believe mine eyes

Beheld 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 mystical experience: 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 *ch'io godo*.)

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 exprest  
More feebly than if I could wield no 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 from each of the first pair.

Eternal light, that in Thyself alone  
Dwelling, alone dost know Thyself, and smile  
On Thy self-love, so knowing and so known!

The sphering 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,  
Limned 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 equivalent to the experiences of Jewish, Moslem, and Neo-Platonic 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 from each of the first pair"); the third step, the seeing of "our countenance"—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 to the sphere; so sought to see  
How it maintained the point of rest in it.

Thither my own wings could not carry me,  
But that a flash my understanding clove,  
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 phantasy lost power and here broke off;  
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 Pantocrator 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

In *This Ever Diverse Pair* (published under the pseudonym of G. A. L. Burgeon), in Chapter VII, entitled "Vision," he describes the three types of solicitors under the names of Lynx, Glossy, and Applejohn:

With the human Lynx it is not the physical act of swallowing, but the spiritual one of *over-reaching* that is typical. It is in the moment when he is *over-reaching* someone that his true nature flashes upon the inward eye of the observer.

The Lynx's proper element is litigation and negotiation.... In the City he acts for pushful companies and their promoters, and the sums about which he litigates and negotiates are substantial in quantity, whether or no they ever existed in cash. In the little streets adjoining the Police Courts and County Courts he acts for anybody who comes along and strives to allay his cravings by getting 6s. 8d. allowed by the Registrar instead of the 3s. 4d. to which he is entitled.

The second of these sub-archetypes:

The Glossy is better educated than the Lynx and more of a gentleman. He is often to be found occupying such of the better-paid legal appointments in the Civil Service as are open to Solicitors. In private practice he is usually fortunate in his clients, perhaps because he is well-to-do enough to refuse those whom he does not like....

He of course acts so as to further his client's [sic] interests, but he does not identify himself with them, as the Lynx does. Consequently you may feel quite at ease in negotiation and disagreement with him, even when the clients themselves are embittered.

And the third of these figures:

The true Applejohn, as his name implies, has a face covered all over with little wrinkles, like a stored apple. But this particular one of the Applejohn's characteristics, although it is eponymous, is not absolutely essential....

...the Applejohn is not so much the philosopher as the craftsman of our profession. I think the little wrinkles have something to do with this. He likes documents as such. He relishes the drafting of them. If he knocks your draft about, it is because you have departed in some way from conveyancing practice or precedent, and it grieves his soul. He is an 'Attorney' in the good old sense, carrying an aroma about him of the fast-fading days of parchment and the 'fair and clerical hand'.

Now let us return to "Burgeon's" vision of the Absolute Solicitor; Barfield writes:

I am at a loss to know how best to convey or in what imagery to furnish forth the true nature of this great One, which manifests itself so partially and imperfectly in each of us individual solicitors. It has been said that no-one has ever really seen Tree or Horse, but only trees or horses. Those who would rise in contemplation from the particular manifestation to the underlying Forms of things must train themselves by rising first to intermediate levels. Thus they may learn to perceive, as types, the Deciduous Tree or the Draught Horse.

It is at this point that Barfield offers, as intermediate types, the Lynx, Glossy, and Applejohn; after teaching his reader to perceive the sub-archetypes, he continues, commenting on the combination of types often in actual solicitors; then the true Archetype is described:

But the Absolute Solicitor, whom I now perceived in the spirit, stood far beyond and above these faulty approximations. In him none of the three humours was predominant and none deficient, but all three were mingled in just proportion and sweet harmony. The gentleness and sure craftsmanship of the Applejohn chimed perfectly with the tact and suavity of the Glossy and, while the latter continued to preserve a balanced detachment from the passions of the client, so as to uphold the fraternity of the profession, the Lynx, tamed now to a trusty bandog, crouched at the feet of both, with a watchful eye open to ensure that the client's true interest should never be sacrificed for the sake of gentleness or the love of ease, or to preserve that suavity or that fraternity.

It was an inspiring vision.

I do not know if this Absolute Solicitor, whether or not he is an inspiring vision, is appropriately considered here. Barfield's approach to him seems very intellectual, very Platonic, but in the context of the book, the vision is also a dream—that is, Barfield's explanation of the Solicitor is intellectual, but the vision itself seems to come to Burgeon in a moment, not through intellectual training. Is the perception of an archetype equivalent to the Perception of the One in the Imagistic Way? Certainly there seems to be no exact piercing through the Many to the One Archetype—or is the movement from individual lawyers, to the three types, to the Absolute Solicitor, a movement from Many to One? It is analogous, at least. And is the perception of the Archetypal Solicitor part of the Illuminists' tradition, or is it not? I

have no answers here; I only offer the parallels for what they are worth.

## IV The Union with The One

Ultimately the objects of this world are forgotten as the divine union takes place, the soul/bride uniting with God/bridegroom. Obviously the mystic's soul can unite with God only to the extent that the soul is prepared to experience the Omni-Aspected One: Śankara finds the static joy, Plotinus finds the aesthetic *eros*, and Eckhart finds the moral *agape*, of God.

Before I consider this point further, let me pause for 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 intend my illustration as seriously as Bunyan intended his. My reader will notice that the first three steps of the Mystic Ladder I have been climbing *are* steps in perception: from 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 Freud in his dream analysis tells 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 archetypist, 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 existence of the similarity.

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 bridegroom in the first paragraph of this section and which prepares for my final examples in this paper; the critic will notice 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 interpretations, whether of this Psalm or of the *Song of Songs*, which identify the Bridegroom 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 writers did intend. The Psalm remains 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 began to see that the new meaning is not arbitrary and springs from depths I had not suspected. First, the language of nearly all great mystics, not even 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 the desired 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 enough for my present 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 Psyche and Cupid myth, *Till We Have Faces*. Near the end of the book, Orual, Psyche's sister, 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 awful deepening of the blue sky above us, or from a deep breath like a sigh uttered all round us by invisible lips, 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 loud this time. They were awed and trembled. "He is coming," they said. "The god is coming into his house...."

If Psyche had not held me by the hand I should have sunk down. She had brought me now to the very edge of the pool. The

air was growing brighter and brighter about us; as if something had set it on fire. Each breath I drew let into me new terror, joy, overpowering sweetness. I was pierced through and through with the arrows of it. I was being unmade. I was no one. But 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, she that really counted. Or if she counted (and oh, gloriously 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 approach. I cast down my eyes.

In Lewis's work, Orual awakes 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 are more discreet than that: they bring the earthly bride and the heavenly Bridegroom together and allow us to imagine the rest. Unfortunately, most of us have what in Christian terms would be called *fallen* imaginations.

Let me 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 further led me on,

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 at this point. (Perhaps this 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.

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a whole chapter is given to "The Dark Night of the Soul," pp. 380-412; other parallels than these which were alluded to in the above essay appear, of course. I understand that some critics consider other works on mysticism to be better than Underhill's, but since Williams was influenced by her work, it is important in the study of the Inklings.]

WALDOFF, Leon. "Wordsworth's Healing Power: Basic Trust in 'Tintern Abbey.'" *Hartford Studies in Literature*, IV:2 (1972): 147-166. [An interesting comparison to Wilcox's theory (below); Waldoff, arguing from psychoanalytic theory and Romantic history, finds Wordsworth's return to the Wye Valley a regression to the oral stage, in which the capitalized Nature of the last verse paragraph is definitely Mother Nature. Waldoff sees four main defenses in Wordsworth to "gratify the longings for union and omnipotence as well as defend against feelings of loss, diminution of self, and depression" (p.163): "regression, the fantasy of Nature as maternal, identification, and a reverential attitude" (p.164).]

WATTS, Alan W. *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*. Foreword by Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert. Originally published, 1962. New York: Vintage Books (Random House), 1965. [The description of the unity in and underlying 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 dangers of 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 l. 114), noting the echo of Psalm 23. He pointed out both the imagistic and and phrasal echoes of this psalm in other parts of this paragraph, including Wordsworth's reference to "this green pastoral landscape" in l. 158. Religious language not derived from the psalm includes "this prayer I make" (l. 121), "Our cheerful faith" (l. 133), "my exhortations" (l. 146), "A worshipper" (l. 152), "service" (l. 153), "with far deeper zeal/Of holier love" (ll. 154-155). The series of negatives in ll. 128-130 may echo Romans 8:38-39, and the phrase "Shall e'er prevail against us" (l. 132), 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 ll. 70, 72, 89, 108 with the capital in ll. 122, 152); thus in the last paragraph the personification of *Nature*, or more than that, the deification of *Nature*, is clear. From my point of view in this paper, Wordsworth, after discovering a spirit in nature (l. 100), 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.)]

WILLIAMS, Charles. *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante*. London: Faber and Faber, 1943. [The allusion in the first paragraph of the above paper to Williams saying Dante and Wordsworth are in the same tradition is based on pp. 11-14.]

WILLIAMS, Charles. *The Greater Trumps*. First published, 1932. London: Faber and Faber, 1954. [The passage showing the Tarot Emperor in a policeman appears on pp. 55-56.]

# Celtic Myth

# in the Twentieth Century\*

BY  
evangeline  
walton

I PROMISED TO SPEAK ON WELSH AND CELTIC influence on Mythopoeic literature, but on thinking it over I see that that is not exactly my thing. I'm a story-teller, not a critic; it's my business to put things together, not to take them apart and analyze them. So I think I'll do better if I just talk about Celtic myth itself, and about the comments made on it and its influence by the Celtic-born authors who can be said to have influenced my own work.

Wm. Butler Yeats, himself every inch an Irishman, felt that it was wrong to nail down certain literary traits as "Celtic." He preferred to look upon them as part of what he called the "Ancient Religion of the World," to which he thought even modern Celts were still closer than most people. In his essay on Magic he described this primeval religion as only a poet could, speaking of gods whose passions flamed in the sunset, of ancient fishermen and hunters, and of the ecstasy that descended upon those who danced on the hills or in the depths of the forest. The balloon-pricking type of person might say that he worked a good deal of W. B. Yeats into primitive man, but now that we are becoming familiar with folklore we must admit that the ancient people became poets long before they learned how to read or write, and if Yeats ignored their grossness, there'll always be plenty of others to point it out. Too many of them, in my opinion. Whenever I read a modern, non-fantasy novel based on an ancient myth—generally on Greek or Norse material: I don't think the Celts have as much appeal for the realists—I am always shocked at how much more hard-boiled these modern reconstructions seem than Homer or the sagas ever did. But then our realists seem to me to have cultivated a really wonderful sense of smell, whereas Homer and the Norse "song smiths" appeal to the eye—beauty or terrible images—and the imagination. (Though of course these ancient gentlemen may have been too used to the smells to notice them: I admit that.)

To revert to Yeats himself: having always been fascinated by forests I am particularly interested by his remarks about the different racial approaches to nature. To sum it up briefly, 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 of 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 unseens 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 snappishness—you too use your imagination. You keep wondering: "What are they going to find?" or "What is going to find them?" which may be a better way of putting it. Even the reader is not passive, but thoroughly alive.

This invasion of the halls 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 formations, such as Arwen, but a whole pack of

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