



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

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

Volume 17
Number 1

Article 3

Fall 10-15-1990

Joy and Memory: Wordsworth as Illuminated by C.S. Lewis

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Recommended Citation

Carter, Margaret (1990) "Joy and Memory: Wordsworth as Illuminated by C.S. Lewis," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 17 : No. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol17/iss1/3>

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Abstract

Relates Lewis’s concept of “Joy” to the poetry of Wordsworth, particularly the poet’s concept of “Imagination.” While Lewis connected Joy with Christianity, Wordsworth tried to locate it “in the natural phenomena that are only its vehicles.”

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Concept of Joy; Wordsworth, William—Concept of imagination; Wordsworth, William—Poetry

Joy and Memory

Wordsworth as Illuminated by C.S. Lewis

MARGARET CARTER

Of vanished knowledge
Was their intemperate song,
A music that resembled
Some earlier music
That men are born remembering.

This echo of William Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" is part of a poem, "Vowels and Sirens," by C.S. Lewis (*Poems*, 76). Lewis' concept of Joy, involving desire, memory, the numinous, and intuitive contact with a transcendent reality, provides, I believe, a fruitful model for reading certain aspects of Wordsworth's poetry. Though for Lewis Joy carries an explicitly theistic meaning, my aim is not apologetic or biographical. It does not seem relevant whether Wordsworth was a Christian at the time of writing most of the particular poems we shall discuss, for there is no evidence that he ever connected his experiences of Joy (in the Lewisian sense) with Christianity. (J.R. Christopher, whose article on this topic will be cited below, addresses this point.) Besides, according to Lewis, Joy "works" whether or not we recognize its source. The experience is a universal human one, independent of our theories about it. Lewis' demon Screwtape complains, "Even if we contrive to keep them ignorant of explicit religion, the incalculable winds of fantasy and music and poetry — the mere face of a girl, the song of a bird, or the sight of a horizon — are always blowing our whole structure away" (*Screwtape Letters*, 133). Before attempting to link this kind of experience with Wordsworth's poetry, we must define Lewis' Joy and warn against confusing it with the usual notion of Romantic joy. (I distinguish the two by spelling Lewis' Joy with a capital J.)

So central is Joy to Lewis' system of thought that he entitled his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (a phrase, of course, borrowed from Wordsworth). In the first chapter of this spiritual memoir Lewis describes three childhood experiences that illustrate what his life story is really about. They are a memory (not the original perception itself) of a toy garden his brother had made of moss and pebbles, the autumnal atmosphere of Beatrix Potter's *Squirrel Nutkin*, and a passage from Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf." What all three instances have in common is a peculiar kind of desire. What is the object of this desire? Not Lewis' own past, or a biscuit tin full of moss, or autumn (how can one "posses" a season?), or even the northern skies of Longfellow's poem. The common quality is "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction" (*Surprised by Joy*, 18). Whoever has tasted this pang of longing finds it preferable to any ordinary

pleasure. Lewis' 1943 introduction to his early work *The Pilgrim's Regress* points out that "this sweet desire cuts across our ordinary distinctions between wanting and having" (*Pilgrim's Regress*, 8). An instant of longing for a past moment of Joy is itself a new experience of Joy.

All supposed objects of this desire — for example, the past, female, occultism, natural beauty, sexual love — prove themselves inadequate to it. If we locate the object of desire in the natural landscape, for instance, "experiment will show that by going to the far hillside you will get either nothing, or else a recurrence of the same desire which sent you thither" (*Ibid.*, 9). The same displacement occurs when attempting to locate the object in one's own past; the remembered moments of Joy "owe all their enchantment to memory" (*Ibid.*, 9) — a discovery that does not invalidate the Joy, as we shall see. Lewis concludes that the "dialectic of Desire" demonstrates experientially that "the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given ... in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience" (*Ibid.*, 10).

The Christian Lewis, of course, ultimately identifies the Object of Desire as God. The allegorical *Pilgrim's Regress* (Chapter Nine) describes how the Landlord (God) sends "pictures" to lure His misled tenants back to Him. The Romantic movement came about when the Landlord sent pictures of the very landscape His people were living in. "Even the stupidest tenant could see that you [the tenant] had the landscape, in the only sense in which it could be had, already: and still you wanted" (*Ibid.*, 159). The same point is expressed more directly in *The Problem of Pain*:

There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven but often I find myself wondering whether ... we have desired anything else... Even in your hobbies, has there not always been some secret attraction ... not to be identified with, but always on the verge of breaking through, the smell of cut wood in the workshop or the clap-clap of water against the boat's side? ... You have never had it. All the things that have ever deeply possessed our souls have been but hints of it.
(*Problem of Pain*, 146)

For Lewis in his youth, these "hints" most often came through natural beauty and tales of faerie; he therefore called it Romanticism in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933). In his retrospective introduction (1943) he retracts that terminology, noting that "Romantic" has become a word of unmanageably diverse meanings, including adventure stories, the supernatural, Titanic emotions, macabre and anti-natural moods, egoism and subjectivism, revolt

against the existing order, and response to external nature. Despite this disclaimer, R.J. Reilly's *Romantic Religion* discloses good reasons for considering Lewis a latter-day Romantic. Reilly calls Lewis a Romantic partly because of the importance of *Sehnsucht* or "romantic longing," but largely because he sees Lewis as carrying on the Romantic "sense of the meaning of things coming from within the human mind — and from something greater with which the human mind is in touch" (Reilly, 7). Other commentators have linked Lewis with the Romantic movement, for instance, Robert C. Rice, Corbin Scott Carnell, and J.R. Christopher. This connection lends credibility to the enterprise of reading Wordsworth in Lewisian terms. It is also worth noting that at least twice — in *Surprised by Joy* and *Letters to Malcolm* — Lewis places his treatment of Joy and memory in a line of descent from Traherne and Wordsworth.

Turning to our experiment in reading Wordsworth, we note that the function of memory holds a central place in both Lewis' system and Wordsworth's poetry. The transfiguring power of "affective memory" is familiar to all students of Wordsworth. Stuart M. Sperry shows how this faculty in "Tintern Abbey" brings about a coalescence between "the scene as it is held in memory and the poet's fresh impression of it," a power that can "revive, supplement, and extend the force of sense perception" (Sperry, 41). Sperry refers to "the power of memory to reanimate the past" (*Ibid.*, 42). Lewis assigns memory a similar role in *Letters to Malcolm*, where he advances a theory of the importance of memory in the resurrection of the body. Christopher uses this passage to discuss the transfiguration of nature, but I wish to focus on its relevance to Joy. Lewis points out how a commonplace experience of the past may become transcendently beautiful in memory:

Don't talk to me of the "illusions" of memory. Why should what we see at the moment be more "real" than what we see from ten years' distance? It is indeed an illusion to believe that the blue hills on the horizon would still look blue if you went to them. But the fact that they are blue five miles away, and the fact that they are green when you are on them, are equally good facts.... Wordsworth's landscape "apparelled in celestial light" may not have been so radiant in the past when it was present as in the remembered past. That is the beginning of the glorification. (*Letters to Malcolm*, 122)

Over and over in Lewis' work we see how often instances of Joy rely on memory for their enchantment. His brother's toy garden meant little to him at the time but a few years later, in retrospect, became an evocation of "enormous bliss" (*Surprised by Joy*, 16). Lewis, like Wordsworth, finds in the remembered and transformed past a special stimulus to imagination.

I suggest that what Lewis calls Joy may be expressed in Wordsworthian language as "imagination." Gene W. Ruoff supports this theory in his article comparing Wordsworth's imagination to religious mysticism, as a mode of apprehending reality that is valuable but not totally reliable by itself. In any case, Lewis' Joy cannot be

completely identified with Romantic joy, though of course the two have affinities. According to M.H. Abrams, Coleridge's philosophy conceives joy as a "state of abounding vitality" that "relates the self both to other human selves and to an outer nature which it has in-animating" (Abrams, 276). The second part of this sentence suggests Lewisian Joy, the common factor being objective contact with a reality transcending the individual self. Abrams further describes this joy (still with reference to Coleridge) as "the inner power which unites the living self to a living outer world" (*Ibid.*, 277). Coleridge's lines, "Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower / A new Earth and new Heaven" ("Dejection: An Ode," lines 67-69), express this union as well as the freshness of vision bestowed by joy (like Lewis' Joy, transfiguring the commonplace). This Romantic joy, however, seems to be more of a sustained state of vitality than the nearly instantaneous experience described by Lewis. The latter phenomenon resembles what Abrams characterizes, in the Romantics, as "illuminated moments" (*Ibid.*, 80). This experience in which "an instant of consciousness, or else an ordinary object or event, suddenly blazes into revelation," often involving "an intersection of eternity with time," is a function of imagination (*Ibid.*, 385). Abrams describes Wordsworth as using imagination this way in (among other works) "Tintern Abbey," "The Solitary Reaper," and parts of *The Prelude*. I see in this use of "imagination" the Wordsworthian equivalent of Lewis' Joy.

The characteristic notes of Joy, then are these: 1. It blurs the categories of wanting and having; it is a desire more precious than any possession. 2. It comes through certain objects (especially viewed through the eyes of memory) but cannot be identified with them. Lewis, like Wordsworth, starts from experience; his intuition of the suprapersonal does not float in a void but keeps its gaze fixed steadily on its object. 3. It is instantaneous and trans-temporal; one usually recognizes the desire at the moment of falling out of it. As Lewis says of a childhood episode, "before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased" (*Surprised by Joy*, 16). Such moments are the points where "time touches eternity" (*Screw-tape Letters*, 68). As Lewis insists in many contexts, "Where, except in the present, can the Eternal be met?" ("Historicism," 113). 4. Joy puts us in touch with an objective reality beyond ourselves. Addressing this point obliquely in *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis points out that some cultures and individuals recognize the numinous — Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum* — as an objective contact with the Beyond, without ever connecting it to the source of moral law. It is interesting that W.A. Claydon reads Wordsworth as recognizing the "connection between the conscience of the individual and the nature of the numinous object" (Claydon, 609); yet Wordsworth does not attribute these two kinds of experience to God. We see here support for Abrams' thesis that Wordsworth naturalizes the supernatural by creating a "system of reference which has only

two generative and operative terms: mind and nature" (Abrams, 90).

Perhaps Hartman's picture of Wordsworth struggling to domesticate imagination, to prove that nature is enough for the human mind, is a part of "natural supernaturalism." That these imaginative moments are triggered by objects in external nature seems undeniable. Yet the kind of consciousness aroused by the numinous cannot be successfully domesticated, because, in Hartman's words, "imagination deprived of directly numinous data, seizes on nature's imagery to fill the vacuum," but in so doing it "often erases the reality of the familiar world or is affixed to parts of it with overwhelming psychic effect" (Hartman, 216). Substituting an affective content of desire for apprehension, we can see this description as fitting the overwhelming effects of Joy.

And Wordsworth does often reveal desire in connection with these "illuminated moments," despite Hartman's stress on fear. The short poem "Surprised by Joy," contrary to Wordsworth's usual custom, seems to mean by "joy" this kind of instantaneous, overpowering emotion. The "transport" (line 2) is brief, lasting only for "the least division of an hour" (line 7). The "power" (line 6) that ravishes the speaker is strong enough to make him forget his grief over a loved one's death. His falling back into awareness of his loss is, *a fortior*, like the fall into ordinary consciousness that always follows an instant of Joy: "That thought's returned / Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore, / Save one" (lines 9-11). Hence he feels his moment of joy, though blissful, as dangerous, for it has lured him into betrayal. Lewis' last novel, *Till We Have Faces*, contains a similar incident. While the heroine Orual is ascending the sacred mountain to find and bury the remains of her sister, supposed dead, she is unexpectedly taken out of herself by an onrush of Joy. She resists the emotion, defiantly clinging to her grief:

To left and right, and behind us, the whole coloured world with all its hills was heaped up and up to the sky, with far away, a gleam of what we call the sea.... There was a lark singing; but for that, huge and ancient stillness... there came as if it were a voice — no words — but if you made it into words it would be "Why should your heart not dance?" ...I had to tell myself over like a lesson the infinite reasons it had not to dance. (*Till We Have Faces*, 95-96)

Joy is an invader from outside the self, independent of ordinary happiness. The yet-unreached Orual, like Wordsworth, sees Joy as betrayal.

The moment of Joy is, rather, embraced in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." The contrast between society and solitude in the poem is familiar to everyone; I do not wish to put forth a rival reading but only to cite the poem as an encounter with Joy. The appearance of the daffodils triggers a sudden and unexpected ("all at once" and "at a glance," lines 3 and 11) apprehension of beauty. Though there is no overt element of the numinous in this poem (its absence accounting for the poem's relative freedom from affective ambiguity), the imagination is certainly at work.

Wordsworth himself says that the phenomenon recorded is "rather an elementary feeling and simple impression ... upon the imaginative faculty, than an exertion of it" (quoted by Stillinger, *Selected Poems*, 539). In other words, the experience does not have to be sought or forced; it is "given" by some source outside the self. Like many "illuminated moments," this one is not fully appreciated at the time, but becomes more important in memory. The poem "but little thought / What wealth the show to me had brought" (lines 17-18). The last stanza, in characteristic Wordsworthian manner, shifts the experience into the past in order to express the bliss bestowed by frequent recollections of the daffodils. "They flash upon that inward eye" (line 21), he says, indicating that the moments of Joy recur spontaneously, without mental labor on the poet's part. Like Lewis, he seems to recognize that "if you sit down to brood on the desire and attempt to cherish it, the desire itself will evade you" (*The Problem of Pain*, 148). Attempting to seize Joy by force kills it.

The phenomenon is more complex in "To a Cuckoo," involved more intimately with memory. The numinous is evoked in the bird's characterization as "an invisible thing, / A voice, a mystery" (lines 15-16), a characterization reinforced by the word "visionary" (line 12), so often used by Wordsworth to describe imaginative transport. The ambiguity about the cuckoo's location deepens the resonance of the poem's treatment of time; just as nearness and distance merge, so do past and present. Yet the effect is not of confusion, but of transcendence. Identifying this bird as the same one he listened to in boyhood produces an image of trans-temporality; the poet is caught up into the Eternal Now. Stimulated by the bird's song, he enjoys the transfiguration of memory, for he can "listen, till I do beget / That golden time again" (lines 27-28). The present sensory experience, moreover, is transfigured:

O blessed Bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place;
That is fit home for Thee!
(lines 29-32)

The poet's seeking in the sixth stanza can be read not only as a search for the material bird, but as a quest for the source of Joy. Since Joy only comes through, and never dwells in, its sensory vehicles, his goal remains "a hope, a love; / Still longed for, never seen" (lines 23-24).

A bird also mediates Joy in the more melancholy "Reverie of Poor Susan," a poem in which a sense of loss rather than hope predominates. (The caged thrush, by the way, paralleling Susan's imprisonment in the alien milieu of London, looks forward to the "Immortality Ode's" metaphor of the self's imprisonment in this mundane world. In both poems Joy is the message from outside the bars.) Through the bird's notes "enchantment" (line 5) suddenly transports Susan to "A mountain ascending, a vision of trees; / Bright volumes of vapour" (lines 6-7) — phrases suggestive of the magic implicit in the word "enchantment." The rapture is apparently unexpected, for

the first stanza implies that Susan has passed this spot many times in three years with no emotional reaction. Joy comes when it wills and departs just as abruptly. Though Susan yearns to cling to the visionary moment, it fades just as the image is beginning to attain clarity of detail. The auxiliary verb in "The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise" (line 15) suggests a vain struggle to force the stream and hill to do these very things. Susan's instant of affective memory cannot be prolonged beyond its intrinsic lifespan. Here we find great stress upon "wanting," very little upon "having"; the moment of birdsong Susan "has" leaves deeper melancholy in its wake.

Memory operates in "The Solitary Reaper" to enhance the significance of the music "Long after it was heard no more" (line 32). The word "mounted" could be read expressively as a transferred verb describing how the song continues to swell to greater lyrical heights in the poet's heart. When he hears the Maiden's song as if it "could have no ending" (line 26), he seems to be locating her image in a timeless present. As Hartman fully discusses, here the poet feels threatened by his moment of "stronger awareness (call it imagination)," which he perceives as "the influx of an unusual state of consciousness" that needs to be "normalized" (Hartman, 16). Yet the overt message of the second stanza seems to assign a positive value to this moment of Joy, for it is metaphorically a refreshing phenomenon bringing life to the deathlike. The awareness of Joy is triggered by a sensory stimulus (the visual and auditory image of the Maiden) but immediately transcends ("overflows") its physical context.

That "Tintern Abbey" portrays Wordsworth in a state of anxiety over letting the visionary imagination stimulated by nature ravish him out of nature is implied by Hartman's thesis. In at least one section of the poem (lines 41-49), however, the supernatural or mystical state of suspension of the sensory faculties is given a positive value:

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Here Wordsworth uses "joy" in somewhat of a Lewinian sense, as an intuitive contact with superpersonal reality. My main interest in "Tintern Abbey," though, is to stress again the vital function of memory. Recollection magnifies the image of past beauties, producing "sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" (lines 27-28). Such moments resonate until the poet apprehends "something far more deeply interfused" (line 96), another intimation of contact through Joy with a force beyond himself. In this poem he connects this kind of experience with the moral realm. To cite one of the many familiar passages, he gains

— feelings, too

Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts

Of kindness and of love
(lines 30-35)

The naturally beautiful, the numinous, and the moral fuse, though Wordsworth will not unequivocally assign them a supernatural source.

Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" achieves the most provocative fusion of these elements, presenting in fragmented modes in the various works we have examined so far. Whether he, in sober belief, admits the supernatural in the "Immortality Ode" is a question provoking endless disagreement. David Rogers holds that Wordsworth is literally talking about God, while other critics interpret the Ode's ostensibly supernatural context in various metaphorical shades. For reasons stated above (Joy's significance as an experiential phenomenon, independent of how it is interpreted), how Wordsworth philosophizes about Joy is less important than the fact of his experiencing it. It is interesting, though, as J.R. Christopher points out, that the "visionary gleam" fades from Wordsworth's poetry when he enters his orthodox Christian period. Christopher (following Dorothy Sayers) attributes this loss to Wordsworth's turning from "mysticism based on images of nature to a mysticism without images" (Christopher, 4), from an "intuitive, deeply felt apprehension" to an "intellectual understanding" (*Ibid.*, 3) of ultimate reality. Because Wordsworth never returns to the imagistic, intuitive mode, he never connects his earlier experience of Joy with his Christianity. If, as Robert L. Schneider asserts, the "Immortality Ode" spans a period of theological transition for Wordsworth, these factors may partly account for memory's operation in the "Ode" more as a reminder of loss than as a transfiguring power, "the paradox of a memory that works through a powerful consciousness of obliteration" (Sperry, 47). The poet remembers just enough to be aware that something is missing. We are reminded again of the poignant sense of loss that accompanies the fading of a moment of Joy. Lewis employs terminology similar to the "Immortality Ode's" in his "Poem for Psychoanalysts and/or Theologians," a richly sensuous description of Eden, with deliberately Freudian overtones (recall the "oceanic sense" to which critics enjoy attributing Wordsworth's pre-existence motif):

All this, indeed, I do not remember.
I remember the remembering, when first waking
I heard the golden gates behind me
Fall to, shut fast.

(Lewis, *Poems*, 113)

The image of being shut out is, in Wordsworth's "Ode," countered by an image of being locked in. "Shades of the prison-house" (line 67) close upon us as the visionary gleams (flashes of Joy) become less frequent, and nature attempts to reconcile "her Inmate Man" (line 82) to his impoverished state. Following J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-stories," which answers critics who dismiss as "escapist" any fiction not rooted in everyday life, Lewis writes in another poem:

Escapists? Yes, Looking at bars
 And chains, we think of files; and then
 Of black nights without moon or stars
 And luck befriending hunted men

Our Jailer (well he may) prefers
 Our thoughts should keep a narrower range.
 'The proper study of prisoners
 Is prison,' he tells us. Is it strange?

And if old freedom in our glance
 Betrays itself, he calls it names
 'Dope' — 'Wishful thinking' — or 'Romance',
 Till tireless propoganda tames.

(Lewis, *Poems*, 77)

If the universe does hold any transcendent or suprapersonal reality, then intimations of Joy are not mere daydreams but instead the moments when we are most truly awake. For Wordsworth the child, who enjoys these visionary gleams most often, is an "Eye among the blind" (line 111). The overt meaning in Stanza VIII apparently speaks of contact with an objective, suprapersonal reality, for the child is "Haunted for ever by the eternal mind" (line 113). Joy is news from outside the prison walls.

That the "glory and freshness" bestowed by apprehension of Joy are compared to a "dream" I attribute to the prison-house viewpoint from which the words are spoken. Even though the poet can still "remember the remembering," he already doubts which is the shadow and which is the substance. Joy is, however, validated by its transfiguring effect upon the physical world. Nature thus illuminated appears "Apparelled in celestial light" (line 4), which reveals "splendour in the grass ... glory in the flower" (line 178). The paradoxical identification, at some points, of this primal light with shadows, sunset, and darkness recalls Milton's line, "Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear" (*Paradise Lost*, 3, 380). Joy also effects an intersection of time with eternity; we occasionally partake of "moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence" (lines 154-155). Perhaps passages such as these, combined with the apostrophe "Thou Child of Joy" (line 34), inspired the name Lewis gives to his "illuminated moments." Whether Wordsworth is lamenting his separation from God, the Absolute, the Oversoul, the prenatal "oceanic sense," or some other "something" beyond himself, he starts, like Lewis, from a directly experienced rapture and loss.

In Lewis' *Pilgrim's Regress* both the Joy of union and the guilt of separation are explained in terms of Absolute Mind in the words of Wisdom (a sub-Christian allegorical figure, embodying one of Lewis' earlier belief systems): All reality, including the individual human self, is a part of eternal Mind, so that each person says "I" in an ambiguous sense — as his finite self and the great Mind to which he belongs. "The Island [Joy] is nothing else than that perfection and immortality which I possess as Spirit eternal, and vainly crave as mortal soul.... Because I am and am not Spirit, therefore I have and have not my desire" (*Pilgrim's Regress*, 134-135). This is a philosophic rationale that

Wordsworth, concerned as he was with self-consciousness, might well have embraced.

Perhaps Wordsworth's haunting sense of loss arises from his constantly trying to locate Joy in the natural phenomena that are, in fact, only its vehicles. Terms in the "Ode" such as "apparelled" seem to indicate that this poem recognizes them as conduits, not sources. Here the poet indeed opens the way to the doctrine of transcendence but carries it to no clear conclusion.

Why does he feel threatened by Joy's lure to transcend nature? Because he has thoroughly naturalized imagination's intimations of the supernatural, I suggest, if he allows himself to be enticed out of nature, he will be left (like the atheist all dressed up in his coffin) with no place to go. The only destinations open to him will be either the void or his nuclear, autonomous self, which cannot alone bear the "burthen of the mystery." Hence his verse — except, perhaps, in the "Immortality Ode" — constitutes a relentless attempt to achieve the impossible by domesticating the suprapersonal. Christopher, more biographical and apologetic than I wish to be, uses Lewis' imaginative works as a basis for speculating on what Wordsworth might have written in his mature years, had he taken the final step of assimilating Joy to Christian orthodoxy. But such speculations (as Christopher himself also brings out) are ultimately (in Lewis' words) "invitations to wander in ... an 'alongside world' which [has] no reality" (*Perelandra*, 145) and to "send your soul after the good you had expected, instead of turning it to the good you had got" (*Perelandra*, 69) — the poems of Wordsworth as he actually wrote them. ☛

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That is a long and yet bald resume. Many characters important to the story are not even mentioned. Even some whole inventions like the remarkable Ents, oldest of living rational creatures, Shepherds of the Trees, are omitted. Since we now try to deal with 'ordinary life' springing up unquenched under the trample of world politics and events, there are love-stories touched in, or live in different modes, wholly absent from *The Hobbit*. But the highest love-story, that of Aragorn and Arwen Elrond's daughter is only alluded to as a known thing. It is told elsewhere in a short tale, *Of Aragorn and Arwen Undomiel* (*L*, pp. 160-161).

In a letter written to Michael Straight, the editor of the *New Republic* early in 1956, Tolkien reiterates the importance of the Aragorn-Arwen love-story. After assuring Straight that he not trying to compete with the Gospels of the New Testament in his portrayal of Life, Death, and Sacrifice, Tolkien says of the *Lord of the Rings*,

Here I am only concerned with Death as a part of nature, physical and spiritual, of Man, and with Hope without guarantees. That is why I regard the tale of Arwen and Aragorn as the most important of the Appendices; it is part of the essential story, and is only placed so, because it could not be worked into the main narrative without destroying its structure: which is planned to be 'hobbitocentric', that is, primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble (*L*, p. 237).

Perhaps no one needs to be reminded of the gentle association that Tolkien makes in the "Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" that appears in Appendix A(v) in *The Return of the King* between Aragorn and Arwen, and Beren and Luthien. The Aragorn/Arwen story line is somewhat gentler overall than that of Beren/Luthien, but the superstructures of both are essentially the same. The history of Samwise Gamgee and Rosie Cotton is not completely devoid of association with the great love-story. Tolkien himself says of them:

I think the simple 'rustic' love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes, and the 'longing for Elves', and sheer beauty (*L*, p. 161)

In addition, anyone who is familiar with Ronald/Edith story line cannot help but recognize the obvious similarities. Some quiet moment, on a winter's eve perhaps, an open-hearted reading of Tolkien's own account of the young lovers might be in order (See *L*, pp. 52-53). The full weight and measure of Tolkien's conception of love cannot be considered without one final quote, of Ronald and Edith's love for one another, written so long ago.

Lo! young we are and yet have stood
like planted hearts in the great Sun
of Love so long (as two fair trees
in woodland or in open dale
stand utterly entwined, and breathe
the airs, and suck the very light

together) that we have become
as one, deep-rooted in the soil
of Life, and tangled in sweet growth.
(*Biography*, p. 74)

Tolkien's view of the deepest of human emotions may not fully express for every reader the full weight and measure of that emotion to the individual heart. But Tolkien's letter to his son Michael concerning the condition of the human heart helps us to understand that his creations correspond to that well thought out view, and contributes to our awareness of Tolkien's skill and philosophical fidelity as an author. ☞

Notes

- 1 Paul Nolan Hyde *A Descriptive Analysis of the Languages Used in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings* (Unpublished Masters Thesis: Brigham Young University, August 1972). See particularly Chapter I "Reactions to and the Purpose of *The Lord of the Rings*". For those with a militant sense of justice, see my *Linguistic Techniques Used in Character Development in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: Purdue University, May 1982), especially Chapter I "Tolkien's Talent for Portraying Character: The Controversy".
- 2 Lin Cater, *Tolkien: A Look Behind The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).
- 3 Cathrine Stimpson, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Columbia Essays on Modern Writers*, 41 (Columbia University Press, 1969).
- 4 See Chapter I of Hyde-1982 where there is an extended discussion concerning the nature of the Traditional Fairy Tale and Tolkien's strict adherence to the form.
- 5 See *Letters*, pp.325-333, Tolkien's letter to Eileen Elgar, particularly pages 328 and 330, wherein the principle of brotherly love is made quite clear as an informant to the story line.



ART Submissions



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Joy — Works Cited, continued from page 13

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