

Westmont College

An inquiry into the epistemological significance of the imagination:

“The Joy of Imagination”

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Major Honors Project

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“No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.” - C.S. Lewis, Great Divorce.

Part 1: Introduction

Of all my earliest memories, the ones which still stand out most clearly regard those magical times when my Father would tell us his wonderful - and wonder-filled - stories. My favorite protagonists supposedly lived around our childhood neighborhood of St. Andrews, Scotland, either in the old cathedral, the Caledonian Forest, or under the streets of the town itself. We all knew the reclusive habits of the Well-Dweller: a shape-shifting and malleable creature who had unlimited access to St. Andrews' plumbing system and water supply. He was known for surprising the unwary dish-washer (and even the unsuspecting toilet-user) with a friendly splash of water before disappearing again down the drain just before discovery. In other stories we lauded and, of course, wisely feared the mighty Chapel Dragon, who guarded a lair in the tallest remaining tower of St Andrews' crumbling Cathedral, and was so big that even Dad couldn't wrap all the way around his huge neck. But of all these imaginary creatures, we adored Father Forest the most. He was the oldest tree we had ever seen - the ancient grandfather of the entire wood - and he came alive at night to sing songs of the ancient past to all the woodland creatures and swaying trees who might be listening nearby. Though I had not, as a toddler, yet read Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, the blueprints for Smaug the dragon, for Treebeard the ent, and for Gollum the invisible ring-bearer had already been etched into the foundation of my emerging imagination.

Thus was I primed from a very young age to venerate and adore the art of storytelling. The bright faces of laughing elves, the deep beat of dwarvish drums, the sweet voices of traveling bards, and the sight of a king's banners floating in the breeze all danced around the semi-conscious periphery of my young senses. Though I admit that I do not encounter many such sights and sounds today, it may be that the bright eyes and quick ears of children are yet more perceptive than the senses of their disenchanting elders. Perhaps the lilting laughter and pulsing drumbeats of fairy-folk are merely overpowered in the frantic hurry of our beloved modern-day "realities". For it is the very disenchantment of that

brightly-peopled world which I mourn, and it is its reinvigoration for which I long - not because that enchanted world is real in the modern literal sense, but because it hints at a much greater world which certainly is. It may even be that the distinction between imaginative invention and experienced reality is not so great in that other world than it is in ours. Perhaps there is room, after all, for dragon, elf, and dwarf alike in the great halls and mighty strongholds of God's incarnate imagination.

In any case, today, the memory of my Father's childhood tales rings strangely bittersweet in my ears. The nostalgia which they inspire is tainted with a deep sense of loss, a sense that betrays the profundity of my childhood awe at an enchanted and supernatural world, and my accompanying melancholy at the gradual recession of that wonder. But the bittersweetness of those memories serves to illustrate another profound experience which has stuck with me far after the civilized skepticism of growing up did away with my belief in singing trees and well-intentioned well-dwellers. This experience, in fact, is something like the recollection of that self-same boyhood amazement - a whispered tribute to those wonder-filled glimpses of a world that lay beyond ours. It has arisen unbidden within me at various apparently unrelated moments in my life: the faintly recalled melody of an almost forgotten childhood lullaby, the inevitable and yet still sudden ending of a book I had loved, the sight of a crimson sunset casting its reddening glow over sky and sea alike, the sacred touch of a lover after some difficult interaction. All of these apparently disparate experiences have been tied together by some link which I can only describe as an unsatisfied and yet profoundly satisfying longing. They have each generated the same deeply compelling desire which, somehow, compels all other desires to be silent and remember their relative insignificance. I cannot truly put the feeling of this desire to words, for its very perception denies the captivity of verbal description. And yet, I must nonetheless give some account of its nature, for it will be a central focus of this project.

However, a merely logical and analytical description of its features will surely not do; I very much doubt, in any case, that such an account could ever authentically capture its true nature. And so, in order to introduce this experience with a method that is not already self-defeating, I will open this project with a poem. It is inspired by one of the occasions upon which I felt something very similar to the longing

my father would create with his wonder-filled stories. This occasion was more recent than many, and as such is still vivid in my memory. I had ridden my bike from Westmont up Gibraltar road and was just getting ready to go back when I suddenly rounded a bend and saw the sunset which had been lighting the hills around me for the past half hour. The sight was breathtakingly beautiful, and as I watched, I suddenly felt a deep longing overtake my entire being as the sky's dying glory transformed the world beneath it. I could not say why, but even in the face of such overwhelming glory, I felt the weight of my unsatisfied desire coursing through me like a fire. It whispered of the things which lay somehow beyond even this incredible beauty, realities that were greater than anything I had yet seen or would ever see on earth. It made me feel like I was about to recall grand visions of a glorious realm about which I had long forgotten. It made me almost believe in the dreams that I had only dared to hope for in the nonverbal language of my deepest desires. And then, just as suddenly as it had arisen, it was gone. In the very instant that I had tried to turn inwards and look at what was happening inside me, the feeling vanished, leaving such a void where it had been that all other emotions seemed weak in comparison. So I rode back down to Westmont, and wrote a poem. It recounts, at first glance, the surpassing beauty of watching the sun set behind the Channel Islands, but more fundamentally depicts that very longing, deep and unspeakable, which calls me to wonder what might *lie beyond* the materialistic reality of much modern thought.

What lies Beyond

Against the brightly crimson blush
of daylight's soft demise,
a line of rocky sentinels
uphold the painted skies.
Before them stretch the reddened seas,
beyond them, who can tell?
Perhaps all heaven's splendor
or perhaps the fires of hell.

But even in the gloaming light
of sky and glittering sea,
those dark and shrouded titans
are unmatched in majesty.
They stand upon a burning stage,
all stoic and unscathed:
immune to every bloody ray
in which the earth is bathed.

For though the weight of sea and sky
must press upon that range,
its proud and unbowed peaks defy
the stains of temporal change.
Few sights on earth are quite as sad,
or nearly as defiant,
as cliffs of stone against which waves of time
are so compliant.

Yet men remember not why still they
stand in such defiance.
Some claim the cliffs are what remain
of a bygone alliance
between the folk of aeons past
and those undying Kings
for Whom the fabled poets strung
their harps with golden strings.

Still others claim that all such tales
of magic, myth, and song,
were nothing but poetic lies
for children all along.
The Modern Man shall not be fooled
by poets and their fictions -
The Realist builds His marbled world
with all the right restrictions.

But as the sun dips down below
the faintly glimmering sea,
I wonder, to myself, is there
not truth in fantasy?
Are there not even stranger truths,
as God is One in Three?
For, without faith in paradox,
life has no mystery...

Such thoughts once captured every soul
when innocence was bliss,
when childhood left us free to dream
of waking to a kiss.
But, with age, men crown Reason as
the sovereign judge of truth,
while wonder, awe, and fairy tales,
they cast away in youth.

Yet who are we to limit God
to that which limits we?
Perhaps His truth contains both magic
and reality.
Perhaps beyond the setting sun

there lie undying lands,
where elves and dwarves and dragons feast
with God on golden sands.

But now the rocky mountain isles
are fading far away -
scarcely hinting at the light which
once was bright as day.
What hides beyond those silhouettes
is not for us to know,
yet I, for one, still wonder at
the magic of its glow.

And so what lies just out of sight
shall haunt the mortal mind,
'till few can long ignore the thought of what
one just might find
beyond those dark and shrouded peaks
which guard the hidden West:
that starlit realm of legends lost
whose light is ever blessed.

I recount this poem of mine for a few reasons. The first is that I do not believe I could better articulate the experience of that profoundly awe-filled longing with any systematic or analytical definition. I say this not because I have exhausted every possible attempt at doing so, but rather because there is a fundamentally beautiful, imaginative, and deeply experiential element of that desire which I can only capture in an equally aesthetic medium. The second reason is that this poem acts as a structural introduction to the various positions I intend to investigate throughout this project. In stanza five, I introduce the popular idea that fairy tales and myths are “nothing but poetic lies for children,” which echoes C.S. Lewis’ pre-conversion opinion of mythology as “lies and therefore useless, though breathed through silver” (Tolkien, 1931, *Mythopoeia*). During his now famous conversation with Tolkien on Addison’s walk, Lewis argued that, although he loved the beauty, high-mindedness and “breathed through silver” nature of various mythologies, he could not get over the fact that such stories were most fundamentally false - and that they must, therefore, be abandoned with the onset of academic integrity. Next, I reference the related belief that “Modern Man” is not to be fooled “by poets and their fictions.” Rather, we grown-ups are the “Realists” who define reality according to the appropriate and often

anti-imaginative limitations of science and reason. In stanza seven, furthermore, I articulate this common view as a subtle form of “chronological snobbery” (Lewis, 1955, p.207) with regard to human development: “But, with age, men crown Reason as the sovereign judge of truth, while wonder, awe, and fairy tales, they cast away in youth.” This verse is also meant to depict the challenge that our cultural associations of reason with maturity and imagination with immaturity bring to bear against the idea that mythological fairy-tales may be important sources of truth.

Stanzas six and eight, however, represent my hesitation to accept such assumptions with the questions: “is there not truth in fantasy” and “are there not also stranger truths, as God is one in three?” These queries allude to an association between the truths of both fantasy and Christian doctrine insofar as they often reference concepts which defy reason in favor of a strange “faith in paradox.” At this point in the poem, I also reference the innocent childhood belief in “waking to a kiss” which is meant to metaphorically recall the enchanted and youthful lense with which children so often engage the mysteries of the world. The connection between ideas, here, is that mystery arises when two apparently true things seem paradoxical or contradictory, but that many folks, Christians not least among them, must sometimes adopt the childlike ability to faithfully accept such paradoxes as the truth. In his famous apologetic work, *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton uses a metaphor about our stereoscopic vision that rather pithily sums up this concept:

The sane man’s... spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for it. Thus, he has always believed that there was such a thing as fate, but such a thing as free will also. Thus, he believes that children were indeed the kingdom of heaven, but nevertheless ought to be obedient to the kingdom of earth. He admired youth because it was young and age because it was not. It is exactly this balance of apparent contradictions that has been the whole buoyancy of the healthy man. (Chesterton, 1908, p.37)

This is not to say, however, that the epistemological significance of scientific observation and reason should be in any way disregarded, nor should Enlightenment thinking be unequivocally condemned. To the contrary, I marvel at the great wonders of technological advancement which have so transformed our

quality of life in the past few centuries. Science and reason are by no means the enemies of this project, nor do I believe we should stop discovering truth by scientific or logical methods; I simply wish to suggest that they must not be the “sovereign judges of truth,” for the imagination reveals some things which neither reason nor science can comprehend alone.

Doubtless, these assertions are more likely to be accepted by someone with theistic inclinations, or at least a predisposition to believe in things that transcend the merely material. However, I do not consider this to be a major problem, for something in the range 85-90% of the world’s population is religious, whereas only 7% are decidedly atheistic or agnostic.¹ Thus, to those who will not consider my argument because of a pre-existing intolerance for things which may be transcendent, I make no defense. The purpose of this project will not be to prove the validity of Christian monotheism, or even of theism in general, for that effort has already been made by many far greater thinkers than I. On the other hand, to those who do believe in realities which lie beyond the merely materialistic, I will continue making the case that it is the faculty of imagination which allows us to glimpse such things. The function of “What lies Beyond” in this essay, therefore, is twofold. It serves, firstly, as the best illustration I can offer of what it was like to experience that wonder-inducing and yet unsatisfied desire for some greater glory than even the beauty of this world can offer. And secondly, it introduces readers to the main ideas that will be either challenged or defended throughout this project.

Part 2: The Inklings

But let me now turn back to the experience of that bittersweet longing, for, much to my surprise and great excitement, it has not only been shared by others whom I greatly admire, but also thoroughly discussed in some of their best works. When I first read Tolkien’s *Silmarillion* as a teenager, and even much earlier when my father read me *Lord of the Rings* as a boy, the sheer magnitude of Middle-earth’s mytho-history, the marvelous descriptions of its physical beauty, and the incredible depth of its many characters fueled my desire for a magical reality beyond our own; but I never thought that Tolkien himself

¹ Stats taken from Wikipedia: List of Religious Populations (2021)

knew of, or ever intended to create such feelings in his readers. Nor had I ever imagined that Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, which I had listened to countless times on my tape-player while growing up, were written by an author who, himself, would write an autobiographical account of his encounters with just such an experience. Yet (and one can imagine my great excitement at this discovery), both Lewis and Tolkien, the twin forefathers of my love for epic storytelling, had already discussed and written at length about my experience in terms of what they called "Joy." Apparently, the two men had been good friends in life, and had founded a group of Oxford intellectuals called "The Inklings" to discuss literature, review each other's works, and encourage the value of mythopoeic narrative in epic storytelling. It turned out that both Lewis and Tolkien had encountered this bittersweet longing of mine far earlier than I did, and, moreover, had spent a good deal of time describing it not only through their works of great fiction, but also in more formal prose. And I am inclined to agree with their choice of the term "Joy" to describe it, for that fleeting desire is certainly something which, as Lewis admits, "no one would ever, if both were in his power, exchange for all the pleasures in the world" (Lewis, 1955, p.17).

But let us see what these two prolific advocates of mythopoeia have to say about Joy in their own works - starting with Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*. In this autobiographical account of his "most reluctant conversion," Joy is depicted as a deep and unspeakable longing for "something-we-know-not-what."² Lewis describes it as quite different in quality from either happiness or pleasure, but nonetheless as something which we would never give up for either of them. Joy is thus a fundamentally desirable experience, and yet also the climax of desire itself. It is not something that we can cultivate by turning inwards to contemplate its nature, for Joy is not an end in itself, but rather a byproduct that only arises as the evidence of our deep need for something beyond it. By the end of *Surprised by Joy*, we learn that that much deeper need, despite Lewis's extreme reluctance to admit it, is only fulfilled by the transcendent love of God. It follows, then, that rather than being something which our rational faculties can deduce from immanently empirical realities, Joy is the byproduct of our active and creative imagination grasping at transcendence. It is for this reason that we only experience Joy when the sheer weight of some external

² Concept adopted from John Locke: *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, 1689

glory turns us away from our introspective self-centeredness and towards some glimpse of a far greater reality that defies description (though not perception). The imagination, furthermore, is what allows us to perceive that which we cannot always describe, making it the primary faculty upon which Joy depends. Thus, it is the cultivation of our imaginations that generates the outwardly-oriented disposition that manifests experiences of Joy and leads us back to enjoyment of the divine.

This concept of enjoyment, moreover, is essential to understanding Lewis' view of Joy. He cites the common distinction made in the human experience between the "Conscious" and the "Unconscious." Though such a distinction is indeed psychologically helpful, Lewis believes that it is not yet sufficiently complex to account for all the modes of human experience. He says:

"The surest way of spoiling a pleasure was to start examining your satisfaction. But if so, it followed that all introspection is in one respect misleading. In introspection we try to look "inside ourselves" and see what is going on. But nearly everything that was going on a moment before is stopped by the very act of our turning to look at it. Unfortunately this does not mean that introspection finds nothing. On the contrary, it finds precisely what is left behind by the suspension of all our normal activities; and what is left behind is mainly mental images and physical sensations. The great error is to mistake this mere sediment or track or by-product for the activities themselves. That is how men may come to believe that thought is only unspoken words, or the appreciation of poetry only a collection of mental pictures, when these in reality are what the thought of the appreciation, when interrupted, leave behind — like the swell at sea, working after the wind has dropped" (Lewis, 1955, p.219).

Thus, Lewis suggests that there must be, rather than the classically twofold model, a "threefold division (between) the Unconscious, the Enjoyed, and the Contemplated." The Unconscious, perhaps obviously, represents all that goes on without the active direction of the will. Acts such as breathing, or digesting, or even dreaming seem to fit well within this first category. The Contemplated, on the other hand, is what people typically associate with conscious, active uses of the rational will. This category seems to represent the objects of a person's mental energy, and involves some kind of introspective deliberation

either for its own sake, or for the sake of causing exterior action. The Enjoyed, however, fits into neither of these two categories, for though its experience is a conscious one, there is no “inward turning,” no premeditated contemplation - it is fundamentally oriented away from the self and towards something else.

For Lewis, Enjoyment represents the state of mind in which Joy is experienced. One must be so absorbed in the enjoyment of something else, so enraptured with its beautiful or inspiring nature, that the sense of self is lost and even consumed in the great glory of that other thing. And yet, that “great glory” is not a direct feature of the thing’s immediate or imminent parts. It is, rather, *implied* or *suggested* by a glimpse of something that transcends the familiar and ordinary experiences of everyday life. For, as Lewis points out, “All joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’” (Lewis, 1955, p.78). Joy, then, is something that reaches beyond our immanent, self-oriented experience, and into a reality which lies somehow beyond such things. To experience it, we must somehow learn to forget ourselves, avoiding the inward turn of contemplation and, instead, turning outward in child-like enjoyment.

Furthermore, according to Lewis, this is an exercise which can only be accomplished by the imagination. Applications of reason, analysis, or any forms of logic all fail to generate Joy because they are fundamentally contemplative and introspective powers, not forms of enjoyment. To enjoy, one must recall, is to turn away from the usual preoccupation with self such that some other entity becomes the sole object of one’s attention. Thus, we must have some other faculty capable of going beyond mere conceptual description and into the aesthetic appreciation of glories which are transcendent - or, to put it more simply, a faculty which can perceive (though perhaps not describe) wholes which are much greater than their parts. Lewis’ depiction of “the imaginative longing for Joy, or rather the longing which *was* Joy” (Lewis, 1955, p.175), also demonstrates his interrelated sense of Joy and the “imaginative life” (which he later defines as “my life as concerned with Joy”). But as Lewis quickly discovered, Joy could not be *consciously* cultivated by acts of will alone. He could not, by any means of contemplative introspection, generate his own experiences of Joy. Lewis recounts how “all my vain hopes to find some mental content on which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say, ‘This is it,’ had been a future attempt

to contemplate the enjoyed” (Lewis, 1955, p.219). Thus, Joy arose only during those periods of imaginative enjoyment when Lewis’ own “official obstructions were swept aside and, startled into self-forgetfulness, (he) again tasted Joy” (Lewis, 1955, p.169).

Now Tolkien, who knew Lewis as a close friend, actually writes about the very practice by which enjoyment can cultivate Joy. In his essay *On Fairy Stories*, he claims that the sudden “eucatastrophe” (or good turn) of the fantasy genre is the most effective place for us to lose ourselves in the enjoyment of something else. He believes, however, that this is not by virtue of the escapism that many often associate with the “imaginary,” but rather because the Joy of eucatastrophe in a fairy-story imitates the Joy of the great historical Eucatastrophes: Christ’s incarnation and resurrection. It is in Christ, after all, that the imaginative beauty of myth and the rational accountability of history are united in one living flesh. They meet in the incomprehensible (and yet perceptible) union of transcendent divinity with immanent humanity, for though we have seen the face of God in Jesus Christ, we see it yet “through a glass darkly” (1 Cor 13:12, KJV). It is the function of the imagination, therefore, to plow a fertile field within us such that the seed of Joy can take root, bloom, and occasionally unveil the transcendent beauty which lies beyond the dark glass through which we long to see. A good fairy-story, according to Tolkien, does exactly this. It does not deny sorrow, suffering, pain, or “dyscatastrophe,” but rather illuminates and heightens the joy of deliverance in the face of these very realities. The only thing good fantasy does deny is final defeat, ultimate hopelessness, and the supreme rule of evil. There are always brave champions, no matter how small or how few, who will stand for the goodness and valor which expose fleeting glimpses of “Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (Tolkien, 1947, p.14). In this sense, though *The Lord of the Rings* may not be allegorical in the directly religious sense of Narnian lore, its eucatastrophic ending still calls us out of ourselves and into imaginative glimpses of Joy that prepare us for the Joy of evangelium; and though it is likewise obvious that Frodo Baggins is no Jesus Christ, his story still grants us that “catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears” (Tolkien, 1947, p.14) - which should also be our response to the Gospel story, itself.

We cannot, however, hope to understand the realm of “Faerie” by means of mere reason alone, for Tolkien reminds us that “that perilous realm... has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole” (Tolkien, 1947, p.2). With these words, Tolkien reveals his view that “the whole” truth is epistemologically complex. Since analytical abilities are simply not sufficiently equipped to reveal everything about the realm of Faerie, Tolkien must provide a further set of abilities which might complement the analytical (for we must note that although analysis does not reveal the “whole” truth, it still plays a fundamentally important part). To this, Tolkien readily obliges, suggesting that the genre of fantasy combines its “older and higher use *as an equivalent of Imagination* with the derived notions of ‘unreality’ (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact,’ in short of the fantastic” (Tolkien, 1947, p.6). Thus, three things must complement analysis in the art of fantasy. The first is a semblance of “unreality,” which is to say, of things that do not resemble our actual world. The second is that of “freedom from the domination of observed fact,” which is to say, from the materialistic assumptions often made about what is real and what is not real. The last, and arguably most important, is Tolkien’s emphasis on the role in fantasy played by the imagination, by which he means “the mental power of image-making” (Tolkien, 1947, p.5). Such images, for Tolkien, need not make perfect analytical sense. They need not be particularly exhaustive and detailed, nor need they be a glimpse of something particularly familiar. Is it even possible that they might appear contradictory, or paradoxical, when analytically explained. This is not to say, however, that fantasy thrives in the absence of reason and coherence; Tolkien explicitly states that “The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make” (Tolkien, 1947). But even reasonable explanation does not limit the scope of one’s private imagination - though it does limit its communicable content, for the realm which fantasy attempts to depict is one of “indescribable, though not imperceptible” wonders.

Thus, for Tolkien, as with Lewis, the imagination is needed to complete the picture which analysis and reason could not paint alone. The effort must be epistemologically balanced; rooted, of course, in the logical coherence which makes any story intelligible, and yet simultaneously freed by the imaginative capacity to grasp something which transcends our ordinary experience. Storytelling,

furthermore, does not merely lure the imagination into creating illusions of magical glories that do not exist - for the very opposite is true. True fantasy hints at the wonder and the magic and the glory of realities which, per Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, are even more *real* than our own. It is the imagination, after all, that leads the soul into experiences of desire-filled Joy which, for both Tolkien and Lewis, beg for fulfillment in the mythical historicity of God's love for humankind. Cultivating our imaginative faculties, therefore, is an essential part of discovering the transcendent and immaterial realities in which so many people believe. It is important to note that this does not require that we abandon the empirical methodology of good science - though it may, indeed, compel us to abandon the scientism of much Enlightenment thinking. For Tolkien's defense of fairy-tales and Lewis' account of Joy show that only *the combination* of reasonable intellect with creative imagination will serve to reveal the "whole truth" of reality - both in its beautiful immanence and its more glorious transcendence.

Part 3: The "Enlightened Objector"

At this point in the project, however, it is worth investigating some objections to the idea that the faculty of imagination has such epistemological significance. For those who find themselves sympathizing with the analytical and reductive methods of Enlightenment scientism, the first, and likely most pressing objection is that empirical logic and scientific analysis are surely more attuned to accurately depicting reality (and thus truth) than the wild and unhindered extrapolation of our imaginations. Such an objection is well-represented by the common belief which a pre-conversion Lewis, himself, held about the truth-value of all imaginative storytelling and mythology: that such things, though often beautiful, are but "lies breathed through silver." It is for this very reason, after all, that we all discover the "truth" about Santa, or the Tooth-fairy, or the Easter Bunny as we grow older. Though the revelation is often sad, we do not long hate our parents for their deception; we almost always, in fact, repeat the very same silver-breathed lies for our own children. And yet this does not, therefore, imply our literal belief in such mythological beings - for they are, after all, brought to life merely by the optimistic fancies of youth, and should be fondly left there as the lenses of maturity correct our childish vision.

It is this very objection that George MacDonald addresses from the outset of his essay *The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture*. Those objectors to whom the last paragraph appeals will no doubt defend the solid and verifiable nature of reasonable scientific conclusions against the wild fancies of the imagination for which there is no accountability in reality. ““Are there not facts?” say they. ‘Why forsake them for fancies? Is there not that which may be known? Why forsake it for inventions? What God hath made, into that let man inquire.’” (MacDonald, 1883, p.1). With these sorts of questions, of course, MacDonald was well acquainted, for he grew up in the century which followed that of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, and Hume. At that point in history, the Scientific Revolution was in full sail, and the medieval tendency to philosophize in light of religious authority had been all but abandoned by the academic elite.

For MacDonald, however, an individual’s ability to reason in conjunction with the scientific method did not suffice to depict the *whole* truth about reality. His response to the questions offered by the “enlightened objector” quite emphatically condemns any empirical epistemology that tries to ignore the imagination. He states:

“To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination. It is aroused by facts, is nourished by facts, seeks for higher and yet higher laws in those facts; but refuses to regard science as the sole interpreter of nature, or the laws of science as the only region of discovery” (MacDonald, 1883, p.1).

Here, MacDonald defends the role which he believes the imagination must play in all scientific discovery. Though he readily admits that reason, or the intellect, is indeed used to collect and record data from observation, he points out that “in finding out the works of God, the Intellect must labor, workman-like, under the direction of the architect, Imagination” (MacDonald, 1883, p.11). This architectural direction is a key tenet of MacDonald’s theory. He asks the objector

“how the man of science come(s) to think of his experiments? Does observation reach to the non-present, the possible, the yet unconceived? Even if it showed you the experiments which ought to be made, will observation reveal to you the experiments which might be made? And who

can tell of which kind is the one that carries in its bosom the secret of the law you seek?"

(MacDonald, 1883, p.12).

Whereas it may indeed be the function of the intellect to record *what is true*, it is the function of the imagination, on the other hand, to imagine *what might be true*. If we lived in a world in which all reality was known to us - wherein no question was left unanswered, no mystery unsolved, no distant (celestial) shore unreached - this function of the imagination would not be important. And yet, we do not live in such a world, for in embracing the practice of scientific *discovery*, we admit to the need for a *discoverer* - a bold captain to search unknown waters for the safety of an exotic harbor.

The imagination, according to MacDonald, serves this very purpose. For even our objector must admit that forming a hypothesis is the fundamental genesis of every experiment. And yet, the very formation of such theses concern *what might be* the case rather than what is, in fact, the case. A hypothesis, therefore, is not a rational conclusion about reality, but rather an imaginative guess about what reality may be like. And if, as MacDonald asserts, we accept that "without the scaffolding of hypothesis, the house of science could never arise" (MacDonald, 1883, p.13), then the very method upon which science bases its discovery of truth depends upon imaginative creativity even before reason enters the picture. To peer beyond the realm of observed fact and into the land of natural laws is, after all, the function of imaginative creativity. It requires that one be able to imagine what *might be* the most harmonious relation of the facts observed by reason. Only after the imagination has drawn up an architectural blueprint of a law's possible form does it send the intellect to investigate whether or not that form represents reality accurately. Thus, Macdonald dismisses his "enlightened" interlocutor with an almost contemptuous discharge: "We yield you your facts. The laws we claim for the prophetic imagination" (MacDonald, 1883, p.12).

It may be further replied, however, that even if there is a sort of imaginative guess-work which is fundamental to the scientific process of testing the unknown, the objector truly intended to target a different sort of imagination. They may grant that, per MacDonald, the imagination plays an important part in guiding scientific discovery, but that it may also be (and is more often) used to create fancies or

illusions of realities that do not, in fact, reflect the truth of our own world. The genre of mythology, of epic poetry, and of fairy-tales, furthermore, all fall under this latter use of the imagination - to create that which does not mirror our empirical reality, that which, instead, is used merely to tickle one's fancy with the "imaginary." Any such use of the imagination, they will say, cannot enhance our understanding of reality - for the "imaginary" only has meaning when contrasted with the "real," and as such, the two are obvious opposites.

However, in another of his works - *The Fantastic Imagination* - MacDonald makes a further distinction that may yet clear mythopoeia of its "merely imaginary" charges. He defines imagination, on the one hand, as that which produces "new embodiments of old truths," whereas "mere inventions, however lovely... (are) the work of the Fancy" (MacDonald, 1893, p.2). For MacDonald, fancy appears to be a neutral category which can be used by the imagination as either a tool for good or a tool for ill. It has no innate moral quality, and is thus rather comparable to the neutral will in its ability to perform either great or ugly deeds. In metaphorical terms, fancy can be thought of as a hammer with which a smith creates his wares. The smith might use the hammer to forge strange and fantastic shapes in the metal which yet contain no deeper meaning, or the smith might use it to reveal the form of some shapely nude which yet hints at the greater glory of a living woman. In the same way, the imagination can use fancy to invent bold and yet meaningless illusions, or it can use fancy to *body forth* old truths in new and beautiful forms.

But we must not confuse the mere resemblances of fancy that bear no meaning with the richly meaningful creations of the imagination. For MacDonald, this distinction is clearest in the following evaluation: "seek not that your sons and your daughters should not see visions, should not dream dreams; seek that they should see true visions, that they should dream noble dreams" (MacDonald, 1883, p.23). And so, while it may indeed be the case that some myth-making merely invents fantastic novelties that bear little to no relation with truths about reality, there are still works of imaginative fiction which create the exotic and even otherworldly context wherein truths about our own world develop new meaning. It is, in fact, the very strangeness of such contexts that allows for "mundane" truths to be reborn with all the

power they once possessed; for it was only by the incessant pounding of familiarity that they were originally rendered obscure. Thankfully, the imagination, through great works of creative fiction, may bring such truths back into the light of day - though perhaps not in the light of our own sun, nor on any day from the calendars of our own world. That distinction, however, is surely trivial, for truths are worth knowing regardless of the light which reveals them. If the constant familiarity of our own world has hidden the meaning of a great many truths, then we can hardly be blamed for turning to those other worlds in which we are reminded, once again, of their primordial power.

The compelling call of those other foreign, unfamiliar, and even unknown worlds, moreover, is further depicted by MacDonald in the final part of his essay:

“for it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully; undefined, yet vivid visions of something beyond, something which eye has not seen nor ear heard, have far more influence than any logical sequences whereby the same things may be demonstrated to the intellect” (MacDonald, 1883, p.22).

In this passage, MacDonald acknowledges that strange power which the hint of transcendent realities often wields. The immanent revelations of “logical sequence,” on the other hand, simply do not influence us so deeply - and for reasons which seem surprisingly economic. The laws of supply and demand reveal the high value of scarce things, and the inversely low value of things that are widely accessible. The logical sequence, in its certainty and completeness, bears the very accessibility that renders it cheap. The imaginative grasps which we make at transcendence, on the other hand, never truly attain the object of their desire - and that object’s scarcity, therefore, makes it only the more desirable. For humankind has always prized that which it could not have above anything else. Take immortality as the paradigmatic example of this desire, although the aforementioned experience of Joy, itself, would do almost as well.

And so, once again, we find ourselves coming back to that type of Joy which, Lewis claimed, “no one would exchange for all the pleasures in the world” (Lewis, 1955, p.17). In fact, its experience seems to have had an incredible effect on Lewis, for he describes the nature of such Joy as an “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction,” and also as that experience which “makes

nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting. There, to have is to want and to want is to have” (Lewis, 1955, p.18, 166). In summary, and put most simply, Joy affects us as an “inconsolable longing” - something which cannot and must not be ignored. Now, although MacDonald makes no explicit mention of this “Joy” in the two essays mentioned above, he still seems to share the Lewisian view that there is something of great worth beyond our own reality which no amount of reason or logic could ever attain. He insists, furthermore, that our imaginations can rediscover the power of old truths hidden by the repetitive familiarity of our own reality. These two beliefs combine to reveal MacDonald’s own view of what Lewis and Tolkien very well may have classified as Joy. For something which lies beyond our common experience of reality, which deeply influences our longing for its transcendence, and which may only be accessed by the imagination must be, if not Joy itself, something of an incredibly similar nature. We may, thus, quite easily infer that MacDonald’s elusive desire for “something which eye has not seen nor ear heard” and Lewis’ acute longing for “something-we-know-not-what” are so similar that they actually describe the same phenomenon. I believe Lewis and MacDonald would certainly have said so. But regardless of this claim, it is clear that MacDonald attributed significant epistemological worth to the role of our imaginations in discovering and regrasping the truths of science, nature, and even realities which transcend them both.

And yet, there remain further objections to the idea that anything beyond “the familiar” realms of science and nature is worth knowing. What if one accepts, as before, that the imagination serves an important role in generating hypotheses and discovering laws therein, and further, as MacDonald now suggests, that the imagination helps us to regrasp truths which the repetition of everyday life can render obscure. One who grants that even these roles belong to the imagination may still claim that such functions pale in comparison to the truth-revealing capacities of science and reason. It is not, after all, the imagination that carries out an experiment, nor the imagination that records its observations. The methods of empirical science account for all of that. It is not, furthermore, the imagination that originally discovers the truths we may need to regrasp, nor even the imagination that verifies whether the laws it perceives in collections of data are verifiable. Reason, rather, is responsible for that as well. So even though the

imagination may remind some folks of truths that they occasionally forget, and even if it also imagines possible scientific experiments and perceives where possible laws may lie hidden, it is still the role of reason and science to discover whether what is merely possible is actually true. The objector may even, at this point, grant to Macdonald his “imagined hypotheses,” “prophetic laws,” and “reminders of truths,” and yet still claim the truths themselves for science and reason alone.

But the authors we have investigated so far would surely not have settled for such meager epistemological gain. Lewis has already claimed that the imaginative ability to experience Joy is more dear to humankind than any happiness or pleasure currently known. It is that which, after all, teaches us to long for the transcendent love of the Divine. Tolkien, moreover, believed that all good works of imaginative fiction both illuminate and point us towards the most important events of all time - the incarnation and resurrection of a God made flesh. The otherworldly environment of such stories, however, cannot be understood from a merely analytical or empirical standpoint, for the “realm of Faerie” is one which (like Heaven) is susceptible only to glimpsed perceptions, not to concrete description. MacDonald, finally, even claims that the imagination is “that faculty in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God” (MacDonald, 1883, p.2). Though the imagination does indeed fuel hypothetical and law-making science, as well as the recovery of truths in their primordially powerful nature, it also represents the manner in which humans, per their *imago Dei*, can best emulate their image-maker in the practice of image-making. For just as God made Creation through the imaginative practice of giving physical form to divine thought, so human beings are given the faculty of imagination to give image-like forms to finite thoughts. We have imaginations, in other words, so that we might become poets, or mini-makers, who create in the image of their divine Creator: the Maker of all.

Part 4: Imagination and the Transcendent

It still seems up for debate, however, as to whether the compelling nature of Joy, or the poetic creation of our *imago Dei* implies any direct capacity of the imagination to reveal truth in the ways that science and reason consistently do. It would seem that in order to move beyond the trivial claim that the

imagination sometimes *assists* science and reason in their quest for uncovering truth, the imagination must have unique access to some reality that neither science nor reason could hope to uncover by themselves. It is in defending this very claim, however, that Malcolm Guite, a scholar of Tolkien and Lewis alike, makes his case. In *Faith, Hope, and Poetry*, Guite adheres to what he calls the “fiduciary tradition” in epistemology wherein no language (and thus no knowledge) can exist without symbol and metaphor. The simple consequence of accepting Guite’s “fiduciary” position is that there must be realities beyond language to which its linguistic symbols point. Without at least some such realities, there is no foundation from which language can draw meaning, for if no word can be defined in non-linguistic terms, then language devolves into a viciously circular and ultimately spurious social construct. However, since most of us do think that language does relate to reality, that language does carry deep meaning, and, moreover, that it acts as the creative medium by which we primarily communicate what we mean, the “fiduciary” position is an attractive one. Now, in much the same way that mere black and white words on a page allude to the complex and beautiful material world which both inspires and transcends them, Guite believes that the physical world likewise alludes to other realities which similarly inspire and transcend it. These realities include things as familiar as goodness, beauty, and love, but also embrace the more controversial existence of the Heavenly Realm, itself.

But where does the imagination come into Guite’s picture of transcendent realities and their immanent, earthly symbols? How does “fiduciary epistemology” improve the imagination’s standing with respect to discovering truth? In short, this question gets at the very thesis of Guite’s book, where he states that understanding reality requires “a critical approach to language that is alert to both the immanent and the transcendent, and indeed *the unique power of the imagination to move between the two*” (Guite, 2011, p.10, emphasis mine). For Guite, the imagination is the vehicle by which we gain glimpses of the transcendent realities that lie beyond immanent experience. It allows those who cultivate its creative power to see both immanent symbols *and* the transcendent realities to which they point. In this sense, then, the imagination functions very much like the ship from Peter Pan which transports the Darling children to Neverland, or in the Christian tradition, like the divine grace which carries believers into

Heaven after their earthly death. It is not, of course, by virtue of any science - and certainly not good reason - that we enter the eternal glory of God's presence, nor even in the aforementioned Disney classic did the Darling children find Neverland by using any scientific discovery or especially clever argument. No, in both cases, the transcendent destination in question is only fully accessible to those who humbly admit their need for transformation - Christian believers by Christ's saving grace, and the Darling children by Tinkerbell's magic pixie dust. It is in much the same way that Guite depicts our need for the imagination, especially in terms of its unique ability to "transport us" to places where we can perceive the transcendent. Moreover, since neither reason nor science can account for such transportation, both fairy-tale lovers and Christians must look to the imagination if they still hope to catch glimpses of the glorious realms for which they long.

This claim, however, should not be taken for granted, for it greatly expands the imagination's epistemological significance. Though the immanent realm of scientific observation and logical inference represents a huge portion of our everyday experience, there is another realm which, albeit perhaps less physically tangible, nonetheless holds great influence over humankind. We are referring, of course, to the realm of the transcendent, a realm which lies beyond the merely material, a realm wherein true goodness, beauty, and love are made gloriously manifest. And according to Guite, that realm is made experientially available only by the transformative power of the imagination. If he is right, then our ability to catch glimpses of the divine or spiritual realm is mediated by our imaginative faculty. For those who consider such experiences to be part of the "whole truth," it seems obvious that reason and science need the imagination to complete the epistemological picture of reality.

But the "transcendent realm," according to Guite, is not limited to the spiritual. It also includes the realities which motivate aesthetic and moral experiences. He provides a variety of surprisingly practical arguments to support this claim. In the field of morality, for example, he cites empathy as the behavioral motive "which enables you to stand in another person's shoes, to go out from your life and place and into theirs, to imagine and even re-imagine the world from their perspective" (Guite, 2021). Here, Guite is referring to the myriad of experiential and emotional motives that fuel our strongest social

convictions. Though there may well be sound and logical reasons to uphold a moral standard, our selfish desires often prove stronger than any argument. It takes more than a set of syllogisms to stop a thief from stealing, or an adulterer from committing adultery, for we all need something more compelling than abstract reason to overcome our selfish Hobbesian instincts. Thankfully, we already find ourselves taking great pains to defend those with whom we empathize. We find that we cannot ignore the feeling of deep camaraderie and shared suffering that is born of empathetic connections. The human psyche is composed in such a way that whenever we feel someone has been wronged, our irrepressible response is one of empathetic solidarity with that person, and we subsequently condemn whatever action wronged them. This would imply that even the judgements of our inner moral compass are guided by the primal empathy we feel for the wronged and the accompanying anger we impulsively direct at the wrongdoer. For Guite, this fundamental moral experience is only made possible by the ability to imagine oneself in another person's world, a world that is not one's own - in a world which, in fact, may often seem as foreign as Fairyland itself. In this way, the moral reality which transcends our egoistic biological instincts is directly revealed by the imagination's ability to cultivate empathy.

Furthermore, in reference to the aesthetic experiences associated with good poetry or other artforms, Guite emphasizes the importance of the imagination. If the imagination is that faculty which allows us both to form and perceive images that are not physically visible, then it must be a fundamental element of all the creative art forms - both in their making and in their appreciating. For Guite, a poet is simply someone who cultivates the soil of their imagination such that the seeds of inspiration may take root. Appreciating aesthetic art forms, moreover, is likewise an experience heightened in proportion to the relative strength of one's imagination - in proportion with how easily it allows one to perceive the transcendent images that lie beyond the words on a page, or the brushstrokes on a canvas. He goes on to reference what he believes is the pentecostal work of the Holy Spirit "through whom the imaginations of poets are kindled" (Guite, 2011, p.145). The inspiration which comes and goes for poets like Guite cannot be entirely within their power: else all poets would choose to be constantly inspired. Rather, Guite believes that the Holy Spirit gives moments of deep inspiration to those with fertile imaginations. It is for

this reason that even pagan mythologies exhibit divine inspiration, for many of the ancient secular poets wielded incredible imaginative power. In the Norse legends, for example, *Yggdrasil* is the sacred world tree around which all the nine worlds balance, and in whose roots and branches they are bound together. According to the original myth, Odin impales himself upon his spear, *Gungnir*, stabs out his eye, and then hangs himself on *Yggdrasil* as a sacrifice for the nine worlds. He separates himself from the other Gods, and insists that they do not help him during his suffering. After nine days and nine nights, Odin's sacrifice endows him with the power to protect humanity from the powers of evil and death, and he comes down from the tree as the newly established "All-Father" over all good creatures in the nine worlds.³

The parallels between this story and the story of Christ's Passion are striking. One could indeed chalk them up to mere coincidence, but the prevalence of such similarities throughout ancient pagan myths and poems suggest something more mysterious and perhaps more divine. In any case, Guite relates such pagan imitations of the Resurrection to the verse in Romans where Paul tells us that "even in the pagan places God 'had not left himself with a witness.'" (Guite, 2011, p.36). Under this interpretation, then, the imagination is the human faculty which reveals God to the unevangelized, or, in the words of the ESV, that which allows God's "invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, (to be) clearly perceived... in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:20, ESV). The use of "perceived" here is especially interesting. As Tolkien already demonstrated, the scope of the perceptible and the scope of the describable are not equal; rather, the former's is far larger. For there are transcendent realities which, though perceptible, still escape formal conceptualization. Analytical thinking, in other words, is not sufficient *by itself* to encompass the transcendent realms of Faerie - or the similarly transcendent realm of Heaven. And so it would appear that even Paul may hint at our need for something more than reason or science alone to account for the "whole truth" about transcendent realities such as God, Himself.

Let us now focus, however, on another argument which Guite makes in support of his claim that the imagination enables us to perceive the transcendent which lies beyond the immanent. This argument is perhaps the most powerful, and yet simultaneously the most dangerous, for its misinterpretation may lead

³ Details from Norse Historian Snorri Sturluson: Poetic Edda, 1270

to subjectivism about the transcendent - an outcome that both Guite and I hope to avoid. Nevertheless, its dangers must be risked for the sake of its persuasive power; so, according to Guite's final argument, even our immanent experience of empirical reality may yet, itself, be a transcendent one. This claim, we should note, is far from being the first of its kind. Centuries before Guite, Immanuel Kant proposed an ideological switch of such significance that philosophers compare it to Copernicus' discovery that the universe was heliocentric rather than geocentric. According to this "Kantian Revolution," it is not our minds that conform to objects in the external world, but rather those objects which conform to our minds. We actively form our phenomenal experience of the noumenal world in order to make it perceptible and, moreover, recognizable. Without the lenses of space, time, causality, and other "phenomenal assumptions," the world would be (and in a sense is) a chaotic maelstrom of sensory inputs randomly striking us at an incomprehensible speed. Thankfully, the lens of human experience allows us to actively form the chaos of the noumenal world into the phenomenal "reality" we take for granted. Guite seems to adopt this view when he says "it is not the case that a certain quantum of manipulatable data falls, as it were, ready made into the mind through the senses and then we make the necessary calculations to make sense of it, but rather, that our hearts and mind go out to embrace the world imaginatively" (Guite, 2011, p.172). It would seem, then, that Guite is a quasi-Kantian who believes that even the phenomenal world of our immanent experience transcends the chaotic noumenal reality which underlies it. In this sense, even what we have hitherto referred to as "empirical experience" and "scientific observation" is already an imaginative revelation of the transcendent in the immanent, for it is "by the forming and perceiving power of imagination that the constant stream of data flowing into us through our senses is shaped into a tree, a mountain, a sunset, the face of our beloved" (Guite, 2021, p.13).

The most important function of this last argument, it would seem, is to combat those who would claim that the transcendent is such a strange and unconventional realm in comparison with our every-day observations that we either cannot comprehend it, or it does not actually exist. Rather, the immanent realm of our materially objective reality is the only one which we should try to know, for it does not exhibit the strange and unconventional features which make the transcendent so elusive. Guite's

perception-based argument, however, serves the purpose of showing that, to the contrary, anyone who believes we can have knowledge of what they call “immanent, objective reality” is already accepting knowledge of an imaginatively created phenomenal realm. This is because the world which they have named as the most basic or unalterable reality already represents a transcendent interpretation of a much simpler realm. If we accept, then, the Kantian Revolution’s conclusion that reality conforms to our minds rather than vice versa, it would be hypocritical to argue that knowledge of Guite’s transcendent realm cannot be had simply because it is unlike the “objective realm” which lies below it. Scientific observation, after all, reveals a much-simplified world of reductive particles and atoms that do not directly reveal the forms of trees, mountains, sunsets, or loved ones which we take for granted. Of course, when we zoom out to the level of regular human perception, such things become clear. Yet can we therefore assume that human perception represents the farthest “zoomed-out” limits of reality? Surely not: such an assumption would be merely arbitrary. For if the subatomic level does not directly reveal the reality of a transcendent human experience, then the level of human experience may likewise not directly reveal the reality of a yet greater transcendence. To claim that we may accept the form-filled images of reality which arise from a fundamentally chaotic bedrock of constantly moving particles is to imply that we already function within a transcendent reality. To say, then, that there cannot be yet another transcendent reality which lies beyond our own would be, at the very least, inconsistent (if not hypocritical).

Does this mean, however, that the phenomenal world of our every-day experience is entirely subjective? That it is an unguided and totally subjective construct of wishful thinking? We must surely hope not, for then there could be no foundation of common experience upon which to base our knowledge of reality. Forming any kind of objective epistemology, moreover, becomes a very difficult task in a world without some common reference points. It is here, thankfully, that Guite seems to diverge from the Kantian skeptic, for he still asserts the general truths not only of immanent experience, but also of the transcendent realm which lies beyond it. The fact that everyday observation is already the creative product of our imaginative human lens does not mean that reality is purely subjective, for our imaginative faculty functions in much the same way from person to person, and as such we tend to function within the

same phenomenal reality. Even animals appear to be capable of this basic imaginative creativity; they clearly register the same external stimuli as we do, and as such must experience a very similar external world. It is, rather, the higher form of the imagination, the type which perceives yet an even greater transcendence than the merely phenomenal world, which sets us apart from the animals and which makes us truly human. It is this higher form which Guite wants to place on a level playing field with the empirical and logical tools of enlightenment epistemology - he just wants to characterize the external world of "objective investigation" as a realm which is already more imaginatively formed than many enlightenment thinkers would care to admit.

Part 5: The Key Role of Joy

The arguments of the past few pages have focussed on Guite's view of the imagination as that which both reveals and allows us to tangibly experience the non-immanent realities of aesthetics, morality, and even of phenomenal experience, itself, but let us now more broadly summarize his position. We begin with a tradition in epistemology which acknowledges that language cannot exist without symbol and metaphor. Whenever human knowledge is communicated linguistically (as it normally is), the words must symbolically represent meaning that transcends the circularity of merely linguistic definition. There is, in other words, a non-linguistic reality to which linguistic symbols point. Now, in the very same way, the natural world is a set of symbols which points to realities that lie beyond the merely material world. These realities include moral values, aesthetic experiences, and even glimpses of the heavenly realm. If we want to move beyond our immanent experience of nature in order to access these transcendent realities, the imagination is key, for it fuels the empathy which motivates all moral sentiment, and also allows us to create and/or appreciate the transcendent element of all aesthetic experiences. Without the imagination, in other words, non-immanent realities like moral and aesthetic experience would be very difficult to perceive. If Guite's Kantian picture of experience, moreover, is right, then all aspects of reality, whether transcendent or immanent, are likewise impossible to perceive without the creative and forming power of the imagination's role in general perception.

But even if there were some argument for how reasonable intellect or scientific observation could fully capture the experiential realities of morality and aesthetics (which I thoroughly doubt), there still remains an epistemological function of the imagination that is uniquely its own. I have fairly consistently alluded, throughout this paper, to glimpses of transcendence as those compelling moments when our imaginations long for something even greater than the wonders we have seen on this earth. I have associated these glimpses with what Lewis and Tolkien and MacDonald, whether directly or otherwise, called Joy. And now even Guite, quoting the great father of modern poetry, addresses that same Joy in the following comments:

“Shakespeare pairs the complementary words ‘apprehend’ and ‘comprehend’ alongside the complementary ways of knowing ‘reason and imagination.’ He says that imagination ‘apprehends’ more than cool reason ever ‘comprehends,’ and again that if imagination ‘would but apprehend some joy, it comprehends some bringer of that joy.’” (Guite, 2021, p.21).⁴

If I may be allowed to interpret Guite a little, it would seem he believes that we comprehend immanent reality with the faculty of reason, and that we apprehend transcendent reality with the faculty of imagination. Comprehending, on the one hand, concerns the analytical and objective study of those things which can be physically measured, whereas apprehending, on the other hand, is the tangible experience of realities which lie far beyond such objective measurement. This latter form of tangible experience, however, is intimately linked with knowing via comprehension, for Shakespeare claims that when we imaginatively apprehend something, it often leads to rational comprehension of something else. But that “apprehended something” which leads to a “comprehended something else” is not without a tangible example. Rather, Shakespeare explicitly states that what our imagination apprehends is Joy, and that it leads to comprehension of something which brings that Joy. And so, after all, the Joy which originally captivated my childhood mind may prove to be the most important piece of the imagination’s epistemological puzzle!

⁴ Original words taken from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act 5, Scene 1

When the imagination longs with bittersweet passion for things which neither eye has seen nor ear heard, when it apprehends, for even a few moments, a reality which both lies beyond and also inspires the beauty of our own, we are experiencing Lewis's Joy. It is this sensation, in fact, which so unignobly testifies to a reality that transcends our own. We are perhaps unsurprisingly overcome with joy when we apprehend a glimpse of such a glorious reality, but that joy is almost always accompanied by a strange sorrow when we remember that the reality we apprehend still lies just beyond our reach. The bittersweetness of these competing reactions, however, is exactly what Lewis recounts in his autobiography about Joy:

“there arose at once, almost like heartbreak, the memory of Joy itself, the knowledge that I had once had what I had now lacked for years, that I was returning at last from exile and desert lands to my own country; and the distance of the Twilight of the Gods and the distance of my own past Joy, both unattainable, flowed together into a single, unendurable sense of desire and loss”

(Lewis, 1955, p.73).

He reminds us that although Joy is inescapably desirable, the only thing it shares in common with happiness or pleasure is that anyone who has tasted it will want it again. He even notes that, apart from Joy's incredible desirability, “it might equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief” (Lewis, 1955, p.18). This apparently strange combination of deep joy and bitter longing seems less paradoxical, however, in the context of the human reaction to truly joyful moments. For our very bodies impulsively manifest this strange combination of mingled joy and sorrow at the birth of a child, or the wedding of a beloved, or the salvation of a dear friend: we cry tears of Joy. Could it be that even this basic physiological response was made to reflect the truth of a reality that transcends our own? Could even our physical nature be wired to reveal the imaginative soul that transcends it?

Guite, moreover, makes an argument which is similarly based on physical manifestations of our ability to perceive that which lies beyond material reality. He thinks not only that our bodies manifest the paradox of bittersweet Joy, but that even nature teaches us about a transcendent realm by “imaging that which is beyond nature - that she may be not only a distinct series of opaque objects, but also a language

of symbols” (Guite, 2011). He uses an illustration of the moon to represent how our knowledge of such realities is mediated through nature. The sun, in this Neoplatonic metaphor, stands for the absolute truths which “cannot be apprehended directly by fallen man any more than the naked eye can endure to look directly at the sun” (Guite, 2011, p.155). And yet the moon, in reflecting the sun’s light, makes its otherwise unbearable splendor accessible and even beautiful to the human eye. Though we cannot, of course, see the absolute truths of the sun’s blinding light directly, we can yet perceive them in the mediated form of its lunar reflection. This simple metaphor manifests an idea which forms the core of Guite’s symbolic realism: that even nature manifests glimpses of the transcendent in the immanent. As my own experience of deep Joy and wonder at the beauty of the sunset from Gibraltar would no doubt imply, I am inclined to agree.

Thus, for Guite, the moon provides a helpful example of how even nature exemplifies our ability to perceive realities that lie beyond common experience, for it (or in Guite’s personified terms: she) allows us to see the transcendent *quite literally reflected* in the immanent. We should not be surprised, considering these comments, when it is the beauty of nature that most often leads us into deeply bittersweet experiences of Joy. Though imaginative fairy tales and other creative works of non-literal art are also capable of cultivating its longing, they serve more often as the imagination-cultivating mediums which enable us to experience Joy even in the world we know best. For God did not leave us without the ability to long for Him in our own reality, rather, he gave us the imaginative ability to apprehend Joy right here and right now. And so even though mythopoeic literature provides us with the otherworldly context in which our imaginations can most easily run wild, it only does so with the *telos* of bringing our imaginative Joy, as it were, back down to earth. For perhaps it is earth, after all, which represents the most wonderful Creation imaginable. Might we not, if born in one of the otherworldly contexts which so stimulate our imaginations, be even more stimulated by imagining the reality of earth? Perhaps, as Chesterton once wrote, fairy-tales told that “apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green,” that they “make rivers run with wine only to make us remember,

for one wild moment, that they run with water” (Chesterton, 1908, p.79). It is wonder, after all, that most commonly leads us to Joy.

Whatever the case, such glimpses clearly point us towards some sort of transcendent and glorious reality which lies beyond our own. The imagination, furthermore, must be that which enables us to apprehend those Joy-filled glimpses. But what, exactly, does the apprehension of that Joy lead us to comprehend? Well, according to Guite’s comments on Shakespearean Joy, its apprehension implies that we comprehend some “bringer of that same Joy.” This conclusion, in fact, is very much like the one which Lewis embraces at the end of *Surprised by Joy*. He recounts how, after chasing the mere feeling of Joy for many years, he eventually

“perceived (and this was a wonder of wonders) that just as I had been wrong in supposing that I really desired the Garden of the Hesperides, so also I had been equally wrong in supposing that I desired Joy itself... All the value lay in that of which Joy was the desiring” (Lewis, 1955, p.220). That thing for which Joy was only the desiring, Lewis soon discovered, could be none other than the Divine, Himself. Lewis did not ultimately want merely the desire which is Joy, but rather the transcendent thing which Joy, itself, desired. Joy, then, was not the end Lewis sought, but rather the indication of the end which all things seek, the end which fulfills all true desires, the end which is also the beginning: both alpha and omega. And so, for Lewis, although Joy was primarily a signpost that pointed down the road to God, it was still the signpost which led him to faith. It was his imagination’s apprehension of Joy, moreover, that ultimately revealed God’s existence to Lewis. In his well-known apologetic work, *Mere Christianity*, he subtly references this conclusion with the following comment: “if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world” (Lewis, 1952, p192). In his essay, *The Weight of Glory*, moreover, Lewis concludes that “our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation” (Lewis, 1949, p.7).

If Lewis is right, then it is Joy which teaches us of that other world for which we were made, Joy which teaches us of the author of both that world and this, and ultimately, Joy which leads us back to the God who both made and fulfills its bittersweet longing.

Part 6: Joy and Christianity

Lewis' story of conversion, then, is really a testimony to the transformative power which Joy can have on our perception of reality - on our perception of what is real, and what is therefore true. For it was through the apprehension of Joy, by virtue of an already well-cultivated imagination, that Lewis gained comprehension of Joy's bringer, who is also Joy's fulfiller. In this sense, then, the imagination's ability to apprehend Joy-filled glimpses of the transcendent realm serves as an evangelical witness for all those who do not know God. It would explain, once again, why in Romans Chapter 1, Paul claims that the Godless "are without excuse," for God's "invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." Thus, wherever the Gospel was never brought by Christ's followers, the imagination might still have served as the evangelist of a transcendent reality, though perhaps not as effectively as the human evangelists of Christ, Himself. But there may yet be different standards of salvation for different peoples. Perhaps this is why Lewis writes of the pagan warrior who, after going through the barn door during the last battle in Narnia, meets Aslan: its Christ-like King. The warrior recounts how "He was more terrible than the Flaming Mountain of Lagour, and in beauty he surpassed all that is in the world, even as the rose in bloom surpasses the dust of the desert." The warrior falls at the lion's feet, knowing that since he always worshiped the pagan deity Tash, this must surely be the moment of his death. Aslan, however, bends down and licks the warrior's forehead, saying simply: "Son, thou art welcome." The warrior is confused, and feels he must confess to the great lion that, "Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash." But Aslan merely answers, "Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me," for, as Aslan goes on to clarify, "if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him" (Lewis, 1956, p.102).

For Lewis, then, it would seem that there are some who apprehend a transcendent realm without properly comprehending its name, nor, moreover, the name of its king. Such people, however, may be accepted by the King of that Kingdom even when they did not know His name before death. Thus, it would seem that even without comprehending the special revelation of scripture, one may yet apprehend the general revelation of God's transcendent reality. And if what Lewis says about such people is true, then the imagination - and its Joy-filled longing - is sufficient for even the pagan worshiper to be saved.

We may also note the interesting fact that whereas neither science nor reason can ever certainly prove the existence of God with any single argument or experiment, Joy is not so limited. Instead, it very slowly, as in Lewis's case, calls our souls to recognize that there is more than the merely material world, and sometimes even more than the evaluative world of aesthetic and moral experience. The imagination, then, insofar as it enables us to apprehend experiences of Joy, serves as an epistemological link not only to the realities of morality and aesthetics, but also to the divine glory which transcends it all. Though science and reason may later come up with tests and arguments which support our imaginative convictions, such evidence always relies on a set of presupposed axioms that are ultimately arbitrary and non-rational. There is no set of reasons, in other words, which can prove the most fundamental assumptions upon which all rational knowledge must rely. The experiential evidence provided by our imagination, however, is not of the axiomatically derived sort, but rather of another kind altogether. It relies purely on the personal experience of Joy which cannot, by any argument, be invalidated or taken away. To this point, Guite references St. Anselm's claim that "credo ut intellegam⁵," which means "I believe in order to understand," to highlight how "reason can only proceed from, test and interpret, a position of faith and trust, including trust in reason itself, which precedes it" (Guite, 2011, p.6). In the case of imaginative Joy, however, there is no such demand for trust in something that precedes Joy, itself. Rather, the intuitively compelling knowledge of Joy serves as the womb through which our imaginative apprehension of transcendent realities is born. The foundational imaginative "axiom", in other words, also serves as its apprehended evidence; as such, imaginatively apprehended knowledge does not suffer from

⁵ Original quotation from Anselm's *Proslogion*, 1078

the disconnect of comprehension's knowledge: that separation between presupposed axioms and the rational arguments which follow therefrom. One might even argue that Joy provides the intuitively apprehended knowledge from which rational arguments may then deduce further comprehensions. If this is true, then the link between imagination and reason in discovering God is surely one in which the latter relies upon the former, and not vice versa.

St. Anselm seems to suggest a similar epistemological framework wherein an intuitive faculty of belief is the foundation from which reason derives its axioms. As we saw before, "Credo ut intelligam," means "I believe in order to understand," and implies that our most deeply perceived beliefs (whether intuitive or otherwise) must form the bedrock of knowledge upon which reason stands. But it is clear, nonetheless, that reason and understanding are a necessary and important part of the "whole truth." We would not have a civilized society in which law-enforcing government, life-saving technology, and even beautiful artforms are abundantly accessible without the structure of reason's guidelines. It would seem, then, that God gave us both the perceptual intuitions of imagination and the conceptual logic of reason to *see* the world better than we could have with either faculty alone. Earlier, I used a metaphor from Chesterton to describe the appropriate way to view a true paradox; the quotation becomes useful again in this context: "the sane man's... spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for it" (Chesterton, 1908, p.37). The two different pictures, however, are not contradictory truths in the case of imagination and reason, they are, rather, complementary ways of accessing reality - one perceptive and the other inferential, one apprehended and the other comprehended - which combine to give us an accurate vision of the truth.

And yet, we must recall that we now see but through a glass darkly, and shall one day see face to face. The transcendent glory which lies beyond our immanent experience shall, one day, greet us as tangibly as dawn greets the deep blue darkness of night. It is in the person of Christ, after all, that we find the most incredible example of transcendence being made immanent. It is in the person of Christ, moreover, that the magic of Faerie-land finally enmeshes itself with the solid facts of reason and history. To use Guite's words once again, the story of Christ's incarnation, "in which the Word became flesh and

the creator entered his creation, was itself a healing and reconciliation of the false split between reason and imagination; comprehension and apprehension; history and myth” (Guite, 2021). For even in the Gospel accounts, John’s famous prologue about the Word becoming flesh is a testament to how

“heaven itself, the transcendent and otherwise unknowable love, meaning, being, and personhood of God is bodied forth for all of us in the person and in the flesh of Jesus Christ. He *dwells* with us, he takes on a *local habitation and a name*” (Guite, 2021, p.22).

I do not mean to overuse Guite’s interpretation of events, but I think that this last quotation summarizes the role of Christ in healing our vision of reality better than I ever could. He says:

“I firmly believe, indeed it is the core of my Christian hope, that the veil of our mourning will be lifted, that the dark glass through which we presently see will be brightened, that the persecutions and hatreds that seem so rife in our world are not the core, not the deepest truth about the world, but are a veil or shadow covering something better. In the coming of Christ the veil is lifted, lifted not only from the world but also from our own hearts. In Christ we encounter not only what Chesterton called ‘the buried sunrise of wonder’ but also the long-veiled image of God in all his beauty, truth, and goodness. That hidden image is suddenly revealed, through Christ, deep within ourselves and in all the others whom he sends to meet us, in whom he comes to meet us” (Guite, 2021, p.91).

Thus, it is Christ, himself, who best demonstrates the combination of tangible immanence and glorious transcendence, who gradually re-sews the torn tapestry of reasonable and imaginative knowledge, who tears the fallen veil that originally obscured our view of God asunder, and who turns our weeping into rejoicing - our mundane lives into celebrations of Joy.

Part 7: Conclusion

And so ultimately, whether or not one believes in the Christian incarnation, our “enlightenment objectors” must come to terms with the epistemological significance of the imagination - especially in that most compelling form which we have called Joy. I would hope, at this point, that the imaginative

anecdotes, metaphors, and illustrations offered throughout this paper have served to illustrate the truth of this claim. I must also hope, furthermore, that the occasionally empirical and/or rational methods I used to argue for the imagination's epistemological have not been self-defeating, for I have emphasized from the beginning of this paper that its point is not to undermine the epistemological value of either reason or science. It is, however, sometimes the place of reason to show us its own limitations - and likewise the place of reason to identify what might fill the epistemological gaps it leaves behind. In the article "I'm a philosopher. We can't think our way out of this mess," James K. A. Smith says something to this effect when he quotes the French novelist Marcel Proust.

"I was sensing important parallels with theology and the importance of recognizing what Proust called 'the relative inferiority of the intellect.' And yet, he emphasized, there is a paradox at work here, since 'it is the intellect we must call on to establish this inferiority. Because if intellect does not deserve the crown of crowns, only intellect is able to award it.'" (Smith, 2021, para. 13).

Thus, even with an argument that employed the intellect at multiple pivotal points, I have tried to show that the imagination is yet an equally important faculty which reveals parts of the "whole truth" about reality that neither science nor reason could otherwise comprehend. It is the imaginatively apprehended knowledge of Joy, furthermore, which teaches us to long for the transcendent and heavenly realm of the Divine, and ultimately Joy-filled longing that serves as God's evangelist for those who never heard the Good News about Christ.

But even after utilizing reason so often in a project that defends imagination, I would still like to conclude with some remarks that, in their aesthetic and imaginative quality, manifest the experiential aspect of this project. They come largely from the poetic mouths of authors who more eloquently depict the truths I have been trying to convey - but that is only appropriate. I have found that the experience of defending my case has been very much like the Chestertonian voyage of an explorer who initially thought he discovered an exotic kingdom, only to realize that he had, in fact, come home to the England from which he originally set sail. This is all to say that greatly imaginative thinkers have already discovered, and, moreover, given brilliant defenses of the imagination's epistemological significance, and have done

so in far more glorious detail than I. Thus, although the quotations which I reference in this conclusion may be less argumentatively convincing than many philosophical thinkers prefer, I nonetheless hope this paper may have revealed such imaginatively apprehended knowledge as an important source of truth.

And so, please bear with me as I cite those passages which, in my experience, best facilitate an imaginative apprehension of such truths. Although I have already referenced Lewis at multiple points, I have yet to quote the passage which originally began to shift my perspective. It can be found in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and transpires during Lucy and Edmond's final adventure on the Dawn Treader. In the later stage of the Narnian crew's quest, the protagonists meet an old man in white robes who lives on an island which floats "at the beginning of the world's end." He tells them that he is Ramandu, a retired star, slowly rejuvenating his youth with the fire berries that a small bird places in his mouth every morning. Eustace Scrubb, the recovering bad-natured skeptic from a modernist London family, tells the old man that where he comes from, "a star is just a huge ball of flaming gas." To this rather tactless comment, the retired star patiently replies: "Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of" (Lewis, 1952, p.115). This beautifully imaginative interaction was the first to challenge the reductionism that had long held my imagination back. It began to open my mind to the possibility of a universe that was composed of far more than the merely material: a universe in which the truth about dying stars might transcend a merely scientific analysis of their chemical composition, and in which skeptics like Eustace Scrubb might shed their draconian self-righteousness for the wonder of an awe-struck child.

Later on, in a C.S. Lewis Seminar at Westmont, I was directed to read Lewis' brief essay, *The Weight of Glory*. Upon finishing its eight pages, I felt as though I had discovered the very words which, if any words ever could, captured the feeling of watching the sunset from my bike at the top of Gibraltar. It also explained why, in the original process of composing this project, I felt so hesitant to include any accounts of my own personal experience with Joy. For Lewis writes:

"I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and

Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name” (Lewis, 1949, p.2).

After this brilliant and even convicting description of my hesitation to share, Lewis goes on to articulate that strangely bittersweet longing which both accompanied and outlasted my moment of Joy on the mountaintop, itself:

“For a few minutes we have had the illusion of belonging to that world. Now we wake to find that it is no such thing. We have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken into the dance” (Lewis, 1949, p.6).

It was on account of that very disparity, then, that my experience had not been purely blissful. It is likewise the reason that no experience of true longing is ever so hedonically one-sided, for to long for anything is to admit separation from that very thing, and any separation from that which we most deeply desire must be felt as deepest pain - though its perception is greatest Joy. The imaginative experience of glimpsing Heaven in the beauty of nature, then, is necessarily bittersweet so long as we remain separated from the glory for which we long. A glimpse, after all, is by definition a fleeting thing, and we can only hope that such glimpses are powerful enough to make us long for their fulfillment until the day we finally leave this earth for the next.

Lewis, however, notes that we should not obsess over the beauty of nature to the point of pagan idolatry. He believes, much like Guite, that nature is only an end insofar as it points us towards the reality that transcends it. Thus, to the contrary, Lewis writes:

“For you must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into Nature. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away,

each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects. And in there, in beyond-Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life” (Lewis, 1949, p.7).

It was in reading this passage that I first realized how much greater this Heavenly “beyond-Nature” must be. I had, for a while, thought of God’s glory as roughly equal to that of the most beautiful sunset I had ever seen, or as something which mirrored the quality of my most loving relationships. But Lewis made me realize that the opposite was true. Nature, though indeed surpassingly beautiful, is far from unsurpassingly beautiful. To the contrary, the “splendour which she so fitfully reflects” is of a beauty which so transcends our current experience that even the deep and unspeakable longing of Joy is but a fleeting shadow in comparison. It is earth, after all, that reflects the true glory of Heaven - not Heaven which is a reflection of earth’s. As long as we remain aware of this, we will never be fully satisfied by the great and yet ultimately holographic beauty of a world in which our lives are but short-term pilgrimages on the way to an everlasting feast.

These beautifully poetic passages from Lewis have all impacted my imagination for the better. I find that I am more attuned both to the beauty of nature, and to the glory which lies beyond it. But there are also (and my friends know this better than most) many times when reason takes over and I forget, temporarily, that I am anything more than a syllogistic vending machine. At those times, I wish I could be reminded of Chesterton’s comments on insanity: “The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.” He writes, moreover, that

“To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician that seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits” (Chesterton, 1908, p.20).

It seems to me, in reflecting on my own experience, that Chesterton was right, for whenever I lose track of anything but my own rational assertions, I find that I damage not only my relationships with others, but even my relationship with myself. I become pedantic, dogmatic, defensive, and ultimately blind to the

wisdom of both other people and my own better judgement. It is in recalling times like this that Chesterton's depiction of the human condition hits hardest:

“We are all under the same mental calamity, we have all forgotten our names, we have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense, and rationality and practicality and positivism, only means that for certain dead levels of our life, we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant, we remember that we forget” (Chesterton, 1908, p.80).

When it really comes down to it, I realize that I undertook this project in the hopes of convincing myself that Chesterton was right. I did all that research about the imagination and wrote all these pages about Joy mostly because I wanted that Chestertonian reminder of my own forgetfulness. I suppose, then, that I ultimately undertook this project in the hopes of transforming myself. But how, exactly, did I want to change? And what, moreover, did I want to become? There are all kinds of ways that I could answer those two questions, but most of them are not particularly relevant to the argument of this project. So I will limit myself to this last quotation in the hopes of providing a simple response.

“The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic. He has permitted the twilight. He has always had one foot in earth and the other in fairyland. He has always left himself free to doubt his gods; but (unlike the agnostic of today) free also to believe in them” (Chesterton, 1908, p.37).

I think of this project, then, most fundamentally as the account of my attempt to become “sane.” It represents my desire to perceive reality like the “ordinary mystic,” whose ability to live in the twilight realm between Faerieland and Earth allows him to avoid the madness of purely analytical reason. It serves as a depiction, moreover, of my increasing conviction that reality as revealed without the imagination is hollow, disenchanted, and ultimately devoid of deeper meaning. For I have spent many years in the clutches of a rationalistic insanity. I reasoned, and I argued, and I debated, and I dug myself into all kinds of viciously circular pits. And in the pits of those spuriously rational truths, reality was a cold, hard, and lonely place. My redundant little syllogisms alienated me from everyone, including myself, for I could not

see beyond the thick veil of autonomous reason's totalitarian rule. I look back on the times in my life that were characterized by that blinding reign with both regret and some genuine fear, and, as such, it is now the sanity of confessing my own limited intellect that I seek. For it is ultimately this confession which allows Chesterton's "ordinary man" to remain a sane mystic, and it is likewise the proper integration of both reason and imagination that allows such mystics to remain sane.

For these reasons and at this point, I must submit the case of imagination to my reader's good judgement. I do not claim to have proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the imagination deserves James K. A. Smith's "epistemological crown," but I do hope to have demonstrated that there is both reasonable and intuitive evidence that points to its great significance. I close, then, with this last poem of Lewis's. It serves as a testament to our shared struggle with reconciling pure reason and aesthetic imagination, and it likewise represents our compelling desire that they be, one day, united as one flesh. For Lewis depicts reason as the purest virgin, and imagination as the most beautiful of mothers, and though he did not know it (he wrote this poem six years before his conversion), the union of reason and imagination would come from the womb of a maid who was, indeed, both virgin and mother alike. The poem is called "Reason."

Set on the soul's acropolis the reason stands
 A virgin, arm'd, commercing with celestial light,
 And he who sins against her has defiled his own
 Virginitv: no cleansing makes his garment white;
 So clear is reason. But how dark, imagining,
 Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
 Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
 Is loaded and her pains are long, and her delight.
 Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains
 Demeter, nor rebel against her mother-right.
 Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
 Who make in me a concord of the depth and height?
 Who make imagination's dim exploring touch
 Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
 Then could I truly say, and not deceive,
 Then wholly say, that I BELIEVE.

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