

IS TUMBLR THE NEW NARNIA? A Few Reflections on C.S. Lewis, Romanticism and Their Relevance on Media and Cultural Studies

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Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic and semiotic observations made by the author on the microblogging platform Tumblr, this paper argues that C.S. Lewis' critical literary heritage, particularly his reflections on the psycho-aesthetic, imaginative value of 'Kappa' (hidden / cryptic) elements in fiction, retains its relevance today and can provide analytical insights to contemporary media and cultural analysts. A brief empirically-informed argument will be presented, building on material extracted from a loosely-woven community of 'nostalgic' bloggers. Their collaborative use of hypermedia, including literary citations, illustrations, animations and photographs, will be analysed, in an attempt to understand the Romantically-informed emotional and historiographic construction of 'nostalgic' visual discourse, as represented throughout this specific digital environment.

Keywords: *Narnia, Tumblr, nostalgia, digital environment*

From Tumblr to Narnia (and Back Again) ¹

In a Merton College address given to an Oxford youth literary society in the 1940s, C.S. Lewis described what he referred to as the 'Kappa Element in Romance' — a 'feel', a 'sense', a 'wonder', an 'intrinsicness', a 'mythopoeic resonance' beyond mere excitement or suspense (for a comprehensive commentary thereof, see Schakel, 2002, pp. 53-69; for the original text, see

¹ This article would not have been possible without the generosity of Professor Rodica Albu, of the University of Iași, and the inspiration of Dr Michael Ward, of the University of Oxford, who (the former knowingly, the latter unknowingly) encouraged me to expand upon the topic. Needless to say, I alone bear responsibility for the ensuing heresies.

Lewis, 1947). This deeply atmospheric, somewhat intangible quality, or nuance, or psychological texture is often found in immersive forms of high-quality fiction (think of the work of Tolkien, or indeed of Narnia's popularity). The topic, as both Lewis and Schakel suggest, tends to be neglected by literary critics, who often advance a more traditional (and, we may add, somewhat masculinist or rationalist) approach, favouring analytical expository writing, realism, the 'serious' novel, and so forth (Schakel, p. 53). My goal in this article is to connect some of Lewis' comments on the nature and psychological appeal of 'Story' to a number of expressive digital practices mainly reflected in the construction of, and interactions between, a number of youth microblogs on the social media platform Tumblr.

A decade after its launch in 2007, Tumblr is hosting as of February 2017 over 300 million blogs, with over half a billion monthly visitors. The service, which continues to offer its users an intuitive, minimalistic and flexible interface, is not only an influential social media platform with a palpable influence on mainstream popular culture (Dewey, 2015), but also a resilient 'alternative' niche for a wide range of youth cultural and social activities. Many Tumblr users do indeed seem to benefit from what they consider a more authentic (and, we may add, often anonymous and highly streamlined) communication and content sharing platform, quite different in its techno-social structure to more mainstream entities such as Twitter or Facebook (Rifkin, 2013; Reeve, 2016).

In essence, Tumblr offers an intuitive set of tools that can be used to create, select, redirect and circulate any type of digital content. As is to be expected from a platform that grew almost exponentially for many years in a row, this content is now extremely eclectic, featuring everything from cookery and gardening enthusiasts to massive pornography archives, political commentary, fandom content, and so on. The 'nostalgic' community upon which I draw below is, like many other (dis)similar communities hosted here, a relatively well-insulated enclave, possessive of its own aesthetic, literary and emotional rhythms.

While I have elsewhere introduced the community at length, together with the dilemmas associated with the 'curatorial' nature of its content, including issues related to its (often lack of discernable) origins and copyright, as well as the implications on notions of collaboration, agency and identity online (Munteanu, 2017), I will attempt here to give a brief analysis of two microblogs. Both belong to young women in their early 20s, whom I shall refer to as C. and M. Both make particular use of what I will show to be Lewisian

literary-aesthetic tropes, and both aim to create a certain sense of emotional quality, continuity and style. The example below is illustrative:²



Figure 1 Screenshot of C.'s tumblr

Beyond the blog's immediately apparent 'mood'— C.'s preference for a refined aesthetic, with its tendencies towards natural poignancy, literary embellishments and careful use of colour and style is typical of her entire tumblr ('I like my blog to be simple yet elegant at the same time') — I wish to first emphasize here the scene's underlying Romantic affective ideology. This, I will argue, is an ideology, or a literary-aesthetic perspective, upon which Lewis himself draws when building his 'Story'-related considerations.

Indeed, once liberated from the medical treatises and the battlefields of premodern psychiatry (where nostalgia was highly dangerous and sometimes fatal, an epochal martial disease that signalled the birth pains of modernity itself - Dodman, 2011; Matt, 2011; Boym, 2001, p. 3; Munteanu, 2015, chapter 2; Fritzsche, 2004, *passim*), it is not at all easy to relocate it without 'seeking help from poets and philosophers [...], alternating between critical reflection and storytelling, hoping to grasp the rhythm of longing, its enticements and entrapments' (Boym, 2001, p. xvii). However, as has been remarked, to properly analyse the pervasively evasive, yet 'pivotal nostalgic component' of even just French Romantic literature is a daunting task requiring a dissertation (and, in all probabilities, more than one) in and of itself (Dodman, p. 281).

Suffice to say that, either in poetry, prose or travel memoirs, from Chateaubriand's mournful *René* to Byron's medievalist meditations in *Childe Harold*, from Wordsworth's pastoral disillusionment with urbanisation to Poe's atemporal obsession with loss and death in *Annabel Lee* ('It was many and many a year ago / In a kingdom by the sea') (the nostalgic interweaving of death/loss and beauty/femininity is, of course, a strongly recurring Romantic theme: in

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Nerval's *Cydalises* — 'Où sont nos amoureuses ? Elles sont au tombeau'; in young Dumas' dying heroine in *La Dame aux camellias*; in Chateaubriand's seminal *Atala*; and even in the failed romance between George Sand and Alfred de Muset, which informed Muset's generational *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*; all these (and so many more) made key use of nostalgia's newly found equivocacy (if not of the word itself, which only properly established itself in the popular global vernacular in the 20th century – see also Davis, p. 4). They all mused on human origins and energies, celebrated the force of sentiment in the face of estrangement, while also often becoming engaged in a 'rejection of contemporary society, an experience of loss, a melancholic nostalgia, and a quest for the lost object: such are the chief components of the Romantic vision' (Löwy & Sayre, p. 24). Clearly, the most casual, intuitive of glances over Chateaubriand's journals (his state of perpetual exile, his disenchantment with contemporary history, his highly poetical revival of Catholicism), or Keats' Arthurian *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, or Nerval's deeply melancholic *Sylvie*, as well as the latter's (along with his contemporaries', from Hugo and Lamartine, to Stendhal, Gautier and Dumas) travel memoirs (permeated by ancient ruins and oneiric reconstructions of past historical events, informed by memory as much as by imagination) can all attest to the link between the two — as do, of course, the post factum interpretative efforts of literary and cultural analysts (e.g., Colley, 1998; Thomson, 2012).

For our purposes here, it is actually a phrase written by Chopin in the midst of his affair with Amandine Aurore Lucile Dudevant, or George Sand as she is known to us, that comes close to capturing the spirit of Romantic nostalgia that informs our tumblrs in general, and C.'s screenshot above in particular. Here is the composer's description of the Spanish monastery where he and Amandine planned to retreat, and which Sand herself called 'the most poetic home on earth' (quoted in Goldberg, p. 16). Notice how Chopin invests the image of this locality (he had not even visited it yet) with an interesting catalogue of Romantic motifs: 'I shall probably lodge in a wonderful monastery, the most beautiful situation in the world; sea, mountains, palms, a cemetery, a crusaders' church, ruined mosques, aged trees, thousand year old olives' (*idem*).

Notice, now, *Chopin's Nocturne in C Sharp Minor* playing in the background of C.' website (Figure 1, lower bar). Notice also the surfacing themes, uncanny in their almost literal reflection of the pianist's own words: nature, autumnal and primeval like a Heian haiku; ruins, as evocative as the most piercing passages in Chateaubriand's *René*; even Chopin's aristocratic sensibilities find themselves echoed in the blurred palatial horizons of the screenshot's upper left quadrant.

To Lewis too, 'atmosphere' was of paramount importance. If at one level he identified 'suspense' or 'excitement' as literary facilitators, it was actually the 'quality' of suspense, the fact that the best works lend themselves to multiple

readings, that laid the magic spell upon readers' imagination (Schakel, p. 57). This is reflected in his critique of Hugo's *The Three Musketeers*, which although very much suspenseful and 'exciting', did little to animate a reader such as Lewis:

The total lack of atmosphere repels me. [...] There is no country in the book – save as a storehouse of inns and ambushes. There is no weather. When they cross to London there is no feeling that London differs from Paris. There is not a moment's rest from the 'adventures': one's nose is kept ruthlessly to the grindstone. It all means nothing to me.

(Lewis, 1947, par. 5)

For C., too, intangible atmosphere is a purpose worth fighting for, and she describes her blog as 'eclectic', 'pensive', and 'ethereal', tracing it to her love for 'odd or whimsical things or things that evoke strong emotions'. Elements of subtle yet important psychological differentiation similarly crystalize on M.'s tumblr. She quotes, for example, John Berger's musings on how 'every city has a sex and an age which have nothing to do with demography. Rome is feminine. So is Odessa. London is a teenager, an urchin, and in this hasn't changed since the time of Dickens. Paris, I believe, is a man in his twenties in love with an older woman'. For M., these 'multiple acts of remembering, conjecture and speculation' that create the 'place-worlds' upon which modern identities (and in this case, her website itself) arguably rest (Osborne, p. 4; see also Basso, 1996; Sack, 1997; for a classical exploration of the politics of power that such processes produce in public / nation-building contexts — thus removed from our own focus here — see Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), remind her of her own fascinating city, that of Tbilisi, which through her own words comes alive as 'an older woman who wants to be young'.

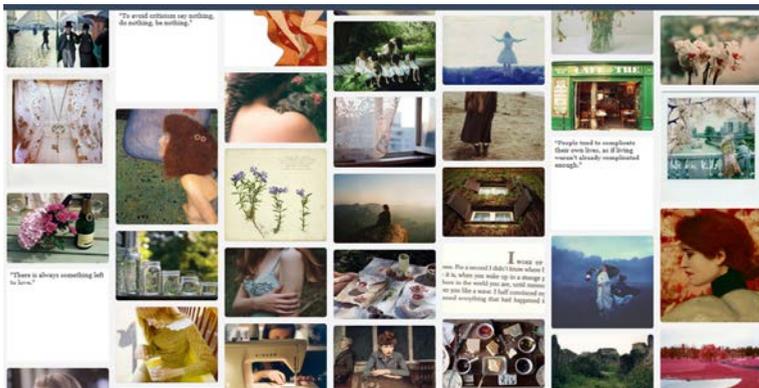


Figure 2 Screenshot of M.'s tumblr archive

As is the case with Narnia (by which I mean its atmospheric blend of fantasy, adventure and imagination, rather than its clunky attempts at Christian allegory), where in order ‘to have atmosphere there must be a feeling, when the children cross over to it, that Narnia differs from England ... [not] a previously undiscovered part of our world, [rather] a world in which our myths exist as realities and our realities become their myths’ (Schakel, pp. 58-59), these tumblrs too are permeated by an ambiguous and complex emotional colouring.

On one side, informed by nostalgia’s literarily rich and paradoxically oscillating affective spectrum, this combines itself with what has been referred to as a ‘prosthetic’/empathetic quality of vicarious memory (see Landsberg, 2002, for an optimistic exploration of this effect in mass media, with a particular focus on cinema). In our case, this allows the bloggers to explore connections that are themselves fragile, elusive and often poetic (‘sadness’, ‘melancholy’, ‘excitement’, ‘wonder’, ‘happiness’, ‘peace’ - their own keywords), merging reverie with hope, innocence with sadness, emotion with poignant reflection — all of it permeated, evermore, by an ineffable sense of loss: ‘My soul is an empty carousel at sunset’, writes Pablo Neruda on M.’s blog (the soul, the empty carousel, the sunset — unadulteratedly Chateaubriand, with just a pinch of post-apocalyptic colour), while Wordsworth more classically replies: ‘In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts bring sad thoughts to the mind’ (*idem*).

On C.’s tumblr, the Fitzgeralds themselves converse (though separated in tumblr space by other fragments — sometimes belonging to friends: ‘The purpose of literature is to turn blood into ink’ – T. S. Eliot), engaging in a doubly nostalgic dialogue. One level is occupied by their own, aching biographies (‘The sadness of the past is with me always. [The things that we have done together and the awful splits that have broken us into war survivals in the past stay like a sort of atmosphere around any house that I inhabit.]’ – F. Scott / ‘Something in me vibrates to a dusky, dreamy smell of dying moons and shadows.’ - Zelda³), while the other is marked by our own perception thereof, haunted by all the myths of the Jazz Age, *Great Gatsby*, love, tragedy, gangsters, Freud, broken bottles and the impossibility of return.

³ In another letter (‘he was a novelist and she was a novelty’, as Ring Lardner famously remarked – Green, p. 1), Zelda Fitzgerald captures nostalgia in one of its most acute contingencies, that of love: ‘the softness of that expansive Alabama night a long long time ago when you invited me to dine ... The night was soft and gray and the trees were feathery in the lamp light and the dim recesses of the pine forest were fragrant with the past, and you said you would come back from no matter where you are. So I said and I will be here waiting. I didn’t quite believe it, but now I do’ (cited in Bryer, pp. 77-78). Unsurprisingly, the emotions have been compared, including in recent psychological studies (Wilson, p. 22): ‘love and nostalgia cannot be separated ... In both love and nostalgia a wave of presence swirls around with a wave of loss’ (Harper, 1966, cited in *idem*).

Furthermore, as Schakel (2002) remarks, and as is similarly the case with our bloggers, another important Lewisian literary trope is ‘the blending of familiar things with [the] unfamiliar ... [or] placing of familiar things in an unfamiliar context’, one typical example of which is conveyed in the passage from England into Narnia, with coats hanging on pegs on one side and snow draping the landscape on the other (p. 59). The same kind of magical realism permeates C.’s tumblr, where veins in marble sit alongside white tea pots, fairy lights burn underneath Anaïs Nin quotes, and Michelangelo shares a block of text with a list of flowers and their corresponding language (white tulips for one-sided love, lemon blossoms for discretion).

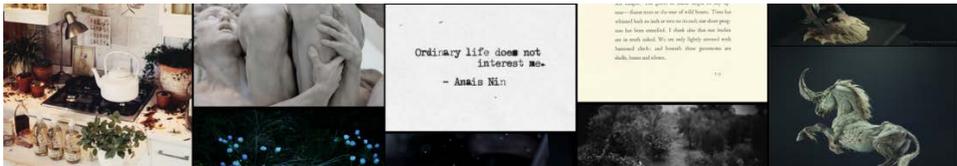


Figure 3 C.’s tumblr (detail)

Narnia also blends the possible with the impossible, its realism hardly separated from utopia:

Narnia is rural, a land of grassy slopes, heathery mountains, plashy glens, mossy caverns and deep forests. It is unspoiled by the side effects of urbanization and industrialization. Lewis’ ideal world has no cities, factories, pollution or poverty. But it takes for granted the availability of many familiar, useful things which require labour, manufacture and trade ... a place of quiet natural beauty where simple wants are filled without the messiness and unpleasantness that usually accompany their fulfilment. (Schakel, p. 60)

So it is here as well. Far from being naïve, passive or misinformed wanderers through an airbrushed past, our bloggers nonetheless entertain the blurry illusions and bittersweet ruminations (reflective, rather than restorative, to cite Svetlana Boym’s essential distinction – p. xviii) typical of their melancholic inclinations. When asked about ‘The Past’ itself, immediate objections related to health standards, prejudice, and slaughter are invoked, and with a sigh delineated from the bloggers’ intrinsic tendencies towards stylistic reverie, centered on the ‘algia, the longing itself’ (Boym, p. xviii), rather than on any sort of teleological, dogmatic or historical chronology (see also Garde-Hansen, p. 134, for a similar point made about the digital archives of the singer Madonna). In other words, the interest is not on the why’s and the where’s, but on the how’s and the hmm’s (pensive, playful, interactive), not on a particular destination but on the journeys themselves, with the homecoming (the Homeric ‘nostos’ contained within nostalgia is another one of those things deserving of several dissertations) being, if

not impossible or irrelevant, then at least perpetually postponed: It is only natural, in this context, to find on these tumblrs mentions on fairy circles and magical histories flanked by quotes from Dorian Gray, illustrious character of a novel that one of our bloggers considers ‘one of the best and most original books in history’, and one from which she quotes often: ‘Can they feel, I wonder, those white silent people we call the dead?’



Figure 4 Screenshot of C.’s tumblr

Yet what comes closest to tying all of these strands together is perhaps their tendency to converge towards that universal impulse to visit or explore ‘strange regions in search of such beauty, awe, or terror as the actual world does not supply ... Myths are imaginative stories ... explorations of matters beyond and above everyday life, concerning origins, endings, aspirations, purpose and meaning’ (Schakel, p. 62). If for Lewis this tied itself in one way or another to religious or dogmatic concerns (be they thinly veiled or held in literary reserve), our bloggers are unconcerned and unconstrained. For C., ambiguous images of skewed horizons, darkened paths into darkened forests and hardly discernable snapshots of lovers long gone, echo the type of reveries one would find in Romantic reflections of Novalis. Note, for example, that on her tumblr everything ‘has to strike [her] as something unique or beautiful or one of a kind [...] they are mainly centered around nature, but anything [she also follows ‘many pagan, nature, and spiritual blogs as well as art and literature blogs’] that truly catches my eye and is something a little different [...], like things that are so odd that they become something beautiful, and things that are so beautiful they become something unusually scary or other worldly [sic]’. And Novalis: ‘by endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with

mysterious aspect[s], the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I romanticize it' (p. 545). In Lewis' words, 'that is one of the functions of art: to present what the narrow and desperately practical perspectives of real life exclude' (1947, par. 11).

It is true that Lewis himself has been described as a Romantic — admittedly, by his earnest Christian apologists, who are quick to tie him down to Reason and God (Piper & Mathis, 2014), thus as far away from the likes of Blake and Shelley as possible. It is, therefore, Lewis the notoriously reluctant convert, who later sacrificed his academic standing among many of his Oxford peers on the altar of evangelical writing (*The Screwtape Letters*, his BBC work, etc.: 'Oxford never forgave him for violating the code of detached irony, for crusading instead of keeping his conversation private' — Hannay Patterson, p. 41.), to whom I should like to pay closer attention, for he seems to share a number of crucial attributes with our young online diarists. This Lewis was a lover of anachronisms, jokingly expressing his 'complete sympathy with the Flat Earth Society, an organization that pretended to believe in the theory of a flat, not spherical earth [as Narnia itself]', or informing the 'Society for the Prevention of Progress, another eccentric British club, that he was in full agreement with their aims. Much of this was dry British humor, but it was not all a jest. He did love the old ways, feeling out of place in the speed and noise of the twentieth century' (*ibidem*, p. 46).

Unsurprisingly, therefore — although the commentator herself (as does the entire, rather unfairly edited collection) seems to believe that this was unflattering to him - 'Lewis lived most of his life not in the modern world, but in the world of his reading and of his imagination. ... He recalls that walking through the countryside of Surrey "gave one the same sort of pleasure that there is in the labyrinthine complexity of Malory or *The Faerie Queene*"' (*ibidem*, p. 43). This is something C. could easily sympathize with, having caught herself for years 'day dreaming or letting my mind wander. Whenever I day dream [sic], it's like I'm in a trance of sorts. ... I feel so at peace when I day dream. I could fall asleep'. Her tumblr becomes an integral part of this, and a 'huge part' at that, giving her 'a huge sense of accomplishment and happiness ... [it's] therapeutic for a person like me who tends to spend quite a bit of time thinking'. M. is the same, referring directly to Umberto Eco when suggesting that she herself feels like 'belong[ing] to a lost generation ... comfortable only in the company of others who are lost and lonely'. Not only is Poe a regular on her blog ('Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night' — cited by M. on November 2nd 2011), but Tolkien himself makes an appearance on her tumblr, thus gifting us with a bridge to the Inklings directly: 'fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape,

and to take as many people with us as we can' (the last time we spoke, M.'s tumblr was being followed by around 100,000 individual escapees).

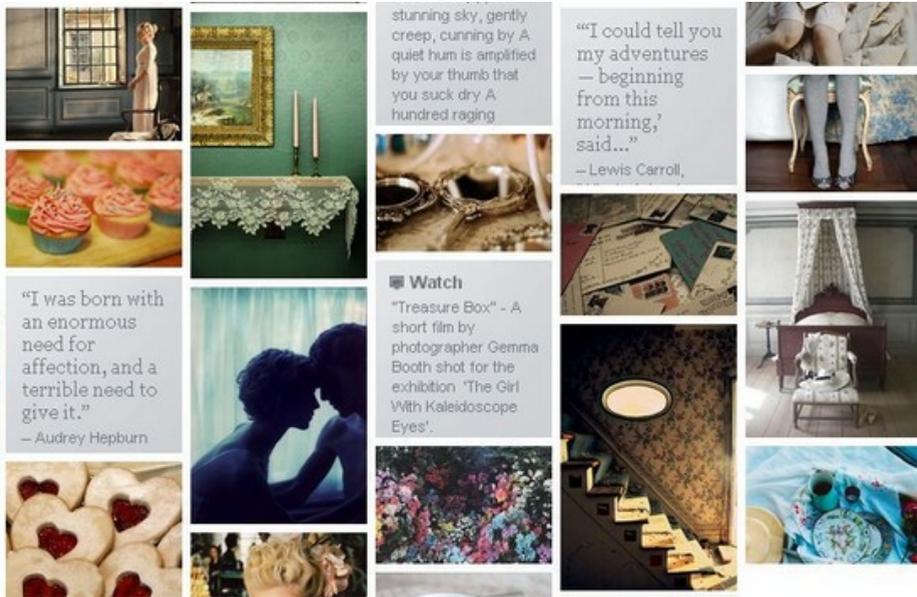


Figure 5 Screenshot of M.'s tumblr

Lewis' literary critique goes even further, and here we are perhaps allowed to glimpse the Romantic Impressionist behind the Christian apologist: a story's mere *plot* becomes irrelevant to him — as indeed it is to our own bloggers, assuming their celebratedly fragmentary collections of shadows and clippings can even sustain such an old-fashioned concept as a literary plot (in this, Tumblr is fundamentally different to literature, and, by being closer to how we actually perceive reality⁴, perhaps even superior to it):

To be stories at all they must be series of events: but it must be understood that this series - -the plot, as we call it -is only really a *net whereby to catch something else*. The real theme may be, and perhaps usually is, something

⁴ Physicist David Bohm speaks of 'an illusory perception that we have of nature shaped by our fragmentary thought. Because we think in a fragmentary way, we see fragments. And this way of seeing leads us to make actual fragments of the world' (cited in Griffin, p. 82). Similarly, Andrei Pleșu (1993) once argued that writing itself is fragment: 'ultimately, all great books, all great speculative constructions are summarizable, reducible to fragment. The fragment allows nothing to be said except what, at a given moment, is being said [Rom. 'se spune'] inside ourselves, without the superfluity of later ingenuity. [...] An island of discourse on the inexhaustible sea of heavenly silence [...], the fragment is a language of supreme honesty' (pp. 86-87).

that has no sequence in it, something other than a process and much more like a state or quality. (Lewis, 1947, par. 26, emphasis added).

This very impulse to capture the evasive ‘state’ or ‘quality’, be it literary, aesthetic or otherwise, is arguably the same energy that prompted Dumas’ fictional travellers and adventurers to never relinquish their quest for *la chastre*, that rarest of birds which, as Thomson (2012) underlines, is not only a symbol of ‘that avid [Romantic] curiosity and irresistible urge to possess all the world and its history [...] but also the symbol, as Gautier saw, of that hunt for the [unattainable] ideal which we all pursue: “le chastre, c’est l’idéal, la chimère, le caprice; [...] dans la vie on ne l’attrape jamais, ou ce jour-là on meurt, car on n’a plus de raison d’être” (p. 386) (‘that ideal, the illusion, the caprice ... we never capture it in life, or that day we die, for we have no more reason to live’).

This may be something as evanescently exuberant as Gautier’s light upon the Sierras,

whose rugged outline enfolds the city from this side, [and] takes on tints that one cannot imagine. All the escarpments, all the summits, turn pink beneath the light, a dazzling pink, ideal, fairy-like, frosted with silver, shot through with iris and opal reflections, which would turn to mud the brightest colors of the palette; tints of mother-of-pearl, transparencies of ruby, veins of agate and gold-spangled glass, such as would shame all the fairy jewellery of the Arabian nights. The valleys, the ravines, the broken surfaces, all the spots not reached by the setting sun, are blue — a blue that might vie with the azure of the sky or of lapis-lazuli or sapphire. The tonal contrast between the light and shade is prodigious, the mountain seems to have put on an immense mantle of changeable silk, sprinkled and ribbed with silver. Little by little the splendid colors fade, they melt into semi-violet, the shadow invades the lower slopes, the light withdraws to the lofty peaks, and when all the plain is in darkness the silver crown of the Sierra still glitters in the sky beneath the farewell kisses of the sun. (translation cited in Shanks, p. 173)

Finally, that Lewis’, and our own bloggers’ aesthetic quests in themselves are deeply reflective of that quintessentially Romantic oscillation between the present and the past, life and death, possibility and impossibility, tombs and angels (see also Berlin, p. 18), comes forth with particular clarity in the epoch’s travel literature, prompting me to quote one critic’s observations in full:

[energy] was mostly experienced as existing *elsewhere*, whether in time, in space, or in the deepest recesses of nature and of human personality. [...] [T]he prize moves and is forever deferred, is always just ahead of, or already behind, the traveller. As Nerval heads East, the creative fire lies ahead of him, in the sun, in religious myths, and in the rites of Greece and Egypt. But in Greece, Pan has died [...], while in Egypt, death reigns and the beneficent sun proves no more than a

mirage [...]. For Stendhal [...] there is more of it in Italy than in Paris ... more in Bologna than in Florence or Milan ... more in Rome than in Milan ... but even in Rome [...] it was already exhausted in around 1700 [...]. Even for Hugo [...], [t]he Rhine of his imagination, its volcanoes, castles, and Rhinegraves, is more the Rhine of its first emergence from the Alps, and of the two Empires, than is the bearer of English steamboats. (Thomson, pp. 386-387)

The adroit intellectual that he was, a younger Lewis might have glimpsed the modern Abyss beyond these temporary permutations — the sense, perhaps, that we are free, but merely to be lost, and that there are no answers beyond the veil except the veil itself. We know how he came to terms with this, but beyond his purely (and dogmatically so) Christian shield and Christian creed, he was one to note how ‘the slow fading of the magic in *The Well at the World's End* is [not] a blemish. It is an image of the truth. Art, indeed, may be expected to do what life cannot do: but so it has done. The bird has escaped us. But it was at least entangled in the net for several chapters. We saw it close and enjoyed the plumage. How many “real lives” have nets that can do as much?’ (Lewis, 1947, par. 29).

So it is with our tumblrs. The scenes, the sounds and the wor(1)ds roll ever forward, or rather sideways, replacing one after the other, never stopping — it is impossible to find that *one* image, or song, or quote that will locate, define and freeze in time that one nostalgia of all and every essence imaginable. Like the shifting mosaics of life itself, there are no clear limits where something (someone, sometime) begins on a tumblr and where it ends, and there is no such thing as the ultimate nostalgic ‘signified’.⁵ It is precisely this psychological instability, the human self’s tendency to constantly realise/develop/search for itself, that I think jumpstarts the young nostalgics’ quest for bringing all of these signifiers together — in the hope that, one day, out of the corner of one’s eye, rolling from the sky in a perfect spiral of impossible beauty, *le chastre* herself will visit, for a second at least, the golden cage with endless bars that our bloggers lovingly put together every day.⁶

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⁵ If only the likes of Jameson or Baudrillard had understood this, how much toil and ink would have been saved!

⁶ This is a quest that informs entire psychological models, from Jung’s alchemically deep reflections to Carl Rogers’ humanistic approach to psychotherapy.

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