ABSTRACT

The True Myth: C.S. Lewis and Remythologization

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The term *myth* often carries with it a negative connotation, especially when it is brought into conversation with widely held religious beliefs. The most common definition of *myth* pertains to outdated convictions held by primitive people. Popular Christian apologist C.S. Lewis, however, entertains a different idea of mythology. For Lewis, myth is used as a descriptive term to identify a genre of literature that is extra-literary. A work that contains mythological elements must draw a reader out of himself or herself and into something greater. In *An Experiment with Criticism*, Lewis explains that a reader, after entering into an experience with myth, may well say to himself or herself, “I shall never escape this. This will never escape me. These images have stuck roots far below the surface of my mind.” I argue that Lewis’ developing understanding of the concept of myth played a key role in three distinct facets of his life: his conversion, his development of Christian theology, and his apologetic fiction writings.

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THE TRUE MYTH: C.S. LEWIS AND REMYTHOLOGIZATION

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DEDICATION

To my beloved grandparents for teaching me what the unconditional love of Christ looks like when lived out over a lifetime. You are, and have always been, my inspiration.

CHAPTER ONE

The Progression of Lewis' Understanding of Myth and Its Impact Upon His Conversion as Seen Through His Personal Articulation

Clive Staples Lewis was born, the youngest child, to Albert and Flora Lewis on November 28, 1898 in Belfast, Ireland. His intellectual journey toward becoming the well-known Christian apologist, popularized today by his works of fiction and theology, is intricate. Lewis himself, in his spiritual autobiography *Surprised By Joy*, admits that he was a most reluctant convert. So, what convinced this enlightened, modernized scholar to ground his faith in something as intellectually "outdated" as Christianity? How did Lewis go from being accused of "chronological snobbery"[1] to a fervent apologist, publishing countless books, letters, and essays on the subject? I argue that a key facet in his conversion, theology, and apologetic literature is his interest and understanding of both Christian and Non-Christian mythology. In Chapter One, I will support this thesis by exploring the way in which Lewis articulates for himself the importance of myth in his early education and how it continued to play a key component in his longing for purpose into his collegiate years. The importance of understanding Christianity in light of myth,

[1] While attending Oxford, Lewis admits that one of his classmates and friends, Owen Barfield, rightly rebuked him about his "snobbery" towards archaic ideas. Clark describes this habit as Lewis' "tendency to accept the latest trends in thought while assuming that what is no longer in vogue must have been discredited." See David G. Clark, *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology* (Maldan: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 21. Lewis speaks similarly against assuming that the "thought of our age is correct" and ignoring the fact that there are indeed doctrines and ideas that " transcend the thought of our own age and are for all time." See C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2012).

and the part that this understanding played in Lewis' conversion, will then be discussed in Chapter Two. Through out the final chapter, Chapter Three, I will analyze Lewis' own writings on the topic of mythology and the process of remythologization. The final chapter will use Lewis' own criteria for myth and his understanding of theology, as explained in the first two chapters, and apply these criteria to Lewis' retelling of the pagan myth of Cupid and Psyche, in *Till We Have Faces*. Overall, I wish to convey how important the concept of myth, and the development of Lewis' understanding of myth, is to the intellectual and spiritual development of C.S. Lewis, along with explaining Lewis' employment of remythologization and how this concept is present in his own writings.

In the late 1800's, infant life expectancy in Belfast was approximately nine years due to prevailing diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough, cholera, scarlet fever, and typhoid.[2] Flora Lewis feared losing her two young sons to illness and insisted that Jack[3] and Warren remain inside when it rained, which was about two-thirds of the year. Being confined to their house, the boys spent vast amounts of time with their intellectual parents, whom Lewis describes as "bookish or clever people."[4] His mother held a B.A. in mathematics from Queens College in Belfast, and his father was a self-made man who joined a partnership in a firm that produced boilers and ships. While Albert Lewis was indeed successful, his son wondered if he would not have been happier pursuing a career

[2] Janet and Geoff Benge, *C.S. Lewis: Master Storyteller* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1958).

[3] Around the age of four, Lewis insisted that his family call him Jack after the dear family dog, Jacksie, was run over by a car. It is widely believed that his tutor W.T. Kirkpatrick, affectionately called "the Great Knock" by Lewis, was the only one to who regularly called him Clive.

[4] C.S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 4.

in politics, for this seemed to be his main interest. Lewis seems to stress that his parents had little to do with his love of romantic literature, myth, and adventure. His father was fond of political novels, poetry,[5] and humor. He recalls that, "there was no copy either of Keats or Shelly in the house."[6] He hypothesizes that neither one of his parents would have shown the slightest interest in the kind of works that would later capture the mind of Lewis. In his words, "neither had ever listened for the horns of elfland" as he soon would.[7] Both boys were never particularly good as sports, perhaps because of a birth defect that the brothers shared which omitted a joint in their thumbs. They therefore spent the majority of their time reading, drawing, and developing imaginary worlds. Lewis describes this time of his life as "living almost entirely in my imagination."[8] While the boys were hard at work developing maps and historiography for their created worlds, Lewis notes that something was missing from their early creations: beauty. He remarks that his creation "was full of interest, bustle, humor, and character; but there was no poetry, even no romance in it. It was almost astonishingly prosaic."[9] Lewis describes these early works as wholly different from Narnia, except for the anthropomorphic animals. The wonder and beauty that characterizes Narnia had not yet developed in the imagination of young Lewis, nor did he even acknowledge such ways of thinking as

[5] "…provided it had elements of rhetoric or pathos, or both." See *Surprised by Joy*, 4.

[6] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 5.

[7] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 5.

[8] David G. Clark, *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 16.

[9] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 15.

valuable. In fact, he classifies the entirety of his childhood as characterized by beauty's absence. Lewis goes on to say that, "if aesthetic experiences were rare, religious experiences did not occur at all."[10] The only things that foreshadowed the young man's future quest for purpose, ultimately fulfilled in his Christian faith, that could be seen in his childhood were: an experience of beauty he had while delighting in a small toy garden created by his brother on the top of a biscuit tin, and the unattainable "Green Hills" that the boys could see from their nursery window. Save for these two glimpses of what Lewis will later label joy,[11] or longing for the numinous (a feeling that would later play a key role in his identification of myth later in his life), his early childhood was solely filled with rationality and intellectualism as presented through his teachers and parents. During his early years, tutors were brought into the home, the earliest being a governess name Miss Harper. However, Flora began teaching both of her sons Greek, French, Latin, and math as early as ten years of age. With this early exposure to ancient languages came Lewis' first exposure to pagan myth, primarily through translation exercises. At this point

[10] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 7.

[11] This term joy is essential to understanding Lewis' intellectual and spiritual development, however, an exact definition is quite illusive. In his autobiography, he takes special pains to distinguish this term from happiness or pleasure. In fact, he says that it has only one characteristic in common with happiness or pleasure, the "fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again." Aside from this, however, Lewis says, "it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want." He says that it is a sensation, but before he even knew what he desired, the desire vanished, leaving only the "sense of incalculable importance" behind. The best summary I can give for the term is that is accompanies a deep longing for something greater that is never in our power to reach, that is of course not to say that it is unreachable.

in his life, Lewis would have articulated a definition of myth that largely matched that of the popular sense: "a fabricated untruth."[12]

During his youth, these fabricated untruths began to unsettle Lewis, who was caught between his love of imagination and an unswerving loyalty to a purely rationalist understanding of the world around him. Myth was, if the reader will allow the phrase, Lewis' intellectual "guilty pleasure." He "dismissed myths as primitive superstition" but could never avoid the romantic pull that they created in his emotions. Lewis saw mythology strictly as lies, but as he described to his colleague and friend J.R.R. Tolkien later in life, they were "lies breathed in silver."[13] His introduction to romantic and poetic literature continued to challenge this dichotomy. He recounts his first readings of Longfellow's *Saga of Kin Olaf*. While scanning through the book, knowing nothing about the characters, he came across a passage that awakened feelings of joy. He describes the experience thus:

> "I was uplifted in huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be describe and then, as in the other examples, found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it."[14] The readings of these works created in him, quite against his intellectual "better" judgment, "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction."[15]

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[12] Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 55.

[13] J. R. R. Tolkien's recollection of an early Lewis describing the fashioning of fairy-stories: J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories." *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 54.

[14] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 17.

[15] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 17.

While Lewis struggled against these emotions, attempting to be consoled and sobered through the enlightened side of the argument, it is important to understand that this enlightened view was not the only articulation of myth or literature on the scholarly playing field in the late 19th and early 20th century. English romantic poets, such as John Keats, and German Romanticism portrayed an entirely different understanding of archaic myth. In this line of intellectual discovery, myth was seen "as a means of recovering and renewing a deeper mode of engagement with fundamental human questions, yearnings, and imaginative questings."[16] By participating in the works of various German romantic authors, specifically that of Richard Wagner, Lewis became further enchanted by the power of myth to lay hold of his emotions and take him into an experience of sin and redemption that could not be articulated in abstract intellectual dialogue. Lewis' perception of the world around him continued to deepen into a seemingly unsolvable paradox. He describes this time of confusion thus: "Nearly all that I believed to be real I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless."[17] Historian Alister E. McGrath describes this dichotomy as an "unstable intellectual equilibrium- a resting place but not a resolution."[18]

Lewis began boarding school in England in 1908. His experience there was so terrible that he refuses to name the establishment. He postulates that the head master, whom the children called Oldie, was believed to be mentally ill by all, including his family. For rhetorical purposes, Lewis simply refers to this location as a "concentration

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[16] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 56.

[17] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 197.

[18] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 57.

camp" that completely lacked any educational value, save geometry, and excerpts from a grammar book. Lewis states that during his tenure there, his imagination declined and was nearly lost altogether. The school lacked a library; therefore Lewis partook in the books that were available, which he describes as "twaddling school stories,"[19] providing pleasure not from literary excellence or his coveted feeling of joy, but through vicarious adventures with petty heroes. This is also where he began reading works focused on the ancient world, though the works were mostly "bad books" sought for only a morbid erotic taste of "sandals, temples, togas, slaves, emperors, galleys, and amphitheaters."[20] In the summer of 1910, to Lewis' great pleasure, Oldie's school closed. Lewis was then enrolled in an Irish boarding school called Campbell College. However, he did not spend long at this school due to illness. The one great contribution that Lewis attributes to Campbell in his intellectual journey is the reading of *Sohrah and Rustum.* This is a poem with vast Homeric undertones and allusions. While Lewis admits that he did not understand much of these allusions, he remembers his experience with the poem as wet fog that "wrapped me round an exquisite, silvery coolness, a delightful quality of distance and calm, a grave melancholy."[21] He found himself enchanted and, as he recalls, when he later discovered the works of Homer, it returned him to this poem and this feelings, fueling his hunger for ancient myth and the experience that accompanied it all the more. Once Lewis fell ill, he was returned home. During his period of illness, stuck at home with only his father, hired help, and shelves full of books, he discovered his love for

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[19] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 35.

[20] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 35.

[21] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 53.

fairytales. He describes this draw towards this genre, which was ironically completely absent from his early childhood, as a spell being cast upon him. He was particularly enchanted by the stories of dwarves, and recalls that his obsession led him close to hallucination as he seemed almost to visualize these short earthmen as he roamed the gardens surrounding his father's estate.

After his illness in 1911, Lewis was finally old enough to attend the preparatory academy that his brother attended at Wyvern college. This school had less that twelve boarders, which allowed individualized attention for each student. The headmaster focused on Lewis' strengths in Latin and English literature and began to prepare him for a scholarship at the university. Ironically, as great of an impact as Wyvern had on Lewis' education, this is where Lewis completely abandoned his faith. While entertaining ideas of the occult, Lewis describes this period as one of "spiritual lust" that made everything else in life seemed unimportant. What was once blind or assumed belief faded into speculation and eventually developed into apostasy.[22] While doubts arose from various sources, one of the most alluring was from classic literature, especially that of Virgil. As he read these texts he became aware that all of his teachers seemed to take for granted the premise that ancient paganism was made of sheer illusion. Lewis, on the other hand, had a problem with blindly assuming that hundreds of other religions were to be understood as mere illusions. He blatantly saw echoes of paganism in Christianity and numerous

[22] Because of the great "work" that Lewis associated with the Christian faith, prayer in particular, he describes himself as subconsciously looking for a way out. When he first dabbled in the occult and then later in intellectual denial of religious truth altogether, he describes himself as experiencing a great sense of relief. In denying and leaving his Christian roots, Lewis was able to forfeit both virtue and the stress associated with attempting to cultivate "true religion". He describes this process as one lacking any sense of loss but overwhelming relief. See chapter VI in *Surprised by Joy*.

stories that prefigured Christ: how was it that these were false and his own Christian Protestantism was the only source of truth? Lewis came to the conclusion that "religion in general, though utterly false, was a natural growth, a kind of endemic nonsense into which humanity tended to blunder."[23]

While this time was completely detrimental to his religion, it was a place of incomparable growth for his intellect. In fact, he describes this time as a kind of personal renaissance. It is during this period at Wyvern that shifted his focus exclusively on myth, particularly Norse myths. Through mythology, he reawakened the lost sense of joy, and was once again engulfed by "pure Northernness." He described this pursuit as greater than that of any religion, though he admitted that this was because "it contained elements which my religion ought to have contained and did not."[24] While it was not a religion, it did contain the adoration and self-abandonment that he would later direct towards a renewed Christianity. He described a kind of worship he felt towards these Norse gods, though he never believed them to be true, that was wholly missing for his interaction with Christianity. In fact, he credits this time of false worship with developing in him a capacity for worship that he would later need when he would returned to his Christian roots. Lewis soon discovered problems with this new renaissance and reawakening of joy. First of all, he did receive "stabs" of joy as he submerged himself into a pursuit of Norse mythology, but he slowly became aware of the fact that these stabs became increasingly less intense and farther and farther apart. Secondly, the overwhelming longing that was a part of this joy was insatiable and constantly "implied the absence of

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[23] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 63.

[24] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 76.

its object."[25] The pressure of desire for an object that was nowhere to be found constantly remained. Furthermore, Lewis began to realize that it was a "thrill" that could only be found when one was not looking for it, or paying any attention to it. It came "only when your whole attention and desire are fixed on something else."[26] He found that far more often than he experienced joy, he scared it away with "greedy impatience" or "instantly destroyed it by introspection". During this period, Lewis found himself attempting to combine materialism and spiritual philosophy. While he longed for the comforts of something rational, he also found it hard to reduce the seeming beauty around him to mere accident. To fully embrace materialism would "relegate everything one valued to the world of mirage."[27] A decisive point for Lewis came when he found himself exposed to the work of George MacDonald's fantasy novel *Phantastes*. This work was unique in the way that it intellectually seemed to disarm Lewis, allowing him to "trespass into the rationally forbidden, tasting its fruits before he realized the enormity of what he had done."[28] Lewis claims that the imagery was similar enough to that of other stories, which he had been exposed to before to lure him in without perceiving the change. He described this experience as dying in an old country and suddenly reawaking in a new one. "For in one sense the new country was exactly like the old… But in another sense all was changed."[29] What was different in this work was not the images, but the exposure to what

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[25] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy,* 82.

[26] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy, 168.*

[27] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy, 173.*

[28] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 57.

[29] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy, 179.*

Lewis describes as Holiness. Through the illusion of familiar imagery he heard the cries of the sirens tempting him to Joy, but "for the first time," Lewis explains, "…[they] sounded like the voice of my mother or my nurse." The voice that had once spoken from a distance appeared personal and close. Never had a story so intimately intertwined itself with joy, yet it was wholly discernable; there was no danger of confusing the two. This holiness also had a peculiar effect on the surrounding world. Before MacDonald's work, joy had always shown reality to be an impoverished desert. But this work cast light from its pages upon the common things of the world, transforming them in its light. Lewis describes the effects of *Phantastes* as the baptism of his imagination; a key step leading to his conversion.

In 1916 Lewis accepted a scholarship to University College, Oxford to study classics. Providentially, Oxford had been home to rigorous study and debate on the nature of myth that continued to develop into the time of Lewis' tenure. In the late 1800s, a professor by the name of Max Muller accepted a position at Oxford as Professor of Comparative Philology. Muller focused on the origin of myth. After the Great War, Clement C. J. Webb, a tutor at Magdalen College continued Muller's theme, and studied the purpose of mythology. He expressed that mythology seemed to be a story that served as a kind of history. He did not claim that myth portrayed historical truth, but that it did express something similar and should not be as readily dismissed as many were accustomed to doing during this time period. In 1925, J.R.R. Tolkien accepted the position at Oxford as the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon. He is the scholar responsible for turning Oxford's interest in mythology away from historical roots and purposes, to a more literary study of significance and function. Tolkien studied and

classified the qualities of mythology, specifically those related to fairy-stories, according to how they related and impacted the reader. Tolkien defined myth as a story that suggests *Sehsucht,* a sense of the numinous. He argued that myth, and the continued development of myth, was necessary to pass down this *Sehsucht* to future generations. Bringing much of his Catholic faith into his intellectual argument, he claimed that part of humanity's talent that resulted from being made in the *imago Dei* was the ability to participate in a kind of pseudo-creation. He describes this further in his work "Fairy Stories" in which he claims that "we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker."[30] In other words, it makes sense that humanity is able to create stories that allow a glimpse into the divine realm; it is in our created nature to do so. Therefore, we should not be surprised if we find, as Lewis certainly did, that "pagan myths illicit wonder and longing." Tolkien argues that they are meant to, and by doing so create "both an appetite and an opening for the discovery of the deeper truth that underlies all truth."[31]

After the Great War, in 1919, Lewis returned full force to his studies at Oxford. While focusing his intellectual energy on classics, he began to question the traditional definition of myth. It seemed that the Greek term *mythos*, at least for those who coined the term, meant not a falsehood but the revealing of human origin through narrative. In other words, to the Greeks myth was not a particular kind of story, "but any sort of

[30] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 56.

[31] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 59.

story."[32] It is only when exposed to the Greek naturalistic alternatives of philosophy and history that the term *mythos* began to lose this early interpretation and power.

In 1922, Lewis went on to study English literature at Oxford. It is during this time that he began to "reflect on the quality of literary representations of reality." In doing so, he concluded that modernist writers seemed to lack depth and appeared too simple, presenting an outlook that did not seem to be able to confront the "roughness and density of life." However, Christian works, specifically Dante's *Divine Comedy*, satisfied Lewis' search for purpose and depth far better. In opposition to the writing of H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw, the writings of Christian poets seemed, for Lewis, more able to present "the very quality of life as we actually live it." He found that the only other authors that held a candle to the Christians were the Romantics, and even they, Lewis claimed "were dangerously tinged with something like religion, even at times with Christianity."[33]

As time progressed at Oxford, Lewis continued to chase this feeling of joy that he found present in Christian literature and the lives of his Christian friends. In 1929, Lewis began to entertain the idea of theism, and started attending chapel services in October of 1930. It seems, according to a letter that Lewis wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves,[34] that

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[32] C.S. Lewis, *An Experiement in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 40.

[33] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy, 214.*

[34] Greeves is a lifelong friend of Lewis, they met while he lived in Belfast with his father. In 1914 the two neighbors discovered that they shared a similar love for Norse mythology. According to *The C.S. Lewis' Readers Encyclopedia*, Lewis' wrote more letters to Greeves than to anyone else. This correspondence began in their youth and continued up until a few months prior to Lewis' death. See *Surprise by Joy, They Stand Together, or The C.S. Lewis' Readers Encyclopedia*.

the main issue holding him back from Christianity was an understanding of redemption. He wrote that this particular doctrine puzzled him, because he did not understand "in what sense the life and death of Christ 'saved' or 'opened salvation to' the world."[35] It appears that this particular complication was answered for him in a night conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson on Saturday September 19, 1931. Tolkien stressed upon Lewis that myths were not to be understood as historical accounts, but that they did contain profound meaning that was beyond the grasp of simple articulation and language. These narratives and stories served the purpose of opening up a larger portrait of reality to their readers. Applying these ideas to the gospels, Lewis was able to understand that salvation and redemption was not something that was meant to be understood or articulated, but that these themes were described in mythical form because the depth of the truth that they contained was simply too complicated for abstract enunciation. Tolkien encouraged Lewis to see in the gospels the truths that had enchanted him in pagan mythology, and how these stories had allowed him a glimpse into the greater truth that the gospels conveyed. Shorter than two weeks after his initial letter conversion, Lewis wrote to Greeves to tell him that he had "passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ."[36] Thus, a great apologist was born.

At this point it may seem strange that the understanding of myth would draw Lewis into a concrete, even historical, belief in the gospels of Christianity. Further explanation into his thought process is therefore needed. As in his childhood, Lewis

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[35] C.S Lewis, *Collected Letters*, ed. Walter Hoooper, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishing, 2004), 976.

[36] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 974.

continued to see the stories of Christ as myth, the difference now being that he also saw them as true. His expanded definition of mythos lead him to the reality that the stories of Christ as presented in scripture serve the function of myth: that is, to convey deeper meanings of truth than can be articulated in abstract notions and provide the reader with a sense of wonder and the numinous, but that they had also actually happened. The gospels were like myths, but they were the further incarnation of mythical truth into history. He explains his reasoning to Reeves:

> "The Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things'. Therefore, it is true, not in the sense of being a 'description' of God…but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties."[37]

The distinction, therefore, is that pagan mythology is the myth of man, while Christianity is the myth of God. Lewis' allegorical account of his conversion, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, expresses this idea as such: "Child, if you will, it is mythology. It is but truth, not fact: an image, not the very real. But then it is My mythology… this is my inventing, this is the veil under which I have chose to appear even from the first until now. For this end I made your senses and for this end your imagination, that you might see My face and live."[38]

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[37] C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 977.

[38] C.S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), 171.

CHAPTER TWO

The Consequences of a Mythical Understanding on Lewis' Theology

Description of Necessary Terms and Ideas

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the development of the understanding of myth in the life of C.S. Lewis played an integral part in his understanding of Christianity and ultimately his conversion. In this next chapter, I wish to explore the impact that this thought had on his understanding of Christian theology. I propose that Lewis' interest and intellectual understanding of myth resulted in three distinct ideas that must be taken into account when one attempts to progress through Lewis' articulation of theology in general. The first idea stems from Lewis' understanding that Non-Christian mythology is an imperfect grasping towards the truth ultimately fulfilled in the myth that entered history: Christianity. This idea has a particular impact on the way Lewis views other religions and soteriology. Secondly, the central role that myth plays in communicating the Christian faith leads Lewis to conclude that the reality portrayed through myth is of greater importance than human interpreted doctrine. While both doctrine and exposition of theology certainly play a role in Lewis' faith, he argues that these methods are mere interpretations of divine narrative and must be used as aid for understanding truth rather than understood as truth itself. Lastly, Lewis critiques the modern strategy of demytholization as it relates to scripture. Lewis argues that God chose to communicate through the narrative of scripture and that to reduce scripture to abstract ideas absent from narrative is to forfeit an extensive amount of depth and understanding. For Lewis, it

is essential that Christian ideas, values, or morality cannot be dethatched from the actual narrative of Christ. But, before these three concepts are explored, it is important first to discuss Lewis' understanding and articulation of the term *myth*. A clear understanding of what exactly he means by the term myth will better help us to understand how these later ideas form a fundamental part of his theological understanding.

Lewis' most detailed analysis of myth appears in his work *An Experiment in Criticism*. In this short volume, Lewis sets out to reinvent the way literature is judged on its head. Instead of following the typical pattern of assessing a book's literary merit by the way the work is written, Lewis attempts an experiment in which books are judged by the kind of reading they invite. In other words, instead of claiming that tabloids are bad reading because of their lowbrow vocabulary and shallow themes, Lewis argues that an analysis of the kind of reading tabloids promotes is imperative if one is accurately to articulate their measure of literary worth. If such a tabloid renders a simple, shallow way of reading, then the work in itself is simple and shallow. It should be noted that this particular way of literary assessment is not important for understanding Lewis' concept of myth. This concept of literary assessment is important to discuss, however, because Lewis' concept of myth is the cornerstone of what is meant by a work that invites good reading. This, however, is where confusion arises. Myth, for Lewis, contains very distinct characteristics, but not everything that anthropologists would classify as myth holds to these characteristics and there are certain modern stories that no anthropologist would classify as myth that hold distinct mythical qualities according to Lewis' definition. It is essential, then, to discuss the specific characteristics that Lewis refers to when he labels a story as mythical.

The first quality that must be present in order for Lewis to judge a particular work as mythical is the extra-literary component. That is, despite the way the story is written, be it in the most beautiful prose, complicated meter, or simple elementary synopsis, the work must hold within itself depth that creates a kind of hold on the reader. This element is wholly absent from stories that embody mere action or petty gossip. A story of extra-literary quality can be boiled down to its bare bones, removing all the "glitz" of language and still remain touching. It is the difference between a story of adventure and a story of purpose; one extends beyond itself into the life of the reader while the other merely entertains. This component can be seen in Lewis' reaction to George McDonald's work *Phantastes* described in Chapter One. *Phantastes* seemed to cast a spell on the world surrounding Lewis, transforming common things into elements of joy. It is to this effect that Lewis is referring when he describes the extra-literary component of myth.

Secondly, myth should render pleasures independent of "usual narrative attractions as suspense or surprise."[1] In fact, Lewis admits that occasionally, a myth may seem to be lacking a narrative storyline all together. More than a narration, myth is an "object of contemplation," that which is almost an object itself. It works on a reader less like a story, and more by means of "its particular flavor or quality rather as a smell or a chord does."[2] Using an example from Lewis' own work, the idea of the great lion Aslan, wild and fierce yet entirely good, contains the quality of myth. Aslan takes on a kind of

[1] C.S. Lewis, *An Experiement in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 43.

[2] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism,* 43.

object form that is independent of the narration that he finds himself in. The mere form of Aslan compels the mind and heart of the reader.

The third quality of myth is the lack of human sympathy. The reader is quite unlikely to project him or herself on the characters of the story. The characters become mere components of the story, components moving in a world entirely apart from our own. Lewis articulates this idea as follows: "The story of Orpheus makes us sad; but we are sorry for all men rather than vividly sympathetic with him…"[3] It is not the characters themselves who connect intimately with the readers but the ideas that the characters embody. The fourth quality is simple: Lewis' myth will always contain an element of fantasy. That is, there will be impossibilities and preternatural concepts and ideas at work within the story.[4] The fifth quality of myth, for Lewis, is its *gravity*. A myth may possess elements of humor, tragedy, or joy, but as a whole it is always grave. Lewis rules out the idea of a comic myth altogether.

The final quality of myth is that it inspires awe. A myth will always communicate something great that the mind must struggle to conceptualize. Lewis remarks that there will be the temptation for readers to give allegorical explanations to mythical readings, but that "the myth itself continues to feel more important than they."[5] In other words, myth captures something that is unable to be adequately transferred into exposition or

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[3] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism,* 44.

[4] It is important that the reader not confuse the term "preternatural" with the term "supernatural". Preternatural events are outside of the realm of understanding but are assumed to have natural explanations that are simply unknown. Supernatural events, on the other hand, are entirely mysterious and without cause.

[5] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 44.

understood fully through introspection. The ideas communicated through myth are too large for words to communicate plainly outside the medium of mythology.

At this point, the attentive reader will have noticed the subjectivity that surrounds Lewis' definition of myth. What seems awe-inspiring to one person may not seem so to another, or what captures the mind's attention for one person may merely appear as a form of entertainment to the other. For this reason, Lewis is not shy in admitting that it is a very real possibility that the same work may qualify as a myth for one person and not for another. Lewis warns the reader that he or she "must never assume that we know exactly what is happening when anyone else reads a book."[6] This understanding, then, calls for a distinction between readers. Lewis chooses the term *unliterary* and literary when attempting to distinguish between two sorts of readers. The first, the *unliterary*, are those who participate in "simple" reading. These kinds of people read almost exclusively for the action within a story. They prefer "narratives in which the verbal element is reduced to a minimum"[7] and the constant flow of events. A narrative is read, not for a deeper meaning, but for the entertainment that is found in hearing what occurs. These event-mongers pay little attention to word choice, style, or meter and often, though not always, even prefer books that the literary would consider poorly written, filled with cliché, so that the reader need not spend time thinking about what the author is attempting to communicate. That is not to say that the reader dislikes style—those who avoid stylistic writing altogether Lewis' classifies as the antiliteraly—but that the unliterary merely wish for the style not to interfere with the flow of events. It is also the trait of the

[6] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 48.

[7] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 30.

unliterary that they will rarely reread a work. They read to fulfill a vicarious pleasure through the lives of the characters and once this desire has been met, they are satisfied. In light of this definition, Lewis does wish to make the distinction that it is not this particular way of reading a story that makes the unliterary poor readers, but that they "enjoy them in no other way. Not what they have but what they lack cuts them off from the fullness of literary experience."[8] Those that lack the ability to engage with a text in any other way are cut off entirely from the deeper enjoyment of myth that Lewis attempts to communicate. Not *all* literary people are able to develop such a taste either, but *no one* who falls within the realm of unliterary will be able to participate in the transcendent element of myth. Lewis describe the distinction as such: the unliterary person will read a story that contains mythological elements and wonder "Will the hero escape?" and the literary person who has a taste for myth will read the same story and exclaim, "I shall never escape this. This will never escape me. These images have stuck roots far below the surface of my mind."[9]

The Consequences of a Mythical Understanding on Lewis' Theology

With this perspective on Lewis' definition of myth and the impact myth has made on his intellectual development in mind, it is now time to turn to the consequences that this understanding has had on his theology. In other words, this section's purpose is to pinpoint the places of interaction between myth and theology in Lewis' articulation of the Christian faith. Most specifically, I wish to show how Lewis' understanding of myth illuminates his articulation of Christianity. As mentioned before, I propose three areas of

[8] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 38.

[9] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 48.

interaction. These three topics will now be discussed in detail. I wish not only to explain these ideas but also to connect them with the larger theological conversation of Church tradition and to identify how they are presented by Lewis in his body of writings.

Consequence #1: Non-Christian myth in not false, but an imperfect grasping towards the truth that Christianity illuminates fully

A huge impediment to Lewis' conversion was his hesitation to pronounce the story of Christianity, and the religion that it produced, as the only source of truth. While attending Wyvern, he first began reading classical literature. Especially in Virgil, Lewis identified a massive amount of religious ideas. His instructors, Lewis writes, "took if for granted from the outset that these religious ideas were sheer illusion."[10] The proposal seemed to be that religious ideas, in their entirety as presented throughout history, were simply ludicrous, with the exception of Christianity, which was taught as "exactly true."[11] Lewis was taught that to maintain Christian belief was to maintain the idea that, "in the midst of thousands of such religions stood our own, the thousand and first labeled True."[12] Lewis simply could not stomach this idea. Observation had taught him that Christianity had much in common with the religious ideas of Virgil, and plenty of other thinkers and writers across the scope of history. In the climactic conversation between Lewis, Tolkien, and Dyson, in the fall of 1931, Tolkien offered a way for Lewis to reconcile this conflict. It is not that Christianity is to be understood as the only mythological narrative that offers the reader the ability to transcend themselves into a

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[10] Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 62.

[11] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism,* 62.

[12] Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism,*, 63.

larger understanding of the deeper truths of reality, but that Christianity must be understood as the fulfillment of all previous attempts. In other words, Tolkien held that there were absolutely echoes of the Christian message in other mythological stories through out history, but that these stories failed to capture entirely the message of Christ that was the ultimate realization of all mythological elements. McGrath describes this understanding thus: "Christianity tells a true story about humanity, which makes sense of all the stories that humanity tells about itself."[13] Through this understanding, Lewis reached the conclusion that he did not have to hold that the myths of the pagan age were wholly false, but that "they were echoes or anticipations of the full truth…"[14] The Christian faith does not maintain a monopoly on truth, rather the Christian faith brings all of the incomplete glimpses of truth scattered throughout the history of human culture to completion.

While this concept was clearly new and revolutionary to Lewis in the fall of 1931, it is by no means new to the corpus of Christian tradition. Justin Martyr,[15] a second century apologist removed from the crucifixion by less than a century, proposed similar ideas in his theology of the *logos*. The Greek term "logos" has various meanings depending on its context. Stoics used the term to describe a "rational principle in

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[13] Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis: A Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 150.

[14] McGrath, *C.S. Lewis: A Life*, 150.

[15] Justin Martry was raised as a Gentile, knowing very little about the Jewish tradition of faith. He was a self-described "philogian" (one who, by means of reason and rhetoric, defends philosophy as the only road to truth) whose philosophical endeavors eventually brought him into contact with Christianity that lead to his conversion and ultimately to his martyrdom. See *The Writings of Justin Martyr*, Shepherd's Notes Christian Classics.

accordance with which the universe existed."[16] This branch of philosophy proposed that each individual was given, upon his/her creation, "seed forces" or *spermatikoi logoi*. These seed forces connected back to the ultimate rational principle that is God. In Judaism, the concept of the logos most often referred to "the Word of God in Creation and of the message of the prophets by means of which God communicates his will to his people."[17] Justin, in an attempt to make his ideas applicable to both a Greek and Jewish audience, seems to bring these two ideas into conversation with each other. He proposes in his writings that each person is endowed by God at birth with a certain amount the logos, Jesus Christ having been the only human to possess the logos in its entirety. In fact, Justin would claim that Jesus is to be understood as the Father's rational thought that became flesh, "the logos is the medium between the Transcendent God and the finite universe."[18] For Justin, the logos is the point at which each individual begins to commune with God's Reason and explains why previous generations, void of the revelation of Christ, are able to participate in truth. Justin focuses specifically on the Platonic tradition when discussing the logos presence throughout history. While Justin admits that Platonism "does not entirely harmonize with the Christian and biblical tradition," it is strikingly obvious that some amount of overlap is present. For Justin, this is explained in the theology of the logos. Greek poets and philosophers were endowed with an exceptional amount of this divine reasoning and therefore produced a dialogue of truth that came strikingly close to that which is ultimately revealed in the life of Jesus. This

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[16] L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Great Britian: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 86.

[17] Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought*, 86.

[18] Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought*, 91.

theology allowed Justin to do two things: first, it allowed him to show that Christianity and the story of Jesus in particular was as old as creation itself. Secondly, it explained the similarities of the Christian ideas with those of the past. These similarities were not to be seen as a stumbling block to Christian belief; rather, they were to be seen as a sign of its eternal truth. Christianity was not merely another way of suggesting the same ideas, but the fulfillment and ultimate realization of the logos. What was highly diluted in the logic of the Platonist was fully concentrated in the life of Christ.

It is to this tradition that Lewis is connecting when he reasons through and adopts the suggestion of Tolkien. For Lewis, this concept of the logos is portrayed in what he calls mythological elements. While the terminologies between the two differ, the idea is largely the same: there is an element of truth that can be identified through out history that finds its fulfillment in the life of Christ. Lewis illustrates this idea in his fiction work *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (hereafter abbreviated as *Dawn Treader*). In *Dawn Treader*, the two youngest Pevensie children, Lucy and Edmund, embark on another journey into Narnia, unwillingly bringing their younger cousin Eustace with them. At one point in their long adventure, where the three children aid their old friend Prince Caspian in reclaiming lost Narnian land, they end up on what Lewis names "The Island of Voices." The island is thus named because there are disembodied voices that seem to bounce about around the Narnian crew who has come ashore. The voices explain to the crew that they need Lucy to enter a Magician's castle, find his spell book, and read a spell in order for them to turn visible. If Lucy does not complete this task, these invisible beings threaten to slit the throats of all present. After a sloppy dinner and restless night's sleep, Lucy follows the hallway to the last room on the left and enters to find the

Magician's Book. She is startled when she realizes the enormous size of the book and that she has no guidance in how to find the specific spell they need. Exasperated at the potential gravity of this task, Lucy reluctantly begins her search from the beginning of the book. In the book's pages she finds many curious spells and enchantments, but one that stands out in particular is a spell entitled "For the Refreshment of the Spirit." Attracted by the beautiful pictures, Lucy begins to read. She describes what she finds as "more like a story than a spell." As she continues through the words, Lucy begins to forget that she is reading altogether and finds herself participating in story and the living pictures. Upon reaching the end Lucy exclaims, "That is the loveliest story I've ever read or ever shall read in my whole life. Oh, I wish I could have gone on reading it for ten years."[19] But whenever she attempts to turn the pages back to read the story again she is unable. She quickly tries to remember the elements of the story, to capture in her memory what made the work so extraordinary but finds it slipping from her grasp the more she attempts to recapture it. While Lucy is never able to remember the enchanted story, Lewis tells the readers that the feeling that it created stayed with her and was later identified in other works. Lewis explains that, "Ever since that day, what Lucy means by a good story is a story which reminds her of the forgotten story in the Magician's Book."[20]

This particular section of *Dawn Treader*, while relatively small and seemingly insignificant in the overall context of the story, helps to illustrate Lewis' idea that a taste of divine reality can be found in the various mediums of mythological narrative throughout history. In the Magician's Book, Lucy finds the greatest story to which she

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[19] C.S. Lewis, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc, 2010), 497.

[20] Lewis, *Voyage of The Dawn Treader*, 497.

will ever be exposed. This short work is so enchanting that Lucy wishes to remain in its grip for years. However, much like the element of joy described in Lewis' autobiography, as soon as Lucy grasps the story for what it is and attempts to capture it, she finds it slipping away and leaving her grasping for something that was simply not made for her to hold on to. For Lucy, and for Lewis, this element of joy, or the mythological element, is the key indication that such a story has innate value and describes or allows its reader to experience the truth of a great reality. The core element that Lucy identifies in this story is found in various places throughout her life. In fact, her definition of what makes up a good story is now built upon this element. However, the reader is left to assume that her only fully concentrated experience with joy was found in this short account of the Magician's book, as the Christian story is the only fully concentrated experience in the life of Lewis.

This understanding, the idea that truth is sprinkled in varying degrees throughout human history, also appears to extend to Lewis' understanding of soteriology. While not ever stated explicitly in his non-fiction works, an observant reader is left to wonder whether Lewis' ideas allow for salvation without the revelation of Christ. After all, if one is without the story of Christ but extends all of his/her energy in capturing, understanding, and living a life that recognizes the elements of truth presented to him/her in the myths that are available, is this enough to receive salvation? Lewis answers this question, rather cryptically, the in the character of Emeth in *The Last Battle*.

Emeth is a Calormene soldier who has devoted his life to the work and worship of Tash. Tash is portrayed in this work as a kind of anti-Christ. He is the antithesis of everything Aslan stands for and a prime illustration that the Calormenes have been

worshiping a false God. When given the opportunity to meet Tash face to face, most of the Calormenes back away in fear after seeing a talking cat by the name of Ginger return from such a venture dumb and terrified. Emeth, however, humbly comes forward beseeching his senior officer to give him the chance. He is chastised for his youth and denied by his senior officer, but Emeth commences once again to ask for the opportunity.

Emeth understands the danger and the fear of those around him but humbly replies to the warnings that he "would gladly die a thousand deaths if I might look once upon the face of Tash."[21] As he boldly approaches his fate, Jill, one of the Narnian protagonists, whispers into the ear of the Narnian King, "By the Lion's Mane, I almost love this young warrior, Caolormene though he be. He is worthy of a better god than Tash."[22] In these short words, Lewis gets at the heart of one of the most complicated and heart-wrenching questions in Christian soteriology. Can those among humanity, as good as they may be, find salvation in light of their service to another god or cause? Here we have Emeth, a brave, beautiful warrior who fearlessly stares into the face of certain danger willing to give his life a thousand times over if he is only able to glimpse his lord. In Jill, this bravery and virtue inspires love and admiration. Surely such devotion and service should be directed to Aslan, not to Tash. Surely such a person deserves truth in full rather than this vague shadow of holiness.

As Emeth enters the shed that houses Tash, the reader's heart aches for him to know the truth though we are certain that he will face a fate quite like Ginger's. However, to everyone's great surprise, when the children reach Aslan's country, they find Emeth

[21] C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc, 2010), 728.

[22] Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 728.

simply sitting under a tree next to a stream. Peter approaches him and addresses him with honor as a noble enemy, one to be valued nearly as much as a noble friend. Emeth explains his venture into the stable and his meeting with Aslan upon arrival. He feared that he would surely die once the great lion found that he had lived a life in worship of Tash, however he fell to the ground and knelt, counting himself fortunate to have been able to experience truth and to have seen the great lion, though it would surely mean death. But, instead of killing young Emeth, Aslan approached and touched his forehead saying, "Son, thou art welcome."[23] Emeth denied this invitation and explained that he had been a servant of Tash all of his life, to which Aslan replied that he has rendered all of the service that the noble youth had done in the name of Tash as his own.

Aslan explains that it is not that Tash and Aslan are one, but that Emeth had served goodness and truth and "no service which is vile can be done to [Aslan], and none that is not vile can be done to [Tash]."[24] Aslan continued, "if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted."[25] Though Emeth thought he was seeking Tash, his virtuous way proved that his true desire was Aslan and for this desire he is rewarded. Aslan explains more, "Unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek."[26] Though Emeth found himself in a culture that seemed directly contrary to Aslan, his noble service is rendered to him as service to the

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[23] Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 757.

[24] Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 757.

[25] Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 757.

[26] Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 757.

true Lord. This is because, though the Calormenes did not capture truth it its entirety, they did produce an idea of understanding that led those who were looking to goodness. In the vocabulary of Justin Martyr, the myth system available to Emeth contained a degree of the logos, it is this facet of life that he seemed to cling to. Emeth was able to shift through the stories offered to him and locate the truth within. For this, he is rewarded with the ultimate realization of the logos, Christ, or in the case of Narnia, Aslan.

For Lewis then, a lack of the full revelation of truth does not exclude one from a later realization. If one desires and faithfully lives a life that seeks goodness and truth, however such elements are presented in their particular culture or mythological renditions, one can be assured that such things will be credited to him/her as righteousness. Ultimately, such things will be valued by Christ as an acknowledgment of his message and power and an acceptance of his gift of eternal life.

Consequence #2: Christian Doctrine is Subordinate to the Reality that is Articulated in Christian Myth

The second main consequence of Lewis' understanding of myth on his theology can be found in his October 18, 1931 letter to Arthur Greeves. As mentioned in Chapter One, this letter communicates Lewis' recent understanding of Christianity in light of the myth lens (provided by J.R.R. Tolkien) that is primarily responsible for Lewis' conversion. Here, Lewis explains that Christian belief and doctrine are the "translation into our concepts and ideas"[27] of the more adequate original narrative of the Christian faith. In other words, human articulation surrounding the meaning of the Christian

[27] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 974.

narrative, as seen in the living testimony of the Israelites and specifically in the life of Jesus, must by definition be subordinate to the original narrative itself.

God chooses to communicate truths about himself through historical narrative. What we interpret from this historical narrative becomes a secondary source, an interpretation of the original more pure expression. Lewis' expresses this line of thinking more precisely in his work *Mere Christianity*. In Chapter 4, "The Perfect Penitent", Lewis makes the analogy between Christian Doctrine and the understanding of modern nutrition. He explains:

> "All sensible people know that if you are tired and hungry a meal will do you good. But the modern theory of nourishment—all about vitamins and proteins—is a different thing. People ate their dinners and felt better long before the theory of vitamins was ever heard of: and if the theory of vitamins is some day abandoned they will go on eating their dinners just the same…"[28]

Lewis argues that it is the same way with Christianity.

The truth in Christianity is that something happened on the cross at Calvary that purified humanity from sin and defeated the power of death. The various theories proposed by theologians and lay-people over the years as to how exactly this happens are quite irrelevant. In the same way that one does need to understand the chemical workings of vitamins and proteins in the body's systems in order to find refreshment and fuel in one's dinner, a Christian does not need to understand the metaphysical workings of the cross. Lewis, in fact, argues that, when it comes to the cross, one *must* accept what has been done on his/her behalf before understanding will ever follow.

At this point, the reader will no doubt be facing a dilemma. Lewis seems clearly to state in *Mere Christianity* that Christian doctrine and theology is a secondary matter.

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[28] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollings Publishers, 2001), 55.

Why then, does he spend such a large part of his life participating in this field? If theological articulation and doctrine is subordinate to the narrative, as Lewis clearly suggests here, what use does this articulation have for the average Christian?

In explaining this, Lewis alludes, once again, to modern science. He directs his reader to think of the various description of the atom. No doubt, over time, many scientists have attempted to explain the complexities of matter through diagrams, drawings, and even metaphor. These are examples of knowledgeable people attempting to take a complicated idea and make it relatable to the masses. However, any good scientist will know better than to confuse his/her models with the original. What these diagrams enable students to do is to hold briefly in their mind's eyes a mental picture. Lewis explains:

> "This mental picture is not what the scientists actually believe. What the scientists believe is a mathematical formula. The pictures are there only to help you to understand the formula. They are not really true in the way the formula is; they do not give you the real thing but only something more or less like it."[29]

There is merit, therefore, in helping a student understand. Doctrine often takes something far away and surreal, like the salvation from sin, and makes it manageable to the mind's eye.

However, it must be remembered that these theories and pictures are not the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is that Christ died in order to rid humanity of sin. Lewis encourages readers to use these tools if they help, but says that they are "quite secondary: mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do no help us, and, even if they

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[29] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55.

do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself."[30] McGrath explains that this belief has widespread effects, especially when it comes to apologetics. For Lewis, "outsiders should not be asked to accept the truth of Christian beliefs in order to discover the vibrancy of the Christ faith."[31] Rather, they needed first "to discover the myth, the grand narrative, the big picture—and then to appreciate the role played by beliefs in sustaining and representing the grand narrative."[32]

Lewis' views on this particular subject help connect him to the larger conversation on theological language. Ranging the timeline from early mystics to contemporary feminist theologians, the struggle pertaining to how to relate the idea of God within the human language has plagued students of theology. The fear is that to relate knowledge of God by using metaphor and imagery increases the risk of idolatry. Sallie McFague describes this fear in her work *Metaphorical Theology*. She explains that images run the risk of becoming idols when the one using them can "absolutize one tradition of images for God."[33] If this occurs, the understanding of God will not be aided through metaphor and language, but realized there.

In other words, "true religious language is also a copy of what it represents… If the Bible says that God is 'father' then God is literally, really, 'father'…"[34] This idolatry

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[30] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 56.

[31] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 73.

[32] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 68.

[33] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (United States of America: Fortress Press, 1982), 3.

[34] McFague, Metaphorical Theology, 5.

is, above all, what Lewis wishes to avoid in his understanding of the religious narrative being superior to human description and interpretation. One is to view language, metaphor, and theological interpretation as a kind of road sign pointing to ultimate truth. It is not the sign, or the representation displayed on the sign, that Christians are to become fixated upon, but rather what that sign is pointing to. Old Testament Scholar Phyllis Trible explains the same idea using other imagery. For Trible, theological language is "like a finger pointing to the moon. It is a way to see the light that shines in darkness…[but] to equate the finger with the moon or to acknowledge the finger and not perceive the moon is to miss the point."[35] So it is with Lewis' theology of language. While theological interpretation and exploration may prove quite helpful, it is meant to point to something other than itself. If this "sign" or "finger" distracts from the ultimate object, that is the narrative of God, then it is to be discarded as a stumbling block. For Lewis, the way in which God has chosen directly to interact and communicate to his people, which is through the true mythical account of the life of Jesus Christ, will always supersede human interpretation and explanation.

Consequence #3: Christian Ideas and Values Cannot be Detached from the Christian Myth

The final way, to be discussed here, that Lewis' understanding of mythology effects his interaction with Christian theology, is seen in his resistance to theories that detach the Christian teachings from the overall Christian Narrative. However, the temptation to separate Christian teaching from Christian narrative was present in various 19th and 20th century theologians. One of the most popular theologians, writing around

[35] Phyllis Trible, *God and The Rehetoric of Sexuality*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 16.

the same time as Lewis, was the German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann recognized, much as Lewis does in his own writings, the stumbling block that mythological language can present. Carol Hamilton explains that, "Bultmann's chief concern is that the pre-Copernican world-view of the biblical writers should not prevent modern man from facing the true stumbling block to faith, the word of the cross."[36] In other words, Bultmann recognized that the Christian message was difficult for hearers to digest. He wished to rid this narrative of all unnecessary confusion by bringing it out of its cultural context which modern reader would have struggled to understand.

Hamilton describes Bultmann's attempt as "bracketing" away the problem of historical reference, especially how they relate to the personality of Jesus and the mythological stories of the gospel, so that readers can struggle with what Paul has labeled as foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews: Christ's crucifixion. Bultmann does this by extracting an "existential interpretation" of scripture. This interpretation is then used as a hermeneutical tool that removes the stumbling blocks that mythological language brings to a text. Bultmann argues that, "every interpreter brings with him certain conceptions, perhaps idealistic or psychological, as presuppositions of his exegesis, in most cases unconsciously."[37] This process, however, cannot be used rightly if one wishes to interpret a text in a non-biased manner. A proper interpretation seeks to learn from the text alone, not to know in advance what the text will say.

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[36] Carol J. Hamilton, "Christian Myth and Modern Man," *Encounter* 29 (1968): 248.

[37] Rudolph Bultmann, *Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era* (London: Fortress Press, 1991), 307.

The process of demythologization, in Bultmann's theory, helps to aid in such proper exegesis. By removing the mythological elements, which are the elements in the text that are most likely to trigger foreknowledge or unbiased interpretation, he believes that he is able to present the gospel to modern minds in such a way that removes the mythological stumbling block of the text. Underlying this theory is the premise that our current worldview, complete with a total rejection of myth, is to be seen as accurate. As we have seen, Lewis whole-heartedly disagrees.

For Lewis, Bultmann's premise reveals his own "chronological snobbery." The reader will remember that this is a term coined by Lewis in his autobiography *Surprised By Joy* that is meant to describe Lewis' own early tendency to "accept that latest trends in thought while assuming that what is no longer in vogues must have been discredited."[38] Lewis' understanding of the world, contrary to Bultmann's sees, the current age as "no more modern nor myth-free than any other age."[39] Bultmann's method, instead of removing stumbling blocks, according to Lewis' theory, adds them. Hamilton explains that this method of bracketing off "historical questions" has the potential to bracket off "sever crucial question for Christians," specifically those that relate to a personal response to Scripture.

She argues that:

> "Bultmann gives little thought to the undeniable facts that our own psychological make-up and our own limited world-view limit us in our ability to face the truth when we read it or hear it. Our only recourse is to unbracket as many facilities as are open to us, including historical facts and claims, and the comparing of personal experience with the confessions of other historically reliable and authoritative persons."

[38] Clark, *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology*, 21.

[39] Hamilton, *Christian Myth and Modern Man*, 247.

In other words, for true understanding to occur, Hamilton argues that "complete subjectivism" must be allotted to the reader. The existential interpretation that appears with the Bultmann's demytholization of the text robs the reader of this subjectivism and instead creates a more limited approach to the text.[40]

Lewis makes the very same argument. In an essay titled *Is Theology Poetry?*, Lewis simply proclaims, "We are invite to restate our belief in a form free from metaphor and symbol. The reason why we don't is that we can't."[41] Many critics of Bultmann argee with Lewis that this action is indeed impossible. McGrath argues that Bultmann's work should not be seen as a successful demythologization of scripture, but a remythologization. That is, Bultmann did not rid scripture of mythological elements because to do so is impossible, but he "recast its ideas using a myth which was believed carried cultural weight in the first half of the twentieth century."[42] This idea connects back to Hamilton's proposition that "modern man may be more at the mercy of his myths than were men of other generations, because the greatest myth which modern man holds about himself is that he does not believe in myths."[43]

Because humanity has, and always will, operate within a realm of mythological elements and understanding, the gospel cannot anymore be separated from its historical context and ideas that our own lives. Any attempt to do so, in Lewis opinion, "is to break

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[40] Hamilton, *Christian Myth and Modern Man*, 247.

[41] C.S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry," in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses*, 133 (New York: HarperCollings Publishing, 1976).

[42] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 70.

[43] Hamilton, *Christian Myth and Modern Man*, 246.

the link between the Christian faith and the realizing imagination, and substitute something or lesser significance."[44] Bultmann was able to successfuly produce an existential interpretation that largely resembled the ideas of Christ, but this rendition is but a shadow of the depth and meaning contained in the original. While Bultmann argued that the myth of the New Testament should be seen merely as the shell surrounding the feast hidden inside which is the Christian kerygma, Lewis instead used this metaphor from *Is Theology Poetry*:

> The earliest Christian were not so much like a man who mistakes the shell for the kernel as like a man carrying a nut which he hasn't yet cracked. The moment it is cracked, he knows which part to throw away. Till then, he holds on to the nut: not because he is a fool but because he isn't.[45]

The nut has not yet been fully cracked, nor will it be within human history. To throw away any piece of the whole, therefore, is foolish. We can no more separate the shell from the core today than the original witnesses of the gospel could. What Butlmann argues as mere "shell" Lewis saw as vehicle for the delivery of theological truth.

These two contradicting understandings of the gospels manifest themselves not only in these two thinkers' writings *about* Christianity, but also in their writings *for* Christians. While Bultmann can be seen clearly morphing the gospels into an existential interpretation, Lewis approaches as one might expect: through narrative. After all, if Lewis believes that the gospels are only truly themselves when enveloped in their mythological wrappings, why would he not write in-a way that mimics this?

Quite contrary to Bultmann's proposed concept of demythologization, Lewis seems to have favored remythologization. He takes the familiar narratives of scripture

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[44] McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, 70.

[45] Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry," 133.

and instead of reducing them to abstract ideas, he places them into new stories. This can most easily be seen in his popular children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as his Cosmic Trilogy. In the next chapter, we are going to look at Lewis' work *Till We Have Faces*, a retelling of the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche. This work will be used as a case study through which we will be able to analyze how these two methods differ. Why is remythologization acceptable for Lewis when demythologizing is in conflict with the heart of the gospels? And, furthermore, what does remythologization entail? Why does Lewis believe it to be so effective?

CHAPTER THREE

Till We Have Faces: A Case Study in Remythologization with C.S. Lewis

Why Remythologization?

We have now studied the ways in which Lewis' understanding of myth has influenced his understanding and articulation of Christian theology. Most importantly was his employment of remythologization when presenting the gospel. The folly of demythologization, as presented by Rudolph Bultmann, was introduced in the last chapter. However, we are still missing an in-depth analysis of Lewis' proposed alternative. First, we must ask why remythologization is necessary, not only in the way that it maintains the integrity of Christian myth, but also in relation to Lewis' audience. Second, a deeper exploration of remythologization is in order. It is essential that we not only define the workings of remythologization, but that we also explain how it differs from the three failures listed in Chapter Two. Finally, Lewis' own work will be used as a case study for effectiveness. The work *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* will be used to better define what remythologization looks like when employed by Lewis and how it is used to convey gospel ideals.

One of the primary problems that Lewis faced was how to address the modern western world in which "the universe is silent, God is dead, or at least silent, and the only authentic life for a person is to act in whatever way seems right."[1] A popular way to refer to this described mindset is in reference to enchantment. While the medieval world

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[1] Clark, *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology*, 37.

displayed a thin veil between what was spiritual and what was "real," modern westerners have largely become disenchanted with anything having to do with religious ideas, particularly those associated with ancient texts. Religion and the stories associated with it are viewed as myth- not in the numinous way that Lewis describes, but negatively, as ancient folklore absent of all reflections of truth and reality. For Lewis, staying true to his understanding of theology meant that divorcing Christian thought from its mythological incasing was impossible; to do so would be to lose the key component of Christianity. Therefore, the story must remain. How, then, was he to address a generation already convinced that the stories of Ancient Israel and Jesus of Nazareth are fables and ancient folklore?

For those who have experienced the stories of Christianity in such a way that they have developed either negative or melancholy feelings towards them, little good comes from a simple retelling. For one in this situation, a retelling will only resurrect these notions to the forefront of their minds. Attentive readers will notice that this is much the same dilemma that Bultmann faced- how are Christians to present the gospel in a way that is relevant to our readers. However, instead of divorcing stories from ideas like Bultman did, Lewis recasts the familiar stories of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in a way that maintains their integrity while also disguising them enough to help critics move past predetermined discrimination. This recasting is what I have termed "remythologization": the creation of a new story that points to another original story. It is, like the gospels themselves, a story that directs its reader to Jesus. However, this direction is not taken as blatantly or directly as in the gospels. Remythologization is the participation in creating a new myth that points to Christ and the original true Christian

myth. While the myth created by remythologization is not in itself historical, it is based on the true myth and therefore contains the essence of truth.

The main difference between this technique and those suggested in Chapter Two is the way in which remythologization directs the reader back to the original source. The work of Bultmann suggests that we use the story of Christ found in the gospels as a tool that directs us toward doctrines and existential ideas. Lewis sees this process as inverted. Any tools employed in order to aid Christian understanding should point back to the original gospel narrative, not outward to themselves. The narrative is not meant to produce doctrine or existential understanding that exist on their own, rather any Christian doctrine or existential philosophy should be used only to the extent that it returns the reader to a stronger understanding of the core narrative. This is the purpose of Lewis' literary creations. He produces a recast of the Christian story that leads readers to return to the original. Remythologization is not a road leading out of an understanding of the story of Christ, but a path leading inward.

How does this process work? The process of remythologization is primarily employed by allowing readers to enter a world absent of their preconceptions about Christ. For example, for someone who has grown up in a home were religion is continually degraded and the Christian God highly criticized, reading the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus will normally fuel already present condemning fires. However, when a reader in this situation is introduced to the character of Aslan, there is little resistance. Aslan does not look like Jesus; he is not human nor is he from Nazareth. Upon first glance, Aslan is merely a literary character; he is the voice of reason and guidance for the young Pevensie children on their adventures. Therefore, because the reader does not

connect Aslan with the Christian God, whom they have already decided to hate and hold responsible for countless evils, they are able to approach Aslan with trust. Slowly, they begin to learn about his character as one who is dangerous yet good, or fierce yet merciful. Slowly, the reader gets to know Aslan, maybe the reader even begins to love Aslan. It is not until the emotional connection has been made that the reader then sees Aslan's connection to the Christian Jesus. At this point the reader is much more willing to reevaluate his or her understanding of Jesus, thus leading him or her back to the original story of Jesus with a fresh perspective and a more open mind. The reader is then able to see Jesus in light of the descriptions of Aslan, not in light of his or her understanding of the historical church's failings or the actions of morally inept Christians they know.

This idea is illustrated in a letter that Lewis writes to a parent of one of the fans of the Narnia series. The woman, addressed only as Mrs. K, writes to Lewis in fear that the Narnia series is producing idolatry in her son Laurence. Laurence seems, in Mrs. K's opinion, to have developed a love for Aslan that supersedes his love for Christ. Lewis, in return, explains how this simply cannot be:

> …Laurence can't really love Aslan more than Jesus, even if he feels that's what he is doing. For the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really did and said. So that when Laurence thinks he is loving Aslan, he is really loving Jesus: and perhaps loving Him more than he even did before…[2]

In this same way, the characters and events of Lewis' remythologized fiction lead more readers to better appreciate the characters and events of the Christian myth. In the case of the Narnia series it is often children who form this deeper appreciation, however, in the case of the Cosmic Trilogy, it could very likely be adult skeptics who are met with

[2] C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Children* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 195), 52-53.

the Christian message as if for the first time. Remythologization is used as a set of training wheels, allowing those who are not yet ready to fully comprehend the truth in the Christian Scriptures to begin to do so gradually and carefully. It is important to note that this process is not formative only for nonbelievers. Many Christians carry with them the baggage of preconception too. Presenting the gospel through remythologization allows even seasoned believers to experience their faith in a way that reveals new merit and depth long eclipsed by familiarity.

It is my belief that Lewis presents the Christian story in such a way because this is the method that allowed him to first truly experience holiness. As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, upon Lewis' first encounter with George MacDonald's book *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, Lewis experienced what it was like to be lured into a new myth unaware of the consequences. C.S. Lewis scholar Alister McGrath describes Lewis' first encounter with MacDonald in the spring of 1916 as profound:

> MacDonald's prose enabled Lewis to trespass into the rationally forbidden, tasting its fruits before he realized the enormity of what he had done…MacDonald's narrative was like 'the voice of the sirens,' causing Lewis to crash against the rocks of a deeper vision of reality, his rationalism overwhelmed by the sheer beauty of its "bright shadow."[3]

This description of what Lewis experienced upon reading *Phantastes* is the ultimate goal of Lewis' own remythologization. Lewis' writings recast the Christian narrative in such a way that allows just enough familiar imagery "to lure [one] in without the perception of change."[4] Lewis helps his readers enter forbidden territory: territory that

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[3] McGrath, The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis, 57.

[4] Lewis, Surprised By Joy, 179.

has the potential to create an assault on the reader's intellectualism or preconceived notions attached to religion. Without realizing the realm that they enter, Lewis' readers are able to be "carried sleeping across the frontier"[5] into a new country of religious perception and experience. To return to the metaphor of the bicycle, those who are not yet ready to experience the feeling of holiness when attached to Scripture are able to use Lewis' stories as a set of training wheels. Here, in the safety of the familiar, they experience their first taste of this new joy.

Till We Have Faces: A Case Study

The Story Retold

As the subheading suggests, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* is Lewis' retelling of the classical Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche. The original myth is told by Apuleius in his work *Metamorphoses*, also sometimes referred to as the *Golden Ass* or *The Transformation of Lucius*. As Lewis assumes that the reader has a basic understanding of the original text, a short recap of Apuleius' work is needed here. I will be summarizing the events as edited by Robert Graves. The story begins by introducing the reader to a royal family of three daughters. The first two daughters are married to kings, but the last daughter, Psyche, is described as so beautiful that those around her ceased worshiping Venus in order to worship her. Her beauty led others her to believe that she had divine blood and out of fear, no man pursued her.

Her father consulted an oracle regarding his inability to marry off his youngest daughter and was told that she would not marry a human, but that he must abandon her

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[5] Lewis, Surprised By Joy, 179.

on the top of a mountain to a serpent groom. Though her family mourned her, they heeded the commands of the oracle and left her exposed upon the mountain.

Soon after, the jealous Venus sent her son Cupid to shoot Psyche with an arrow of love that would cause her to fall in love with the basest of men. However, upon seeing Psyche's great beauty, Cupid fell in love with her himself. The west-wind carried Psyche off the mountain to Cupid's palace where invisible servants fed and cleansed her body. That night, Cupid came to her and made her his bride. However, Cupid left Psyche before sunrise and forbid her to ever try and glimpse his face. While happy with Cupid, Psyche longed to see her sisters. Cupid was not fond of the idea of the sisters coming to visit but ultimately agreed. He sent the west-wind to carry the two women to the palace. Psyche revealed her great fortune and happiness to them. However, she told her sisters that her husband was a young hunter. Upon their next visit, Psyche forgot her original story and told her sisters that her husband was a merchant, advanced in years with grey hair. The two sisters then realized the Psyche had never actually seen her husband and began to suspect that she had entered into a relationship with a god. Jealousy overwhelmed the two sisters and they desired to end her happiness.

When they returned the next day, they convinced Psyche that her husband must actually be a hideous serpent, as the oracle described. They encouraged her to hide a lamp and a knife in her room and to peek at her husband that night while he slept. In sheer terror, Psyche promised to do so. That night, as she lit the lamp, she beheld the face of her divine husband. However, hot oil dripped from the lamp onto Cupid's shoulder and woke him. He responded harshly to Psyche for her lack of faith in him and vanished from sight. The thought of disappointing such a wondrous lover led Psyche to the point of

suicide, however, the river into which she threw herself would not allow her to complete her horrid task. The god Pan then intervened and warned her never to try to kill herself again. She then fled to her sister's house and told her sisters of what happened and that Cupid was coming to take this sister as his bride instead. This sister flung herself off of the cliff expecting to be carried by the west-wind to Cupid's palace, however the wind did not come to her aid causing her to hit the rocks at the bottom and die. The same then happened to the second sister. Next, Psyche left in search of her husband. Various goddesses refused to shelter her because she carried the wrath of Venus.

In despair, Psyche searched for Venus, hoping to reconcile with her. Venus, however, beat her, commanded Sorrow and Sadness to torture her, and forced her to attempt seemingly impossible tasks. First, Psyche was made to separate a mixed pile of wheat, barley, millet, poppy-seed, peas, lentils, and beans from each other into separate piles. However, this task was carried out for her by a troop of kindly ants. Next, Psyche was commissioned to obtain a handful of golden wool from killer sheep. Luckily, before putting herself in danger, a reed whispered to her that she should simply remove the wool that the sheep left behind on briars in the pasture. Next, Psyche was told to fetch a cup of water from the river Styx, which is located on a dangerous slope guarded by dragons. An eagle came to Psyche and took the cup for her, returning it filled.

Finally, Psyche was to enter the world of the dead and obtain a box containing Persephone's beauty. A mysterious voice instructed her on how to complete this tasks, warning her that she would be asked three times for help from people who seemed to deserve it but that she must refuse them all. Also, when Persephone handed her the box, she must not open it. She did all of these things and returned to the world of the living.

However, curiosity finally got the best of her and she opened the box. She found it to be filled with infernal sleep that took hold of her at once. Cupid, once he had been healed from the hot oil, went in search for his bride. He woke her and sent her to Venus. Jupiter agreed to allow Cupid to marry Psyche and made her a goddess. Venus was no longer jealous and took joy in her new daughter-in-law who later gave birth to a child: Pleasure.[6]

In Lewis' version, we begin in a similar place: the palace of the King of Glome. This king, however, has two daughters. Upon their mother's early death, the King takes a new wife. His two young daughters, Orual, the oldest, and Redival, are given a Greek tutor, Lysias (affectionately known as the "Fox" due to his red hair). The Fox is a Greek prisoner of war bought in hopes that the King's new wife will produce a son for him to educate. At the marriage ceremony of the King and his new bride, the Fox teaches the two daughters and other palace children a Greek marriage hymn. The King then commands that the children be veiled. He motions towards Orual and states that he is afraid that her ugly face will scare his new bride. From this point on, Orual dons a veil continually. The King's young bride, however, produces yet another daughter for the King and dies in childbirth. In rage, the King blames his "misfortune" on the local priest as the King has faithfully followed all his orders and was assured a son for his faithfulness.

The unwanted child is named Istra. Orual and the Fox, however, call her by the Greek version of her name: Psyche. Psyche is described as beautiful: "at every age the beauty proper to that age."[7] The Fox proclaims that she is "according to nature; what

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[6] Apuleius, *The Transformation of Lucius, Otherwise Known as the Golden Ass*, ed. Robert Graves (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009).
[7] C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc, 1956), 22.

every women, or even every thing, ought to have been and meant to be, but had missed by some trip of chance."[8] As those around her become more aware of her beauty, they venerate her. Many peasants bring forth their children believing that Psyche's touch will make them beautiful. And when a plague comes forth into the land the people bring their sick and beg for the beautiful princess to heal them. Redival, filled with jealousy, conspires with the Priest of Ungit (the local pagan god) against Psyche.

After putting hands on the sick, attempting to heal them as they requested, Psyche falls ill with fever. Because drought, pestilence, famine, and rebellion continue to claim residence in the kingdom the people attempt to find other solutions to their problems. It is clear that the hands of Psyche did not heal as they had expected, what else could be causing these calamities? The peasants then conclude that it is Psyche's pride that is wreaking havoc on the land. She has made herself a god and Ungit is jealous and will continue to punish the people until this is rectified. The Priest comes to the castles and explains to the King that a sacrifice to the Shadow Brute, the god of the mountain who is Ungit's son, must be made. Lots are casts and they fall on Psyche. Despite desperate attempts, the King refuses to listen to the pleas of the Fox and Orual to save Psyche. On the eve of the sacrifice Orual arranged a meeting with Psyche in her cell where she was being held prisoner. While Orual is frantic, almost to the point of madness at the though of losing Psyche, Psyche seems calm. She displays a sort of fascination towards what awaits her on the mountain where the sacrifice would take place. She attempts to explain this longing to Orual:

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[8] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 22.

> "But listen. Are these things so evil as they seem? The gods will have mortal blood. But they say whose. If they had chosen any other in the land, that would have been only terror and cruel misery. But they chose me. And I am the one who has been made ready for it ever since I was a little child in your arms, Maia. The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing- to reach the Mountain, to find the place where al the beauty came from…my country, the place where I ought to have been born. Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home? For indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back. All my life the god of the Mountain has been wooing me." [9]

Orual responds with resentment and wails, she sees Psyche's acceptance of fate as a lack of love for her.

The sacrifice is carried out: Psyche is left tied to a tree on the top of the mountain and the rain returns to Glome. As time goes on, Orual resolves to travel to the mountain and give Psyche's remains a proper burial. She enlists the help of the trusted solider Bardia and eventually is able to make the trip. Upon arrival, she is surprised to discover that Psyche is not only alive, but also thriving. Psyche describes how she was carried to the god's palace and attended to by invisible servants. She tells her sister how the god of the mountain comes to her every night. Orual requests to see her palace and Psyche becomes confused. She tells Orual that they are standing on the palace's main stairs.

Orual looks around and sees nothing but the surrounding pasture. That night, however, Orual approaches the river so that she can drink; as she rises she glimpses the palace just as Psyche described it. The next instant the palace vanishes. On the trip home, Orual asks Bardia's opinion, telling him all that Psyche proclaimed but leaving out her own vision. Bardia is noncommittal towards an explanation, but Orual decides that Psyche must be a bride to a monster and resolves to end the union by what ever means necessary, even if it means killing Psyche. When she returns home, she seeks the Fox's

[9] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 76.

advice, once again sharing the entirety of her experience, save her night vision. The Fox suggests a rational explanation: Psyche must be victim of a swindling vagabond. The thought of Psyche's giving birth to a "beggar's brat" drives Orual to rage, causing her to exclaim, "We'll have him impaled if ever we catch him. He shall die for days. Oh, I could tear his body with my bare teeth."[10]

While her father is away from the castle, Orual again returns to visit Psyche. This time, when she finds Psyche, she warns Psyche that she must take a lamp and view the face of her beloved. When Psyche loyally refuses to sabotage the trust of her lover, Orual thrusts a knife into her own arm. She tells Psyche that if she refuses, she will not only kill Psyche but also herself. Brokenhearted, Psyche agrees to Orual's demands but explains, "Whatever comes after, something that was between us dies here."[11] In the dead of the night, Orual witnesses the light from Psyche's lamp. The god awakens and the surrounding mountain rages with thunder and lightening. A loud voice, the voice of Cupid, echoes through the mountain:

> "Now Psyche goes out in exile. Now she must hunger and thirst and tread hard roads. Those against whom I cannot fight must do their will upon her. You, woman, shall know yourself and your work. You also shall be Psyche."[12]

Orual cannot see Psyche but hears her as she flees, crying into the darkness.

From this point on, Orual does her best not to think of Psyche. While it is evident that her avoidance often fails, she attempts to lock away her feelings and focus on ruling the kingdom. Her father soon passes away and Orual spends all of her time working. During this time of her life she is seen as a valiant Queen, keeping the country from war

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[10] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 146.

[11] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 165.
[12] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 174.

and proving herself as a great warrior. After the death of the Fox she decides to travel and see nearby kingdoms. During one such time, she comes across a small temple dedicated to a new goddess: Istra. Orual pays to hear the priest tell the story of the goddess and is shocked when she discovers its similarity with her own experiences. What is different, however, is how cruel the sisters in the story are painted. They seem to act out of jealousy, almost intentionally causing the goddess to suffer. Outraged, Orual resolves to write her own account of these events. She thus ends her first book bitterly, harboring terrible feelings towards the gods who act only to punish and trick her, taking from her the one she loved, punishing her for attempting to save her sister, and worst of all, making it seem like it was all her fault. Thus ends the first book in *Till We Have Faces*.

The second book is the work of a much older Orual. In this part of the novel, weakness and age has caused Orual to reflect once again on the events of her past. The death of Bardia inspires Orual to visit his widow, Ansit. Upon the visit, Ansit becomes quite frank with Orual, saying that when Bardia became ill, she knew that it was no light matter. She explains that Bardia was like "a tree that is eaten away within."[13] While he appeared strong he was asked to keep working past the age of retirement, Ansit reminds Orual that "he was not made of iron or brass, but flesh."[14] In essence, Ansit rebukes Orual for her treatment of Bardia. She explains that in his weariness he was not given rest and that cruelty ultimately resulted in his death. Orual learns that her love for Bardia had been one of devouring, leaving Orual to wonder once again if her life events were the results of the gods or a personal defect.

[13] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 260.
[14] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 260.

This suspicion deepens when she ventures to the temple of Ungit on the day of the Year's Birth. After watching the typical holiday events, she went into her chamber to rest and while she "sank into deep thought," a vision of her father began. He came to her and forced her to dig through the stone floor of the pillar room and throw herself into the newly created hole. She continued this tough labor, digging farther and farther down. Finally, her father turned to her and asked, "Who is Ungit?" while leading her to face a mirror. As she is forced to peer into the mirror she sees that she has the face of Ungit and replies, "I am Ungit." When she wakes she ponders the meaning of this dream, coming to the realization that, "It was I who was Ungit. That ruinous face was mine…that all devouring womblike, yet barren, thing. Glome was a web—I the swollen spider, squat at its center, gorged with men's stolen lives."[15] She then resolves to no longer be this monster and attempts to kill herself. However she is too weak to do so with her sword and when she gets to the river, a voice of a god tells her not to complete her mission. "You cannot escape Ungit by going to the deadlands," the voice tells her, "for she is there also. Die before you die. There is no chance after."[16]

Later, however, she enters into more visions and is forced to complete other laborious tasks. Finally, she is taken before a judge where she may make her complaint against the gods. When in the courtroom, her face is unveiled by order of a veiled judge. She is then ordered to read her complaint. What she sees in her hands, however, is not the book she has written but "a little, shabby, crumpled thing."[17] Despite her certainty that

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[15] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 276.

[16] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 279.

[17] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 289.

this could not be hers, she unrolls it and reads it to the courtroom over and over again. The judge then asks, “Are you answered?” to which she replies, “Yes.”[18] Orual is then led by the Fox to see a series of living pictures that show how she enabled Psyche to complete various tasks. The final picture shows Psyche entering the deadlands. She is instructed to bring back the beauty of Persephone while ignoring the cries of others along the path. The last figure that attempts to dissuade Psyche reaches out an arm dripping in blood, which Orual recognizes as her own. With great effort, Psyche walks past the pleading Orual. Finally, Orual is confronted with the real Psyche, who hands her the box of beauty. It is then that Cupid enters the realm to judge Orual. When she looks down into the river, she sees a reflection of two Psyches, one clothed and one naked. Cupid calmly explains that, “You are also Psyche.” The book ends with Orual’s death.

Lewis’ retelling alters parts of the storyline, the most significant being that he renders Psyche’s castle invisible to “normal, mortal eyes,”[19] the motivations of the sisters (or in Lewis’ tale: sister) are changed or at least complicated, and Psyche is not the only one to receive redemption in the end. These alterations, plus an infusion of the gospel message and Christians themes into the tale, allows Lewis to take a work that some critics deem “just another fairy tale”[20] and transform it into something truly *mythical*.

My purpose over the next several pages is to show how Lewis is able to convey the heart of the gospel by recasting this pagan story. Lewis allows skeptics of Christianity

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[18] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 293.

[19] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 313.

[20] Virginia V. Chennell, "Till We Have Faces," *The English Journal* 65, no. 1 (1976): 67-68.

and Christians so familiar with the stories that they have long grown indifferent to experience the gospel, while unknowingly checking their preconceived prejudices at the door, by infusing Apuleius' original tale with themes from the true myth, that of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Many Faces of Ungit

Lewis uses the god of Glome, Ungit, in various ways through out the novel. The most obvious is the way in which Orual finds herself reflecting the image of Ungit, especially in regards to how her love often involves a kind of devouring. In this instance, we see Ungit as something to be purged of; it is, after all, the face of Ungit that Orual ultimately trades in to don the beauty of Psyche. However, Ungit's importance to the novel should not be limited to just this one interpretation. As is often repeated in the work itself, "Ungit has many faces." I propose that one of these faces is a reflection, be it dimly, of true religion.

The temple of Ungit is described in the novel by Orual as a dark place, "[Ungit] is a black stone without head or hands or face, a very strong goddess,"[21] difficult to see in the recesses of the temple save on a bright summer day. Young women are often given to Ungit to be kept in the temple and, in particularly bad years, like the one detailed in the novel, human sacrifices are made to appease what is believed to be Ungit's wrath.

The Priest, the primary mouthpiece for the goddess, frightens Orual. She supposes that this fear comes from "the holiness of the smell that hung about him—a temple-smell of blood (mostly pigeons' blood, but he had sacrificed men, too) and burnt fat and singed

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[21] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 4.

hair and wine and stale incense."[22] This "holy" smell is, for Orual, Ungit's smell. The Priest's intimidation does not end with his smell; he is also dressed in many animal skins and dried bladders. He wears a mask that resembles the head of a bird. Orual recounts that "it looked as if there were a bird growing out of his body."[23]

Throughout the novel, the practices of the Temple are constantly put into contrast with the philosophy of the Fox. The Fox hears what Orual has to say about Ungit and the traditions that surround her and shudders, saying, "Lies of poets, lies of poets, child."[24] Throughout the novel, the Fox is constantly denying the existence of the gods, finding his comfort only in reason and what is "according to nature." However, Lewis' depiction of the temple, while indeed frightening, offers something that the words of the Fox lack: thickness. It is as if the philosophy of the Fox is thin like water, while the Temple flows with channels of blood. In Orual's elder years, she visits the Temple on the day of the Year's Birth, as is custom for the queen to do. Here she witnesses a particularly powerful scene. A peasant women hastily enters the temple, her face drenched in tears, clearly there on pressing matters of her own that have nothing to do with the joyous birth feast. She carries a pigeon and hands it to one of the lesser temple priests who cuts it open and lets the blood drip onto the stone of Ungit. The peasant woman falls to her knees in front of the stone and weeps. Orual then, surprised, notices that the woman gets to her feet, puts her hair out of her face and ceases weeping. When the woman turns so that Orual could see her more clearly, she looks "grave enough; and yet it was as if a sponge had

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[22] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 11.

[23] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 11.

[24] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 9.

been passed over her. The trouble was soothed. She was calm, patient, able for whatever she had to do."[25] Curious, Orual asks if she has been comforted by Ungit, the woman replies, "Oh yes, Queen…Ungit has give me great comfort. There's no goddess like Ungit."[26]

This scene shows that, while Orual's experience with the temple and Ungit has been frightening and grievous, that is not the case for all of Glome. This woman in particular shows that the dark stone can offer tremendous help for those in need. In Orual's final judgment scene, she comes into contact with a wiser version of the Fox. The Fox beseeches the gods not to convict Orual for her misunderstanding of Ungit, that he is to blame. In a lengthy monologue, which is worth quoting in full, the Fox explains:

> "I taught her, as men teach a parrot, to say, "Lies of the poets," and "Ungit's a false image." I made her think that ended the question…I never told her why the Priest got something from the dark House that I never got from my trim sentences…Only that the way to the true gods is more like the house of Ungit…Oh it's unlike too, more unlike than we yet dream, but that's the easy knowledge, the first lesson; only a fool would stay there…The Priest knew at least that there must be sacrifices. They will have sacrifice—will have man. Yes, and the very heart, center, ground, roots of a man; dark and strong and costly as blood." [27]

Here, in the Fox's explanation, we see what Lewis was trying to communicate by introducing the reader to Ungit. It is a vivid description of what was discussed in Chapter Two: while the myths of other religions may not capture the whole truth which is Christ, they can still maintain some semblance of this truth. The "trim sentences" and eloquent

[25] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 272.

[26] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 272.

[27] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 295.

philosophy of the Fox fall short because they are divorced from myth, much like the work of Bultmann. The Temple, however, maintains some essence of truth. In the Temple the reader sees true understanding, this message that Psyche receives with joy and fascination and Orual finally accepts begrudgingly: that the true god will have the sacrifices of men.

Lewis is not saying that human sacrifices are the desire of God, but that an ultimate sacrifice from within is necessary. This theme of sacrifice introduces one of the easier ways to identify the differences between non-Christian mythology, Christian mythology, and remythologization in this novel. We see that the myth proposed by the House of Ungit, that representing non-Christian mythology, does hold a semblance of truth and relation to the Christian myth. Christianity proposes that all men and women must go through a process of surrender; they must, to some extent, internally participate in Christ death if they are to be free of their own deceptions. The story of Orual and Psyche, however, takes this familiar Christian concept and recast it in a new way that allows readers to experience it as if for the first time. Readers witness the need for Orual's internal death and then are able to ponder what this means for their own lives. Like Orual, we are convicted that we must surrender our veils in order to see God face to face. It is to this process that Cupid refers when he tells Orual, "Die before you die. There is no chance after."[28]

Cupid as Christ the Transformer, Bridegroom, and Judge

Perhaps the most significant way that Lewis portrays the gospel in this work is through the character of Cupid. While Cupid has very few speaking roles, those he does

[28] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 279.

have are important and play an essential function in shaping the novel overall. In my reading of the work, I have found that Cupid, as the Christ figure, illustrates three key roles of Christ's ministry and plan for humanity as explained in the gospels. Those three roles, Christ as transformer, Christ as bridegroom, and Christ as judge, and how they are illustrated in Lewis' novel, will now be explored in detail.

The primary role of Cupid in this novel for both Psyche and Orual is *transformer*. Psyche, upon hearing that she is to be a sacrifice to the god of the mountain, is curious and eager. While she does seem to harbor some fear, she accepts her fate with dignity and even fascination. Compared to Orual, she is much more open to the workings of the gods and even trusts that no matter what is to become of her in this sacrifice, she will at least be on the mountain—the place for which she has longed her whole life.

As Psyche describes her experiences to Orual, we see that Psyche has not only embraced her role as Cupid's bride, but has never been happier. However, despite her deep devotion, when Orual threatens to kill herself if Psyche does not betray the trust of her beloved, Psyche falls pray to this blackmail. When her god awakes, we hear Psyche's distant wailing as she sets out to complete the tasks that will reconcile her to her husband. Ultimately, Psyche must face her failure again when she enters the deadlands to complete the last task. She is faced with a pitiful Orual reaching out to her with blood-covered arms—this time, however, Psyche willfully passes her. Through these experiences, Psyche is transformed into a person who cannot be controlled by humanity, but who learns to rely wholly in her god. Ironically, it is in her ability to ignore the pleading Orual that she is able to participate in Orual's own transformation.

Orual’s transformation is much more complex than Psyche’s. This is because she is far less receptive to the workings of the gods. However, throughout her constant determination to ignore or fear the gods, Cupid continues to pursue her. The pursuit does not look anything like the loving pursuit that we see unfold in the intimacy of the marriage bed of Psyche and Cupid; for Orual, pursuit must be done through pain. This is because of Orual’s determination to ignore the workings of the gods, but, as Lewis explains so concisely in *The Problem of Pain*, “We can ignore pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”[29] For Orual, the god of the mountain must express his love in the only way she will listen: through pain.

This pain manifests itself in many ways, the first of which is seen through her loss of Psyche. Later, through the visions, and the tasks within the visions, Orual’s defenses are forcefully confronted and then removed through the aid of the gods. Ultimately, these tasks culminate in her trial, where she receives not only her answer to her charge against the gods, but also forgiveness and redemption. Orual’s internal transformation is mimicked by her physical appearance. While she is described as ugly and plain at the beginning of the book, when her veil is finally stripped away she looks into the water and sees Psyche in her reflection. The meaning of Cupid’s words, “You too shall be Psyche,” do not refer to a merger of body or spirit or ultimate dissolving of Orual’s personal identity, but to the suffering in which both Psyche and Orual must participate as well as the redemption that they will both ultimately experience.

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[29] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollings Publishing, 1996), 91.

Transformation is an important concept for Lewis. All of his Christ figures in his fiction works bring about some aspect of transformation. For Aslan, this transformative power is seen in his relationship with the Pevensie children, especially Edmund and Eustice. In the Cosmic Trilogy, this theme is seen in Ransom's effect on Jill and others. It is interesting to note that Lewis, attempting to communicate the way in which Christ transforms, continues to transform the way he confronts this topic. It is important to ponder how this affects the presentation of Christ that Lewis is attempting to communicate.

The second way that Cupid is presented in this work is as the Bridegroom. This is seen most easily in his relationship with Psyche, but is undeniably present in Cupids relationship with Orual as well. Willingly left upon the mountain and surrendered wholly to the elements, Cupid sends servants to carry Psyche to his palace. Upon arrival, Psyche is washed, cleansed, and prepared for her marriage bed. It is in the night, then, that Cupid comes to her and makes her his bride. However, the dark veil of the night keeps Psyche from seeing her groom. It is not until she has visited the deathlands that she is able to see her god's face with his consent. I find Psyche's experience analogous to that of the human experience. We can, like Psyche, begin a relationship with our god on earth. However, this relationship cannot reach full form until we have been transformed through death and the veil that separates humanity and divinity is removed. It is essential to note, however, that even in light of Psyche's disobedience, Cupid continues to pursue her throughout the novel. In her laborious tasks, she sees the grace and aid given by the god. In the original myth, it is said that Cupid intercedes to Venus on Psyche's behalf. This same undeserving intercession is done for Orual's as well. Despite her disobedience and

even blatant determination not to love Cupid we see that in the end she partakes in a similar union built on redemption and transformation. In this same way, on this side of death or the *eschaton*, whatever may come first, humanity can rest knowing that we do have a beloved intercessor distributing grace to us in our spiritual want.

Cupid's intercession leads appropriately into his final role in this novel: that of both judge and advocate. The Fox is given the task of leading Orual to her own trial before the gods. On the way, Orual expresses fear. In an attempt to explain the nature of the gods and also to calm Orual's fears, the Fox participates in the following exchange:

> "Be sure that, whatever else you get, you will not get justice."
> "Are the gods not just?"
> "Oh no, child. What would become of us if they were?"[30]

We then see this ides of mercy played out in Orual's trial. This trial abandons the formalities that we saw in Orual's trail against the gods. The entire process is contained in the simple coming of Cupid. His approach is described as both beautiful and dreadful. Upon his approach, Orual casts her eyes to the ground. It is here that she sees her new reflection. Cupid then states only, "You also are Psyche," and this final visions breaks. Her trial, then, is not a trial at all, but the fulfillment of the god's promise of transformation and redemption. He does not take the place of the traditional judge, one of justice, but takes the place of an advocate filled with mercy. Thus is the message of the cross and the Christian Savior not only in the life of this myth, but in our own.

Conclusion

[30] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 297.

The purpose of my thesis is threefold: I desire to explore the ways that Lewis articulates the place myth has in his life and conversion, the effect that myth has on his theology, and finally, how this understanding appears in his fiction writings. Through this study, we have seen how the Christian myth is not limited to our Christian Scriptures, but can be recast into various settings. This recasting allows readers to enter into the Christian story as if for the first time, enabling them not only to learn but also to experience the gospel free of preconceived misconceptions or prejudices. This recasting was an essential step within the conversion of Lewis and is therefore not surprisingly incorporated into his own work.

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