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THE *MYTHOS* OF SIN: C. S. LEWIS, THE GENESIS FALL,
AND THE MODERN MOOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MAY 2011



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This dissertation entitled

**THE MYTHOS OF SIN:
C.S. LEWIS, THE GENESIS FALL, AND THE MODERN MOOD**

written by

JEREMY G. GRINNELL

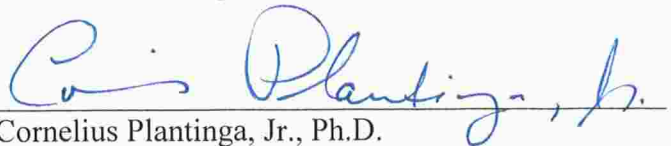
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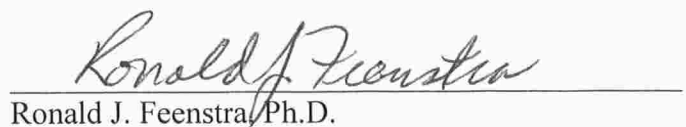
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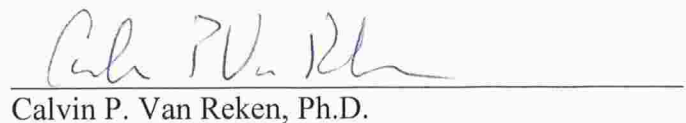
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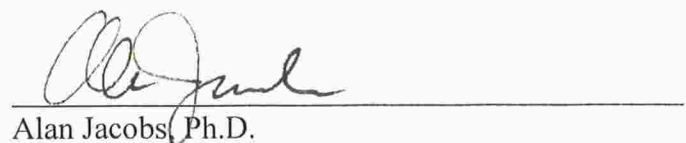
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To, for, and mostly because of

Denise

Could God Himself create such lovely things as I have dreamed?
Answers Hope, “Whence then came thy dream?”
—George MacDonald, *Lilith*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation wrestles with the question how to profitably and theologically handle the Fall narrative of Genesis 3 once it has been classified as “myth,” as was the conclusion of the *Formgeschichte* school.

The dissertation begins by establishing the theological conversation of the mid-twentieth century, which marks a zenith in the discussion. Beginning with a survey of the traditional interpretation of the narrative as historical account, which dominated pre-Enlightenment churchly thought, the survey then summarizes the change of tenor that Enlightenment and higher critical voices brought to the question. The survey concludes with consideration of Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, and Rudolph Bultmann on the definition and role of myth in the Bible.

At this point C. S. Lewis is brought into the conversation in the belief that his expert status as a literary critic and Medievalist would have given him a unique position from which to help theologians wrestle with the question. Lewis is thus introduced as a literary authority with deep commitments to traditional Christianity, yet with a healthy respect for the conclusions of the modern sciences. In addition Lewis’ thoughts on modern theology and higher criticism are parsed along with his agreement on the mythic quality of the Genesis Fall narrative.

Following this comes an extended survey of Lewis’ theory of myth. Good myth attempts to communicate truth by by-passing the abstracting intellect and addressing itself immediately to the imagination. Close consideration is given to the epistemological role of the imagination and the reader’s response to mythic literature.

These efforts afford two levels of consideration. First, Lewis' own views on the Genesis narrative are presented under the following heads: (1) the possible *history* standing behind the narrative, (2) the meaning and appropriate use of the *doctrine* resulting from the narrative, and (3) the implications of its status as *myth*—how such a narrative ought to be read and what it produces within the willing reader. Second, Lewis is compared with the aforementioned theological trajectories and persons to consider how his robust literary theory of myth might help clarify or critique the theological conversation of his period. The dissertation concludes with some suggestions for further application of Lewis' ideas.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the *Formgeschichte* school of the nineteenth century suggested that the narratives of early Genesis should be classified under the literary genre of “legend” or “myth,” rather than direct “historical account,” questions have been rife regarding the nature and function of these narratives as well as their relationship to history. If a narrative is in some sense mythological, does this mean its events never happened, or happened other than as represented? And if it did happen in differently than recorded, in what sense can it still be considered true?

In particular, the text of Genesis 3 describes the event known as the Fall. This story of a forbidden fruit eaten under temptation stands almost without exception as the gateway to the Christian explanation of all the evil the world has known. Playing such a role, it lies near the center of Christian ontology and provides the narrative impetus for the redemptive events that follow. This narrative is then one of the great hinges on which the Christian interpretation of the world swings, sharing its central place with such beliefs as a divinely accomplished creation, the singularly redemptive work of the Christ, and ultimate eschatological justice.

Being told, however, that such a foundational story was a “myth” was problematic for many who held dear the history of churchly interpretation. For prior to the Enlightenment, the Christian Church held overwhelmingly that the human Fall into sin

was at least an historical event that grounded the redemptive acts of the historical Christ.¹ Could it be that the Church had simply been in error about how to best understand this narrative? If so, could one affirm at the same time both the historical veracity of these texts *and* the documentary sciences that asserted their mythological character? And if not, with whom ought one to side?

Even where one feels less concern over traditional exegesis, questions still press of how to handle a story so central to the heart of Christianity. What is a theologian to do with a mythical Fall into sin? Is its mythological form something to be gotten past or something to be embraced? Are its significance and role in the Christian mind diminished or enhanced because of this categorization? Does the theologian even know what it means to call something a “myth?”

Beyond the particular exegetical details of Genesis 3 or even the historical treatment the story has received in the past, the larger question is the status of the entire narrative. On the assumption that it is indeed mythological in its form or content, how is such a story to be treated, and what then is its relationship to history or theology? In what way does its form-genre contribute to or detract from communicating its overarching intention, however that is construed?

Questions such as these were at the center of a flurry of discourse in the mid-twentieth century. Some of the best known and most influential theologians of the period such as Rudolph Bultmann, Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and their diverse followers

¹ For an early and particularly poignant example of this dependency, see John Chrysostom, “The Epistle to the Romans: Homily 10,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 401-408.

poured a sea of ink over a forest of paper trying to sort out these issues.² It might even be safely said that the question of the presence and role of “myth” in the Bible reaches a critical and interpretive climax in the mid twentieth century.

The world of theology, however, is not the only world in which the category of “myth” is used. Arguably it is not even the world best suited to the discussion. “Myth” is also a fundamental genre-concept in the world of literature. And this raises a more deeply penetrating question for the theologian. If theologians are dealing with “myth” only because they believe they have found it in the text, and not out of some intrinsic interest in, knowledge of, or passion for the genre, are they even the best persons to address such questions? Wherein lies their credibility?

To illustrate the point, if one wanted an answer to the question, “What is Love?”, one might make a good case for asking a psychologist, who understands the human mind, or perhaps better, ask the lovers themselves, who know it viscerally and existentially. But one would do well to suspect any assistance offered by a theologian whose only interest in love is that it happened to be part of the Song of Songs and whose occupation therefore requires him to say something about it. C. S. Lewis has spoken of this need to understand the literary form even more bluntly: “It is easy to forget that the man who writes a good love sonnet needs not only to be enamoured of a woman, but also to be enamoured of the Sonnet.”³

² For a sense of the foment of the period, see the various volumes of Hans Werner Bartsch’s *Kerygma & Myth* from the period. Hans Werner Bartsch, *Kerygma and Myth by Rudolf Bultmann and Five Critics*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, vol. I (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961); and *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, vol. II (London: SPCK, 1962).

³ C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 3.

What seems to have been missing from the theological debate at that critical period was the voice of a unique sort of expert. Much help might have been gained in consulting one who understood the essential workings of myth, not only by profession, but also by existential passion and personal experience. Such a source would be of further help if he also had a strong interest in the theological issues at stake. C. S. Lewis was just such a thinker. And Richard Cunningham recognized it as early as 1967, when he said,

Current theological discussion on demythologizing could profit by more exposure to Lewis' understanding of the mythopoeic nature of language, his theory of myth, and his understanding of the epistemological function of the imagination. It would not hurt theologians to listen to a great literary critic, an expert in linguistics, and one of the best-read men in mythology—Greek, Nordic, Roman, and others. More than just talking or writing about mythology, Lewis loved and avidly read mythology throughout his life. His views thus convey some experiential insight.⁴

Yet to date Cunningham's challenge remains unanswered in any thoroughgoing way—particularly in relation to the Genesis Fall story. This dissertation seeks to fill that void.

The Nature of the Project

A series of hefty tomes would be required to address the questions raised in the introduction. The goals of this dissertation, however, are necessarily more modest. It will demonstrate that C. S. Lewis' approach to the nature and function of *mythopoeia* represents an important and unheard contribution to mid-twentieth century discussions on the mythological nature of the Fall narrative of Genesis 3.

With a few exceptions such a juxtaposition does not seem have been attempted anywhere in the literature. Hugo Meynell's brief article stands alone as a tantalizing

⁴ Richard B. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 95. Likewise, Medcalf enticingly suggested, without actually executing the suggestion, "...perhaps the literary critic's formulation can help the theologian's at a time when people talk as if 'the Word became flesh' is itself a myth." Stephen Medcalf, "Coincidence of Myth and Fact," in *Ways of Reading the Bible*, ed. Michael Wadsworth (Sussex, Great Britain: Harvester Press, 1981), 76.

foretaste of the total palette considered in this dissertation.⁵ After surveying Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, and Karl Rahner in a few sparse paragraphs, he asks the following leading questions,

Could not the special significance of Christianity be due largely to what it has in common with myth? Could not Christianity actually be the *true myth*, in some sense in which this is not a contradiction?...Could Christianity be thought of as being or containing *mystery*, in the sense of a literally true story which affects people by appealing to their emotions and imaginations in essentially the same way as is done by the literally untrue but profound stories which are myths strictly speaking?⁶

He offers C. S. Lewis as a proposed answer to these questions. But what Meynell only hints at shall herein be demonstrated—specifically, that Lewis views *mythopoeia*, not as a product of primitive and unenlightened thought, but as a proper literary device for addressing that ubiquitous human longing common to both ancients and moderns. Thus his robust psychological model is able to embrace the efficacy of the Genesis text in its existing mythopoetic form without the need of demythologization, the establishment of some historical narrative or prior mythology to undergird it, or conversely some supra-historical reality inaccessible to historical scrutiny. This is possible because a good myth succeeds in facilitating truth regarding transcendent reality by employing certain non-discursive aspects of the human noetic package. Its primary target thus is not the intellect,

⁵ Hugo Anthony Meynell, “Myth in Christian Religion,” in *Theolinguistics*, ed. J. P. Van Noppen (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit, 1981), 133-142. C. Stephen Evans has, likewise, offered a brief survey of Lewis versus Bultmann on the nature of gospel myth, but again its length allows it to be little more than an introduction to the topic. His conclusions are similar in vein to Meynell’s. C. Stephen Evans, “The Incarnational Narrative as Myth and History,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23, no. 4 (1994): 387-407. Lee Alan Brewer’s dissertation does compare the anthropologies of Barth and Lewis, but it says little of Barth’s thoughts on myth and focuses rather on the nature of “freedom” and choice in both men. As such it is of limited value to these particular questions. Lee Alan Brewer, “The Anthropology of Choice: A Critical Analysis and Comparison of the Doctrine of Man in the Theologies of Karl Barth and C. S. Lewis” (PhD dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

⁶ Meynell, 138.

but the imagination, which Lewis believes to be a truth-facilitating faculty for the person who is willing to adopt a particular perspective.

In relation to the historicity question, the dissertation presents Lewis' belief that myth is doing something more, not less, than giving history. Something grander is at work in the story of the Fall; something more is being achieved than could be gained by an unaccommodated historical record. Now bushels of theologians would have readily conceded this point when stated so generally, but one is hard pressed to synthesize from the theological work of the period any adequate explanation of how this mythic story achieves its desired work in the human mind.

That is the goal of this dissertation—to show that even a mythical Fall narrative may serve the theological need if care is taken to properly understand what the genre does and does not entail.

Method of the Exploration

The first chapter will focus on developing the historical context of the discussion. Because a major aspect of the question hinges on the significant differences between modern and pre-modern interpretation of the Genesis Fall, the survey must begin with what might be called the Augustinian-Reformation trajectory. Following this will come a brief exploration of the rise of at least two contrasting trajectories, consisting primarily of Enlightenment thinkers, who disagreed with the first trajectory on the narrative's historicity, but responded in different ways. The first, as illustrated by Kant, attempted to lift the narrative out of history and into a trans-historical realm. The second, that of higher criticism, pressed the narrative downward into history as a mere example of cultural-religious evolution. Finally the chapter concludes by laying out the contemporary

theological landscape into which Lewis be placed. Specifically in view are Reinhold Niebuhr and the Barth-Bultmann demythologization debate.

In chapter 2, Lewis will be presented as a thinker in the throes of this tension, with a complex relationship to the various parties. It will first demonstrate his sympathies with modern scientific conclusions regarding the age of the earth and species macro-development (as well as his specific hesitations). Second, Lewis' own view of himself as a traditional churchman will be presented, along with his commitment to stand within the tradition of what the Church has always taught—that is, that the Genesis account has divine origin and authority and provides a true explanation of human origins and fallen nature. Third, his great skepticism toward higher critical methodologies and resulting conclusions will be presented. And finally and conversely the chapter will parse Lewis' nuanced affirmation of the Form-school's conclusion that the Fall narrative is primarily mythopoetic as well as his rejection of efforts to reconstruct the historical development of the myth.

Chapter 3 will lay out Lewis' understanding of the nature and function of the mythic genre in general. What is myth? What is its general relation to history? How does it function? Much work has been done here, particularly by Charlie W. Starr,⁷ so the task will be more synthetic than constructive. The only original contribution will be a consideration of why myth affects people differently. Some people's experience corresponds to Lewis' structure perfectly; others walk away seemingly unaffected by myth. Lewis argues that a particular vantage point is critical if a mythic narrative is to

⁷ Charlie W. Starr, "The Triple Enigma: Truth and Myth as the Key to C. S. Lewis's Epistemological Thinking" (DA dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University, 2002).

succeed. A failure to assume this posture might explain some theologians' rush to get past the genre trappings to some more intrinsic message.

This analysis will afford two kinds of application. The first, covered in chapter 4, is primarily textual. Lewis' own treatment of the Fall narrative is parsed. While Lewis nowhere offers direct exegesis of Genesis 3, he offers much consideration of its historical, doctrinal, and mythological significance.

The second application will make up chapter 5. Lewis' total program will be brought into orbit with the contemporary theological alternatives from chapter 1 to see how he might improve, critique, and clarify the discussion of that period.

The dissertation will conclude by thrusting Lewis' ideas forward into our current context. In what ways was Lewis prescient of future theological developments? How might his work be useful to theological problems dominating the present theological landscape?

A final note on method should here be made. Due to both the large number of moving parts in this dissertation as well as the voluminous but often insipid quality of secondary literature on C. S. Lewis, an ordinary survey of scholarship, normally inserted at this point, is very nearly counterproductive, needlessly ballooning the work while promoting more numbness than knowledge. This, combined with the highly focused and synthetic nature of this project, means a traditional survey would consist of little more than a long list of Lewis adepts—Kilby, Cunningham, Walsh, Hooper, and so on—each followed by the observation that he did not offer anything significant on this topic. As such the decision has been made to diffuse the survey into the relevant chapters where each component of the subject is treated, thus allowing the single germane line or

paragraph in, say, Walsh to stand out at the precise point of usefulness. It will be abundantly clear throughout with whom and how widely the conversation in this dissertation extends.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION OF THE GENESIS FALL AND ESTABLISHMENT OF MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY CONTEXT

This dissertation wrestles with the function of the Genesis Fall narrative when understood as “myth.” This categorization was not always, and is still not, universally conceded. Yet the mid-twentieth century reflects a kind of crowing elevation of the idea. This chapter offers a brief overview of how the idea of the Fall narrative as myth came into its prominence. This survey is not intended to be exhaustive by any means, nor does it draw persons together in any totalizing arrangement or even in most cases show dependence. Rather it merely identifies three broad kinds of treatment—three trajectories—each providing ingredients which flavor the complex brew of perspectives promoted by mid-twentieth century theologians. The typology used here is intended only to show that otherwise diverse thinkers share orbits around a few specific relevant points of content or methodology. In all other ways they may be radically distinct.

The “Traditional” Approach

Trajectory 1: Augustine

In nearly every way Augustine provides the archetype of the pre-Enlightenment interpretation in the West.¹ While Augustine is certainly not the first to address these

¹ For a far more complete and nuanced tracing of this trajectory, see Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3, Issues in Systematic Theology* (New York: P. Lang Publishers, 1999).

issues,² his work is so formative on the subsequent tradition, that his approach remains almost unmodified until the Reformation, and even it, though less keen on figurative interpretations, clearly shares the trajectory at salient points.

Regarding Augustine's second and abortive work on Genesis, Teske offers, "that it remains incomplete bears witness to Augustine's inability to offer a literal interpretation of the text."³ If Teske is correct, he is so only insofar as Augustine was unable to do so at that early point in his career, and the more mature Augustine admits to just such a frustration in his earliest attempt. In reference to his first attempt, a commentary against the Manicheans, he says,

At the time I did not see how all of Genesis could be taken in the proper sense, and it seemed to me more and more impossible, or at least scarcely possible or very difficult, for all of it to be so understood.

But not willing to be deterred from my purpose, whenever I was unable to discover the literal meaning of a passage, I explained its figurative meaning as briefly and as clearly as I was able...I was mindful, however, of the purpose which I had set before me and which I was unable to achieve, that is, to show how everything in Genesis is to be understood first of all not in the figurative but in the proper sense. And since I did not completely despair of the possibility of understanding it all in this sense, I made the following statement in the first part of Book Two...⁴

He then offers as evidence of his desire for literalism a citation from his anti-Manichean commentary, "Of course, if anyone wanted to take everything that was said according to the letter, that is, to understand it exactly as the letter sounds, and could avoid

² For a sense of the breadth of pre-Augustine consideration, see Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

³ Augustine, "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book," in *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 3.

⁴ Augustine, "The Literal Meaning of Genesis," vol. 2, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 42, ed. Johannes Quasten, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 8.2.5; 35. Augustine identifies the same struggle in "The Retractions," in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 60, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Sister Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), I.17; 76f.

blasphemies and explain everything in harmony with the Catholic faith, we should not only bear him no hostility, but regard him as a leading and highly praiseworthy interpreter.”⁵ And to this should be added the preceding comments from that original commentary: “Hence, this whole discourse must first be discussed according to history, then according to prophecy. According to history events are narrated; according to prophecy future things are foretold.”⁶

Three things are immediately obvious. First, by “proper” and “literal,” as opposed to “figurative,” Augustine intends something like “as it happened in history,” that is, “historical.” Second, he believed such meanings had a sort of first and foundational meaning before any others. Third, while Augustine’s abilities did develop with time, his exegetical assumptions about the “historical” nature of the text remained unchanged throughout his life. The very existence of his final and extensive commentary on early Genesis argues that he overcame in great degree his “inability.”

Yet the Bible is a divine book with a divine author, so it is reasonable to assume it has a diversity of meaning within it. Consequently Augustine embraced a wide variety of allegorical, tropological, or other sorts of interpretations. His later works on Genesis contain at least as much allegorical interpretation as the early Manichean commentary. The last three books of the *Confessions*, which return repeatedly to early Genesis to develop their mystical themes, might even be considered a step beyond allegory to

⁵ Augustine, “On the Literal Meaning of Genesis,” vol. 2, 35. Originally in Augustine and here quoted from, “Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees,” in *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, trans. Roland J. Teske, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), II.2.3; 95.

⁶ Augustine, “Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees,” II.2.3; 95.

something like spiritual vision.⁷ And in his final treatment of Genesis in *The City of God* (*sans the Retractions*), both “literal” and “figurative” readings are found together side by side.⁸ He reiterates that many legitimate interpretations of these things have been offered by many—from those who regard the entire narrative as “figurative,” that is, “written of in order to convey symbolic meanings,” to those who see it as wholly historical, that is, “presented to us in a most faithful narrative of events.” But since “spiritual” meanings of Paradise in no way prevent it from also being “corporeal” (anymore than Paul figuring the two covenants in Sarah and Hagar robs them of their historical personhood), they are permitted. At the same time, however, Augustine’s treatment of them in his great apologetic assumes their historical rootedness; what’s more, it depends upon it for its rhetorical efficacy against the non-historical fables of the pagans.⁹

The bottom line is that Augustine always believed, even at the stage of his life where he despaired at his own inability to so explain it, that the recorded events were at least historical events, just as present in the time-space continuum as the life of Moses or Christ. The presence of other valid meanings within the text, though “permitted” and “appropriate,”¹⁰ did not alter this first and basic reality. Kathryn Greene-McCreight sums it up, “His understanding of the Bible as inspired allows and indeed necessitates

⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), XI-XIII; 221-306.

⁸ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIII.21; 567f.

⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, VII.1-28; 267-304.

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 568.

allegorical interpretation, but his understanding that the Bible speaks of the same continuity of time and space within which he lives requires literal readings as well.”¹¹

Aquinas and the Reformation

In *prima pars* (Q102) of the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas affirms Augustine (by quoting *The City of God*) and then adds, “For what Scripture says about Paradise is set forth in the form of historical narrative, and in all matters that are so related in Scripture we must accept the truth of the history as our foundation and only build spiritual explanations on top of it.”¹² He further affirms this trajectory in his discussion of sin in *prima secundae*.¹³

Even more interesting is the discussion from his other *summa*. Therein, Aquinas defends the doctrine of original sin from its detractors by *assuming* the historical rootedness of the first sin.¹⁴ This is significant given his audience—either Pagans, who might not be expected to share the assumption that the biblical narrative is true, or perhaps Arabian Aristotelians. Yet when citing the common arguments against original sin, the question of Adam’s historicity does not appear. One might infer from this that, regardless of whether the audience is pagan or Muslim, Thomas does not expect them to even raise the question of whether Adam actually existed.

¹¹ Greene-McCreight, 33. It is worth noting that the Synod of Orange in Arausiacum [A.D. 529] assumed the historical nature of Adam’s sin so to explain, against Pelagianism, the imputation of that sin to subsequent humanity.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 13 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 184f.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 26, 24f. See all of Q81, but particularly, art 5.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Charles J. O’Neil, vol. 4: Salvation (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1957), 212-223.

Although the sixteenth-seventeenth century European Reformation highlighted certain tensions that existed within Christianity, great tracts of the faith were still common ground. In theological anthropology, discussions continued to be heavy on questions such as the origin of soul, the essential nature of humanity, and the exact nature and transmission of original sin, however, the historical nature of early Genesis was held in common as a prevailing assumption. While questions on the meaning and implications of Adam's sin continued, the belief that Adam had really eaten a forbidden fruit was embraced sometimes with at least as much vigor as in earlier days. It is reasonable to expect this, for if allegorical interpretations are out of favor, it would not do to lose the literal one as well—for it is all that remains.

Calvin assumes it in the *Institutes* and declared outright in his commentary on Genesis that nothing is gained from leaving the “literal sense” (even for allegory).¹⁵ And while he does acknowledge that one can find persons who think Moses is only “speaking fabulously of things unknown,” he credits such claims only to those who seek to destroy scriptural prophecy in its entirety—that is, to those hostile to Christianity in general. He is more than comfortable with Moses as amanuensis of long standing oral tradition handed down from Adam himself. For “no sane person doubts that Adam was well-instructed in them all.”¹⁶ The historical nature of Genesis was unchallenged by the

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John Baillie, trans. Lewis Ford Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I.14f.; 159-196, and II.1; 241-254; and *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003) 2.8; 114.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 58.

Reformed Church in each of its three forms of unity as well as in the Westminster documents.¹⁷

Luther, likewise, in his *Commentary on Genesis*, expresses distrust of allegorical treatments, but holds the events of early Genesis to be historical. He says, “So far as the opinion of St. Augustine is concerned, I hold that Moses spoke literally and not figuratively or allegorically, telling us that the world with all its creatures was made within six days, just as the word reads.”¹⁸ This assumption was shared by the Lutheran Formula of Concord.¹⁹ In addition to Protestant affirmations, the Council of Trent considered it a foundational assumption, as did the Confession of Dositheus for the Eastern Church.²⁰

Conclusion

Given the limitations of space, this overview should still serve to provide sufficient flavor of the pre-Enlightenment church’s trajectory. Adam was an historical person who lived at the beginning of the world and whose decision to rebel against God in the matter of the forbidden tree is the beginning of the moral problem for humanity.

¹⁷ See the Belgic Confession, articles 14-15; The Heidelberg Catechism, questions 6-7; the Canons of Dordt, Points 3/4, articles 1-2; The Westminster Confession, chapter VI; and the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 10, 12-20 in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:77-206.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 5; see also his conclusion [88].

¹⁹ Formula of Concord Art. 1.ii in *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). Note also that Melancthon sets the systematic trajectory for the Reformation with the same assumption in the *Loci Communes: 1543*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 48.

²⁰ “The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent, A.D. 1563,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), Fifth Session, articles 1-3; 84f.; and “The Confession of Dositheus, or the Eighteen Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem, A.D. 1672,” Decree 6, 407f., in the same text.

From this historical or “literal” foundation, many (even most) also saw additional teaching present in it in the form of allegory, analogy, type, moral teaching, and so on. But these additional interpretations sat atop the historical reality, rather than in place of it. This trajectory is relevant because it remains intact into the twentieth century (although with increasing marginalization), and Lewis frequently interacts with it.

Even though minority interpretations favoring non-historicity do exist in the pre-modern church, the thesis here is unaffected. The inclination of higher criticism was not to favor some minor tradition over against the dominant one, but (as shall be seen) to unilaterally dismiss “pre-critical” interpretation on methodological grounds.

Modern Discussions on the Fall Narrative: A Change of Premise

The Enlightenment brought certain challenges to the viability of the historical read of the Genesis Fall. Whatever this text was meant to do, it need not (or perhaps could not) reflect what actually happened in history. The reasons given were often some combination of the beliefs that (1) a literal-historical Fall was rationally deficient in its explanatory power, (2) modern science had drawn a more compelling picture of human nature and origins that was incompatible with an historical Fall, and (3) the texts themselves argued for a different kind of non-historical exegesis. The following survey identifies persons expressing various forms of these conclusions and, further, identifies two broad trajectories based upon methodologies and assumptions.

Trajectory 2: Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant’s effort to yank Christianity out of the jaws of Humean skepticism forced him to adjust traditional Christian doctrines at points where they seemed unviable in the new context. His efforts are import here because they illustrate an

early Enlightenment approach to the Genesis 3 text that is frequently mirrored and comes to a sort of climax in the mid-twentieth century.²¹ His thoughts regarding the human Fall are presented within his treatment on the problem of original sin in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.²² Space limitations do not permit a full treatment of Kant's program on the original constitution of humanity with its various predispositions and propensities. It will suffice to rehearse one of Kant's major commitments: Ought entails Can. If one *ought* to act in a particular way, then this must imply the ability to so act; otherwise the agent cannot be held morally praise- or blame-worthy for the act. Further, such an act cannot be considered *voluntary* (that is, executed by the function of the Will). Therefore the "ought" of morality, implies the "can" of moral freedom to so act or not act. The individual must be free in this sense at the moment of choice in order to be a moral agent in that choice. Thus a literal Adamic Fall that creates an "inheritance" of guilt for all humans is out of the question—more than this, for Kant, it is the most "inept" of all explanations of the human problem.²³ Thus if the story of the tragic choice in Eden is taken as an unaccommodated historical event with its resulting moral implications for every person, it is contradictory to human moral freedom and responsibility.

What then is the Fall for Kant? His ideas are presented in the context of sorting through the problem that every human arrives in life already possessing what he calls a propensity for evil or a corruption of the will. But of course such a propensity would have

²¹ For consideration of what Kant's role in Enlightenment treatment of scripture both was and was not, see Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 262ff.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore M. Greene and H. Hoyt Hudson, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960). See primarily Book 1, 15-49.

²³ Kant, *Religion*, 35.

to be freely chosen if humans were to be blameworthy for it. Given his repugnance for a passively inherited or “original” sin nature, it is more just and warranted to assert that a detrimental moral choice was actually made prior to our becoming conscious historical beings.²⁴ Such a transcendent choice to embrace this propensity to evil must have been made by each person. This choice, however, lies not within our historical-phenomenal reality, but is part of a noumenal one. The resulting question of what such an atemporal act of the will actually means ontologically remains necessarily unanswered in Kant, for by definition it defies rational exploration as to its nature.²⁵ It is a theoretically necessary assertion, warranted by our practical moral experience here in the phenomenal realm. We could no sooner empirically probe this act of the will *in se* than we could probe the being of God (hence the touchstone with the rest of his program).

The seminal point here is that for Kant the story of Adam’s Fall actually offers an analogy of this otherwise inscrutable noumenal reality. While this is not formally “myth” for Kant, it is something like it. By means of the story, Adam provides some form of epistemological access to what no human actually experiences—the situation prior to their transcendental choice to Fall and that moment of movement from having a morally upright predisposition to the adoption of the propensity for evil.²⁶ It does not reflect a primal state of perfection in any literal or at least historical-phenomenal sense, which, he believes, is the ubiquitous mistake of the tradition. Rather this story serves as a rational representation of the adoption of the evil disposition by every person.

²⁴ Kant, *Religion*, 23.

²⁵ For an interesting attempt to address this problem, see Robert Brown, “The Transcendental Fall in Kant and Schelling,” *Idealistic Studies* 14.1 (1984): 49-66. He admits, however, that his own solution would constitute a “major emendation” to Kant’s thought [52f.].

²⁶ Kant, *Religion*, 38.

At first blush this treatment may sound like the sort of watery “Adam as everyman” of some stripes of later Protestant Liberalism. But Kant has performed a more dramatic feat than this. Kant’s Adam represents, not the historical, but the *noumenal self*. The Genesis narrative takes the self entirely out of the world of sensible cause and effect and provides an avenue for contemplation of an historically-scientifically unverifiable noumenal reality. That is the story’s power and its brilliance.

Kant, then, represents an early and influential expression of the idea that the proper treatment of Genesis 3 involves, not its exegetical data *per se*, but what the passage is intended to do inside the reader—how it is intended to operate and what it is trying to accomplish—through the *kind* of story it is. Kant spends little time actually considering the exegetical details of the text and virtually no time on what meanings the original author might have intended. This might be considered a deficit in his approach, but it is a deficit which higher criticism made good on his behalf—with interest.

The Late Nineteenth Century

The affects of the modern sciences and higher criticism’s documentary hypotheses in the nineteenth century on theology are well known. It suffices here to point out that as the 1800s drew to a close, Kant’s philosophical disagreements with the traditional interpretation of the Genesis Fall had been joined (and perhaps even overshadowed) by a widening geological and manuscript record, a new epic narrative of species macro-development and progress, and complex models of editorial authorship.

By way of providing an indicative taste for the period, in 1890-91, Huslean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, Herbert Ryle gave a series of lectures on early Genesis. When they were later published, he observed with pleasure in the preface that

the “monstrous perversion of Christian freedom” that for so long had forced Christians to choose between Christianity and the sciences was finally giving way to “the intellectual progress of the age.”²⁷ By a not-so-subtle use of overstatement, he added,

The old position is no longer tenable. A new position has to be taken up at once, prayerfully chosen, and hopefully held. The period of transition, the period of anxious suspense of judgment, is drawing to a close...It may be that Science seems to be but a disappointing friend when it shows the path of traditional interpretation to be no longer practicable. But the utterance of truth is the proof of purest friendship; and Science, if it closes one way, guides us to another which hitherto has been hid from view.²⁸

Yet overstatement it was. The old interpretive lines were not yet entirely routed. Even within the higher critical community, some held back, affirming the progression of the critical sciences *and* the necessity of an historical Adam. No less than the perennially popular Franz Delitzsch assumed such a position only a few years prior to Ryle’s hope-filled pronouncement.²⁹ While embracing the great explanatory value of the documentary hypothesis over Mosaic authorship, he was unwilling to abandon the historicity of Adam as he believed such a move came with grave intellectual consequences for the faith. He confessed that if the great geological ages are true, and with them Darwinian macro-evolution

then indeed, we admit it without reserve, the Christian view of the world is condemned as from henceforth untenable. For documentary Christianity professes to be the religion of the redemption of Adamic mankind, and has for its inalienable premises the unity of the first creation of man, the fall of the first-created pair, and the curse and promise by which this was succeeded. Hence, were we to grant that Genesis i.-iii. speaks of the beginnings of human history with the stammering tongue of childhood, it must still be maintained, if Christianity is to

²⁷ Herbert Edward Ryle, *The Early Narratives of Genesis: A Brief Introduction to the Study of Genesis I-XI* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), vii-viii.

²⁸ Ryle, ix.

²⁹ Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Sophia Taylor, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888). This was the fifth and final manifestation of his work, originally published in 1852.

maintain its ground as the religion of the recovery of the lost, and as the religion of the consummation aimed at from the beginning, that man, as the creature of God, entered upon existence as at once human and capable of development in good, but fell from this good beginning by failing to stand the test of his freedom.³⁰

His approach tended to regard the narrative more as “history clothed in figure,” whereby something as fantastical as the speaking serpent, though astonishing, “stands on the level with the talking of animals in fables.”³¹ This, nevertheless, did not prevent him from frequently using the terms “history” and “historical” throughout, even in the same contexts where he is working with the various redactors of the oral tradition.³²

Trajectory 3: Hermann Gunkel and F. R. Tennant

The two decades following Delitzsch’s efforts showed them to be perhaps more of a last gasp than a renewed trajectory. By the dawn of the twentieth century, Ryle’s prediction had in the main been realized. Two major works published in the first decade of that century suffice to demonstrate the intellectual *ethos* of the period preceding this study.

First, Hermann Gunkel’s ground-breaking source and form work on legends in Genesis was published in 1901.³³ Gunkel argues that Genesis in its entirety consists of a

³⁰ Delitzsch, 58.

³¹ Delitzsch, 148.

³² Delitzsch, 18, 57.

³³ Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*, trans. W. H. Carruth (New York: Schocken Books, 1964, originally 1901), or for the entire extended treatment, see *Genesis: Translated and Interpreted*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997). This trajectory, however, was anticipated by his lesser known *Creation and Chaos*, published six years previously. Citations to *Legends of Genesis* will be noted in textual brackets throughout this section.

beautifully edited patchwork of “legends” as opposed to “history.”³⁴ Gunkel exhibited a laudable sensitivity to the literary qualities of the text, but throughout he is torn over whether the legendary forms of the narratives make them primitive or profound. Usually his answer is both. For example, he comments that the “brevity” of the materials, their sparse use of details, and shallow characterization are all marks of “the poverty of primitive literary art” and yet applauds them for their enduring power and beauty [49]. In their favor, primitive legend could succeed despite such Spartan use of detail because it dealt in “types”—broad archetypal pictures of the kinds of persons and events easily recognizable and immediately interpretable by the ancient human imagination.

This was but a happy accident, however, as primitive audiences presumably could not handle “portraits made up of many separate traits and painted with artistic detail” like the deeply-developed modern novel [54],³⁵ nor had they “yet acquired the intellectual power to distinguish between poetry and reality” [39f.].³⁶ Men of antiquity were “in general more simple;” whereas modern men are “many-sided.” And yet this same paucity of detail is one of the major factors in their ability to grab and sustain the attention of even the modern person. While this line of argument (and it shall be met frequently in this period) smacks of “the white man’s burden” and other sorts of Eurocentric assumptions that are as far out of fashion today (and at least as mythological) as the

³⁴ In the introduction, Albright makes the following important note about Carruth’s translation, which he generally concedes to be accurate. Carruth has rendered “legends” for the German *Sagen*, which, although having the idea of “a poetic narrative of historical origin or coloring” [xii] within its semantic domain, should not be understood to prejudge the presence or lack of historicity. Given that much of the coming debate is originally in German, the difficult relationship between *Sage* and the English alternatives “legend” or “saga” should be remembered.

³⁵ To meet the sort of works he envisions, see perhaps Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1991) or anything by Jane Austin or the Brontë sisters.

³⁶ See also 9, 31.

perceptions Gunkel himself attributes to primitive storytellers, these features are exactly what provide Gunkel with his influential taxonomy.

For Gunkel, the literary form of legend developmentally precedes the form of history, just as the form of myth precedes that of legend. Formal history exists in written form, resting upon eye-witness account (or something comparable), is credible in its content, and “treats great public occurrences”—the rise and fall of kings, peoples, and so on [5f.]. As such, it requires a certain level of cultural development before it can occur. Legend, on the other hand, is a product of oral history handed down from antiquity, only being written down at a later time. It reports the incredible (apparently as judged by modern standards of credulity) and the anthropomorphic intervention of the divine in human affairs, and is concerned “with things that interest the common people, with personal and private matters, and is fond of presenting even political affairs and personages so that they will attract popular attention” [4f.]. Myth precedes even this, consisting of “stories of the gods, in contradistinction to the legends in which the actors are men” [14].

It is clear *prima facie* to Gunkel that throughout Genesis, one is meeting legend. For though Israelite writers had mastered the art of history at an early stage (e.g. the book of Kings), clearly the narratives of Genesis do not exhibit such characteristics. And additionally Genesis 1-11 exhibit the quality of “faded myths” [14], that is, they are stories containing much from old myth (Babylonian, Assyrian, and so on), but are in the process of being converted so to be acceptable to the developing monotheism of the early Monarchical period (the period in which they reached their final form).

Such is the sense in which the label “myth” is appropriate to the Genesis Fall narrative. But Gunkel echoes Ryle in cautioning, “The senseless confusion of ‘legend’ with ‘lying’ has caused good people to hesitate to concede that there are legends in the Old Testament. But legends are not lies; on the contrary, they are a particular form of poetry” [2f.]. The conclusion then is something like: although the Fall narrative is not represented as an historical event even within the text, it still manifests its intended theological power through its poetic form.³⁷

Moving from the exegetical front to a formal theological one, outside of certain trajectories of theological conservatism and fundamentalism, late nineteenth and early twentieth century theology and philosophy of religion had little to say on the subject of sin, (which in part accounts for the ruckus created by Barth’s *Römerbrief* in 1919).³⁸ Biological macro-evolution and philosophical ideas of human progress had undermined belief in an intrinsic sin problem within the race. And as traditional Christian interpretations had pinned this exact point to the Genesis Fall like a donkey’s tail, this

³⁷ To follow this trajectory to its zenith, see S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, ed. Walter Lock, *Westminster Commentaries* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904) xliii; and John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2 ed., *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930, originally 1910) iv-viii. Skinner’s taxonomy of history and legend is nearly verbatim from Gunkel, as well as his belief that the non-historicity of the narrative robs nothing from its beauty or theological usefulness.

³⁸ At least Richard Roberts argues so. Richard Roberts, “Sin, Saga, and Gender: The Fall and Original Sin in Modern Theology,” in *A Walk in the Garden of Eden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*, ed. Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 244-260. And Barth himself indicated that this was one of his goals. *CD II/1*, 634-635. See also Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) for the final iteration.

period was rather uninterested in the game as well as the blindfold that seemed necessarily to go with it.³⁹

Cambridge philosopher of religion F. R. Tennant, however, stands as an important exception in this period,⁴⁰ publishing three major works on the nature of sin and its history and interpretation in religion.⁴¹ Of the three, his *Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* treat most directly the Genesis Fall narrative *qua* narrative.

By 1903, Tennant can say, “It can no longer be assumed, in the light of knowledge yielded by comparative mythology and the prehistoric sciences, that the third chapter of Genesis supplies us with the record of a revelation of historical fact, divinely given at some definite time, or even with a story whose form and details were wholly the creation of its writer’s inspired imagination” [1]. The reason for this is quite simple: science has shown it to have happened otherwise. He says,

Indeed, if man is evolved from a non-human ancestry, if his reason, language, morals and religion are the product of gradual development, if his antiquity is what geology asserts it to be, and his earliest condition, as human, that to which several sciences now strongly point, it is quite impossible to entertain at all the view that the Fall-story, and the legends kindred to it, embody any genuine tradition once common to the race, or, therefore, an scientific or historical truth. [78]

³⁹ For a limited but insightful treatment of the minor place the Fall narrative occupied within Liberal Protestantism, see Paul Mojzes, “The Cracked Mirror: Liberal Protestant Understandings of the Myth of the Fall,” in *Society and Original Sin: Ecumenical Essays on the Impact of the Fall*, ed. Durwood Foster and Paul Mojzes (New York: Paragon House, 1985), 106-118.

⁴⁰ Whom Mary Francis Thelen calls “a fortunate exception.” Mary Francis Thelen, “Frederick R. Tennant: The Treatment of Man and Sin in Religious Liberalism,” in *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), i. Citations to *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original* will be noted in brackets throughout this section.

⁴¹ F. R. Tennant, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin; Being the Hulsean Lectures Delivered before the University of Cambridge in 1901-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902); *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946, originally 1903); and *The Concept of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912). For a later work built upon Tennant’s, see Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929).

These “ifs,” however, are not intended as contingencies, but have the force of “since.” It had already been so proven to Tennant’s satisfaction. Such historical interpretations are thus “utterly unfaithful” to the fruit of modern research.

What is more, even Kant’s use of the text as an allegorical story of the race “has been almost entirely abandoned; at least by theologians.”⁴² Such interpretations founder on plain exegesis. For example, the serpent cursed to go belly-down leaves one with no choice but that the author intends an actual animal, not merely a principle of immorality.

What has broken the fellowship here between Kant and Tennant (as with Gunkel) is the intrusion of a “sense of period” [80]⁴³—a hermeneutic focused less on the utility of the text to address the modern concern and more on what the original author could have possibly known and intended. Tennant sees the Fall narrative as having all the features one would expect of the synthetic patchwork of religious ideas indicative of “the spirit of Hebrew religion as it was passing into ethical monotheism” [77].

As with Gunkel, a key feature of this “spirit” is the hazy line between history and the imagination for the original author-editor— “We are dealing with an age in which the line between the natural and the supernatural, and that between legend and history, were only vaguely drawn” [79]. The Fall narrative is not then history, but “a working substitute

⁴² Interestingly, the year before Tennant’s retirement from his Cambridge lectureship in 1938, in a far off land R. Niebuhr would resurrect a very similar line of argument, showing perhaps that it was not so dead as Tennant believed. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (London: Nisbet and Company Ltd., 1938), 10-12; *The Nature of Man*, ed. Robin W. Lovin, *Library of Theological Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 180f.; and *Faith and History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 35.

⁴³ This sense of historical perspective in literature seems to arrive almost in Kant’s wake [*d.* 1804]. Says Lewis, “It is doubtful whether the sense of period is much older than the Waverley novels. It is hardly present in Gibbon.” C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 182-183. See also, C. S. Lewis, “Sir Walter Scott,” in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 103, referencing Sir Walter Scott, *The Waverley Novels*, c.1814; and Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776-1788.

for history.” Regardless of the text’s relationship to history, the author-editor desired the reader to approach the text *as though* it were history, or at least “the equivalent of history.” Asking what the author-editor actually believed the historical events to have been, according to Tennant, may be anachronistic.

Following Gunkel, Tennant expresses reservations about the immediate application of the term “myth” to the Genesis Fall. Simply put, “This narrative is not a myth” [82]. “Myth” is too old of a term to use for this point. Rather this story was compiled *out of* myths, that is, it is “more than” a myth. He says, “It still uses mythological objects, in place of inaccessible historical facts, for the concrete presentation of its teaching; but in its theological and ethical implications,... it has emancipated itself from the characteristics of primitive mythological speculation, and deserves a place amongst the earliest attempts at theological philosophy” [83]. Myth then, for Tennant, is a product of primitive ignorance—that which the author inserts when he does not understand the scientific nature of things. Tennant admits, however, that the author-editor of Genesis is no scientific dullard. He is not unaware of the scientific inaccuracies in his story, he is simply ignoring them. Thus, the Genesis Fall is mythological, not so much in its form, but in that “it embodies, in a fossil state, legendary or mythological matter” [87].

This raises a question for later consideration. If the author-editor wrote these things intending the reader to read them as “the equivalent of history,” then why should Tennant expect he can approach the author’s intention or experience the text as it was meant to be experienced without suspending his incredulity and coming to the text *as if* it were history? In this situation, modern man’s perceived superiority over his primitive

ancestors would seem to create a dramatic barrier to understanding the original spirit of the text. Without assuming, if only for argument's sake, the writer's point of view, are we warranted in saying that we have understood the author's intention?

The Immediate Context: Mid-Twentieth Century

The events of the early twentieth century—the Great War, the Great Depression, and the greater war that followed them both—deflated the optimism of Modernity. Progress—that great “given” promised by both macro-evolution and scientific discovery—did not produce the anticipated utopia. On the contrary, industrial dependency (and its resultant slow down in the Depression) had left millions impoverished, while technological advancement had made possible the more effective and efficient killing of enemy combatants.⁴⁴ Suddenly the idea of an intrinsic problem within the human race did not seem so unreasonable as it had a generation earlier.

Reinhold Niebuhr: A Modified Kantian Trajectory

It is almost impossible to have a discussion on the mythical qualities of Genesis 3 in this period without meeting Reinhold Niebuhr. His visit to post-war Europe in 1923 left him (along with his entire generation) scrambling for ways of explaining the great disconnect between Modernity's promise and the smoldering reality of post-war Europe. Consequently perhaps no thinker in this time period embraces the problem of sin as a sort of central concern more than Niebuhr.⁴⁵ Of primary interest here is Niebuhr's take on the

⁴⁴ Giving impetus to the strong dystopic themes of such as George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and later Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

⁴⁵ See Hans Hofmann, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 184 and 247; and Edward J. Carnell, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1951), 103. Patterson has challenged this claim of a “central

Fall narrative. To understand this, however, a few comments must be made on his thoughts of the human condition, which undergird his use of the Genesis Fall.

Niebuhr on the Nature and Corruption of Humanity

Niebuhr's reflections on human failing can be summed up in his own words: "Man is mortal. That is his fate. Man pretends not to be mortal. That is his sin."⁴⁶ The problem with humanity is rooted in its very constitution. Let us be clear, says Niebuhr, it is not a deficient nature that causes humanity's problems—our race was created good, and even in our sin we know essentially what humanity is supposed to be. But humanity's unique constitution creates both the possibility and, further, the inevitability of failure.

Humans, unlike all other creatures in the world, are a synthesis of two realities. Humanity is tied by essential constitution both to the finite world of Nature and to transcendent world of Spirit. According to Nature, humanity is finite, corporeal, and mortal; according to Spirit, humanity possesses the capacity to extend itself beyond its own perspectives—to think above its own limitations. It would be a mistake to read a neo-platonic depreciation of the physical nature in Niebuhr, for he repeatedly affirms that it is good for us to be so made. The presence of the transcendent within humanity is what makes it "free"—free to become what it was not yesterday.

concern" in numerous places as over-reductionistic, and yet he too affirms that it is his best known subject and is at least "a central pole" around which his thoughts cohere. See Bob E Patterson, "Original Sin' Revisited: McClendon, Niebuhr, and Feminist Theology," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 76; "Sin and Grace in the Light of Reinhold Niebuhr's Writings" (ThD dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960), 65-67; and *Reinhold Niebuhr, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), 81-83. Yet despite Patterson's insistence on a more diffuse interest, Gilkey remains convinced that Niebuhr's "doctrine of sin" is his "pivotal center." Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr: A Theological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 102.

⁴⁶ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 28.

When the worlds of freedom and finitude cohere in a single person, however, the result is a tension within the self that Niebuhr, following Kierkegaard, calls “Anxiety.” The human spirit sees the limitations of the natural self—its mortality and finitude—and is troubled by the recognition. This state itself is not sinful; in fact, says Niebuhr, Anxiety can often be the source of great creative inspiration, resulting in new and dramatic improvements to the human condition.⁴⁷ Yet this Anxiety is also the very temptation to abandon our creaturely place.

The use of our freedom to abandon our God-given place in response to our existential Anxiety is “Sin” for Niebuhr.⁴⁸ When our Anxiety reaches critical mass, the soul may rebel in two possible directions. These two possibilities form Niebuhr’s taxonomy. Following Augustine, “Pride” is the central form of rebellion that occurs when one responds to Anxiety by extending freedom to levels one cannot achieve and does not merit—in essence, assuming the place of God and denying creaturely and natural finitude [179]. In the opposite direction, and subject to much less consideration by Niebuhr, is the sin of “Sensuality” [228ff]. Herein, the self, overcome by the possibilities of Spirit, retreats into the Natural passions and appetites “by seeking to hide his freedom and by losing himself in some aspect of the world’s vitalities” [179], thereby embracing mutable goods as though they were infinite ones.

Every effort to escape the situation, however, ends in necessary failure. As Hofman rightly summarizes the results,

⁴⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, ed. Robin W. Lovin, 2 vols., Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 184f. Subsequent references to *The Nature and Destiny of Man* in this section will be made in textual brackets.

⁴⁸ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 11.

The whole attempt of man to exalt himself by ignoring his original state ordained by God, and using only his self-knowledge falls to pieces because it cannot fit man into the totality of the world forces which surround and limit him. And this failure destroys not only the relation of man to his environment but equally man's own inner adjustment. The confusion of modern man reveals his inner and his outer unrelatedness.⁴⁹

Finally, Niebuhr claims that, despite how it may appear, human sin does not happen *necessarily*; it does, however, happen *inevitably* [178]. All humans face this Anxiety; it is definitional to their humanity. And, while the “ideal possibility” exists that faith in God's sufficiency might prevail, all humans answer that Anxiety with rebellion [182f.]. Whatever salvation is available to humanity, it does not consist of removing Anxiety, for this would destroy humanity's freedom. Only in learning to answer Anxiety with humility and sacrificial love can we be “saved.”

Niebuhr and the Mythical Fall

Niebuhr favored Christianity among available worldviews because he believed it the only anthropology that treated both humanity's finite Nature and its free Spirit with sincerity.⁵⁰ Thus Niebuhr was tied to the Christian story, but this created a complex series of problems regarding the arrival of sin in the race.

Niebuhr expressed frustration with traditional readings of the Fall that reduce the events to mere history, embracing rather the conclusions of higher criticism as to its mythological nature. He says, “In the same manner a symbolic historical event, such as the ‘fall’ of man, loses its real meaning when taken as literal history. It symbolizes an inevitable and yet not a natural corruption of human freedom. It must not, therefore, be

⁴⁹ Hofmann, *Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, 170f.

⁵⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 14f. See also *ND*, I, 124.

regarded...as a specific event with which evil begins in history....”⁵¹ Yet he berates Liberal Protestantism of the twentieth century for its general dismissal of the narrative’s importance altogether. He says,

The story of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden is a primitive myth which modern theology has been glad to disavow, for fear that modern culture might regard belief in it as a proof of the obscurantism of religion. In place of it we have substituted various accounts of the origin and the nature of evil in human life. Most of these accounts, reduced to their essentials, attribute sin to the inertia of nature, or the hypertrophy of impulses, or to the defect of reason (ignorance), and thereby either explicitly or implicitly place their trust in developed reason as the guarantor of goodness. In all of these accounts the essential point in the nature of human evil is missed...⁵²

On the nature and function of myths, Niebuhr believed they played a vital mediating role in the dialectical relationship between the realms of Spirit-Eternity and Nature-Time. Reason or specifically discursive human language, which is a function of the world of Nature, cannot by definition directly explore a trans-rational reality such as Spirit. However, since this is all we have to work with, we must be a “deceiver” in the use of our language to say more than it is capable of.⁵³ And “symbol” is the mechanism for doing so. “It [symbol] is one dimension upon which two dimensions must be recorded. This can be done only by symbols which deceive for the sake of truth.”⁵⁴ We become “deceivers, yet true” in realizing that a symbol can hold a greater meaning than what its scientific understanding will allow; similar to what happens in art, which “constantly falsifies these [natural] relationships, as analysed by science, in order to

⁵¹ Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 33.

⁵² Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 10f.

⁵³ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 4ff.

⁵⁴ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 6.

express their total meaning.”⁵⁵ When symbols become bound together in a narrative form capable of expressing something about the trans-natural reality, myth has been produced.

Christianity is, for Niebuhr, a mythic religion, in the best sense of that term. “The Christian religion may be characterized as one which has transmuted primitive religious and artistic myths and symbols without fully rationalizing them.”⁵⁶ The great myths of Christianity—Creation, Fall, and Redemption—each say something true and powerful to us that can only be realized by the use of the myth.⁵⁷

Niebuhr, however, believed that both traditional orthodoxy and modern liberalism had misunderstood how myth ought to be treated.⁵⁸ Modern liberalism (following Bultmann’s lead) was embarrassed by the presence of myth in the Bible, seeing it only as a vestigial narrative form of pre-scientific peoples. Thus they underappreciated what the myths were capable of communicating, resulting in a decidedly earth-bound and natural religion devoid of the transcendent. Traditional orthodoxy, however, erred in the opposite direction of excessive literalism:

Every mythical idea contains a primitive deception and a more ultimate one. The primitive error is to regard the early form in which the myth is stated as authoritative. Thus the Christian religion is always tempted to insist that belief in creation [for example] also involves belief in an actual forming of man out of a lump of clay, or in an actual creative activity of six days. It is to this temptation that biblical literalism succumbs.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 6.

⁵⁶ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 7.

⁵⁷ In *Sin and Grace*, 46, Patterson draws Niebuhr’s list of “permanent myths” to include: “the concept of creation, eschaton, the Fall of man, original sin, judgment, incarnation, the cross, redemptive love, and salvation.” For more on “permanent” versus “primitive” myth in Niebuhr, see Gilkey, 67ff.

⁵⁸ Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 32.

⁵⁹ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 9.

But the myth cannot be ignored or dismissed. It must be preserved, not because it reflects historical factuality, but because it has an indispensable and essential utility. In the case of the myth of the Fall, Niebuhr believes it articulates exactly what every person experiences existentially in the moment of temptation and sin, and which s/he can know by simple introspection.⁶⁰ Man is tempted by the serpent “to break and transcend the limits which God has set for him” by eating of the tree.⁶¹ The image of the serpent (understood to be Satan or the Satanic principle) teaches us that “the situation of finiteness and freedom in which man stands becomes a source of temptation only when it is falsely interpreted. The false interpretation is not purely the product of the human imagination. It is suggested to man by a force of evil which precedes his own sin.”⁶² Thus the original temptation is true of all people in all moments as they endure their existential situation of Anxiety. In this sense the sin of Adam is present in everyone, and this is what the myth of the Fall is meant to teach.

And therein lies the difficulty. Niebuhr’s fundamental belief about human failing is that temptation exists by virtue of Anxiety, that tension between the transcendent and the finite within us, which is systemic to the human condition. On its own terms, this model has high explanatory value. But Niebuhr makes the further claim that this is what Genesis 3 presents. Yet how does the Genesis 3 narrative illustrate this? The story does not present Anxiety as a systemic situation. No Anxiety is presented prior to the temptation, rather it comes only with the temptation itself—and even there, it is not

⁶⁰ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 12.

⁶¹ Niebuhr, *ND*, I, 180.

⁶² Niebuhr, *ND*, I 180f.

imaged as such. And the source of the temptation is external—a temptation that comes unforeseen from without after a full explication of the human condition in chapter 1. This fact argues for a possible (logical, though perhaps not actual) human condition prior to the existence of Anxiety and temptation, to which Niebuhr's model does not speak. Niebuhr may be correct in everything he says about humanity's existential progression from Anxiety to temptation to sin. But what hath Genesis 3 to do with this?

By 1963, Niebuhr seemed to have realized this, for in the new preface to *Nature and Destiny of Man*, he expresses regret at having employed the Genesis myth to make his case, believing that it, in his words, “obscured my essential thesis.”⁶³ More importantly, while Niebuhr's treatment of the Genesis Fall is uniquely his own and may be at points the most innovative and compelling reflection since Augustine's treatments of pride and privation, it does share methodological sympathy with Kant at certain key points (and runs in the opposite direction of Gunkel and Tennant). Niebuhr expresses no interest in the author-editor's point-of-view or intention (as was the meat of higher criticism), but, like Kant, uses the narrative to address a particularly pressing question within *his own* historical setting. The motive, as with Kant, is laudable—the rehabilitation of a central Christian idea from perceived loss of viability. In Kant's case, it was Humean skepticism, in Niebuhr's the loss of social and scientific optimism. But to illustrate the problem, whenever this approach is used on some event *known* to be historical—say, the sacking of Rome or hurricane Katrina—it is consistently condemned as the most arbitrary form of allegory or a most suspicious historicism. Wherein lies the allowance for so *using* a myth? Is it latent in the myth's non-historical status? Is the

⁶³ Niebuhr, *ND*, I, xxv.

meaning of a myth ultimately limited only by creativity of the interpreter? Is a myth's greatest virtue that we make of it what we need in the existential moment?

Niebuhr clearly bests the banality of higher criticism in his key belief in myth's ability to transmit knowledge in non-discursive forms—that some truths can only be grasped by means of this particular kind of story. Yet because he lacks the exegetical controls of the textual critic, his reader is always left with the sneaking suspicion that the myth has been used rather than interpreted.

Merging and Diverging Trajectories: The Barth-Bultmann Debate

Although the particular focus of this document is the Genesis Fall, one cannot hope to bypass Rudolph Bultmann on the grounds that he is a New Testament scholar. His demythologization program and the resulting debates almost defined for his generation the rhetorical landscape of what myth is, how it functions in the Bible, and how it ought to be treated. Of equal importance is Karl Barth's response, which both critiques Bultmann and offers an important alternative. In relation to the typology at work here, Bultmann's program stands in many ways as an apogee of the Gunkel-Tennant higher critical approach and Kant's utilitarian meaning bereft of its noumenal aspects. As shall be seen, Karl Barth's response alternatively reflects an echo of the Traditional interpretation synthesized with the Kantian trajectory, noumenal aspects preserved.

We need not address every aspect of Bultmann's program nor lay out the often tit-for-tat detail of his debate with Barth. Even less helpful would be the uproarious scandal found in Bartsch's *Kerygma and Myth* volumes. While many of Barth's observations were echoed or critiqued by others, Barth's reaction to Bultmann's notion of "myth" is at the center of this discussion.

Bultmann, History, and Myth

Bultmann adds at least one additional perspective to the puzzle, new so far in this discussion. Bultmann is comfortable rooting the distant origins of a biblical myth in history. This, of course, may only be because he is dealing primarily with the Gospels, which have a stronger historical warrant than the much more ancient narratives of early Genesis. But nevertheless, in Bultmann history and myth can both be aspects within the same story. This is particularly true of the Gospels, wherein “We have here a unique combination of history and myth.”⁶⁴

The mythological and the historical aspects of the story, however, do not merge. For Bultmann the historical fact and the myth remain distinct and (more importantly) both achieve only second tier importance in the face of “what God is trying to say to each one of us through them.”⁶⁵ Of the two, however, the historical fact [*historisch*] is more important as it is the originating event that gives rise to the historic meaning [*geschichtlich*], that is, its “abiding significance.”⁶⁶

The historical process, as Bultmann reconstructs it, seems to go something like the following. Some event occurs in history as history [*historisch*]. Over time this event becomes circumscribed in mythological language that was originally intended to clarify the event’s ultimate significance [*geschichtlich*]⁶⁷—which may have been only marginally related to the historical events now lost. Thus the mythology born out of an historical

⁶⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), 35.

⁶⁵ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 35.

⁶⁶ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 37.

event is intended to communicate to the hearers some truth about themselves.⁶⁷ It may even have done so successfully for the original listeners, who shared the worldview presumed by the mythology. This then is the status of the text that we meet—an admixture of history and tutelary myth. What then shall the modern reader do with it? Enter demythologization.

Demythologization: The Method

The process rests upon a number of premises or steps that can be summed up (with perhaps some inevitable oversimplification) by the following propositions:

Proposition 1: The New Testament (and by implication much of the Bible) is subject to the mythological worldview held by its authors.⁶⁸ As inherited from the Gunkel-Tennant trajectory, Bultmann believes this worldview to be dominated by general scientific ignorance and the inability of hearers to distinguish the scientifically incredible from the historically verifiable.

Proposition 2: Such a worldview is incredible to enlightened modern people,⁶⁹ and must therefore be rejected for the sake of the myth's deeper intention. Thus the narrative in its mythological form obfuscates the significance for the modern person, who does not share that worldview.

Proposition 3: As such, to hear the relevant (and even timeless) message of the Bible, one must get behind the mythological structure to the real intent of the passage.

⁶⁷ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 10.

⁶⁸ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 1; and Rudolph Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 14.

⁶⁹ Even more, a breach of intellectual integrity, a *sacrificium intellectum*. *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 17, 36.

Demythologization is not so much, to Bultmann, an elimination of myth, but a “translation” that renders its original mythological form moot. “We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings as a whole contain a still deeper meaning which is concealed under cover of mythology. If that is so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to retain the deeper meaning.”⁷⁰

Proposition 4: The purpose of a myth is to express humanity’s understanding of itself.⁷¹ As modern persons re-approach the historical fact anew, stripping away the mythology, they also listen to what the mythological superimposition was trying to capture. Thus the mythology is used as a vehicle to get at an underlying principle and then is discarded (demythologized) for the sake of that principle, or as Bultmann calls it, the “permanent fact.”⁷² Bultmann claims that such an interpretation “does far more justice” to the historical event than does any of the mythologizing of the tradition.

Proposition 5: The employment of an existentialist hermeneutic to “translate” the myth’s intrinsic meaning is reasonable.⁷³ Bultmann believes Heidegger has provided the best vehicle by which to translate mythological accounts into terms amenable to modern humanity’s self-diagnosed existential situation.⁷⁴ From this, Bultmann views human sin as submission to anxiety, herein showing an affinity with Niebuhr (as well as Brunner and Tillich, each after their own fashion). Whether or not this idea spirals back to

⁷⁰ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 18.

⁷¹ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 11f., and *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 19f.

⁷² Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 37.

⁷³ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 53ff; and “New Testament and Mythology,” 10.

⁷⁴ Although Bultmann easily conceded his dependence on Heidegger, he never ceased to be critical of him and was careful to identify the inherent weaknesses of Heidegger’s philosophy. Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 17-19, 29f.

Heidegger or Kierkegaard is an interesting future question, but does not matter here. Given the combined weight of the thinkers espousing this understanding, it might not be an overstatement to say the “sin as existential anxiety” approach is the quintessential modern understanding of sin.⁷⁵

Proposition 6: The loving act of God in the Christ-event is the key to understanding and only path to actualizing authentic life.⁷⁶ This proposition is not so relevant to our thesis, but does show why Bultmann so forcefully defends his work in the Gospels, and further, it is his touchstone with the Christian Tradition.

Before turning to Karl Barth’s critique and alternative, Bultmann might be tentatively set into context with the previous trajectories. First, Bultmann stands within the trajectory of higher criticism insofar as he desires to understand the history [*historisch*] undergirding a myth, and shares Gunkel-Tennant’s assumptions about the literary and scientific [in]capacities of pre-critical peoples. Yet unlike them, his concern that the passage be understood within its historical context is only preliminary—it must then be usefully reinterpreted for the Christian Church, for it must be after all *kerygma*.

Here then is the tangential point where Bultmann touches Kant. Kant lifts the import of the story into the noumenal realm; Bultmann too lifts, but not quite so high. The height is only that of our own existential situation. Biblical myth does not reflect transcendent realities, as Bultmann was most suspicious of these, but timeless moral

⁷⁵ And Barth very nearly says as much. Karl Barth, “Rudolf Bultmann—An Attempt to Understand Him,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans-Werner Bartsch (London: SPCK, 1962), 92ff.

⁷⁶ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 22ff.

truths. Stripped of its mythological accretions, the narrative can be used by the careful interpreter to address the true existential situation of the modern person.⁷⁷

Karl Barth's Response

Although the dialogue between Barth and Bultmann on this question was generally cordial, the discussion eventually languished in disenchantment as Barth felt perpetually unheard and Bultmann felt perpetually misunderstood.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Barth's critiques serve as an opening for his own positive construction of the same issue. Only the critiques specifically related to our thesis will be mentioned here.

First, Barth believed that Bultmann's use of Heidegger had given him a preconceived notion of what the New Testament could and could not say before attempting to listen to it.⁷⁹ It confused Barth that while admitting that "translation" was the secondary concern to the more primary exegesis of the original text in context, Bultmann is "still hammering away with unparalleled persistence, at the various historical forms in which the gospel is enshrined. Apparently he already knows *what* is in the New Testament. Apparently that is why he wants himself and he wants us to concentrate entirely on translating it from one language and one set of terms into others. For we already know what it is we are trying to translate."⁸⁰ Given Bultmann's definition of

⁷⁷ For a brief but interesting treatment of the status and reception of Bultmann's program 40 years after the furor, see John Macquarrie, "A Generation of Demythologizing," in *Theologistics*, ed. J. P. Van Noppen (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit, 1981), 143-158.

⁷⁸ For a delightfully lucid reconstruction of the arguments, see David Mueller's creatively constructed fictional dialogue between the two taken primarily from their own words. David L. Mueller, "The Whale and the Elephant: Barth and Bultmann in Dialogue," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 197-214.

⁷⁹ Karl Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann," 88, 108.

⁸⁰ Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann," 88. See also *CD I/1*, 146.

myth, Barth believed it would have been more consistent for him to have simply attacked all things supernatural, as classical liberalism did. But even on Bultmann's own terms,

is the demythologized kerygma allowed to say anything about God's having condescended to become this-worldly, objective and—horror of horrors!—datable? Apparently it is not allowed to say that the New Testament God is the kind of God who is capable of such condescension. Nor can it admit that it originated in the concrete fact that the disciples saw with their own eyes, heard with their ears, touched with their hands, in space and time, not only the dereliction of the Word made flesh hanging on the cross, but also the glory of the same Word made flesh risen from the dead.⁸¹

To put his critique into terms already used in this dissertation, Bultmann has not wholly escaped the subjective use of the myth already met in Kant and Niebuhr. He still seems to begin with the modern concern or need (Heidegger's to be precise) and uses the text to address it.

Bultmann answered this critique later in his career after "demythologization" had become a household word in theological circles.⁸² He affirmed with his detractors that, yes, the modern scientific worldview is a presuppositional criterion for his program, but denied that this constitutes a rejection of scripture, only the worldview of the period in which it was written. For Bultmann this indicated, not the gospel's weakness and cultural flexibility, but its transcultural character. "To demythologize is to deny that the message of scripture and of the Church is bound to an ancient world-view which is obsolete."⁸³ The Christian gospel of the Word of God is not a doctrine to be accepted or rejected by the intellect, but *kerygma* addressed to the hearer as a self.

⁸¹ Barth, "Rudolph Bultmann," 109f.

⁸² Bultmann himself admits "demythologizing" is an "unsatisfactory word." [*Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 18.], while Barth called it an outright "barbarism." "Rudolf Bultmann," 102.

⁸³ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 35f.

This only raised a second concern. Barth believed Bultmann held an unstated but apparent assumption that modern humanity is myth-less. The assumption of modern science was that it understood the world as it really was, as opposed to the pre-modern views that understood the world in analogy—it is “like...” Barth challenges this notion from several directions. First, does the modern scientific worldview possess no myths of its own? What then of Marxism and the idea of the “Christian West”? Is it true that all modern persons find myths useless?⁸⁴ And what is more, does not Bultmann’s very definition of what constitutes myth mislead? Myth is not simply any story about the gods.⁸⁵ In fact, The New Testament writers could hardly have communicated their material in terms of such a yarn, “that was just the kind of thing they were attacking.” Barth says that Bultmann, with his background in form criticism, has used an inadequate definition of myth that covers only the form of the New Testament, whereas

if Bultmann used a definition which covered the content rather than the form, he could still find plenty of mythological imagery and terminology incidentally accepted and used in the New Testament. As for the actual content of the New Testament message, however, he could hardly describe it as mythological in form, proceed to dismantle it from top to bottom and replace it by some other form, supposedly more intelligible and relevant to modern man.⁸⁶

In the end, Barth thought he had shared with Bultmann from their youth the belief that, if anything must be demythologized, it was “the belief that man was the measure of

⁸⁴ Barth, “Rudolph Bultmann,” 108ff, 115f.

⁸⁵ Bultmann does seem to lack the nuanced distinction between myth and saga-legend that was key in Gunkel and would be key in Barth’s taxonomy as well.

⁸⁶ Barth, “Rudolph Bultmann,” 109. Barth’s assessment of the *Formgeschichte* school was not wholly negative. Rather he credited it (and Bultmann by name) with “a kind of rediscovery of the objectivity of New Testament and of the biblical witness generally, at almost the same time.” *CD I/2*, 494. See also *CD III/1*, 81, for more on Barth’s thoughts on Bultmann’s (and other’s) inadequate definition of myth, saga, and the rest of this semantic umbrella.

his own understanding and of all other understanding.”⁸⁷ It was the road Barth believed Bultmann had forsaken for the “Egyptian fleshpots.” Bultmann had, in Barth’s view, succumbed to a particularly pernicious form of natural theology, wherein his understanding of human nature, its basic flaw, and its solution are all predetermined by some human process that is then superimposed onto the scriptures. By the time the second volume of *Kerygma and Myth* came out, Barth confessed he was losing interest in the discussion first because Bultmann refused to yield even an inch of ground (“admirable doggedness in its own way, but such as to preclude any real meeting of the minds”), and further that the debate was becoming “bogged down in sterility and boredom, and if it is continued at all, there is little prospect of any improvement.”⁸⁸

It is easy to see why Bultmann’s gospel *would* be offensive to Barth, for it does seem to begin with humanity’s natural knowledge of its own existential condition, and forms the gospel *kerygma* in light of it. It fails to acknowledge that point which was so central to Barth’s concern—our utter inability to know our own condition, self, plight, or remedy. In Barth’s view Bultmann *uses* the New Testament to articulate a modern gospel that he already has in his mind. Bultmann’s program leaves one asking the question, is the New Testament (as it stands with its mythic aspects) necessary or just helpful to understanding our problem and its solution? While Bultmann affirms its necessity,⁸⁹ the answer seems to be mixed. It is only *helpful* when discussing our plight, as we can understand our predicament pretty well by means of existentialist reflection. He does

⁸⁷ Barth, “Rudolph Bultmann,” 127.

⁸⁸ Barth, “Rudolf Bultmann,” 131f.

⁸⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 27.

seem to affirm its *necessity* in relation to the solution—God’s act in Christ. The New Testament record is necessary to get this, and, despite vigorous disagreement with him in general, Barth gives him credit for this later point.⁹⁰

Barth’s critique as it relates to this work may be summarized as follows: First, the saga-form of the text is necessary and intrinsic to its meaning. It cannot be gotten past unless one has a preconceived notion of what it is saying or can say. Second, saga is not just a feature of ancient worldviews, but reflects systemic patterns within human thought life—ancient and modern. Sagas then speak to modern persons as well because we are ultimately like, not unlike, our ancestors in every way that matters to the gospel.

Karl Barth’s Alternative

As so many systematicians have bemoaned, Karl Barth defies easy categorization, and of all the persons considered in this chapter, he is the most difficult to treat adequately in summary fashion. To begin with, Barth agreed with the Gunkel-Tennant trajectory that the presence of non-historical genres in no way diminished the value or veracity of the Bible, in fact given its nature and theme, one should expect to find such material.⁹¹ But his sympathies with higher criticism seem to end there.

First, he rejects the propensity of much of higher criticism to attempt a reconstruction of an history behind the text. He says, “Biblical exegesis can fundamentally only be interpretation of the texts furnished by Holy Scripture. Its task can never be to try to get behind the witness of these texts.” As such, good exegesis simply

⁹⁰ Barth, “Rudolph Bultmann,” 106. See also *CD III/2*, 443.

⁹¹ Barth, *CD III/1*, 81-83. And in relation to the hard sciences, Barth was apparently open to their conclusions in such questions as the age of the earth and so on. It does not seem to be hyperbole at work when he says, “In the light of some 150,000 years of human insecurity, can we even consider any other positive relation?” *Romans*, 74, see also 204.

repeats what the prophets and apostles have testified as the “mighty acts of God.” But higher critical (or Barth’s more pejorative, “untheological”) exegesis attempts to “peel off as far as possible, from reports of past events, all that is the contribution of the narrators and so expose what is ‘actually’ the object of the reports (i.e. what is done and experienced by men).”⁹² So, while Barth does work to establish a text’s *Sitz im Leben* when such a task is necessary to its interpretation, early Genesis has for him no such situation to analyze. Its non-historical status precludes it as a feature of its genre.

Second and closely related, as already seen with Bultmann, Barth rejects the attempt to penetrate these non-historical texts in search of an ‘historical’ [*historisch*] kernel which is supposed to give the true, that is, ‘historical’ Word of God.⁹³ Its very content and status as non-historical thwarts the attempt, and if it were successful, it would succeed in robbing the narrative of its import and value as a non-historical account.

Third, Barth is unsatisfied with the basic taxonomy of genres he has inherited. In his mind, none of the higher critics (Gunkel and Bultmann by name) have managed to “give us any illuminated and acknowledged clarification, distinction, and co-ordination of the terms myth [*Mythus*], saga [*Sage*], fable [*Märchen*], legend [*Legende*] and anecdote [*Anekdote*], let alone any useful definition of their relationship to history and historical scholarship.”⁹⁴ But it may be arguable whether Barth’s own taxonomy sheds any additional light. In the end his typology of genres works perhaps only for himself, and he makes it do so. But then this is more or less what Gunkel did a generation earlier as well.

⁹² Karl Barth, *Credo* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 187f.

⁹³ Barth, *CD III/1*, 82; *KD III/1*, 89.

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD III/1*, 81; *KD III/1*, 88.

Nevertheless Barth does not believe the Fall narrative should be categorized as “myth” as higher criticism has done. Rather, it is “saga” [*Sage*].⁹⁵ Barth does not take a theological-cultural evolutionary approach to these terms as does Gunkel (wherein myth developmentally precedes saga-legend which precedes formal history). Barth parses the terms more in light of their intrinsic qualities.

First, like Bultmann, but for different reasons, Barth employs the German distinction between *historie* (and the “historical” [*historisch*]) and *Geschichte*. Stated over-simply, *historie* consists of the events that occur in the time-space world in all their particularities and are thus capable of being scrutinized by historical methodologies. It is the event as it happened and was (theoretically) sensibly experienced by witnesses. And the Bible does contain this at many places,⁹⁶ and the term usually comes into English as “historical” or perhaps “mere history.”⁹⁷

But the Bible also contains what Barth calls “non-historical” or “pre-historical history” [*unhistorische* or *prae-historische Geschichte*]. These events are non-historical, not in that they did not truly happen, but rather that they happened in a way that is not verifiable or falsifiable empirically. This *Geschichte* is not unrelated to *historie*, but occurs above and within in such a way that it provides meaning to *historie*. All important

⁹⁵His disagreements with higher criticism here need not have been so strident. Both Gunkel and Tennant are very clear that the Fall narrative is not precisely “myth;” it is something better—at least at the level of theological-cultural evolution. This critique may have had more in its crosshairs Bultmann, of whom Barth would later accuse of having embraced only a “crude” definition of myth. Barth, “Rudolph Bultmann,” 109.

⁹⁶ Barth, *CD III/1*, 81. See also *Credo*, 189. While Gunkel likewise had the *historie/Geschichte* distinction available to him, he seems to use them more as synonyms. The distinction between them may be more a theologian’s distinction than an higher critic’s, but this requires more consideration.

⁹⁷ English editors of the *Church Dogmatics* will also use the word ‘history,’ but can generally be relied upon to put the term in single quotation marks to distinguish it from the ‘real’ history, which is *Geschichte*.

historie will have this non-historical aspect within it. While a little crass, it would not be entirely inaccurate to say *historie* consists of events as humanity sees them, *Geschichte*, of events as God knows them in all their true significance.⁹⁸

How then are sensibly-dependant humans to encounter *Geschichte*? Barth is absolutely certain it is *not* through myth. Myth does not have such a power. He says,

The customary definition that myth is the story of the gods is only superficial. In myth both the gods and the story are not the real point at issue, but only point to it. The real object and content of myth are the essential principles of the general reality and relationships of the natural and spiritual cosmos which, in distinction from concrete history, are not confined to definite times and places. The clothing of their dialectic and cyclical movement in stories of the gods is the form of myth.⁹⁹

And a bit later,

But its [myth's] tales and their events and figures are obviously pictures and embodiments of what happens always and everywhere and to that extent does not happen 'anywhere or at any time'...It chooses and uses the form of a story, but in the case of all intelligent persons it makes the demand that they should look through this story, that they should not cling to it as such, but that in all the enjoyment of its events and forms, spurred on by its cheerful play, they should press on to its true non-historical, timeless and abstract sense, to a perception of the eternal truth presented in the play.¹⁰⁰

Myth, then, is by humanity about humanity. As Barth says, "the contemplation of man and his cosmos as self-moved and self-resting."¹⁰¹ It speaks of general truths, and "winks and nods" to the reader to push past the story to the eternal truth to which it refers.

Given Barth's disagreements with Bultmann and the higher critics already mentioned, it is surprising to find such close proximity between them at this point. Barth

⁹⁸ Barth nuances it a bit more, saying that God knows all things both mediately and immediately. That which is mediate to God is historical to us, that which is immediate to God is non-historical to us.

⁹⁹ Barth, *CD III/1*, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD III/1*, 84f.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *CD III/1*, 86.

concedes much of Gunkel's ideas on the anthropocentric nature of myths as well as Bultmann's position in their existential function. Myths indeed *can* be winnowed for timeless truth "kernels," and suggestions are present in Barth that, when faced with a real myth, he could even speak a form of Bultmannian.¹⁰² Barth does not even believe myth is inherently bad. On the contrary, "never is man more himself and at home in his world, never does he have in his own strength a better understanding of himself and his world, than as an inventor and author or an intelligent hearer and reader of myth."¹⁰³ Now his point of departure from Bultmann and higher criticism is more precisely seen.

Mythopoeia is a grand thing; myth is a good human cultural activity, but it is *not* myth that we meet in the scriptures, and particularly not in early Genesis.

The Creation and Fall narratives are "pure saga,"¹⁰⁴ not mythological in any sense. Barth believes their very form betrays this,

What is fundamental to myth, namely, the contemplation of man and his cosmos as self-moved and self-resting, the contemplation of his emergence as one of his own functions, is not only not essential to it [the creation saga] but is declared by it to be groundless in every respect. And what is unessential to myth, namely, God and His activity, the distinction and confrontation between the Creation and the

¹⁰² In his discussion on the Son's journey into the far country "for us," Barth states, "...it must first be demythologised in the light of this 'for us.'" *CD IV/1*, 285. But he intends to reverse Bultmann's process. Bultmann believes we must divest ourselves of myth for the sake of the true message; Barth rather believes we must not abandon the biblical "for us" and as such, we must "demythologize" so to avoid the *pro nobis* becoming nothing more than myth. Both believe myth is bad, but one believes in rooting myth out of the Bible to find the message; the other believes myth is something the biblical message is in threat of becoming. And Barth implies in the following pages the Bultmann has followed just such a course.

Barth speaks similarly in his discussion on demons, where he says, "They are *the* myth, the myth of all mythologies. Faith in God and His angels involves demythologization in respect of the devil and demons; but not in the superficial phenomenological sense current to-day, in which they are grouped with the angels and even with God's own Word and work as the figures of a world-outlook which has now been superseded." *CD, III/3*, 521.

¹⁰³ Barth, *CD III/1*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *CD III/1*, 82, 84.

creature,...is not only fundamental to the biblical creation saga but the one and only thing that it seeks to exhibit.¹⁰⁵

Geschichte then is expressed in the narrative form of saga, not myth. Barth defines saga as “an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once for all within the confines of time and space.”¹⁰⁶ Myth is something humanity makes for itself. Saga is something that breaks upon humanity from without, to which it contributes nothing but the hearing. Myth is a tune a man hums to himself as he walks down the road; Saga is a symphony that bursts upon him from an unseen orchestra and to which he contributes neither note nor measure. It knocks him to the ground and deafens him to every tune of his own device.

Barth does not claim to know why the Israelite imagination should have chosen to produce saga and shun deficient mythologies or a necessarily-abortive *historie*, but the fact that they did demonstrates the central role that the imagination plays as a vehicle for God’s revelation. In his words, “...the human possibility of knowing is not exhausted by the ability to perceive and comprehend. Imagination, too, belongs no less legitimately in its way to the human possibility of knowing. A man without imagination is more of an invalid than one who lacks a leg.”¹⁰⁷ Even more, “It is because they are in fact

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *CD III/1*, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *CD III/1*, 81. He rejects the labels of “legend” and “anecdote” as “degenerate forms [*Abart*] of saga.” He later lumps “fairy tale” [*Märchen*] in with them. [*CD III/1*, 84.] As these are minor terms within his structure, they will not be given further consideration, except to note that later in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth does begin to reappropriate the word “legend” as roughly synonymous with saga. *CD IV/1*, 336ff.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD III/1*, 91. Garrett Green finds Barth’s recognition of the role of imagination in the production of the creation sagas to be “most significant, and potentially most useful to theology today.” Garrett Green, “Myth, History, and Imagination: The Creation Narratives in Bible and Theology,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 12 (December 1990): 30.

imaginative in this different way that they are inspired, that they bear witness to God's self-revelation, and that they demand faith and can lay claim to faith."¹⁰⁸

An entire work could be written just on Barth's understanding of saga and myth. It will suffice here to reproduce in part Greene-McCreight's work, which has the virtue of visual brevity (See Table 1: Barth on Saga v. Myth below).¹⁰⁹

Table 1: Barth on Saga v. Myth

Saga	Myth
deep, inclusive literal sense	timeless connexions, relationships not recounted
takes narrative seriously on the historical plane	narrative as embodiment of what happens everywhere, ergo not anywhere at any time
speaks properly	timeless and abstract; historical covering for non-historical; speculation
truth identical with historical picture	perception of eternal truth
points beyond itself only to historical saga and history, and not to non- historical meaning	monistic
does not accommodate, wink or nod	accommodates, winks and nods

Barth's discussion of the saga of the Fall comes largely within his exposition of the covenant of grace as the controlling motif of history. This is not incidental but the point. This covenant, fulfilled in the Christ, is the real history at work—the *Geschichte* recorded in the scriptures. If creation's *raison d'être* is the covenant, the same is true of the Fall. Whatever meaning the Fall narrative has, it has it because of its participation in this history—more specifically in this person, the Christ.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *CD III/1*, 92.

¹⁰⁹ Reproduced in part from Greene-McCreight, 187.

¹¹⁰ If the exegetical details of Genesis 3 were more at the center of this dissertation, Barth could play out this reality in a number of striking ways. For example, even the two trees of the garden are understood in Christ to be part of the covenant—one reflecting the old way of Adam and death, the other,

This is most directly seen in his treatment of the historical Adam in the *Römerbrief*. Adam's historical relevance is only that he exists as "as the type of the second Adam who is to come, as the shadow cast by His light."¹¹¹ The first Adam can be only understood when he is "brought to naught" in Christ.

He does not deny an Adam of *historie*, but is careful in "leaving out of account what may have occurred to the historical Adam."¹¹² Rather, the transcendent Adam, who is the type of rebellious humanity overthrown in Christ, is the one with whom we must concern ourselves. Here Barth very nearly posits an Adam of History and an Adam of Faith not unlike Protestant Liberalism's Christ of history and faith. And as with Liberalism, it is the figure of faith that ultimately matters; the history is a curiosity of interest to archeology, but not to the Church.

This distinction is made more obvious by what he does say of the Adam of history. Such an Adam, if he existed, was surely a rebel against God. But it is not his sin within history that condemns us. Rather the sin of this "natural, earthy, historical man" was only the "first manifest operation" of the non-temporal Fall of all humanity. Adam was the first case of that which ails us all, therefore it is rhetorically proper (and only in this sense) to "call and define by his name the shadow in which we all stand."¹¹³ In the historical Adam, "what was invisible becomes visible," just as in the historical Christ and

Christ and newness, which is why it appears again in Revelation 22. *CD III/1*, 272ff. And for an insightful consideration of this sort of detail, see David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics*, ed. Richard Fiedli, et al., *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* (Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981), 122f.

¹¹¹ Barth, *Romans*, 170.

¹¹² Barth, *Romans*, 171.

¹¹³ Barth, *Romans*, 171f.

his resurrection. Both the old and the new man “proceed from the same invisible origin” but they are flowing in opposite directions—one to death, the other to life.¹¹⁴

Karl Barth Considered

Like Kant then, but for very different reasons, the Fall for Barth is “timeless and transcendental.”¹¹⁵ Our fallen state is not the result of an historical act, but “lies behind time” and is “the unavoidable presupposition of all human history.”¹¹⁶ It cannot be examined by any act of historical investigation. If it could, it would cease to be what it was and be reduced to mere history.

So then the question arises, as it did for Kant, how does such a transcendental Fall occur? But here, unlike Kant, Barth has a great deal to say about how this impossible possibility obtains. It is wrapped up in the pre-temporal Divine Yes and No, God’s right and left hands, and Barth’s treatment of Nothingness as rejected possibility, but, grievously, space precludes such a discussion here.¹¹⁷

What is relevant here is that Barth supersedes Kant in two ways. First, he offers a transcendent *Geschichte* that is epistemologically analogous to the noumenal with all the

¹¹⁴ Barth, *Romans*, 177.

¹¹⁵ Barth, *Romans*, 171. See also *CD IV/I*, 495. “It obviously means that in relation to the transgression and therefore the corruption of man there is no time in which man is not a transgressor and therefore guiltless before God.”

¹¹⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 168, 181. As stated elsewhere, the Fall of man “precedes and determines all of history.” Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 166.

¹¹⁷ See Barth, *CD III/3*, 289-368; or for fine secondary discussions, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Left Hand of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: Karl Barth as a Mythopoetic Theologian,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 25, no. 1 (1968-1969): 3-26; Wolf Krötke, *Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. Thomas W. Gillespie, trans. Philip G. Ziegler and Christina-Maria Bammel, *Studies in Reformed Theology and History*, vol. 10 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005); and R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

benefits of empirical inscrutability, but then he creates the possibility of its intersection with the events of history.¹¹⁸ This is made possible because of the centrality of the incarnation in Barth's theology. God has become man in Jesus Christ. His resurrection is the archetypal example of how the entire transcendent non-historical covenant history-*Geschichte* can be understood within the finite narratives represented in scripture. If God can make it so in the saga of the last Adam's resurrection, God can do it in the saga of the first Adam's Fall.

Further, Barth's commitment to the exegetical framework of the existing text provides strong interpretive controls that were the virtue of higher criticism. Whether one agrees with Barth's conclusions or not, he demonstrates a clear desire to take the text seriously as it stands and within both its immediate context and the greater context of the covenant of grace.

A third strength, now related to higher criticism, is his reluctance to make saga simply a product of ancient superstition and un-enlightenment. Saga is both a legitimate and necessary genre for communicating some things—particularly non-historical truths. One cannot get around its use; it is unavoidable for certain kinds of content. To demythologize a “kernel” out of it robs it of the very meaning the form is intended to facilitate. This position serves to reanimate the biblical narrative and infuse it, not just with a moral, but with a deep structural relevance rooted in its very language. In short, it takes the form with the same seriousness as the content.

¹¹⁸ Both the Kantian noumenal echo and its overthrow are present immediately from the outset of the *Römerbrief*, wherein we in ourselves can know nothing of that other world from which the newness comes, but only in that the Christ can “intersect vertically, from above.” *Romans*, 30. Suggestively, he adds that such a Christ can only be understood as a problem or a myth.

Fourth, Barth takes the narrative form seriously as a form. Gunkel, Driver, and other higher critics expressed an aesthetic appreciation of the myth's beauty and terseness of style, but believed this was incidental (or perhaps accidental)—like a medieval artist accidentally incorporating perspective into his painting. But Barth considered the theological value of the literary form as part of its content. As Ford points out (specifically in relation to the gospels),

He grasped better than most exegetes in recent centuries the significance of realistic narrative form in the Bible. He then concentrated his reflection on this feature, shared by novels and historical writings, and this raises a range of complex issues which his critics must not bypass, such as the relation of fact to fiction, the role of imagination in knowing, the status of realistic narrative as religious language, the way in which works of literature cross the hermeneutical gap, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁹

This highlights a final strength. Barth believed that the human imagination is a vital theological faculty. While this is perhaps not absolutely unique to Barth, it is rare for the modern context, which tended to focus more on the intellect or rational-sensitive mind as the noetic center. That a saga can be formulated by means of an imaginative exercise and be epistemologically valid seems a quite profitable thought, given the assumptions of modernity.

This, however, highlights the biggest weakness in Barth insofar as this dissertation is concerned—a weakness to Lewis' thoughts will offer a solution. Barth does not extend the work of the imagination to the reader of the saga, only to its original crafter, and it is quite understandable that he does not, given his ubiquitous concerns about natural theology. The imagination cannot be a “natural” or intrinsic human source for theological truth in itself any more than the intellect without becoming idolatrous. It

¹¹⁹ Ford, 183.

can presumably be a pathway of revelation, as with any area of our humanity, but it does not function with theological validity outside of the moment of divine revelation.

Beyond the imagination, his concern over human epistemological adequacy casts a cloud over the nature of the saga's efficacy. How does it achieve its effect? Wherein lies its power? Barth cannot provide an explanation as to the point of connection between the saga and the human constitution. He can attribute it to faith and the work of the Spirit in the moment of revelation, but from there its operations are mysterious. The Holy Spirit uses the saga to act *upon* the human soul; the human constitution in itself and as such can contribute nothing but pride and error.

Critiques of Barth's phobia of natural theology are perennial and somewhat dreary to recount. Suffice it to say that if one finds Barth's absolute resistance to natural theology compelling, then admittedly C. S. Lewis' proposals will offer no help, because no problem has been admitted. To the reader (and it seems there are many) who, despite Barth's compelling arguments, continue to believe that scripture teaches and human experience affirms that some aspect of humanity (be it the *Imago, sensus divinitatis*, presence of a rational mind, or similar) is capable in itself of contemplating the divine, then C. S. Lewis will be able to improve on Barth's designs.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to offer a brief introduction to the spirit of dialogue that existed in the mid-twentieth century, along with a bit of its historical development. Its goal has been to identify some of the issues and questions of the period that Lewis may be conscripted to address. By way of conclusions, a few distillations may be performed to make these issues apparent.

The first trajectory, that of pre-modern interpretation within the Church, generally rooted its diverse interpretations in the historical fact of Adam's existence and his choice to sin under temptation. The position becomes problematic with the rise of the modern sciences which seem to offer overwhelming evidence that the terrestrial creation possesses an history incompatible with such a story. To this must be added the objection (as seen in Kant) that an historical Fall is rationally deficient to explain the systemic problem of humanity in general. In addition the story itself seems to possess certain literary features (myth, saga, or similar) that imply that an historical interpretation was never warranted in the first place. Need the tradition be salvaged from these critiques?

The Kantian trajectory, reflected at seminal points in a modified form by Niebuhr, employs the story to answer the perennial question of the basic human problem as it is being represented or challenged in the existential moment. The result by both is similar—a lifting of the story out of history into a transcendent realm or meaning, and thus a great deal of immediately fruitful and practical reflection blossoms in the work of both men. It does so, however, by making quite free with the textual history of interpretation—or rather by mostly ignoring it. But what confidence can one have that one has understood *this* text in particular by this method, and not simply reaffirmed one's preexisting biases and desires?

Higher criticism, on the other hand, tended to reverse the poles, pressing the narrative downward into history as mere example of cultural-religious evolution. The exegetical Gunkel and more theological Tennant expended great energy on establishing original context, audiences, and backgrounds for the text. The story may be beautiful and

possess insights into the history of religion, but is strictly (or at least methodologically) of ancient human manufacture.

Bultmann is a hybrid of these two trajectories, reflecting higher criticism's belief that humanity now possesses a more enlightened existential framework than our ancestors. Therefore the intention of the myth must be translated into a more credible form, stripped of its outdated mythological accrual. In appropriating Heidegger's existentialism as his hermeneutic, however, he draws out of the text the meaning that is most useful to modern man in a manner not dissimilar to the Kantian method. But can the form be so easily disposed of as Bultmann believes? Is the form part, not only of the myth's beauty, but also its message?

Barth is a different sort of hybrid still. Barth acknowledges both the historical setting of the original story and its meaning to the author-editor and its original audience (where such can be determined). Yet the saga form is not superfluous, but intrinsic to its meaning. Here he shares a strength with Niebuhr. Myth-Saga is a stable and irreducible truth-facilitating form, a product of the highest productions of the human imagination, but deeply true in that it makes accessible to the reader realities that are beyond human *historie*. However, the imagination of the hearer in itself is not (and cannot) be a contributor to its successful receipt. The saga must work its magic from without by means of divine revelation or mediation, without a touchstone in the human heart as such. Consequently, how does one explain the great power a saga-myth exerts on the hearer without making *Deus revelat* simply a *Deus ex machina*?

The next chapter introduces C. S. Lewis as a literary historian with deep theological interests, who stands in a unique position to address some of these questions.

CHAPTER 2

C. S. LEWIS ON HISTORY, SCIENCE, AND THE TRADITION

The previous chapters introduced a number of long-standing issues surrounding the interpretation of the Genesis 3 Fall narrative. While inadequate in any final sense, the survey does provide a feel for how the Fall narrative was being handled in the theological world in the mid-twentieth century.

This chapter places C. S. Lewis into this theological context by addressing four questions. First, what were Lewis' views on the scientific questions that relate to the Fall's historicity—specifically, questions regarding the age of the earth and the origins of the human species. Second and conversely, what are Lewis' commitments to traditional churchly interpretations? What sort of churchly obligations does he perceive himself to be under? How “orthodox” does he desire to be at the end of the day? These first two questions have been addressed by many others, who will be noted in their place, but the answers form a kind of perimeter in which his perspectives must be understood.

Third, what is Lewis' relationship to higher criticism? What did he think about the theological developments of the mid-twentieth century? Lewis' disagreements with many of the dominant assumptions within his own field of medieval English literature particularly at Oxford are well known.¹ What comparable reservations did he have about

¹ He himself speaks of it in numerous places. See C. S. Lewis, “Is English Doomed?” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 23-26; “Democratic Education,” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 32-26; “The Idea of an ‘English School’,” in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 57-78; and more obliquely in such places as *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Collier Books, 1946); “The Inner Ring,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1976, revised 1980),

“goings-on” in the theological world in general? And fourth, the question of Lewis’ embrace or rejection of the specific conclusions of higher criticism on *this* question—does Genesis 3 consist of mythological literature? This chapter thus sets up chapters 4 and 5, wherein Lewis’ own ideas about Genesis 3 can be analyzed, as well as chapter 5, where his work will be brought into dialogue with the theological discussion of the period.

It will not be necessary to here develop a biography of Lewis as the thesis here at work depends very little on whatever biographical origin his thoughts may have,² not to mention his life has been chronicled with such frequency as to nearly constitute a proof of reincarnation.³

Question 1: Lewis, Science, History, and Origins

Lewis, Darwin, and Guided Evolution

On the question of origins and the events of history, Lewis generally found the claims of modern science compelling. Lewis did not believe the Fall story or the creation

141-157; and with a comic tinge in his Cambridge inaugural address where he refers to Oxford as “that Western darkness from which you have so lately bidden me emerge,” “*De Descriptione Temporum*,” in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 10.

² For Lewis’ own money, he called the pension reviewers have for explaining thought by means of biographical detail the “personal heresy” or the “personal dogma.” His thoughts can be gained in whole in C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) or in variously truncated versions in the following locations: C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to Be Said,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 45-48; “On Criticism,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 127-142; and “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 159-163.

³ Of the innumerable biographical sketches that exist, some of the most significant projects are the following: Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994); A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990); for a slightly more fictionalized approach, William Griffin, *Clive Staples Lewis: A Dramatic Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986); finally, for a biography that effectively engages in an analysis of Lewis’ thought, see Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harper One, 2008).

narratives that precede it were anything like unaccommodated history. His most complete treatment of the topic comes early in his career in his first foray into apologetics, *The Problem of Pain*, published in 1940.⁴ In this well-known passage, he draws a distinction between the text as we have it—“a story (full of the deepest suggestion) about a magic apple of knowledge”—with its subsequent theological doctrine and the results of modern science.⁵ His interpretation of the story and its doctrine will be discussed in chapter 4. Of interest here is what Lewis believed the sciences could confirm and deny.

Of course, neither he nor modern science could confidently assert the nature of the actual historical events, but he offers what he calls “a ‘myth’ in the Socratic sense, a not unlikely tale.”⁶ Lewis clarifies in a crucial footnote that he does not mean here by “myth” what is meant by Reinhold Niebuhr—“a symbolical representation of non-historical truth,” but rather “an account of what *may have been* the historical fact.” What Lewis then suggests in this place would be closer to what was called in the last chapter the *historie*—the actual events as they occur within time-space—rather than their ultimate significance (*Geschichte*), which will be handled later.⁷

Lewis’ use of the term “myth” in this way is *sui generis* in his corpus. He means something different here than he will at nearly any other time.⁸ In his final presentation of

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

⁵ *Pain*, 71.

⁶ *Pain*, 77.

⁷ While Lewis never uses the *historie*-*Geschichte* distinction himself, he is latently working with similar categories. Throughout, the term “history” and “historical” should be understood in the sense of *historie*. See Cunningham, 97.

⁸ A point Cunningham misses and consequently mistakes this usage for Lewis’ definition of *all* myth. Cunningham, 96.

this proposal in *Reflections on the Psalms*, Lewis gives a form of the same possible history but does not here call it a “myth.”⁹ By 1958, Lewis had done a great deal of work on myth (some of it right in *Reflections on the Psalms*). Perhaps working in the context of myth-proper, he dared not use the label for this tutelary story because of its muddling effect.

Lewis’ idea represents a form of theistic or guided evolution, or more precisely a synthesis of theistic evolution and a special divine creative act. Aristotle defined Man as a “rational animal;” Lewis would have agreed, but tweaked it to something like “an animal that God miraculously made rational.” He proposes that “for long centuries God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of himself.”¹⁰ The creature may have existed for ages in this state of rude animality. He continues, “Then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say ‘I’ and ‘me,’ which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgements of truth, beauty, and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past.”¹¹

The whole creature was thus “flooded” by this new consciousness. This new Man ruled his organism completely, down to its passions and relations with animals. He would have seemed “savage” technologically, and would have appeared to us “naked, shaggy-

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1958), 115ff.

¹⁰ *Pain*, 77 (The whole discussion consists of 72-83).

¹¹ *Pain*, 77.

bearded, slow-spoken,”¹² but if you were holy enough not to dismiss him out of hand, at your second consideration, you would fall at his feet recognizing him to be holier than thou.¹³ Reflecting on Milton’s presentation of the royal priestly Adam in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Lewis remarks that at such a meeting, “it is *we* who would have been the stammering boys, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, red in the face, and hoping that our clownishness would be excused by our ignorance.”¹⁴ Here was truly the unmarred *Imago Dei*. He or them (for God may have endowed many such creatures) may have endured that way for a long time before the event of the Fall. In a letter to Sister Penelope dated January 10, 1952, he sums up his proposal with more poetic flair.

Oddly enough, I, like you, had pictured Adam as being, physically, the son of two anthropoids, on whom, after birth, God worked the miracle which made him Man: said, in fact, ‘Come out—and forget thine own people and thy father’s house.’ The Call of Abraham wd be a far smaller instance of the same sort of thing, and regeneration in each one of us wd be an instance too, tho’ not a smaller one. That all seems to me to fit in both historically and spiritually.¹⁵

Lewis follows up this Socratic story with how the Fall might have occurred in such a situation, which will be considered in chapter 4. The point here is that Lewis did not find the claims of Darwinian macro-evolution necessarily at odds with Christianity.

¹² Wilson records the personal reflection Helen Gardner, who, a few years after *Pain* was published, said something akin to this to Lewis over dinner at The Kilns, to which Lewis replied gruffly, “I see we have a Darwinian in our midst.” She was never invited back again. Wilson, 210.

¹³ William White wonders if Lewis is not in part depicting this “gradual dawn of consciousness” in the Green Lady of Perelandra, who the reader watches grow into an understanding of choice, reflection, potentiality, and so on. William White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 101f.

¹⁴ *Preface*, 117.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis and Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1988), 117.

Lewis, Guided Evolution, and the Scholarship.

Given the above, a rather odd hesitation exists in a surprising number of otherwise excellent scholars to acknowledge Lewis' relation to evolutionary theory and human origins. Note the following examples. First, Cunningham says, "Yet in the broader statement of his faith he *seems to* incorporate evolutionary theory into his thinking."¹⁶ Similarly Vaus claims that his views of science "*left open the possibility* for Lewis of accepting certain aspects of evolution into his theology, thus making Lewis a theistic evolutionist."¹⁷ Likewise Willis, "He [Lewis] *seems to* leave the door open for the possibility that there were several such primordial figures who fell at the same time by an act or series of acts resulting in disobedience."¹⁸ Each of these statements is made in the face of the same primary data outlined here.

This hesitation, however, seems unwarranted based on Lewis' own statements. In the early *Problem of Pain* he says, "If by saying that man rose from brutality you mean simply that man is physically descended from animals, I have no objection."¹⁹ In the late *Reflections on the Psalms* the same affirmation and hesitation are suggested, "On the ordinary biological view (what difficulties I have about evolution are not religious) one of the primates is changed so that he becomes man; but he remains still a primate and an

¹⁶ Cunningham, 111. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁷ Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 62. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁸ John R. Willis, *Pleasures Forevermore: The Theology of C. S. Lewis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983), 49. Italics added for emphasis. For a similar hesitation, see also Brewer, 100.

¹⁹ *Pain*, 72.

animal. He is taken up into a new life without relinquishing the old.”²⁰ Further, the personal letter that Purtill published in 1981 further nuances the point,

I accept the story of the Fall, and I don’t see what the findings of the scientists can say either for or against it. You can’t see for looking at skulls and flint implements whether Man fell or not. But the question of the Fall seems to me quite independent of the question of evolution. I don’t mind whether God made Man out of earth or whether ‘earth’ merely means ‘previous material of some sort.’ If the deposits make it probable that man’s physical ancestors ‘evolved,’ no matter. It leaves the essence of the Fall itself intact. Don’t let us confuse physical development with spiritual.²¹

In addition, several writers who might be described as possessing a more fundamentalist hermeneutic, such as Boss, Wheeler, and Watson, easily recognize and quickly criticize Lewis for not producing a more traditional and historical interpretation of early Genesis (Edgar Boss as early as 1953).²² Presumably Lewis’ commitments would have been equally obvious to the more sympathetic Cunningham and Willis. Why then hedge on it? The explanation may be no more than a desire to preserve Lewis’ orthodox standing against accusations from such as Wheeler. Such a motivation would be understandable, if methodologically suspicious.

An honest attempt at critique can be found in David Watson. He critiques outright Lewis’ defense of developmental origins of hominid life as being inconsistent (with overtones of incoherence). Watson discusses Lewis’ assertions in a two-part serial

²⁰ *Psalms*, 1958), 115. For another probably-late (published posthumously) affirmation of Lewis’ qualified embrace of guided evolutionary theory, see “The Funeral of a Great Myth,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 83-85.

²¹ Richard L. Purtill, *C. S. Lewis’s Case for the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 58.

²² Edgar W. Boss, “The Theology of C. S. Lewis” (PhD dissertation, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1953), 169; Andrew Wheeler, *C. S. Lewis: Clarity and Confusion* (Leominster: Day One Publishers, 2006); and David C. C. Watson, “C. S. Lewis and Evolution,” *Biblical Creation: Journal of the Biblical Creation Society* 7 (Spring 1985): 9f.

published in 1943.²³ In these articles, Lewis attempts to mediate the tensions between historical creedal affirmations and modernist beliefs about the nature of the universe. Lewis' germane assertion is that whenever a true advance in knowledge occurs, some aspects of old belief change and some remain. "New bottles for new wine, by all means: but not new palates, throats and stomachs, or it would not be, for us, 'wine' at all."²⁴ Lewis believes the unchanging categories might consist of such things as (1) the simple rules of mathematics, (2) the primary principles of morality, and (3) the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

He then offers several examples of this principle, two of which serve for Watson's critique. First, the affirmation of Christ's resurrection would be understood differently by an African tribesman and a medical specialist from Harley Street (a London street noted for its large number of private medical specialists). To the tribesman it is a blunt fact—a dead man got up and walked. The doctor (that is, one who believed it) would agree, but would add a great deal more regarding biochemical and physical processes working in reverse. The knowledge of the doctor is truly an advancement over that of the tribesman, but what is common is that both know they have seen a miracle. Or if they both disbelieve it, the only difference would be the doctor's far more detailed explanation for why it could not happen.

Second (and to the point here), when Genesis says "God made man in his own image," the ancient author may have envisioned a "vaguely corporeal God making man

²³ C. S. Lewis, "Dogma and the Universe," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 38-47.

²⁴ "Dogma," 45.

as a child makes a figure out of plasticine.”²⁵ A modern Christian philosopher would imagine an immensely long process lasting from the first creation to humanity’s readiness to receive spiritual life—that is guided evolution. The rejected idea is the same—“that matter by some blind power inherent in itself has produced spirituality.”

Watson critiques Lewis, arguing that the second illustration does not show the same thing as the first. In the first case two persons both believe in an instantaneous miracle—a resurrection. The difference is only the amount of detail in which they can discuss it. In the second, only the first believes a miracle has occurred; the philosopher rather believes in a process “going on before our eyes according to a fixed natural ‘law’ of evolution.”²⁶ As such it is not supernatural, but merely natural. This observation then in the hands of Watson’s hermeneutic becomes evidence that Lewis has failed to embrace the biblical intention. The evolutionary position has not the same basic content to Watson as a special immediate act of creation. Thus as predicted above, Lewis’ orthodoxy becomes suspect.

Watson’s critique of Lewis, however, only obtains if he has read him correctly. If Lewis were comparing instantaneous creation with *blind* evolutionary “laws,” Watson’s critique would be sound. But Lewis is not doing this. Lewis’ proverbial philosopher rejects blind development according to absolutely fixed laws with the same vigor as the biblical author. As with everywhere else in Lewis’ corpus this is a *guided* evolution—and the distinction is not a minor one. The Creator God superintends the process to produce the desired creature with the required spiritual capacity, followed by a supernatural (i.e.,

²⁵ “Dogma,” 46.

²⁶ Watson, 9.

miraculous) endowment to establish it as *homo sapiens sapiens*. Thus in fairness to Lewis, both his biblical author and his philosopher *do* believe in the miraculous—a God who creates humanity. The difference is in the accompanying mental picture—immediate miraculous act or long period of guided development with miracle as the final climax.

One additional and recent work also needs to be addressed. G. C. Holt's 2009 dissertation on Lewis' anthropology from his letters is an important work for its focus on an under-examined area of Lewis' thought.²⁷ Holt's primary reason for working from his correspondence is that he believes they can serve an important falsifying function regarding his authorial intent. Stated differently, they can show in some cases what Lewis *did not* believe, and thereby bracket away misreadings of his published work. That Holt works primarily from Lewis' correspondence is a great virtue, given the lack of attention his letters generally receive. This same self-imposed limitation, however, becomes the dissertation's greatest flaw. The myopia generated by Lewis' correspondence *sans* his publications is certainly greater than the opposite one. Correspondence is by definition more occasional and less precise, and further consists of only half of the context (that is, the recipient's letters are seldom available).

Oddly, Holt critiques Boss and White for claiming Lewis was a theistic evolutionist, on the argument that Lewis was not against science, but only against

²⁷ G. C. Holt, "These Humans: The Theological Anthropology of C. S. Lewis Primarily from His Correspondence" (PhD dissertation, Trinity International University, 2009). It should be noted that the subject of Lewis' anthropology remains under-treated even following William's useful but misleadingly titled work, *Mere Humanity: G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006). This book is actually a polemic against modernist anthropologies loosely drawn from Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien. For further consideration of the book's merits and deficiencies (particularly related to Lewis' anthropology) see Jeremy Grinnell, review of *Mere Humanity: G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition*, by Donald T. Williams, *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 25 (2008): 119f.

scientism as expressed in evolution.²⁸ Holt's argument that Lewis did not embrace a theistic evolution is grounded on the absence of such an affirmation in his letters. At best, he argues, the letters (particularly the Acworth letters) show a hesitant unwillingness to commit himself.²⁹ He then proceeds to assert a philosophical progression in Lewis' thought between the publication of *Perelandra* (1943) and *Magician's Nephew* (1955) toward a special creationism, as seen in the Narnian cosmology.³⁰ His conclusion,

In Lewis's thought there is a progression over time concerning the question of human origins, that is amply demonstrated in his correspondence. He came to realize that for evolution to be true, God must have made an evil world (the latter is *nefas credere*). He arrived at an understanding that if humans are simply a product of random chance, then humans have no value, and that the internal moral compass within humanity tells that this is not true and therefore must not be believed.³¹

The problems with this conclusion are legion. First, to claim that Lewis rejected human development from pre-human hominids from his letters alone demonstrates a staggering methodological flaw, constituting (at best) an argument from silence. Holt's focus on Lewis' letters is worthy, but to draw from it a final conclusion regarding Lewis' thoughts is unacceptable and myopic. Holt does not interact anywhere with the definitive material in *Problem of Pain* or *Reflections on the Psalms*, or even remarkably Lewis' letter to Sister Penelope of January 1952, cited earlier.

Second, the philosophical change Holt posits between *Perelandra* and *Magician's Nephew* simply on the basis of the narrative presentation is equally flawed. Disregarding

²⁸ Holt, 18.

²⁹ For a more nuanced treatment of this hesitation, see Gary B. Ferngren and Ronald L. Numbers, "C. S. Lewis on Creation and Evolution: The Acworth Letters, 1944-1960," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48, no. 1 (March 1996): 32.

³⁰ Holt, 46.

³¹ Holt, 58.

the specious nature of arguing directly from fiction to the author's true belief, what alternative to a special creation did Lewis have in a story such as *Magician's Nephew*? How could he have represented a billion-year development of a world (if he had wanted to) and still accomplished the vital narrative point of having Digory witness it? Narnia *requires* a special creation because of the constraints of the plot. If Lewis had no narrative alternative, then its significance is underdetermined. Likewise, that *Perelandra* is more sympathetic to evolutionary biology is not above being challenged (consider the discussion of Schwartz's thesis to follow).

Third, throughout the dissertation Holt is too quick to assert growth, change, and alteration in Lewis' perspective without considering mediating alternatives. Nine times in chapter 2 alone he posits fundamental shifts or developments in Lewis' thoughts.³² But might not all this "change" be equally credited to the occasional and casual nature of the genre—the letter—wherein one often speaks colloquially, imprecisely, and flippantly? In his *letter* to Arthur Greeves of January 8, 1931, Lewis seems to think so, saying, "I quite agree with what you say about letters being haphazard and informal—in their choice of subject. Things ought to come up just as they do in conversation."³³

Finally, even the basic shift that Holt posits—away from guided evolution toward special creation—does not seem supportable from Lewis published work here shown. Thus no change in Lewis' thought exists to require explanation.³⁴

³² Holt, 36, 43, 45, 46, 56, 57, 58, 70, 71.

³³ Walter Hooper, ed. *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979), 329.

³⁴ Holt makes a similar mistake regarding "animal salvation" [58]—to which the un-surveyed chapter 9 of *Pain* is equally crucial.

In the end Holt has simply not earned the right to draw the conclusions he makes. He does not use Lewis' correspondence as his thesis asserts he will—as a means of falsifying claims about Lewis' original intentions in his published work. He rather uses the correspondence to construct Lewis' original intentions without interacting with the published works at all.

Lewis, Wells, and Scientism

Lewis says the problems he did have with macro-evolution were not religious in nature, nor even scientific.³⁵ While Lewis has been accused of having a negative view of science,³⁶ he repeatedly clarified that his disagreements were not with the scientific method or any *reasonable* application of it, but rather the tendency to elevate science (as popularity understood by the non-scientist) to categories comparable to religion, complete with a metanarrative of progress—that is, what may be called, “scientism” or even “Wellsianity.”³⁷ His concern is akin to what is sometimes seen in the work of

³⁵ *Psalms*, 115.

³⁶ In his own lifetime even, see his exchange with Prof. Haldane over the “problems” with his representation of the scientist Weston in his space trilogy in “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 69-80. For himself, he flatly denied the charge C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Collier Books, 1947, 86; and White defends him with admirable pith, “There is no more reason to assume that Lewis is against science when he develops Weston as a monomaniac physicist than to assume that he is opposed to law and order when he develops Fairy Hardcastle as a brutal, perverted policewoman. Every area of life is susceptible to corruption.” White, 82.

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1976, revised 1980), 137; and “Funeral”, 82. To confuse Lewis' detestation of scientism versus science is quite unbelievable (nearly unforgivable) given the frequency with which it has been clarified in the secondary literature. Michael D. Aeschliman has given a noble summary of this discussion in *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case against Scientism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983). See also Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1949), 128-133; Bruce R. Reichenback, “C. S. Lewis on the Desolation of De-valued Science,” *Christian Scholar's Review* XI.2 (1982): 99-111; Timothy James Demy, “Technology, Progress, and the Human Condition in the Life and Thought of C. S. Lewis” (PhD dissertation, Salve Regina University, 2004); Evan K. Gibson, “There are no “Trees”...Only this Elm!: C. S. Lewis on the Scientific Method,” in

“historicists” (rather than historians), who, “by use of their natural powers, discover an inner meaning in the historical process.”³⁸ As might be expected, he does express concern over the effects of such movements on the practical sciences. For example, seeing the mess we have made of our own planet and culture, his opinion of human space travel and colonization was low.³⁹ While Gary Ferngren and Ronald Numbers have suggested from Lewis’ letters to Captain Bernard Acworth between 1944-1960 that Lewis’ sympathies for macro-evolution became more troubled as he grew older,⁴⁰ his concerns even here were not about what science could legitimately demonstrate but rather with “the fanatical and twisted attitudes of its defenders.”⁴¹ Lewis saw in his lifetime the rise of a more “popular Evolutionism” that was committed, not just to biological “change,” but to universal “improvement.”⁴² The distinction between Lewis’ respect for well-drawn scientific conclusions and his rejection of pseudo-science elevated to the level of religious fervor can be seen neatly in a 1951 essay:

Permanent Things, ed. Andrew A. Tadie and Michael H. Macdonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 240-252; and Thomas C. Peters, “The War of the Worldviews: H. G. Wells and Scientism versus C. S. Lewis and Christianity,” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 203-220.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis, “Historicism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 100, 112. See also “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought,” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 63f.

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, “The Seeing Eye (Onward, Christian Spacemen),” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 167-176; and “Religion and Rocketry,” in *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1973), 83-92. And of course, the character of Weston in the space trilogy and Uncle Andrew in the *Narniad* stand as epic expressions of this point. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Collier books, 1965), 133-139; *Perelandra* (New York: Collier Books, 1944), 86-96; and *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Collier Books, 1955), 18ff. For an additional and more comic consideration of how colonization of space would not produce any different results than the terrestrial sort, see “Ministering Angels,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1994), 107-119.

⁴⁰ Ferngren, 28-33.

⁴¹ Ferngren, 30.

⁴² C. S. Lewis, “*de Futilitate*,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 58.

To this deep-seated objection I can only reply that, in my opinion, the modern conception of Progress or Evolution (as popularly imagined) is simply a myth, supported by no evidence whatever. I say ‘evolution, as popularly imagined.’ I am not in the least concerned to refute Darwinism as a theorem in Biology. There may be flaws in that theorem, but I have here nothing to do with them...For the purposes of this article I am assuming that Darwinian biology is correct. What I want to point out is the illegitimate transition from the Darwinian theorem in biology to the modern myth of evolutionism or developmentalism or progress in general.⁴³

Elsewhere he calls such “Wellsianity” merely an “optical illusion” that comes from too closely attending to only half of nature—the owl’s emergence from the egg and the oak from the acorn—forgetting that the egg was produced from a full grown owl and the acorn by a mature oak.⁴⁴ Lewis himself embraced something like this view prior to his conversion to Christianity, but “on these grounds and others like them one is driven to think that whatever else may be true, the popular scientific cosmology at any rate is certainly not.”⁴⁵

But even in his disagreement he maintains a professional disinterest, saying without jest that, as a myth, “It [the myth of inevitable progress] is one of the most moving and satisfying world dramas which have ever been imagined...neither the Greeks nor the Norsemen ever invented a better story.”⁴⁶ It begins with nothing, features a struggling hero, who continues to advance by millionth chances against the forces of chaos, rises by its own bootstraps to sound its barbaric Yop!, only to finally be overwhelmed again by the power of chaos in the slow cold death of the universe. As

⁴³ C. S. Lewis, “The World’s Last Night,” 101. He says essentially the same thing in “The Funeral of a Great Myth,” 82f.; as well as in his letter to Acworth of September 23, 1944. Ferngren, 29.

⁴⁴ “Is Theology Poetry?,” 137f.; and “Modern Man,” 63f.

⁴⁵ “Is Theology Poetry?,” 138.

⁴⁶ “Funeral,” 86-88.

myth proper he finds it more imaginatively satisfying—more absolute and tragic in its literary form—than Christianity itself.⁴⁷

Conclusion

In answer to the first question, then, Lewis is not adverse to conclusions of science, even if they stand in apparent contradiction to a received interpretation of a biblical event, so long as the scientific conclusions are well-founded and free of the rhetorical posturing that accompanies modern developmentalism. Specifically related to the early Genesis narratives, Lewis believes that science has indeed offered a compelling case for species macro-development and an old earth, but does not believe that this necessarily and in all forms compromises Christianity or the veracity of its scriptures.

Lewis, Bergson, and the *Élan Vital*

While Lewis' relation to evolution seems relatively clear, Sanford Schwartz has offered an insightful thesis proposing a more nuanced relationship.⁴⁸ As his proposal runs counter to the interpretation of Lewis presented here, he demands analysis at some length.

Schwartz's Thesis

Schwartz asserts that the *Perelandra* volume of the Space Trilogy has historically been interpreted as a war between religious and naturalistic points of view, and that, therein "Lewis seems to present an impassable conflict between Christianity and post-

⁴⁷ "Funeral," 88. See also "Is Theology Poetry?," 122-126.

⁴⁸ Sanford Schwartz, "Paradise Reformed: Lewis, Bergson, and Changing Times on *Perelandra*," *Christianity and Literature* 51, no. 4 (2002): 569f. Paginal citations to Schwartz's article will be made parenthetically throughout this section.

Darwinian tendencies of modern thought” [569]. Yet, Schwartz believes that a third and more pivotal perspective is in the mix—an “in-between” position—that was deeply influential on Lewis. Although he was critical of it as a total system, it was the dominant force behind the construction of the Perelandrian world and story—that force was Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* [569f.].

By way of summary, Bergson’s vitalism stood over against mechanistic interpretations of the world in the biological sciences, as well as against philosophical positivism’s attenuation of the human mental life, both of which dominated the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [571].⁴⁹ In its place *Lebensphilosophie* (of which, Bergson is an heir) emphasized the power of “Life”—the dynamic and underlying force behind all nature—occupying a middle ground between naturalism and spiritualism. He says, “In defiance of a tradition that privileged Being over Becoming, unity over multiplicity, and essence over existence, vitalists celebrated the creative and multiform power of ‘life’ that spontaneously gives rise to new forms of expressions and ceaselessly strives to overcome the obstacles that impede its realization” [572].

Bergson built his early career critiquing logical positivism for its unwarranted application of mechanistic methodologies from the physical sciences to the realms of the human mind and was widely credited (by his publicist, at least) with “dispelling ‘the nightmare of determinism’” [574]. In his most relevant and celebrated text, *Creative Evolution*, he reinvented Darwinism away from its rationalistic and mechanistic

⁴⁹ His article features what amounts to a seminal bibliography on Emergent Evolution. The central works are Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1911); Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920); C. Lloyd Morgan, *Emergent Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt, 1923); and as a further development Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929).

structures. He posited “the existence of a creative spiritual impetus, the *élan vital*, that spontaneously produces novel forms of life and thereby raises creation to new and previously unpredictable levels of development” [574]. The bridge between religious and naturalistic views of the world was thus built. In further conversation, particularly with Roman Catholic intellectuals, the possibility of equating this force to the Christian God was seen, further establishing its utility for theological consideration.

Whether or not Schwartz has correctly presented Bergson’s ideas does not change the particular critiques presented below. The question herein is related, not to the definition of emergent evolution, but to Lewis’ appropriation of it however it is understood. As such, Schwartz’s understanding of emergent evolution is granted.

Schwartz believes that “most interpreters” have embraced an oversimplified thesis of what Lewis was doing in *Perelandra*—that Lewis was against Emergent Evolution and used *Perelandra* to critique it. Against this, Schwartz says, “Given these clearly defined battle lines, it is surprising to find that some of the most distinctive features of *Perelandra*’s new Eden are derived from the same ‘biological philosophy’ espoused by the enemy. In a dramatic departure from traditional views of the earthly paradise, Lewis presents the prelapsarian order as a state of continuous flux and dynamic development” [569]. He further argues that this prelapsarian order stands in great contrast to the traditional view of the “static” garden state. Lewis makes the whole virgin world more dynamic and fluid (literally) in a way that more closely resembles the *vitalism* of Bergson than it does the “immutable condition” of traditional interpretations of Paradise.

He admits at the outset that “it seems strange, if not contradictory” that Lewis should employ the very approach he is critiquing, but offers that this tension can be

lessened by realizing that Lewis was at the time of *Perelandra*'s composition also writing his *Preface to Paradise Lost*. Therein, Lewis rejects the standard Romantic understanding of Satan as "exalted tragic hero" for the sake of an Augustinian privatory interpretation of Satan as "...a parody of the God against whom he has rebelled...[becoming] a warped imitation of his Creator" [570]. Thus Schwartz argues that a similar motif might "account for the otherwise baffling situation in *Perelandra*."

Lewis then is constructing an original emergent world—"a Christian vision of Becoming"—while negating the naturalistic philosophical implication of Bergson's model. Lewis, like Bergson, represents a view that is "in-between" the religious and the materialist, only Lewis' view is a Christian one.

His view is supported by evidence such as Lewis' early fascination with Bergson and his lifelong appreciation of Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity*.⁵⁰ Schwartz offers a long synopsis of the book with commentary, identifying aspects of the book that have their analogue in Bergson's thought. The dominant thread consists of the general resistance to a mechanized understanding of linear time—the narrator's impulse to retreat in the beginning, Ransom's momentary desire to recapture a pleasurable experience ("the urge to immobilize the flux"), Un-Man's offer of "what might be" rather than "what is," the Lady's need to learn of past-present-future rather than accepting the flux, and the fact that the furry Martian creatures will not come again. Even the very terrain—the flux of

⁵⁰ Schwartz references Lewis' own affirmation of the impact Bergson had on him in C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1955), 198, 204f. This relationship has long been known in Lewis studies. See Daniel K. Kuhn, "The Joy of the Absolute: A Comparative Study of the Romantic Visions of William Wordsworth and C. S. Lewis," in *Imagination and the Spirit: Essays in Literature and the Christian Faith presented to Clyde S. Kilby*, ed. Charles A. Huttar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 194.

the land masses and the prohibition of the “fixed land”—underscores Lewis’ desire to invest this world with the sort of dynamism characteristic of Emergent Evolution.

But what of the introduction of Weston, who seems a pejorative parrot of Bergson himself? This is the point of difference, says Schwartz. The creative evolution outlined by the antagonist Weston represents a “dangerous distortion of the divinely ordained and beneficent temporal dynamism with which he invests his imaginary paradise” [571]. Further he says, “To be sure, Weston’s doctrine bears only a rough resemblance to the sophisticated views of Bergson, Alexander, and Morgan...Nevertheless, Lewis employs Weston’s self-serving vulgarization to bring to light the dangerous assumptions behind ‘biological philosophy’...In Weston’s hands it degenerates into little more than an excuse to pursue the ‘fixed idea’ of interplanetary conquest” [583].

Thus, while acknowledging how often Lewis criticizes Bergson, Schwartz suggests that *Perelandra* represents Lewis’ attempt to construct his own version of creative evolution by endowing his imaginary world with “a principle of dynamic change in which even the evolutionary lapses, including the spiritual catastrophe that has overtaken our fallen planet, are transfigured into something new and more marvelous by the redeeming act of God” [577].

His conclusion then is that “we may begin to look at Lewis’s novel less as an irreconcilable struggle between an old-fashioned Christian humanism and a newfangled heresy than as the effort of a modern Christian intellectual to sustain and enrich the former through critical engagement with the latter” [571].

Schwartz's Thesis Considered

Schwartz offers an insightful and helpful analysis of the unique role of flux and dynamism in Lewis' *Perelandra*. For this he is to be credited.⁵¹ As to the general thesis, however—that Lewis owes Bergson's Creative Evolution the primary debt for such a device—Schwartz has some challenges to overcome at the level of his basic thesis.⁵²

Lewis is said to be attempting to overcome a weakness in the “tradition.” To what does “tradition” refer, however? Note the relationship between the following assertions. First, at the outset Schwartz clearly has the tradition of churchly interpretation of early Genesis in view. “Traditional views of the earthly paradise” can have no other referent. But, second, the entirety of his discussion of emergent evolution emphasizes its innovations over against a “tradition,” here understood as modern mechanistic naturalism. Third, Bergson and Lewis are both supposed to assume a position “in-between” spiritualism and naturalism. Only two possible arrangements for these three ideas seem possible, and Schwartz attempts both in this article.

In the first arrangement, he claims that the two opposing forces consist of churchly spiritualism and modern scientific naturalism [572]. This is what the *elan-vital* is supposed to stand between—“simultaneously spiritualizing biology and naturalizing the spiritual” [575]. But he cannot mean this, for his entire reason for faulting the churchly tradition in the introduction was that it lacked “continuous flux and dynamic development, that is, the “static” nature of churchly interpretative tradition is what Lewis

⁵¹ He is not the first to provide this analysis, however. Kuhn presented it 30 years earlier in a much reduced form and with less overstatement. Kuhn, “Joy of the Absolute,” 194, 208f.

⁵² Holt agrees with the conclusions here, but dismisses it in a single paragraph. Holt, 35f. This critique seeks to show not just *that* Schwartz's thesis is flawed, but *why*.

attempts to improve. But was it not naturalist biology that was supposed to feature the fault of being mechanistic and lacking dynamism? Was not this what the “spiritual” side was supposed to contribute to the “in-between” position? It seems instead (the second alternative arrangement) that both the “spiritual” and the “biological” exhibit the same flaw—a lack of flux and dynamic development.

The introduction actually presents this second alternative—that churchly interpretation and scientific naturalism are on the side of “static” mechanistic reduction. But then what is the referent for the “spiritual” side? Consequently how can there be an “in-between” position? There does not seem to be any way of coherently using both typologies at the same time.

The greater problem, however, is that neither alternative seems to fit the evidence. Taking the second alternative first, the claim that the pre-Enlightenment history of churchly interpretation saw the paradisaal state as lacking “continuous flux and dynamic development,”—that it had an “immutable condition”—is simply an unverifiable claim. He cites no church fathers, medieval doctors, or reformers as evidence. It can only be asserted as an *a priori* assumption to create the desired tension, which is exactly how Schwartz uses it. Presumably, the reader is expected to draw on a vague imaginative picture of Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther as rather stubborn intractable fellows, too dependent on something like Aristotle’s unmoved mover to understand the vitality of the living world—locked, hide-bound, and out of touch. If the reader actually shares that imaginative picture of history (and many highly-educated persons do), Schwartz’s assumption can work.

This would be a difficult commitment, however, for anyone who has actually encountered the tradition's use of the Paradisal narratives. One need only go back to chapter 1 of this dissertation to gain a sense of how rich and dynamic was the church fathers', medieval doctors', and reformers' understanding of the paradisal state, both in terms of Adam's existential condition and opportunities as well as its interpretive fecundity. The space required to demonstrate the vitality of the church's image of paradise would be prohibitive; the effort required to do so would not.⁵³

The first alternative, however, undermines Schwartz's thesis as well, but now from the other direction. If in fact, the churchly tradition is to be equated with the "spiritual" side of the "in-between" position, then how is *Perelandra* an expression of the "in-between" and not simply an expression of the "spiritual?" Put differently, why does Schwartz feel pressed to find another source for the vitality of *Perelandra* beyond the one Lewis is already dependent upon? If nothing else, the long-standing *Veni, Creator Spiritus* liturgical tradition, with its affirmation of the ever-present work of the divine Spirit in the world, offers all the same imaginative richness as the *élan-vital*, but with the benefit of already being Christian. Why might this not be an equally reasonable source for Lewis' ideas? Why would he need to christen Bergson when such an imaginatively rich tradition already exists within Lewis' own Anglicanism? Even Schwartz's proposed solution to the "strange, if not contradictory" idea involves the irony of Lewis' cotemporary work on Milton, a literary member of the pre-Enlightenment interpretive tradition. Would the *Preface to Paradise Lost* not equally stand as a piece of evidence

⁵³ Bouteneff would be an excellent starting place; Proceed then to Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, volume 1; John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003); and Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958).

that Lewis is already hip-deep in the voice of the traditional church and well aware of its narrative possibilities at the time of *Perelandra*'s composition?

From another direction (and 20 years earlier), Robert Smith asserts that the origin of the Perelandrian vision is “the tradition of the birth of Venus from the foamy sea.”⁵⁴ The Green Lady, a virtual Venus rising from the swelling sea, overthrows the protagonist's conceptions of love and gender—very nearly the narrative expression of Lewis' own arguments in *Allegory of Love* and prescient of his use of it in *The Four Loves*, 20 years later. No surprise should be felt at this, particularly given Lewis' belief that pagan myths often functioned as a *preparatio evangelica*.⁵⁵ The point then is that at least two alternatives to Bergson exist for the Perelandrian landscapes, neither of which require the sleeping-with-the-enemy aspect of Schwartz's thesis.

This then draws out the greatest difficulty in Schwartz's proposal—that Lewis' actual use of the *élan-vital* metaphysic through his corpus is almost universally pejorative. While Schwartz is correct that Lewis read Bergson and Alexander with benefit in his pre-conversion days, the attraction was qualified and seems to have soured dramatically as he aged. In Alexander's case, no one can dispute the profundity of affect his distinction between “contemplation” and “enjoyment” had on Lewis. It became a centerpiece of his thought and shall be presented in all its glory in chapter 3. But what relationship may exist between *this* idea and emergent evolution Schwartz does not identify. Schwartz seems to argue that since Lewis was entranced by one thing Alexander

⁵⁴ Robert Houston Smith, *Patches of Godlight: The Patterns of Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), 128f.

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, “Religion without Dogma?,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 132.

said, he must have been equally enamored of something else Alexander said on an entirely different topic. The flaw is obvious.

Regarding Bergson, Lewis is not even this complimentary.⁵⁶ In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis does lay out Emergent Evolution (and Bergson by name) as a view “in-between” the Materialist and the Religious.⁵⁷ But it would be shabby and very nearly mean to cite this as the source of Schwartz’s idea, as not a whisper of a question exists as to where Lewis stands—he is clearly and wholly on the Religious side. To Lewis, Emergent Evolution is “in-between” in the most untenable and unattractive sense in that it “gives one much of the emotional comfort of believing in God and none of the less pleasant consequences,” like morality, responsibility, and guilt. The Life-Force is “a sort of tame God. You can switch it on when you want, but it will not bother you.” This is hardly the sort of perspective one would expect Lewis to try to redeem, especially as the radio lectures that became *Mere Christianity* were being given at the same time Lewis was completing *Perelandra*.

By way of an unsystematic rummaging through Lewis’ corpus, the following examples can be added. Writing to Acworth in 1960, Lewis critiqued de Chardin’s *The Phenomenon of Man*, calling it “evolution run mad.”⁵⁸ He accused de Chardin of “repeating Bergson (without the eloquence) and Shaw (without the wit),” and ending up with something like Pantheism. He then applauded the Jesuits for forbidding him to write on the subject any more. In *Miracles*, Pantheism is exactly what he calls “worship of the

⁵⁶ Although he does employ to his own benefit an illustration attributed to Bergson in *Miracles*, it is similar to the Alexander citation in that it is on an unrelated topic. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Collier Books, 1960), 97.

⁵⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier Books, 1952), 35.

⁵⁸ Ferngren, 30.

life-force.”⁵⁹ This is a claim he originally made a few years prior in an essay, calling Bergson a “more modern form” of the old nature religions, which by itself might be either a complement or an insult, but then he adds of Bergson, “but he repented, and died a Christian.”⁶⁰ Apparently Lewis thought Bergson’s ideas were (tongue-in-cheek aside) incompatible with Christian salvation. Elsewhere Lewis argues that the creative evolutionists, as opposed to Christians, were the ones who ought to look at the giant universe with fear, for the “Bergsonian” is only pretending—“as though by concentrating on the possibly upward trend in a single planet he could make himself forget the inevitable downward trend in the universe as a whole, the trend to low temperatures and irrevocable disorganization.”⁶¹ At the very close of his life, he still places the more “highly poetical philosopher” Bergson in the slightly pejorative category of poets rather than scientists in transmitting to the masses the dominant metaphysical myth of the day.⁶² Later in the same work, he makes the Pantheistic connection, placing Bergson directly in the trajectory of Schelling, Keats, Wagner, Goethe, and Herder and others all the way back to Robinet, not as an “in-between” position, but as merely a continuation of a movement that existed before Darwin and that prepared the way for his embrace when he arrived.⁶³ Finally to Bergson’s own notions of the relationship of “life” to “Life” as “the

⁵⁹ *Miracles*, 83, 119.

⁶⁰ C. S. Lewis, “The Grand Miracle,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 86. Lewis makes another oblique reference to Bergson’s conversion in “Revival or Decay?,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 250.

⁶¹ “Dogma,” 44.

⁶² *Discarded Image*, 17.

⁶³ *Discarded Image*, 220f.

residuum of the vital operation to the operation itself,” Lewis answers, “This is very well if *Life* is a thing, a ‘force’, or a daemon. But none of the metaphors will work if it is an abstract universal. Triangles are not related to Triangularity as parts to a whole, or content to container, or residuum to operation.”⁶⁴

Schwartz is correct to underline the appreciation Lewis had for Bergson as a youth, and the early date of *Perelandra* (1943) does stand as an argument in favor of his thesis. If Lewis *were* enamored with Bergson in his youth, one would certainly expect the influence to be strongest at that stage. Yet nowhere in Lewis’ later writings does he affirm any such literary dependency;⁶⁵ rather, we meet at best a cool antipathy toward Bergsonian evolution and at least as often outright antagonism.

All this leaves one with the overwhelming sense that if Schwartz’s solution is correct, it is a wearying one at best. Ockham might well raise an eyebrow at such needlessly complicated connections when such simple and sensible explanations stand immediately before us—that in *Perelandra*, Lewis is either rehearsing certain well-established themes already present within the churchly interpretive imagination against the popular pseudo-science of developmental evolution or expressing an epic story drawn from Pagan mythology along the lines of what he would later do in *Till We Have Faces*.

This generates a final thought, regarding what Schwartz calls the dominant interpretation of the Space Trilogy—that of “an impassable conflict between Christianity and post-Darwinian tendencies of modern thought.” If the implication is that since Lewis was *for* Christianity, he was thus against Darwin, Schwartz is correct in calling this idea

⁶⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 300.

⁶⁵ Even in his 1946 “Reply to Professor Haldane,” Lewis says nothing about Bergson, even though such an association would surely have helped his case against Haldane’s particular accusations.

reductionistic. The previous section showed that he did not see them as incompatible. In fact the only time evolution clearly did trouble him was when it took exactly the step from science to “Wellsianity” that Schwartz now says Lewis sought to mimic.

To the point, however, Schwartz’s thesis begins with a reaction against an inferred body of secondary literature that pits Lewis against Darwin. But as has been shown the best Lewis scholars do not argue for such a mono-dimensional read of Lewis. Neither does Schwartz name a single scholar guilty of this error. In short, Schwartz, having assumed into existence a tension within Lewis (or at least within his scholarship), articulates a creative and complicated resolution to it. But surely a solution can only be as vital as the original problem it was contrived to solve.

Question 2: Lewis the Churchman

To what degree did Lewis perceive himself as under the authority of the Anglican church? Stated differently, how thoroughly did he believe his theological thought needed to coincide with the historical and interpretive voice of the church? This matters because if Lewis feels no such obligation, nothing is gained by looking for it. Any “orthodoxy” he possesses is incidental and accidental. If, however, he deeply desires to reflect “the tradition” then novelty may in fact be an unintended product of ignorance.

The answer is actually rather straightforward. Lewis indicates his desire to stand within the general historical trajectories of the church, to avoid theological or ecclesiastical novelty, and to articulate the contents of the Christian faith that is “...professed by all baptized and communicating Christian.”⁶⁶ On several occasions Lewis expresses a willful conforming to a perceived ecclesiastical authority on subjects

⁶⁶ *Pain*, 10.

that, if left to himself, he would have chosen to stand elsewhere. Twice in *Problem of Pain* he makes such claims. First, as already mentioned, in relation to the story of the Fall, he defers his preference for “the story of the magic apple” for the sake of the Church’s established doctrine of sin. He does this on the grounds that “I assume that the Holy Spirit would not have allowed the latter to grow up in the Church and win the assent of great doctors unless it was true and useful as far as it went.”⁶⁷ Second, on the existence of hell as a place of everlasting retributive punishment, he says, “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power,” and “I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully ‘All will be saved.’”⁶⁸ Yet he cannot, both on the grounds that reason demands such final justice *and* that scripture expressly teaches it and Christendom expressly confesses it. The very attempt to define the word “Christian” in *Mere Christianity* has the force of something like, “If you are going to call yourself one, then conform to the meaning of the word.”⁶⁹ He even deprecates, through the mouth of Screwtape, those who take to themselves the role of clergy but refuse to conform themselves to the rule of faith.⁷⁰

This attitude of submission to a pre-existing authority is not one Lewis reserved for his religion. It was a feature of his academic profession, his own literary work, and

⁶⁷ *Pain*, 72.

⁶⁸ *Pain*, 118.

⁶⁹ *Mere Christianity*, 9-11; see also, “The Death of Words,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 105-107, wherein he mourns the eulogistic degeneration of words that once had a clear meaning such as “Christian” and “Gentleman,” degrading them to roughly synonyms for “good” and “bad.” For a more academically dispassionate exposition of similar themes, see the entirety of *Studies in Words*.

⁷⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961), 72-75. See also his similar treatment of the modern theologian in C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Collier Books, 1946), 37-47.

even his relationships. In relation to his work as a medieval scholar he declares in his inaugural address for his Cambridge chair, “It is my settled conviction that in order to read Old Western literature aright you must suspend most of the responses and unlearn most of the habits you have acquired in reading modern literature.”⁷¹ He means here that to read the classics aright, one must submit oneself to the assumptions of the world in which they were written and not presume the modern position of intellectual superiority. Describing the imaginative process of how he came to write the *Narniad*, he says,

Then came the Form. As these images sorted themselves into events (i.e., became a story) they seemed to demand no love interest and no close psychology. But the Form that excludes these things is the fairy tale. And the moment I thought of that I fell in love with the Form itself: its brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections and ‘gas’. I was now enamoured of it. Its very limitations of vocabulary became its attraction; as the hardness of the stone pleases the sculptor or the difficulty of the sonnet delights the sonneteer.⁷²

He applies the same logic (although a bit more problematic in result) to his view of marriage, both as a young single man⁷³ and a few months before he became a widower⁷⁴ — the difference between them being not the content, but only the sensitivity with which the topic is approached. Lewis believed in a hierarchical Form of marriage. It is that to which the man and woman must submit to have the sort of marriage Lewis believes proper.⁷⁵ The very thesis of *The Four Loves* is that various sorts of love (from

⁷¹ “*De Descriptione*,” 24.

⁷² “Fairy Stories,” 46f.

⁷³ *Mere*, 95-103.

⁷⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishing, 1960), 145ff.

⁷⁵ When Lewis demands the submission of the character Jan Studduck to her husband rather than her books in *That Hideous Strength*, Stella Gibbons, who is perhaps only the first to put it in print, declares his attitude toward women “narrow and unkind.” Stella Gibbons, “Imaginative Writing,” in *Light on Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965), 93.

affection to friendship and so on) have a Form that make them what they are and can only be fully enjoyed in the embrace of the limitations of the Form. What is more, Lewis' entire moral code reflects the necessity of submission to an external reality—that of the *Tao*.⁷⁶ Its demands are rationally apprehended and an act of submission is required if one wishes to act morally.

Finally and in the light of the *Tao*, even the very internal dispositions of one's humanity are in need of reorganizing according to a series of "stock responses," wherein one becomes trained to respond properly to given stimuli. He says in *Preface to Paradise Lost*, In my opinion such deliberate organization is one of the first necessities of human life, and one of the man functions of art is to assist it."⁷⁷ In short, one is obligated cast aside the very preferences of our "Romantic Primitivism" and learn rather to love truth, beauty, and goodness and to hate the false, the loathsome, and the evil.

It is obvious that Lewis believed that the willing submission to a preexisting (or at least external) Form was a source of not only delight but success. For humans to think and act coherently, they must submit to certain Forms.⁷⁸ It is essential to human wholeness to submit selfish autonomy to religious, imaginative, moral, and literary Forms. These Forms make demands, and one can only faithfully perform one's functions in the act of submission to such basic realities—the seed must die before it can live. Thus

⁷⁶ See *Abolition*, 39ff; and the "Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe" section of *Mere*, 17-42.

⁷⁷ *Preface*, 55. Such responses are possible only because of the objective nature of reality, by which the waterfall in *Abolition of Man* is rightly to be called "sublime." *Abolition*, 13ff.

⁷⁸ Schakel has edited an entire collection of essays on the literary application of this idea in Lewis. See in particular his introduction to the volume. Peter J. Schakel, ed., *The Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C. S. Lewis* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), xi-xvii.

one explanation for Lewis' desire to stand within traditional Christianity despite areas of disagreement can now be suggested.

Lewis' commitments to historical Christianity were not an uncritical or unconscious reality—a simple fideism born of ignorance—but were rather the intentional response of a value-laden life. If one wants to write good sonnets, one must embrace the Form,⁷⁹ or if fairy tale, then that Form. If one wishes to be “Christian,” then it is no good attempting to formulate one's own version. The word has a meaning—a Form—and one must either submit to it or else call oneself something else. To express it as he does in *Mere Christianity*, “All this is said simply in order to make clear what kind of book I was trying to write; not in the least to conceal or evade responsibility for my own beliefs. About those, as I said before, there is no secret. To quote Uncle Toby: ‘They are written in the Common-Prayer Book.’”⁸⁰ Or as he puts it elsewhere, we do not believe in Christianity because it is noble or useful or strong, but because it is true.⁸¹

Thus in relation to the questions posed in this dissertation, one should expect Lewis, on the basis of his own commitments, to work hard at being faithful to the historic beliefs of the Church, even in the places where he disagrees. This will serve as his default orientation, his bias, or even his presupposition.

⁷⁹ *Preface*, 3.

⁸⁰ *Mere*, 8. Uncle Toby is a character in *The Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne.

⁸¹ See *Screwtape*, 108-109; “Modern Man,” 65; and C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 101.

Question 3: Lewis and Higher Criticism

This section addresses the first half of a larger question regarding Lewis' relationship to mid-twentieth century theology. In chapter 4, Lewis' perspectives on the Genesis Fall will be brought into conversation with those of the theologians from chapter 1. Here the question is more general. What was Lewis' overall appraisal of higher criticism and theology as a discipline? Lewis confessed to be neither a theologian nor a higher critic by trade or training.⁸² He stood outside the world of the theologian. The disadvantages of such a position are obvious—Lewis lacked professional credibility to engage them on their own turf (much as they would have struggled to discuss medieval literature with Lewis). Yet knowing this, Lewis was keen on offering what he could—that is, what did the work of mid-twentieth century theologians look like to an educated Christian from the outside? His conclusions were enlightening, and could not do less than underscore his above-outlined relationship to traditional Christian beliefs.

In 1959, Lewis was asked by the Principal of Wescott House, Cambridge, to give an address to budding seminarians on an educated layperson's view of the state of theology.⁸³ This address not only has the virtue of providing with succinctness Lewis' ideas on textual criticism in general (fleshed out at greater length in other places⁸⁴), but also focuses on how those ideas differ from the dominant ones in the theological climate

⁸² *Pain*, 10; and *Mere*, 6.

⁸³ "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," 152-166. Cunningham's broadly adequate discussion of Lewis on Rudolf Bultmann suffers from the disadvantage of not having had access to this definitive address which, although having been originally given in May, 1959, was not published to the wider world until 1967—the same year Cunningham's book came out. The same appears to be true for Hamilton's 1968 treatment. Cunningham, 91-102; and Carol J. Hamilton, "Christian Myth and Modern Man," *Encounter* 29, (Summer 1968): 246-255. Throughout this section, paginal reference to this address will be in text brackets.

⁸⁴ See C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) and "On Criticism," 43-59.

of his day. So pivotal is this address in fact for the present thesis that it is almost remiss not to quote the entire text. Nevertheless, as this would be unseemly, an attempt at a reasonable summary shall be made. Relevant references to his other works will be inserted where they are most helpful.⁸⁵

Lewis begins the address by admitting his ignorance of the issues of theology. Musing upon why the principal had asked him to speak anyway, he offers, “But I think his idea was that you ought to know how a certain sort of theology strikes the outsider. Though I may have nothing but misunderstandings to lay before you, you ought to know that such misunderstandings exist” [152]. By “outsiders,” of course, Lewis meant two different things—the uneducated outsider and the outsider who *is* educated, but in a different subject matter. Lewis, being one of the latter, can only speak from that framework. What uneducated persons make of modern theological developments, Lewis does not know and is not going to guess at here. For himself, he notes that it is primarily on the authority of New Testament higher critics, such as Schweitzer, Bultmann, Tillich and others, that “we are asked to give up a huge mass of beliefs shared in common by the early Church, the Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformers, and even the nineteenth century” [153]. Lewis, however, expresses skepticism of such authority for four reasons.

Reason 1: Higher Critics are Deficient as Readers

The first reason amounts to a critique of their qualifications to speak authoritatively on the *kind* of literature with which they deal. “Whatever these men may

⁸⁵ Freshwater, similarly, discusses Lewis’ relationship to New Testament scholarship. While it is a more robust discussion than is here presented, it does not focus on the issue of myth nor patently treat Old Testament myth to the degree needed here. Mark E. Freshwater, *C. S. Lewis and the Truth of Myth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 55-86.

be as Biblical critics, I distrust them as critics. They seem to me to lack literary judgment, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading” [154]. Lewis suggests that those who have been “steeped” in the minute study of the New Testament all their lives may now have a myopia, whereby their “literary experiences of those texts lacks any standard of comparison such as can only grow from a wide and deep and genial experience of literature in general” [154]. Without a literary standard against which to compare the biblical literature, Lewis wonders if they do not become prone to miss some of the most basic aspects of the biblical literature as literature. “If he [the critic] tells me that something in a Gospel is legend or romance, I want to know how many legends and romances he has read, how well his palate is trained in detecting them by the flavor; not how many years he has spent on that Gospel.”

By way of example, he considers a commentary he once read wherein the commentator claims the Fourth Gospel is a ‘spiritual romance,’ ‘a poem not a history’ like Jonah, *Paradise Lost* or *Pilgrim’s Progress*.⁸⁶ Replies Lewis (with clear agitation), “After a man has said that, why need one attend to anything else he says about any book in the world?... I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this” [154f.]. What does the fourth gospel feel like to Lewis? It can be only one of two things. It is either “reportage” of actual events (with errors perhaps) or else “some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. The reader who doesn’t see this has simply not learned to read” [155].

⁸⁶ Hooper has identified this work as Walter Lock, “A Gospel According to St. John,” in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, including the Apocrypha*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1928), 241.

Lewis then turns on Bultmann by name. When Bultmann comments on the “unassimilated” nature of the parousia predictions in Mark 8 which follow the predictions of the passion,⁸⁷ Lewis wonders, “What can he mean? Unassimilated? Bultmann believes that predictions of the parousia are older than those of the passion. He therefore wants to believe—and no doubt does believe—that when they occur in the same passage some discrepancy or ‘unassimilation’ must be perceptible between them. But surely he foists this on the text with shocking lack of perception” [155].

Lewis then rehearses the passage: Peter’s confession of Christ, the succeeding prophecy of coming death, Peter’s “false step,” the rebuff, the generalized moral to the crowd that all must so take up their cross, the summons to martyrdom. Lewis’ conclusion:

“Logically, emotionally, imaginatively, the sequence is perfect. Only a Bultmann could think otherwise” [156].

Finally he tackles Bultmann for holding that the historical personality of Jesus is of no interest to the *kerygma* of the church, and consequently that no attempt was ever made to give the Lord any specific personality by the biblical writers.⁸⁸ Lewis responds with apoplectic frustration,

Through what strange process has this learned German gone in order to make himself blind to what all men except him see? What evidence have we that he would recognize a personality if it were there? For it is Bultmann *contra mundum*. If anything whatever is common to all believers, and even to many unbelievers, it is the sense that in the Gospels they have met a personality...Jesus of peasant shrewdness, intolerable severity, and irresistible tenderness. So strong is the flavor of the personality that, even while He says things which, on any other assumption than that of Divine Incarnation in the fullest sense, would be appallingly arrogant, yet we—and many unbelievers too—accept Him at His own valuation when He says ‘I am meek and lowly of heart’...I begin to fear that by

⁸⁷ Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: S. C. M. Press, 1952), 30.

⁸⁸ Bultmann, *New Testament*, 35.

personality Dr Bultmann means what I should call impersonality: what you'd get in a D.N.B article or an obituary or a Victorian *Life and Letters of Yeshua Bar-Yosef* in three volumes with photographs. [156]

This then is Lewis' first point: "These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight" [157].

Reason 2: The Presumption of a Lost and Recovered Christianity

Lewis believes that liberal theology always involves somewhere the claim that real Christianity was lost at a very early stage and has now been rediscovered by the modern scholar.⁸⁹ Here Lewis' own field of expertise is brought to bear, for he recognizes this sort of logic from the world of literary criticism. For example, Lewis was educated to believe that the real meaning of Plato had been misunderstood by Aristotle and grandly violated by the neo-Platonists. Yet when moderns "recovered" the true meaning of Plato, it turned out conveniently that he was an English Hegelian. And of course, Lewis was forced to endure the quarterly reinterpretations of what various Shakespearean plays "really meant." He shakes his head, "The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous. There is an *a priori* improbability in it which almost no argument and no evidence could counterbalance" [158]. The "lost" Christ or Christianity that higher criticism recovers, always seems to stand in some

⁸⁹ See *Screwtape*, 106-108, for Lewis' take on the "historical Jesus" search, which he believes revolves on exactly this point.

unexpectedly convenient proximity to the critic's own presuppositions on the nature of Christ or Christianity, of which the next reason is an archetypal example—the default disbelief in the possibility of the miraculous.

Reason 3: The *a priori* Disbelief in the Possibility of the Miraculous

This subject is, of course, an old saw for Lewis about which he had already published a good deal.⁹⁰ In fine, modern theologians are continually asserting that things like Jesus' "predictions" must be the insertion of a later writer. To which Lewis replies, "This is very sensible if we start by knowing that inspired prediction can never occur" [158]. But surely scholars are in no better position to assert this than anyone else. That is, we cannot believe or disbelieve in the miraculous simply because an authoritative biblical scholar says we should. No one can be an authoritative expert on the miraculous by definition. In short, "On this [topic] they speak simply as men; men obviously influenced by, and perhaps insufficiently critical of, the spirit of the age they grew up in" [158].

Frequently in his writing Lewis expresses this concern over the uncritical embrace of modern assumptions within the academic world (theological, scientific, and otherwise). He suggests that the prevailing models of a culture are embraced, beyond whatever truth/falsity they express, in part because they reflect values already dominant in the spirit of the age—in this case the impossibility of the miraculous.

By way of other examples, in relation to Darwin, Lewis argues that a culture dominated by a progress-oriented mythology precedes Darwin by several generations—

⁹⁰ His most famous treatment, the *Miracles* of 1947, is a monograph-length treatment of the same material found in a 1942 sermon. "Miracles," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 25-37. The larger work was certainly his *magnum opus* on the subject, but it was an on-going concern for him with trace arguments against thorough-going naturalism recurring frequently throughout his corpus.

already present in Wagner's *Nibelung's Ring* and Keats' *Hyperion*.⁹¹ Darwin did not offer a staggeringly new idea to the world, "on the contrary, the attraction of Darwinism was that it gave to a pre-existing myth the scientific reassurances it required." This is not only true of Modernity, but was equally so of the great architecture of the Ptolemaic cosmos of the Middle Ages that preceded it.⁹² The science of that day was frequently mustered to support and enable the already embraced vision of the *primum mobile* and the motions of the spheres. After all, "Nature has all sorts of phenomena in stock and can suit many different tastes."⁹³

The modern scholar's particular fault then is not so much that s/he uncritically embraces the spirit of the age—all ages have that feature. But the modern scholar has the uniquely debilitating vice of being interested, not so much in whether an ancient author is speaking truth or error, but in how the text is to be understood as *only* a product of its time. Within the subtext of *Screwtape Letters*, one can hear the tempter's approval (and thus Lewis' disapproval) of this "Historical Point of View,"

When a learned man is presented with any statement in an ancient author, the one question he never asks is whether it is true. He asks who influenced the ancient writer, and how far the statement is consistent with what he said in other books, and what phase in the writer's development, or in the general history of thought, it illustrates, and how it affected later writers, and how often it has been misunderstood (specially by the learned man's own colleagues) and what the general course of criticism on it has been for the last ten years, and what is the 'present state of the question.' To regard the ancient writer as a possible source of knowledge—to anticipate that what he said could possibly modify your thoughts or your behavior—this would be unutterably simple-minded.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "World's Last Night," 101-103; *Discarded Image*, 220-221; and the footnote in "Is Theology Poetry?," 136.

⁹² *Discarded Image*, 216-223.

⁹³ *Discarded Image*, 221.

⁹⁴ *Screwtape*, 128f.

Thus every generation becomes cut off from every preceding generation such that the dominant vices of one's own generation cannot be corrected by the dominate virtues of another. Four years after *Screwtape Letters*, he makes this narrative image patent in an essay requested by the World Council of Churches, "The tactics of the enemy in this matter are simple and can be found in any military text book. Before attacking a regiment you try, if you can, to *cut it off* from the regiments on each side."⁹⁵ The modern person then has lost what was once the common birthright of all preceding peoples—Jewish, Christian, or Pagan—the belief that valuable truth can be still be found in ancient books.⁹⁶ This tendency then in part creates an uncorrectable skepticism in the modern biblical critic for anything that does not already conform to modern sensibilities.⁹⁷ It is the characteristic modern vice—a self-reinforcing historical elitism—which turns the study of the past into, not a search for truth or even wisdom, but a search for historical explanation of past phenomena. To the specifics of this task Lewis now turns in his seminarian address.

Reason 4: On the Reconstruction of the Text and its *Sitz im Leben*

Herein we find Lewis' "loudest and longest" rant. He highlights that one of the major tasks of the modern theologian-critic consists of the reconstruction of the history behind the text— who his sources were, when and where the author wrote, and under what conditions and influences. Lewis admits it is often performed with "immense

⁹⁵ "Modern Man," 62.

⁹⁶ "Modern Man," 62.

⁹⁷ By way of foreshadowing the next chapter, Hamilton put this problem as follows: "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." Hamilton, 246.

erudition and great ingenuity,” and would be very convincing to him if not for one thing, “What forearm me against all these Reconstructions is the fact that I have seen it all from the other end of the stick. I have watched reviewers reconstructing the genesis of my own books in just this way...My impression is that in the whole of my experience not one of these guesses has on any one point been right; that the method shows a record of 100 per cent. failure” [159f.].

At the time of giving this address, Lewis had published all of his major fiction, *Till We Have Faces* being published three years earlier.⁹⁸ He had by this time seen his Space Trilogy, *Narniad*, and other works reviewed and dissected innumerable times. And on the whole, whenever a reviewer attempted to draw a causal connection between some aspect of the text and something going on in Lewis’ mind, life, or past, Lewis found the connections were usually “pure moonshine.”⁹⁹

Now surely differences exist between *Sunday Times* reviewers and great biblical scholars. Lewis agrees, but all the advantages lie with the *Times* reviewers. The books they analyze are written in their own language by their own contemporaries with similar educations, living in the same “mental and spiritual climate.” Biblical critics have none of these advantages. He wonders, “how much *Quellenforschung* in our studies of older literature seems solid only because those who knew the facts are dead and cannot contradict it?” [160]. In the end then, how can Biblical critics be so confident (or we in them) given the track records of those with such greater advantage?

You may say, of course, that such reviewers are foolish in so far as they guess how a sort of book they never wrote themselves was written by another. They

⁹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1980).

⁹⁹ “Fairy Stories,” 46.

assume that you wrote a story as they would write a story; the fact they would so try, explains why they have not produced any stories. But are the Biblical critics in this way much better off? Dr Bultmann never wrote a gospel. Has the experience of his learned, specialized, and no doubt meritorious, life really given him any power of seeing into the minds of those long dead men who were caught up in what, on any view, must be regarded as the central religious experience of the whole human race? It is no incivility to say—he himself would admit—that he must in every way be divided from the evangelists by far more formidable barriers—spiritual as well as intellectual—than any that could exist between my reviewers and me. [161f.]

In the end Lewis hopes and believes this theological tendency will blow over; after all, he notes, his own field had already emerged from such a phase. “The confident treatment to which the New Testament is subjected is no longer applied to profane texts. There used to be English scholars who were prepared to cut up *Henry VI* between half a dozen authors and assign his share to each. We don’t do that now” [162]. After all, even the possibilities of an historical Homer and King Arthur do not seem so farfetched as they once did. He comforts the seminarians that if they experience insecurity regarding all this critical work by theological giants, it may not be the seminarian’s stupidity or youth that causes it. Perhaps room can be found for skeptics of theological method, not just of historical tradition. After all, skepticism can be a healthy thing, and need not be reserved for the New Testament and the creeds. “Try doubting something else.” [164].

When faced with stories of transcendence, we must take our ignorance seriously and be a bit agnostic about our own capacities. The very categories of “literal” and “symbolic” become problematic, because all the experiences by which we judge transcendent stories are entirely on the side of immanence. On that basis skepticism of the story may be warranted, “but how if we are asking about a transcendent objective reality to which the story is our sole access?” [166]. Lewis has more to say in the closing

paragraphs of the address, but it is not of concern here. This final quotation, however, is a key foreshadowing of what is to come in the next chapter.

What can be gleaned from all this in relation to the immediate question is that Lewis distrusted the results of higher criticism as a general movement, first, on methodological grounds—that they spoke of things beyond their experience or competence. But his concern is also pastoral, and what’s more, this seems to have provided the greater reservoir of his passion for the subject. Lewis was frustrated that theological discourse had, in his opinion, ceased to be interested in practical Christianity. Even worse, he thought higher critics, by being uncritically modern, actually participated in the undoing of the basic faith structures that had long upheld and nourished shopkeepers, plumbers, and the mass of common persons. It orphaned them of the wisdom and comfort of the sages and saints by reducing ancient wisdom to historical events to be analyzed but not heeded.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps Lewis’ most generous summary of his thoughts on the problems within higher criticism is found in the conclusion of *Miracles*, where he advises the curious reader about how to take the next step in their consideration of the miraculous:

My work ends here. If, after reading it, you now turn to study the historical evidence for yourself, begin with the New Testament and not with the books about it...And when you turn from the New Testament to modern scholars, remember that you go among them as a sheep among wolves. Naturalistic assumptions...will meet you on every side—even from the pens of clergymen. This does not mean (as I was once tempted to suspect) that these clergymen are disguised apostates who deliberately exploit the position and the livelihood given them by the Christian Church to undermined Christianity. It comes partly from what we may call a ‘hangover.’ We all have Naturalism in our bones and even conversion does not at once work the infection out of our system. Its assumptions rush back upon the mind the moment vigilance is relaxed. And in part the

¹⁰⁰ Screwtape creatively and tragically outlines the negative effects such clergy have on their “sheep.” *Screwtape*, 72-75.

procedure of these scholars arises from the feeling which is greatly to their credit—which indeed is honourable to the point of being Quixotic. They are anxious to allow the enemy every advantage he can with any show of fairness claim. Thus they make it part of their method to eliminate the supernatural wherever it is even remotely possible to do so, to strain natural explanation even to the breaking point before they admit the least suggestion of miracle.¹⁰¹

Now it may be, caveats Lewis, that this movement away from the inspired sage, which requires all persons to hold confidently only what they can rationally discover for themselves, is a prelude to a great social and historical advance—where each is now expected to attain those spiritual heights once reserved for the few. If so, so be it. But, he cautions, “A society where the simple many obey the few seers can live: a society where all were seers could live even more fully. But a society where the mass is still simple and the seers are no longer attended to can achieve only superficiality, baseness, ugliness, and in the end extinction. On or back we must go; to stay here is death.”¹⁰² This detaching of the long-held beliefs of Christianity from the common person, whether by insidious design or simply as a byproduct of the modernist “hangover,” is to Lewis a systemic problem in modern theology—one he felt called to address. In his answer to Dr. Pittenger, he says,

When I began [writing], Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow-countrymen either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly educated clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was therefore simply that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand. For this purpose a style more guarded, more *nuancé*, fineliter shaded, more rich in fruitful ambiguities—in fact, a style more like Dr. Pittenger’s own—would have been useless...

¹⁰¹ *Miracles*, 164.

¹⁰² *Miracles*, 42-43. See also C. S. Lewis, “Bulverism,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 276.

One thing is for sure. If the real theologians had tackled this laborious work of translation about a hundred years ago, when they began to lose touch with the people (for whom Christ died), there would have been no place for me.¹⁰³

And in a follow up letter to the editor on the exchange, he adds, “Any fool can write *learned* language. The vernacular is the real test. If you can’t turn your faith into it, then either you don’t understand it or you don’t believe it.”¹⁰⁴

Lewis on Higher Criticism Considered

Questions of apostasy and modern “hangovers” aside, it must be admitted that Lewis’ critique of the methods of professional theologians may simply be out of court—a failure to recognize that professional theologians have technical and theoretical dialogues unfit for public consumption as do all professions—from research physicians to biologists, from lawyers to Lewis’ own profession of Medieval English. Heron asserts as much, wondering if Lewis’ lack of theological pedigree causes him to do an injustice to higher criticism in general, and Bultmann in particular.¹⁰⁵ He says, “By temperament and training [Lewis] was more philosopher and literary critic than historian. His desire was not, except incidentally, to understand the past ‘as it was’ or to track historical developments for the sake of their interest for the historian. He was therefore ill-equipped to appreciate the interest of historical-critical biblical study.” Granting Heron’s critique an appropriate hearing, it may be a touch overzealous to call the author of *Allegory of*

¹⁰³ C. S. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 183.

¹⁰⁴ C. S. Lewis, “Pittenger-Lewis and Version Vernacular,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 338.

¹⁰⁵ Alasdair I. C. Heron, “What is Wrong with Biblical Exegesis? Reflections upon C. S. Lewis’ Criticisms,” in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, ed. Andrew Walker (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1993), 97f.

Love and *The Discarded Image* uninterested in history or critical study of texts. What is more, his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* is an intractable piece of erudition sufficient to cure insomnia in any save his most committed literary peers.¹⁰⁶ White's critique is as usefully moderated as it is succinct, when he says that Lewis "was a better authority on the great old theologians than on their contemporary counterparts."¹⁰⁷

But it seems over-simple that one so academically proficient as Lewis could not recognize that the vernacular is not the only language game with value. Surely he would have to concede that theologians be permitted the same license to ply their jargon-filled trade as doctors, lawyers, and specialists in any field? And a careful read shows that Lewis would have graciously granted theologians their technical discourse provided they took on the additional task of "translation"—much as the physician must translate the technical jargon of medicine to the patient. Therein lies the rub. Lewis believed theologians existed for the church, just as doctors exist for the sick. Insofar as Lewis believed modern theological shepherds were contributing to the sheep's sickness and not their mending, he bleated. Heron summarizes admirably the context as Lewis would have seen it, "The net result of the appropriation of Bultmann's ideas in academic theology of England after 1945 seemed to Lewis to run out into the sand of a total evacuation of biblical meaning, a dissolution of theological substance, and abdication of evangelical conviction, and a failure of Christian imagination."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*, ed. F.P. Wilson and Bonamy Dobree, 12 vols., vol. 3, *Oxford History of English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944).

¹⁰⁷ White, 33.

¹⁰⁸ Heron, 86.

Question 4: Lewis on the Genre of the Genesis Fall

One will notice that the preceding discussion does not address the Genesis Fall or early Genesis or even the Old Testament. Lewis' primary target in his seminarian address is New Testament higher criticism. But, as was seen in chapter 1, the methods of Bultmann in the New Testament had their Old Testament analogue and even predecessors in Gunkel and others. Would it be such a stretch to assert that Lewis would have felt an equivalent distaste about similar efforts in Old Testament studies?

This is a bit hasty, however. Lewis thought that "gospel" was a very different genre from what one finds in early Genesis.¹⁰⁹ Even prior to his full conversion to Christianity, Lewis had already identified the difference. He says in his autobiography, "I was by now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospels as myth. They had not the mythical taste."¹¹⁰ This distinction will be more clearly seen in the next chapter but can be felt immediately with Lewis' own term for the distinction—"Myth became Fact."¹¹¹ Whatever the gospels are, they have more to do with fact than with myth. The early Genesis material (Fall narrative included), however, is a very different kind of literature. One must not equivocate, so to speak between Gunkel and Bultmann. Lewis clearly disapproved of Bultmann's results; it is not so clear that he would have disagreed with Gunkel's, and certainly not in the same way.

In fact, a form of ironic agreement exists between Lewis and Old Testament higher critics on the matter. In a number of his major works, he speaks of the Genesis

¹⁰⁹ C. S. Lewis, "Answers to Questions on Christianity," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 57f.

¹¹⁰ *Surprised*, 236.

¹¹¹ A reference to C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 63-67.

Fall in very similar terms. He cites Jerome with approval that Genesis “is told in the manner ‘of a popular poet,’ or as we should say, in the form of a folk tale,” even admitting the “depth and originality” of the Hebrew cosmology compared with those of other near east nations.¹¹² Gunkel of course agreed. Similarly, as was discussed at the outset of this chapter Lewis offers in *Problem of Pain* his own alternative history to the story of “a magic apple,” calling it one of the “myths in Holy Scripture.”¹¹³ When answering audience questions in 1944, he responded to a question about the need to “rewrite” the Bible given the “lower state of mental development” people had in those days in their willingness to believe the “preposterous.”¹¹⁴ After commenting on the lack of evidence that people were less intelligent back then, he parses his answer in terms of Old and New Testament,

The Old Testament contains fabulous elements. The New Testament consists mostly of teaching, not of narrative at all: but where it *is* narrative, it is, in my opinion, historical. As to the fabulous element in the Old Testament, I very much doubt if you would be wise to chuck it out. What you get is something *coming gradually into focus*...And it comes still more into focus as it goes on. Jonah and the Whale, Noah and his Ark, are fabulous; but the Court history of King David is probably as reliable as the Court history of Louis XIV. Then, in the New Testament the *thing really happens*...If we *could* sort out all the fabulous elements in the earlier stages and separate them from the historical ones, I think we might lose an essential part of the whole process. That is my own idea.¹¹⁵

While the Fall narrative is not identified here, little question can exist about which category Lewis would put it in. It would have to be fabulous, like the Ark. Freshwater sums up the difference as follows: “One can see that Lewis assigned portions of the Old

¹¹² *Miracles*, 33.

¹¹³ *Pain*, 71.

¹¹⁴ “Answers to Questions on Christianity,” 57f.

¹¹⁵ “Answers to Questions on Christianity,” 57f.

Testament to a solely mythical level while he assumed that the New Testament must almost in its entirety be both mythical *and* historical.”¹¹⁶

The only evidence in Lewis’ entire corpus that might be mustered to the contrary is *Perelandra*, wherein repeated reference is made to Eve’s Fall as a true and apparently historical event standing opposite to the resisted temptation in that younger world.¹¹⁷ But it would be scanty evidence amounting to a category mistake to draw conclusions about real terrestrial history from Lewis’ use of it in a science fiction story.¹¹⁸

What is interesting, however, is that Lewis expresses no concern over what a mythological Fall narrative (versus an historical one) might do to the faith of the simple shopkeeper envisioned in the previous section. He assumes in all his works that his reader is enlightened enough to realize that the science has spoken definitively on the matter, and whatever the text is doing, it is not straightforward history. It might be optimistic, however, to assume that the average shopkeeper understands the difference between a *fabulous* Fall and an *historical* atonement by miraculous resurrection—after all, it is a nuance lost on a great number of highly educated agnostics to this day.

On this final question then, Lewis believed that the genre that best fit the Genesis Fall narrative was “myth.” He believes it so, not because of an *a priori* bias against the possibility of the supernatural (as in much higher criticism), but because the stories of early Genesis fit that literary form. Yet this is not so much a solution as part of the

¹¹⁶ Freshwater, 78.

¹¹⁷ *Perelandra*, 67, 144f., 152.

¹¹⁸ In his short story “Forms of Things Unknown,” the Gorgon Medusa is discovered running amok on the Moon turning astronauts to stone, but it would be absurd to assert from this Lewis’ belief in the historicity of the Greek pantheon. C. S. Lewis, “Forms of Things Unknown,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1994), 119-126.

problem. Moorman surveyed the theological landscape in 1960 and concluded that the primary problem was not indentifying myth but explaining how it worked. He said,

Myth is currently used as a sort of universal literary solvent; the unspoken assumption would seem to be ‘Let us reduce this poem, this novel, this play to its basic mythical, structural, ritual ingredients and there will then be an end to all critical problems.’ Such a point of view avoids the main literary problem raised by myth in literature, which, as I have said, is primarily a problem of function.¹¹⁹

Thus the key question is how this particular form—that of myth, legend, or perhaps even “fairie story”—actually works. And on this question Lewis will make his great contribution. Lewis believed that myth was not just a literary form, like sonnet or novella. Nor is it, as higher criticism argued, merely the expected manifestation of the heuristic religious mentality of the day. Rather, as the next chapter will demonstrate, he believes that this form is actually an indispensable epistemological device, capable by design of communicating a very specialized form of truth to the properly attuned imagination—truth in fact that cannot be apprehended by the intellect alone. In his words, “Sometimes fairy stories may say best what’s to be said.”

¹¹⁹ Charles Moorman, *Arthurian Triptych: Mythic Materials in Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot*, Perspectives in Criticism, vol. 5 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 7.

CHAPTER 3

NO MERE MYTH: LEWIS ON THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF “MYTH”

As shown in the preceding chapter, Lewis believes the Genesis Fall is “myth,” which of course generates the predictable host of questions regarding historicity, exegesis, and meaning. Thus to speak of C. S. Lewis on the Genesis Fall or even to bring him into conversation with the parties from chapter 1, this chapter is necessary. This chapter then takes a central and necessary, albeit preliminary, place for the question of Lewis’ interpretation of the Fall narrative.

“Myth” as a concept possesses a central importance, not only in Lewis’ treatment of scripture, but in his entire epistemology. Anyone familiar with Lewis’ corpus will immediately recognize the unavoidable nature of technical terms such as longing, joy, transposition, truth, fact, reality, imagination, and so on. Thus this chapter threatens at every moment to become bloated and overwhelming in its review of Lewis’ entire epistemological concern. As such, certain limitations in method are required.

Navigating the Slough of Despond: Comments on Method

Several factors complicate any attempted overview of Lewis on the nature and function of myth. First, Lewis’ thoughts are spread over his entire corpus. Myth is discussed fragmentally and occasionally in numerous essays and critical works, deployed latently in his apologetic works, and modeled in his own mythic fiction. The danger of myopia is great unless one considers his entire corpus.

Second, the subject has been oft treated. The secondary literature here manifests itself as a nearly impassable continent of material, much of which is forgettable for its repetition and imprecision. This chapter will then of necessity employ the following limiting devices.

First, the chapter does not attempt to offer a new or novel interpretation of Lewis on myth, but merely lay out what has been exhaustively treated elsewhere with an eye toward our particular use of it later on. This sketch will be drawn primarily from Lewis' own work, and the more important secondary source material will be mustered where necessary to clarify and explain.

Second, this chapter will not attempt an exposition of Lewis' epistemology in full. Concepts will be ruthlessly curtailed to only those necessary to demonstrate the way in which myth interacts with the mind attempting theology-exegesis.

Third, a number of important but related topics on myth itself will have to be bypassed. For example, no attempt will be made to chart the biographical trajectory that resulted in Lewis' own position. It is a long and interesting journey chronicled in part by Lewis himself,¹ and is wrapped up in his lifelong friendships with Owen Barfield, J. R. R. Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, and others. This has, however, been treated at length by others.²

¹ *Surprised*, 170ff; and *They Stand Together*, 426-428. A particularly good synopsis of these events can be found in Medcalf, 55-65.

² Adey represents one of the most substantive analysis of this transformation, drawn primarily from Lewis and Barfield's own letters. Lionel Adey, *C. S. Lewis's 'Great War' with Owen Barfield* (University of Victoria, B.C.: ELS Monographs, 1978). Other worthy, but reduced treatments can be found in Lex O. McMillan, "C. S. Lewis as Spiritual Autobiographer: A Study in the Sacramental Imagination" (PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1986), primarily chapter 1; and Freshwater, chapters 1-2.

Space, time, and prudence allow here only consideration of the view he ultimately embraced, not the ones he outgrew.³

Fourth, in an effort to remain concise, a number of debates in the secondary literature will not be engaged directly but will be relegated to footnotes where they can be fleshed out at leisure. Likewise, unless it is absolutely necessary for clarity, this author's own disagreements with secondary material will also be kept to a minimum.⁴ Instead, the chapter will focus on constructing a kind of "best fit line" through the Lewis literature with an eye towards its utility in the following chapters.

Finally, presenting this material in a reasonable space will require a tight structure—tighter than Lewis himself ever used, for he never published a definitive epistemology. As such, the reader should remember the structure here is not one that Lewis ever used and may have never occurred to him, but is rather a logical one designed to communicate the germane aspects of his epistemology as efficiently as possible.

The chapter will take a problem-solution approach, first laying out a series of epistemological problems of varying degrees of gravity as they presented themselves to

³ Thorson notes that Lewis' conversion so radically altered his metaphysic that his pre-conversion epistemology is almost unrelated to his final epistemology, which concerns here. Stephen Thorson, "Knowing and Being in C. S. Lewis's 'Great War' with Owen Barfield," *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 15 (November 1983): 7. Interestingly, debate arises, however, on the timing of his arrival at his mature view. Granting that Lewis' conversion to Christianity in 1929-31 was formative, Schakel and Wilson both argue that the formation of his mature position is concurrent with his turn toward writing fiction, following his debate with G. E. M. Anscombe in 1948. Peter J. Schakel, *Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 148ff.; and Wilson, 213ff. Jacobs vigorously rejects the connection between the Anscombe debate and Lewis' fiction. Jacobs, *Narnian*, 231ff. Starr charts three phases of gradual development (with the rejected possibility of a fourth). Starr, 36-75, 265-270.

⁴ For example, while it would make riveting polemics, Warnock's staggeringly imperceptive critique of Lewis' view of the myth/history question in the Gospels will be mentioned only in passing, favoring instead the majority view of the scholarship, which sees Lewis' position as adequately nuanced within his total argument. Mary Warnock, "Religious Imagination," in *Religious Imagination*, ed. John McIntyre (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), 142-157.

Lewis. Following this, “myth” will be introduced as a partial solution to them. Myth will then be defined and set into its context as a form of communication. Third, the exact nature by which myth addresses these epistemological grievances will be worked out. Fourth, the necessity of the reader’s proper perspective in relation to the efficacy of myth is clarified, and finally, Lewis’ theory will be critiqued.

By chapter’s end the following questions will have been addressed: What is myth? How does it function? Why is it an irreducible tool for facilitating knowledge of higher realities? And why does it seem to produce a greater effect in some than others?

The Epistemological Problem—Contact with Reality

At every level, Starr’s dissertation stands as a high water mark on questions of Lewis’ epistemology. While he slightly overstates the *sui generis* nature of his project,⁵ it would not be an exaggeration to say that his is the most thorough treatment to date of the interrelationship of such terms as reality, fact, truth, myth, reason, and imagination in Lewis. As this chapter is not aimed at offering a novel interpretation of Lewis’ epistemology, it will rely heavily upon Lewis himself and Starr’s work in this early “shelf-building” section of the chapter.

“Reality” and the Nature of Facthood

The first step is not exactly a problem, but rather the precondition of the problem—Lewis’ belief in an objective external reality, and what is more a “Super-nature” above it.

⁵ A careful reading of the secondary source material with which Starr deals occasionally shows that the “Lewis critics” in his cross-hairs are often more consistent with Starr’s own conclusions than he gives them credit for being—their true faults being the imprecision born of brevity rather than error. This is particularly true of Hooper on “myth,” Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: Companion and Guide* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 564ff.

Existence of an Objective External “Reality”

Lewis was beyond doubt an objectivist on the question of external reality. There exists a “something” external to the mind that has its own particular, solid quiddity, which the mind cannot change but to which its thoughts may or may not correspond. In the radio addresses that became *Mere Christianity*, he argues that this is the thing humanity has been wondering about “ever since men were able to think,”—what the universe really is in itself.⁶ About the same time as this statement was hitting the airwaves, he was arguing in print that the unalterable aspects of this reality—particularly the phenomenon of pain—are themselves an argument for its existence. He says, “Until the evil man finds evil unmistakably present in his existence, in the form of pain, he is enclosed in illusion. Once pain has roused him, he knows that he is in some way or other ‘up against’ the *real universe*...”⁷

Further, his theories of both morality and values are grounded in the existence of a world external to the mind. In *The Abolition of Man* he offers his famous argument from the objective sublimity of the waterfall, concluding with,

Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could *merit*, our approval or disapproval, our reverence, or our contempt...It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.⁸

⁶ *Mere*, 31.

⁷ *Pain*, 95, italics added for emphasis. Starr makes the insightful observation that in the epistemological progression of Orual, Lewis is actually chronicling this journey in *Faces*. Starr, 148ff.

⁸ *Abolition*, 25, 29. For the same argument more concisely delivered, see C. S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 72-81.

From these few brief citations, a first piece of Lewis' epistemological taxonomy can be asserted. The terms "real" and "reality" (and even "fact") seem to Lewis to identify the objective nature of "what is out there," irrespective of the subjective knower. It is perhaps, in the nomenclature of theology-philosophy, Kant's *ding an sich*—equally applicable to God and a rose, whose true essences abide not in the world of mental percepts, but as noumenal facts. The point is that whatever synthetic role the mind plays in the epistemological task, it is, for Lewis, limited in some sense by the "facts" of what things are objectively like.

Existence of Objective External "Higher Reality" and Ultimate "Facthood"

To be sure, Lewis did not believe that God and a rose existed on the same level of reality. Rather, he speaks of God as "...the rock bottom, irreducible Fact on which all other facts depend."⁹ Further, he believed external reality to be hierarchical.¹⁰ At times his primary interests are dualistic, speaking merely of the distinction between "nature" and "super-nature" (that is, the supernatural), or at times "sensibles" and "supersensibles."¹¹ But his dualism is only pedagogically pragmatic, for he also admits the possibility of innumerable "natures" that would all be "super" (in the sense of

⁹ *Mere*, 158. In *Great Divorce*, he likewise, speaking through the mouth of one of the "bright spirits," refers to God as "...Eternal Fact, the Father of all other facthood." *Great Divorce*, 44.

¹⁰ Given the current pejorative association of this term—that of the abuse of power—a clarification is required. Even without the benefit of *Discarded Image*, which was not published until four years later, Marjorie Wright had the foresight to identify the essential role hierarchical cosmologies play in mythic worlds (as well as the Medieval worldview). She suggests that hierarchical structures are natural and normal, and do not, when working properly exhibit misuse of power or injustice. Rather, when the hierarchy is working as it should, each creature finds its place and success. Whether or not she is correct in this assertion (or whether *our* world is mythic in this sense), it is essential to recognize that the implied beneficence was central to Lewis' understanding and use of it. Marjorie Evelyn Wright, "The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth: A Study in the Myth-Philosophy of Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien." (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, 1960), 65-93.

¹¹ See in particular chapter 4 of *Miracles*; and the more abbreviated "Miracles," 25-37.

external) to one another—“...like different novels by a single author...,” with the author’s reality, of course, standing over all of them.¹²

Speaking thusly, it is fitting that throughout his fiction, particularly the Space Trilogy, he constructs his own imaginatively hierarchical realities.¹³ The world of “deep heaven,” where the *eldila* (angelic powers) dwell, is distinct from and superior to the “worlds,” which themselves are divided into the “high worlds” and the “low worlds,” all under the direction of Maleldil.¹⁴

In asserting a multi-storied universe-reality, Lewis is embracing his identity as an “Old Western man.”¹⁵ On display is his background in and love for the medieval view of the universe with its “...splendour, sobriety, and coherence...”¹⁶ Throughout all his writings and despite its lack of correspondence to external Reality, Lewis shows a greater love for the Ptolemaic view of the universe than for the Copernican-Newtonian one.

¹² *Miracles*, 9.

¹³ For a breath-taking treatment of the ontology of the universe Lewis therein constructs, see Robert E. Martin, “Myth and Icon: The Cosmology of C. S. Lewis’ ‘Space Trilogy’” (PhD dissertation, Florida State University, 1991). He argues that the literary ontological architecture at work in the Space Trilogy is of similar kind and quality to what Dante employed in *The Divine Comedy*, of course, on a reduced scale.

¹⁴ Similar structures can be seen in Narnia, with its hypostasized celestial star-persons, diverse conscious fauna, sea kingdoms, and even “the deep realms” of Bism. In a more mythological manner, *Faces* likewise rests on interwoven levels of reality, turning on questions of who is the “real” Shadowbrute, Ungit, and Psyche.

¹⁵ “*De Descriptione*,” 25.

¹⁶ *Discarded Image*, 216. It is interesting to note that throughout Starr’s sustained effort to show that Lewis is not a “Platonist” (on the assumption that the word is unredeemably pejorative) because of his commitment to “levels of reality,” it is exactly this step that he fails to take. Starr, 79-90.]He works entirely from Lewis’ apologetic words, such as *Mere*, *Pain*, *Malcolm*. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1991). And he only incidentally mentions *Discarded Image*, which makes profoundly clear where and why Lewis thought as he did. Lewis was no more or less “platonic” than were the Middle Ages.

Knowing External Reality—Nature and Supernature

“Truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is.”¹⁷

“Truth” for Lewis is a term denoting the mind’s ability to conform itself to Reality.

“Truth” is a proposition held by the intellect (that is, reason) that corresponds with the way things objectively are. Says Lewis in a paper read at Manchester University prior to 1939, “I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth...”¹⁸ This is only a fragment of a key passage which will have to be dealt with more thoroughly later on, but it is sufficient to show Lewis’ commitments. Starr’s synthesized definition of Lewis’ idea of “truth” is insightful: “Truth is abstract, objective, known by reason, and discernible from fact in that truth refers to statements we make about reality, and fact consists of that concrete reality about which we make statements.”¹⁹

This introduces the traditional question of epistemology—*how* does the mind achieve knowledge, or in Lewis’ terms, how can the intellect construct propositions that correspond to objective external reality? For that is, to be sure, the duty of the mind if it wishes to have knowledge. For any proposition to be “true,” it must conform to the “facts” of “reality.” While this may be the primary question of epistemology, it is not quite the question at work in this chapter. At concern here will be the particular sub-question of knowing that level of reality Lewis calls “higher.” Thus his larger epistemology will only be briefly treated before turning to this more central question.

General Epistemological Challenges

¹⁷ “Myth Became Fact,” 66.

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 157.

¹⁹ Starr, 29.

Lewis was not ignorant of the epistemological challenges Modern thought had encountered. While he held to an objective external reality, he was under no illusion about the impossibility of being a fully objective knower. It was a thing observed in his youth from his father, who seemed unable to conform his mind to any set of given facts, but spun meaning out of own mind like a spider. He admits, “Sometimes, indeed, he took in the facts you had stated; but truth fared none the better for that. What are facts without interpretation?”²⁰ This question is telling. Lewis latently acknowledges the implications of Kant’s “Revolution” on the role of the mind in synthesizing knowledge.²¹

In a *Time and Tide* essay as insightful as it is incidental, Lewis used the image of an evening at the theatre to discuss the epistemological situation. One meets the “appearance” of things on the stage—actors in costume, the props, and backdrop, but their “reality” is something else—something off stage. In applying this image to the “universal drama,” he says humans have a great complication. Unlike in the theatre, no possibility exists of running backstage to see what the actor is really like. Further, “We are not even, in the last resort, absolutely sure that such things exist... They may be assumed with great probability; but they are, after all, hypothetical.”²²

General Epistemological Solutions

²⁰ *Surprised*, 121.

²¹ It is a presupposition of “Bluspels,” wherein Lewis actually cites Kant as a philosopher featuring somewhere above 95% “mere syntax masquerading as meaning.” “Bluspels,” 156f. This is not a measure of the amount of “truth” Kant possessed, or even to what degree Kant deeply understood his own intentions, only that he demonstrates a high degree of unawareness of the metaphorical nature of his own speech, often claiming more “literalness” for itself than it deserved. For his own money, Lewis preferred Plato, who was “among the masters of meaning.” “Bluspels,” 157.

²² C. S. Lewis, “Behind the Scenes,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 249.

Even with the above challenge, Lewis admits at least three types of arguments-solutions to the overall epistemological problem, none of which are adequate for addressing the specific problem of Higher Reality to be outlined below.

The first and most obvious solution is the rational use of the scientific method to interpret our physical sense data. It was shown in the last chapter that Lewis was no enemy of science (only its worship at the hands of philosophers, journalists, and scientific-fictionists), calling it a “very useful and necessary job.”²³ Barring disease, injury, incapacitation, and the like, our senses are generally reliable tools by which to interact with the natural world of sensibles. And further, Reason is a generally reliable tool for constructing corresponding truth statements from the received sensibles. But therein lies the limitation; science can only deal with things observable to the senses. To use the stage image from above, the senses may be effective for gathering data about the actors on stage, but ill-equipped for determining what they do once they exit-stage-left, and the actors “...may, in their off-stage life and character, be very unlike what we suppose and very unlike one another.”²⁴ Thus when it comes to answering questions like, “...why anything comes to be there at all, and whether there is anything behind the things science observes—something of a different kind—this is not a scientific question. If there is ‘Something Behind,’ then either it will have to remain altogether unknown to men or else make itself known in some different way.”²⁵

²³ *Mere*, 32.

²⁴ “Behind the Scenes,” 249.

²⁵ *Mere*, 32.

Lewis offers two such “different ways.” First of all, in Lewis’ view, Supernature does not simply hang around hoping to be verified, rather it breaks into Nature in the form of the miraculous. Surveying Lewis’ entire apologetic for miracles is not feasible nor necessary here.²⁶ While the existence of the miracle provides warrant for believing in the existence of Supernature, being an expression of it, its content is limited due to its infrequency and scope. The intrusion will have the qualities or the agenda of Supernature about it, but since it will not submit to rational analysis or predictable sensory authentication as Nature does, it is limited in the kind and amount of truth that can be constructed from it.

This does not mean those witnessing miracles did not have a sensory experience, but rather, that it is the nature of the miraculous, once it arrives in Nature, to cease to be miraculous. Lewis denies that a miracle “breaks the laws of Nature.” The miracle only feeds new material into Nature that is not causally related to the prior situation. Once the new material is present, the “laws” of Nature act upon it immediately, embracing it, conforming all other facts to it—in short, incorporating it into the cause-effect stream flawlessly. He says,

If events ever come from beyond Nature altogether, [Nature] will be no more incommoded by them [than by natural causes]. Be sure she will rush to the point where she is invaded, as the defensive forces rush to a cut in our finger, and there hasten to accommodate the newcomer. Miraculous wine will intoxicate, miraculous conception will lead to pregnancy, inspired books will suffer all the ordinary processes of textual corruption, miraculous bread will be digested...[Nature] is an accomplished Hostess.²⁷

²⁶ Of course, the places to find this are the aforementioned *tour de force Miracles*, and the shorter article by the same name in *God in the Dock*.

²⁷ *Miracles*, 59f.

Reason may be able to contemplate a miracle's significance, but it cannot predict or repeat it. Thus while the miraculous is not to Lewis *contrary to* reason, what reason can actually do with it is limited by the super-natural origin of its causality.

A final means exists of connecting Supernature to Nature—the human mind. That the reasoning mind cannot be explained by natural causes (or Lewis did not believe it so),²⁸ means that it must participate in some real sense in what is beyond nature. This provides the foundation for a somewhat Kantian Moral Argument for the existence of the noumenal realm. Lewis argues frequently that the sense of “ought” common to all people, which cannot be explained in terms of natural causality or “laws of nature,” establishes warrant for asserting a “something” beyond nature—at least an objective Moral Law and its subsequent Lawgiver.²⁹ This, as it was for Kant, is not an argument from pure reason, but from practical reason, which Lewis believed must be embraced as having “absolute validity” or all discussion of values was rendered hollow.³⁰

The difficulty, to this chapter's purpose, is that the argument is still one guided by reason.³¹ That is, it is derived in terms of practical reason's intellectual reflection on the natural order. Given the use Lewis puts it to, this is no deficiency. For the purpose here, however, it will not serve. For even practical reason, for all its virtue, has two great

²⁸ See “Poison,” 72; *Miracles*, 34-38; *Mere*, 31-35; and “Is Theology Poetry?,” 135f.

²⁹ See *Abolition*, 25ff; and *Mere*, 17-39.

³⁰ *Abolition*, 61. Lewis clearly sees practical reason as a legitimate form of “reason.” See also “Poison,” 73.

³¹ Lewis hints at the dependence of moral choosing on reason in *Screwtape Letters*, when Screwtape admits that there was once a time when the intellect was still capable of producing changes in a person's will, “At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning.” Thus Wormwood is admonished never to engage the patient by argument, for “by the very act of arguing, you awake the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?” *Screwtape Letters*, 7f.

deficiencies built into it that drive right to the center of this dissertation. The first is a problem inherent in the rational intellect's dependence on discursive language, the second one of existential condition. To these we now turn.

The Dominion of Metaphor: The Problem of Propositions

As much as Lewis was a man of his time, he was also a man born too late. He called himself a “dinosaur,” a “specimen” of an age long past.³² He never learned to drive, thought human space travel a misguided travesty, and still believed the chivalric code was the best hope for mankind.³³ It is almost certain that when he looked up at the stars on a dark night, he did not feel it the vast emptiness of Newtonian “space,” but rather beheld “the heavens”—that great dance of holy life from which terrestrial humanity was excluded.³⁴ But Lewis' revolt against the modern age was not uncritical. His critique was always strategic and value driven. Lewis believed that the Modern intellectual ethos included a series of fundamental mistakes that came in part from its “chronological snobbery”—that is, “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.”³⁵ This problem can be discussed under a three-fold heading.

³² “*De Descriptione*,” 25.

³³ “Religion and Rocketry,” 88-92; and “The Necessity of Chivalry,” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 13-16.

³⁴ Witness it subjectively in *Out of the Silent Planet*, 30-32, 40, 146; and more objectively in *Discarded Image*, 98-102.

³⁵ *Surprised*, 207.

The Tyranny of Abstraction: Severing the Mind from the Concrete

Throughout his life Lewis expressed gratitude to Owen Barfield for shaping his views of language, history, and imagination.³⁶ He was, to be sure, suspicious of Barfield's embrace of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. The mark of influence, however, is undeniable.

A Taste for Abstraction: Modernity's rejection of the Concrete

In brief, Barfield argued that a deleterious process of increasing abstraction has been at work in human language since the beginning. Barfield called it an "evolution of consciousness"—the movement of language from originally a concrete experience in the ancient mind to modern humanity's extreme divorce of language from reality by means of abstraction.³⁷ By way of illustration, a consistent semantic overlap exists between 'spirit' and 'breath,' as seen in Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and many other languages. The modern scholar presumes the etymology consists of an original concrete meaning—"exhalation"—that came *later* to incorporate the more abstract "spirit" only as humanity's linguistic and mental capacities for abstraction evolved. Modern humanity sits at the zenith of this linguistic evolutionary trajectory, understanding them as two fully distinct concepts, one concrete, one abstract, related perhaps only by allegory.³⁸

³⁶ *Surprised*, 207. He dedicated his first major academic work *The Allegory of Love* to Barfield, calling him, "Wisest and best of my unofficial teachers." He further dedicated the first volume of the *Narniad* to Barfield's daughter, Lucy, and the third to his son, Geoffrey.

³⁷ Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, 3rd. ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973). For his other influential work dealing with many of the same issues, see *History in English Words*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967).

³⁸ For Barfield's treatment of "spirit/breath" see 70-82. Lewis embraced something like this concept in his youth and prior to interacting with Barfield. Hooper, *They Stand*, 118, 135.

Barfield argues this is not the actual history. The ancients were not so naïve.

Kuteeva offers an excellent summary of Barfield's idea:

Once myth, language, and human perception of the world were inseparable. Thus one can trace the plurality of meanings of a word back to the stage when the word had all its present meanings in one. All diction was literal, and there was no distinction between concrete and abstract meanings. Humans perceived the cosmos as a whole, and themselves as part of it. In our age, on the contrary, humanity distinguishes itself from the rest of nature, and words and myths are looked at from the point of view of abstraction.³⁹

Thus the ancient mind did not feature two concepts—one concrete and one abstract—but a single symbolic unity without concern about being literal or metaphorical. Says

Barfield, modern humanity, with its *a priori* preference for abstraction, has torn the two asunder and in its folly reaped only skepticism and ignorance about the world of Spirit.

While Lewis was only partially persuaded that “etymological change revealed an historical evolution of consciousness,”⁴⁰ he did agree that modernity had presuppositionally ballooned the value of the abstract above the concrete.⁴¹ As early as 1936, when tracing the movement from Rome's belief in the gods to the middle ages' allegorical use of them in poetry, he identified a conflict in the Roman treatment of the

³⁹ Maria Kuteeva, “Myth,” in *Reading the Classics with C. S. Lewis*, ed. Thomas Martin (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 268.

⁴⁰ Adey, *Great War*, 14. A debate exists between Adey and Thorson regarding the exact nature of the changes this “Great War” had on Lewis. Thorson argues that Adey's work is deficient due to a lack of reflection on Lewis' metaphysical outlook that changed radically after his conversion. It can be traced in the following documents in order of their publication: Lionel Adey, “The Barfield-Lewis ‘Great War’,” *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 6 (August 1975): 10-14; Adey, *C. S. Lewis's ‘Great War’ with Owen Barfield*; Thorson, “Knowing and Being”; and Stephen Thorson, “‘Knowledge’ in C. S. Lewis's Post-Conversion Thought,” 91-116; and Stephen Thorson, “Barfield's Evolution of Consciousness: How Much Did Lewis Accept?,” *Seven* 15 (1998): 9-35. See also Starr's addition to the debate. [Starr, 271-280.] Reilly offers the interesting argument that *Faces* actually contemplates this movement toward the conceptual intellect, “When once it is recalled that primitive man did not, for centuries, see himself as distinct from nature, and therefore was not rational, and therefore was not Man in the usual sense of the word, then much of what seems puzzling about the story becomes clear.” Robert James Reilly, *Romantic Religion: A Study of Barfield, Williams, and Tolkien* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 118f.

⁴¹ Lewis traces a most Barfieldian trajectory from the Middle Ages to the Romantics in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 3f.

gods that marked a foreshadow of the coming allegorical use. First, they worshiped things which seem like abstractions to us, building temples to deities like *Fides*, *Concordia*, *Mens*, and *Salus*. But at the same time, names that seem like concrete deities are often used as abstract nouns, like *aequo Marte*, and *per veneris res*.⁴² Thus, he says, “we are forced to the conclusion that a distinction which is fundamental for us—the distinction, namely, between an abstract universal and a living spirit—was only vaguely and intermittently present in the Roman mind,” much like the way the term “Nature” might today appear “in the mind of an imaginative but un-philosophical person who has read many books of popularized science.”⁴³

A few years later he wrote *Perelandra*, which Wolfe insightfully recognizes as a study in the unified mind. Whatever else the story is saying, the Green Lady seems to be a picture of Barfield’s pre-discursive mind. Gregory Wolfe says, “...the Green Lady has a perfect ‘intuition of being.’ That is why she can even take the evil thoughts of the Un-man and find in them something that bespeaks the goodness of Maleldil. She is able to revel in the created order because she understands it to be contingent on the will of Maleldil. Diametrically opposed to this is the gnosticism of the Un-man, who is always trying to get her to ‘see through things.’”⁴⁴

⁴² C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 48f. West observes that this tendency is present in the ancient mythological mind even as early as Hesiod, which is to say from the very beginning of written accounts. Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), x-xi.

⁴³ *Allegory*, 49.

⁴⁴ Gregory Wolfe, “Language and Myth in the Ransom Trilogy,” in *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis*, ed. Peter J. Schakel and Charles A. Huttar (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 68f.

Near the end of his life, Lewis reaffirmed this idea in *Reflections on the Psalms*.⁴⁵

When speaking of “seeing the Lord” at the temple celebration [Psalm 68], the psalmist does not mean that “he sees the festival of the Lord” as we might if we were there. He may not even mean that he “felt” the presence of God, nor had a “spiritual vision or even a ‘sensible’ love of God,” as though the celebration and the presence were two distinct things. Lewis argues, “the ancient worshipper would have been aware of no such dualism...I suspect that the poet of that Psalm drew no distinction between ‘beholding the fair beauty of the Lord’ and the acts of worship themselves.” It is the modern tendency toward abstract reasoning that separates the two things. “...no sooner is it possible to distinguish the rite from the vision of God then there is a danger of the rite becoming a substitute for, and a rival to, God himself.” In fact, young children often cannot differentiate between the “religious” and the “festal” character of Christmas or Easter—“Chocolate eggs and Jesus risen” mean the same thing. A time, however, will come when the maturing child can no longer so easily enjoy that unity.

The message here is clear. While the capacity for the abstract is a developmental reality, the *preference* for the abstract over the concrete must be taught, and modernity has been a diligent teacher of all her young. But it is not a choice between two equal goods. The maturing child is now faced with a choice, “If he puts the spiritual first he can still taste something of Easter in the chocolate eggs; if he puts the eggs first they will soon be no more than any other sweetmeat. They have taken on an independent, and therefore a soon withering, life.” This then is one aspect of the problem. The modern mind had an unwarranted preference for abstraction over concreteness.

⁴⁵ *Psalms*, 47-49.

Lewis saw the effects of this shift within his own field. In his analysis of Sir Walter Scott, he identifies the “bloated” and abstract nature of English literature during the nineteenth century, saying of the period, “The word farthest from the soil is liked best; we find *personage* or *individual* for *man*, *female* for *woman*, *monarch* for *king*. Hence Wordsworth, even in poetry, will have his *itinerant vehicle*, *female vagrant*, and *casual refreshment*. Scott, I am afraid, nearly always called food *refreshment*, and is among those who have helped to spoil that potentially beautiful word for ever.”⁴⁶ Lewis also saw this trajectory played out in the theological world. A favorite example is Mark’s account of the ascension of Christ, wherein he was “caught up into the sky” and “sat down to the right hand of God.”⁴⁷ The modern mind snobbishly assumes its superiority to the ancient mind for its recognition of the figurative and non-literal aspects of the passage. But Lewis probes into what an early Christian would have actually believed about this passage. In a Barfieldian manner, he says, “The answer is that the alternative we are offering them was probably never present to their minds at all. As soon as it was present, we know quite well which side of the fence they came down.”⁴⁸ Hence the early church stiffly rejected all anthropomorphic views of God. Lewis expands,

There is no more tiresome error in the history of thought than to try to sort our ancestors onto this or that side of a distinction which was not in their minds at all. It is very probable that most Christians never thought of their faith without anthropomorphic imagery, and that they were not explicitly conscious, as a modern would be, that it *was* mere imagery. But this does not in the least mean that the essence of their belief was concerned with details about a celestial throne.

⁴⁶ “Sir Walter Scott,” 102.

⁴⁷ Mark 16:19. See also Acts 1:9. See also *Miracles*, 148-159, for Lewis’ own positive construction of the ascension’s meaning.

⁴⁸ “Is Theology Poetry?,” 131. See also *Miracles*, 158; and “‘Horrid Red Things,’” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 68-72.

Any one of them who went to Alexandria and got a philosophical education would have recognized the imagery at once for what it was, and would not have felt that his belief had been altered in any way that mattered.”⁴⁹

In a similar vein, Lewis offers a rather snarky reply to Bishop Robinson’s *Honest to God*.⁵⁰ He assures the Bishop that the average lay person will not be offended by his demand that the laity stop thinking of God as sitting on a throne in a localized heaven, but rather think of God as being “outside space time.” The reason for this is that lay persons have always known this was not a literal image.⁵¹ He says that in fact, “We have always thought of God as being not only ‘in’ ‘above’, but also ‘below’ us: as the depth of ground. We can imaginatively speak of Father ‘in heaven’ yet also of the everlasting arms that are ‘beneath’. We do not understand why the Bishop is so anxious to canonize the one image and forbid the other.” To those who cynically argue that the hope of Heaven is ridiculous because no one would want to spend eternity “playing harps,” Lewis caustically replies, “if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them.”⁵²

⁴⁹ “Is Theology Poetry?,” 132. See also *Miracles*, 77f., wherein he actually cites his dependence on Barfield’s work. (see 70, 78.) Cunningham, with some warrant, chides Lewis for obfuscation at this point. “The fact remains that the disciples either saw or did not see a bodily ascension, or that either they consciously expressed it mythologically or God absurdly gave a physical demonstration for their nonscientific minds.” Thus Lewis has argued about the imaginative meaning of the event, but set aside the actual sensory implications which are the particular question about which the modern is most likely to be concerned. Cunningham, 100f.

⁵⁰ J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1963).

⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, “Must Our Image of God Go?,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 184.

⁵² *Mere*, 121.

Accounting for Taste: Why Modernity Prefers the Abstract

Although Lewis never considers it, some effort might here be spent on explaining modernity's preference for the abstract over the concrete. A complete treatment of this question is far beyond the reach of this work, but a few thoughts will be helpful in establishing Lewis' epistemological context.

Lewis asserts that as soon as the distinction between abstract and concrete was present in the ancient mind, it understood the symbolic and metaphorical nature of transcendent religious imagery. If it were true that God was "Father," who sat on a "throne," and "came down to earth," this could only mean that, in these finite and concrete images, greater and unimaginable things were being expressed or pictured. Thus understanding them to be metaphors, they knew that they were not the things themselves, but—Lewis' larger point—such a distinction did not generally occur to them. A form of univocation existed between symbol and referent. Thus they claimed to know something of Reality—nature, of course, by means of the senses, but super-nature by means of this symbolic participation (later on, the term "sacramental" will be used). The insistence on the exclusive distinction is uniquely modern.

In the wake of the skepticism of such as Descartes and Hume, however, the claim to experience and know external reality in any absolute sense (natural or otherwise) begins to sound unreasonably idealistic. Even Kant's sturdy rehabilitative effort leaves the noumenal world as more "warranted" than "known" in the old sense.

The Modern preference for the abstract may, then, stem from a belief that abstraction comes closer than concreteness to expressing the inexpressible nature of reality. It possesses, in its definitional lack of concreteness, a hint of that mysterious

quality reality itself has, a humility born of known limitation. If metaphors derived from the concrete make the presumptuous claim of speaking of reality as it really is, the abstract more reverently preserves the numinous quality of reality by removing concrete metaphors derived from the natural world. Thus, in almost apophatic fashion, to *not* speak in concrete terms is to actually affirm positively the intangible quiddity of things in themselves. The result is that, rather than saying “God comes down from heaven to earth,” it is better to use the less concrete, “God enters history.” Whatever the piety of such an approach, Lewis thought it profoundly and myopically flawed for reasons that must now be examined.⁵³

The Metaphorical Nature of All Language and the Changing Nature of Models

The problem with modernity’s attempt to speak of the highest things while avoiding imagery drawn from the natural world is simply that it is impossible. Abstract language does not bring one any closer to Reality *in se* than does concrete language, for it is dependent on the same tool—metaphor. It is, however, less compelling. Lewis observes,

To say that God ‘enters’ the natural order involves just as much spatial imagery as to say that He ‘comes down’; one has simply substituted horizontal (or undefined) for vertical movement. To say that He is ‘re-absorbed’ into the Noumenal is better than to say He ‘ascended’ into Heaven, only if the picture of something dissolving in warm fluid, or being sucked into a throat, is less misleading than the picture of a bird, or a balloon, going up. All language, except about objects of sense, is metaphorical through and through. To call God a ‘Force’ (that is, something like a wind or a dynamo) is as metaphorical as to call Him a Father or a King. On such matters we can make our language more polysyllabic and duller; we cannot make it more literal.⁵⁴

⁵³ For an example of this logic carried out with nearly comic intention, see the exchange between the bright spirit and the apostate liberal clergy in *Divorce*, 37-46.

⁵⁴ “Horrid Red Things,” 71. See also “Is Theology Poetry?,” 133f, for a smaller list of examples; and *Miracles*, 74f, 79, for a greatly expanded one.

This is a lesson Lewis learned in his pre-Christian days as a philosophy tutor at Oxford, in the midst of what he calls his “watered Hegelianism.”⁵⁵ He found that such abstractness simply did not work if one wished to communicate effectively to others:

A tutor must make things clear. Now the Absolute cannot be made clear. Do you mean Nobody-knows-what, or do you mean a superhuman mind and therefore (we may as well admit) a Person? After all, did Hegel and Bradley and all the rest of them ever do more than add mystification to the simple, workable theistic idealism of Berkeley? I thought not. And didn’t Berkeley’s ‘God’ do all the same work as the Absolute, with the added advantage that we had at least some notion of what we meant by Him?⁵⁶

But theologians are not the only ones with this difficulty. It applies equally to scientists, poets, psychoanalysts, and metaphysicians.⁵⁷ Further, the more truly scientific persons are, Lewis observes, the more likely they are to recognize and admit this rhetorical conundrum.⁵⁸ Both the ancient philosopher poets and the modern scientists know that reality in itself is unknowable, accessible only through metaphor and teaching models. Modern scientists use metaphors such as “the curvature of space,” “natural selection,” and the Bohr *model* of the atom to provide pictures of the reality, but they know that reality is not really like the model. Further he says in reference to Jeans’ *The Mysterious Universe*,⁵⁹

We have recently been told by the scientists that we have no right to expect that the real universe should be picturable, and that if we make mental pictures [aka. models] to illustrate quantum physics we are moving further away from reality, not nearer to it. We have clearly even less right

⁵⁵ *Surprised*, 222.

⁵⁶ *Surprised*, 222f.

⁵⁷ “Horrid Red Things,” 71.

⁵⁸ *Mere*, 32. See also *Abolition*, 86f.

⁵⁹ Sir James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930).

to demand that the highest spiritual realities should be picturable, or even explicable in terms of our *abstract* thought.”⁶⁰

But herein lies a subtle difference between the ancients and the moderns.

Under the influence of concrete modes of thought, the ancients (as well as Renaissance and even early moderns like Copernicus and Newton) believed they were building models of reality in miniature. Even the defunct Ptolemaic hierarchical view of the universe was thought to express the universe as was seen, so to speak, from God’s own perspective. In his most sustained consideration of this subject, Lewis argues that even the thinkers of the nineteenth century, “...still held the belief that by inferences from our sense-experience (improved by instruments) we could ‘know’ the ultimate physical reality more or less as, by maps, pictures, and travelbooks, a man can ‘know’ a country he has not visited; and that in both cases the ‘truth’ would be a sort of mental replica of the thing itself.”⁶¹ Mathematics was a language to describe the real external world. Through math we gained knowledge of more than just numbers—like a person studying a contour map could come to know the terrain of the land.

In Lewis’ own lifetime, however, he noted growing commitments within science that the map contours are all there really were. “All those ideas about ‘real’ rocks and slopes and views are merely a metaphor or a parable; a *pis aller*, permissible as a concession to the weakness of those who can’t understand contour lines, but misleading if

⁶⁰ *Pain*, 86f. Italics added for emphasis. For a compact but useful exposition of Lewis’ thoughts the role and necessity of metaphor in theological language, see Peter W. Macky, “The Role of Metaphor in Christian Thought and Experience as Understood by Gordon Clark and C. S. Lewis,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (Summer 1981): 239-250.

⁶¹ *Discarded Image*, 216.

taken seriously.”⁶² Mathematics was now as close as one could get. Therefore, when we speak of models, one is not speaking (as the ancients thought) of small scale replicas of the real thing, but only an “analogy” or a “suggestion... like the sayings of the mystics.” Thus in the language of absolute abstraction (mathematics), the real step made by the twentieth century is revealed to be ultimately an agnostic one. This is the substantive difference between the medievals and moderns, “Part of what we [now] know is that we cannot, in the old sense, ‘know what the universe is like’ and that no model we can build will be, in that old sense, ‘like’ it.”⁶³

It must be clearly understood here, that this dissertation is not interested in whose view of things, the ancients or the moderns, is actually true. Lewis readily admits that for all the virtues of the Ptolemaic cosmos, its greatest flaw was that it was not true—that is, did not correspond to reality.⁶⁴ Understanding the nature and use of models—*all* models, ancient and modern—was more to his point. But this issue has been belabored here for two reasons—first, to further clarify what Lewis himself thought of the underlying values dominant in modern thought, and second, that by this clarification one might better understand the nature of Lewis’ particular contribution to them (yet to be unfolded). To that end, it is necessary here to introduce an image so central to Lewis’ own perspective that without it everything to come could have the virtue of being “what Lewis thought,” but have little in common with “the way Lewis thought it.”

⁶² *Discarded Image*, 217.

⁶³ *Discarded Image*, 218.

⁶⁴ *Discarded Image*, 216.

The Problem Stated Positively: The Toolshed Factor

The idea, which Lewis called “an indispensable tool of thought,”⁶⁵ will be presented first by means of illustration before it is laid out propositionally. This approach has the virtue of modeling the substance of the idea not only in content but in its very method of execution.

The Principle Introduced

In July, 1945, Lewis published a short reflective piece in *The Coventry Evening Telegraph* that may, for its brevity, be one of the most important things Lewis ever wrote for disclosing how he interpreted the world. He begins, “I was standing in the dark in the toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.”⁶⁶ Then stepping into the sunbeam so that it fell upon his eye, the whole toolshed disappeared from view. What’s more, looking along the sunbeam caused it to disappear as a visible object as well. From here he now saw trees outside and even the sun itself. By means of this simple illustration, Lewis presents a concept familiar to anyone willing to think about it—the difference between “looking at” and “looking along.” It presents the difference between the perspective of a young man in love with a girl and a scientist’s efforts to describe what the young man is experiencing. Lewis presents a number of other examples—the mathematician thinking deeply of “timeless and spaceless truths about quantity” and the physiologist describing

⁶⁵ *Surprised*, 218.

⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Meditations on a Tool Shed,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 212.

what is going on inside the mathematician's head; or the dancing savage believing he is helping the crops grow versus the anthropologist's view that "he is performing a fertility ritual of the type so-and-so;" or even a little girl crying over her broken doll versus the psychologist assertion that "her nascent maternal instinct has been temporarily lavished on a bit of shaped and coloured wax."⁶⁷

This distinction, however, has a more important explanatory feature. It represents the trajectory of modern thought. Modernity has a proclivity for "looking at"—standing outside a phenomenon and examining it from that perspective. In religion, modernists tend to trust the anthropologist over the pious; in love, the psychologist over the lovers; in any "ideology," the sociologist over the people actually living there. Lewis is careful to say that there is nothing wrong with "looking at," for it may be true that the girl one loves may be "very plain, stupid, and disagreeable" and it seems certain that the savage's dance does not in fact make the crops grow. But one must not, for that, assume that the "looking along" view is expendable, and for two reasons.

First, "looking at" is not sufficient. For example, a person studying "pain" would always be inadequate to the task if they have never experienced pain (which is unlikely, but one could easily go a whole life without experiencing religion, love, morality, or honor). They would be talking about a nothing—"all the apparatus of thought busily working in a vacuum."⁶⁸ Second, if "looking along" is discounted as "just a perspective," then one must remember that "looking at" is also a perspective. "You can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another. Therefore, if all inside experiences are

⁶⁷ "Meditations," 212f.

⁶⁸ "Meditations," 214.

misleading, we are always misled.”⁶⁹ Thus we must “on pain of idiocy” deny that “looking at” is by nature “truer” than “looking along,” for by stepping inside, one may find that “the things that look to you like instincts and taboos will suddenly reveal their real and transcendental nature.” The *a priori* prejudice for one over the other is deadly. No one knows beforehand who speaks the truth in matters of love, the psychologist or the lover. Consider a few examples of the dominance this distinction held in Lewis’ thought, favoring sometimes one perspective, sometimes the other.

The Principle Illustrated

This distinction was central in his debate with E. M. W. Tillyard on, what he called, the “personal heresy,” regarding the degree to which the reader ought to try to attend to the poet *qua* poet while reading a poem. Lewis believed that to “look at” the poet was to miss the point. The poet was a finger pointed at something else, inviting you to look where s/he looked. Lewis says,

Let it be granted that I do approach the poet, at least I do it by *sharing* his consciousness, not by *studying* it. I look with his eyes, not at him. He, for the moment, will be precisely what I do not see, for you can see any eyes rather than the pair you see with, and if you want to examine your own glasses you must take them off your nose. The poet is not a man who asks me to look at *him*; he is a man who says ‘look at that’ and points; the more I follow the pointing of his finger the less I can possibly see of *him*.⁷⁰

He then proceeds to the next logical question (noting here, not the question itself, but the terms in which he asks it), “What is the nature of this consciousness which I come to share but not to study, to look *through* but not look *at*, in appreciating a poem?”⁷¹

⁶⁹ “Meditations,” 215.

⁷⁰ *Personal Heresy*, 11. “him” italicized in original; other italics added for emphasis.

⁷¹ *Personal Heresy*, 12. Italics in original.

A few years later in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis complained about the modern notion of the “unchanging human heart” for its assumption that our view of reality is essentially common to all people at all times. In fact, the idea does little more than project modern perspectives of humanity onto a past where they clearly had no place. Much then like the aforementioned poet,

instead of stripping the knight of his armour you can try to put his armour on yourself; instead of seeing how the courtier would look without his lace, you can try to see how you would feel *with* his lace; that is, with his honour, his wit, his royalism, and his gallantries out of the *Grand Cyrus*. I had much rather know what I should feel like if I adopted the beliefs of Lucretius than how Lucretius would have felt if he had never entertained them. The possible Lucretius in myself interests me more than the possible C. S. Lewis in Lucretius.⁷²

In 1955, he asked the readers of *Twentieth Century* to consider the way a “refined” person looks from within and from without.⁷³ The cynic “looking at” such a person sees affectation and pretense, but this is not what refinement looks like to the person who truly has it. He argues that, “From within, it [refinement] does not appear as *refinement*; indeed, it does not appear, does not become an object of consciousness at all. Where it is most named it is most absent.”⁷⁴ So too with the truly religious person, “Almost by definition, a religious man, or a man when he is being religious, is not thinking about *religion*; he hasn’t the time. *Religion* is what we (or he himself at a later moment) call his activity from outside.”

Similarly in *Mere Christianity* he makes a series of such comparisons. Sleep cannot be considered while it is being enjoyed, but only upon waking. Drunkenness too

⁷² *Preface*, 64.

⁷³ C. S. Lewis, “Lilies that Fester,” in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1973), 31-50.

⁷⁴ “Lilies,” 32.

can only be analyzed when sober. Bad people, he argues, cannot even understand their badness while they are doing it; only a good person can truly understand badness because they do *not* stand within it.⁷⁵

Consider Lewis' explanation from *Miracles* for why the existence of the Supernatural often requires so much rational apologetic,

When you are looking at a garden from a room upstairs it is obvious (once you think about it) that you are looking through a window. But if it is the garden that interests you, you may look at it for a long time without thinking of the window. When you are reading a book it is obvious (once you attend to it) that you are using your eyes: but unless your eyes begin to hurt you, or the book is a text book on optics, you may read all evening without once thinking of eyes. When we talk we are obviously using language and grammar: and when we try to talk a foreign language we may be painfully aware of the fact. But when you are talking English we don't notice it...

All these instances show that the fact which is in one respect the most obvious and primary fact, and through which alone you have access to all the other facts, may be precisely the one that is most easily forgotten—forgotten not because it is so remote or abstruse but because it is so near and obvious.⁷⁶

In his essay entitled *Myth became Fact*, he says similarly, “you cannot *study* Pleasure in the moment of the nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyse the nature of humour while roaring with laughter... ‘If only my toothache would stop, I could write another chapter about Pain.’ But once it stops, what do I know about pain?”⁷⁷

Finally, it is a distinction within his fiction as well, showing up latently throughout John's search for the island and its ultimate revelation in *Pilgrim's Regress*.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Mere*, 87.

⁷⁶ *Miracles*, 40f.

⁷⁷ “Myth became Fact,” 65f.

⁷⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1943), see particularly 12f.

Screwtape repeatedly advises Wormwood to keep the “patient’s” perspective focused on religion as seen from without.⁷⁹ In *Perelandra* Ransom experiences “myth” from inside instead of the external terrestrial perspective.⁸⁰ In *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the retired star Ramandu responds to Eustace’s assertion that in our world a star is “a huge ball of flaming gas” with “Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.”⁸¹ It further makes up the backdrop of Puddleglum’s defense of the existence of Overworld to the Witch-Queen of the cavernous Deep Realm.⁸² Finally, it is one of the central interpretive principles in Orual’s (mis)understanding of the gods and her half-sister Psyche’s involvement with them in *Till We Have Faces*.

The Principle Explained

The sheer frequency of this “looking along/looking at” device demands some account. Thankfully Lewis himself provides it in his autobiography. Early in his academic career,⁸³ Lewis encountered Alexander’s recently published Gifford Lectures from 1916-1918,⁸⁴ with its famous distinction between Enjoyment and Contemplation.

The usefulness of this distinction can best be stated in Lewis’ own words,

These are technical terms in Alexander’s philosophy; ‘Enjoyment’ has nothing to do with pleasure, nor ‘Contemplation’ with the contemplative life. When you see a table you ‘enjoy’ the act of seeing and ‘contemplate’ the table. Later, if you took up Optics and thought about Seeing itself, you would be contemplating the seeing

⁷⁹ *Screwtape*, 12f., 72-75, 106-109.

⁸⁰ *Perelandra*, see in particular Ransom’s dialogue with the darkness (140-150) and the final hymn (214-219).

⁸¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1952), 175.

⁸² C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 154f.

⁸³ Green and Hooper date it to 1924, making Lewis about 26 years old. Green, 101.

⁸⁴ Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity*.

and enjoy the thought. In bereavement you contemplate the beloved and the beloved's death and, in Alexander's sense, 'enjoy' the loneliness and grief; but a psychologist, if he were considering you as a case of melancholia, would be contemplating your grief and enjoying psychology. We do not 'think about thought' in the same sense in which we 'think that Herodotus is unreliable.' When we think a thought, 'thought' is a cognate accusative (like 'blow' in 'strike a blow'). We enjoy the thought (that Herodotus is unreliable) and, in so doing, contemplate the unreliability of Herodotus.⁸⁵

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the event of Enjoyment and that of Contemplation are mutually exclusive. We cannot both attend to a reality and examine our attention of it at the same moment. Lewis notes this principle is true in every matter of life, "The surest means of disarming an anger or a lust was to turn your attention from the girl or the insult and start examining the passion itself. The surest way of spoiling a pleasure was to start examining your satisfaction."⁸⁶ But the same is true of introspection itself. All other mental activity stops when the mind turns to consider it itself. What it then finds in this act is not the experience itself, but "mainly mental images and physical sensations." The great error then is for one to mistake this "mere sediment or track or byproduct" for the realities themselves that caused it. If it is not an overly crass analogy, what Lewis is describing may be thought of as a psychological version of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, wherein the act of carrying out the experiment itself affects the subject and changes the outcome.

The crucial realization that this gave to Lewis about his own mental life, as well as the issues from the last section, will be addressed in a future section, but here its implications on the problems themselves are clarifying.

⁸⁵ *Surprised*, 217f. See also *Personal Heresy*, 12.

⁸⁶ *Surprised*, 218.

The Principle Applied

The applicable point of the device is that the abstract language preferred by modernity assumes at its center the “looking at” perspective. It is the language of reason and science, observational and propositional, and when pushed to its limits, terminates in the quintessentially abstract language of mathematics. This is both its glory and its liability. Reason, as the “organ of truth,” can speak “about” the object, but cannot enjoy the thing in itself, for the moment it begins to contemplate the object, it has ceased to enjoy it. It can thus provide a model of the thing, but not the thing itself. In a sense, after Reason has done all the work it is able to do, one still experiences a poignant divorce from the Reality one has just contemplated. It remains ever external as an object of rational contemplation. Says Meilaender, “...the spell [for overcoming this divorce], if there is one, is not available in abstract, theoretical reasoning. Built into our thinking is a kind of frustration: A gap always exists between experiencing a thing and thinking about that thing. In thinking ‘about’ anything we abstract ourselves from it, begin to separate it into its parts, and lose it as an object of contemplation. That is, while thinking about it we are cut off from experiencing it.”⁸⁷

Herein the central problem begins to crystallize. For all the importance of “looking at,” it fails to address the key issue of Supernature or Higher Reality—that practical reason may be able to speak discursively about the nature of the noumenal, but is this enough? Are we as human creatures content to know “about” Higher Reality? Is contemplation sufficient to our needs, or more poignantly to our desires? And “Desire”

⁸⁷ Gilbert Meilaender, “Theology in Stores: C. S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Word and World* 1, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 223. This article was republished in Peter J. Schakel and Charles A. Huttar, *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 147-156.

is the central problem that prevents this from being just a philosopher's discussion. The divorce from Higher Reality with which abstracting reason leaves us was for Lewis a deeply personal crisis—one of insatiable longing. As Starr notes, our interests are not ultimately in knowing “*about* Reality” but knowing “*Reality itself*.”⁸⁸ This brings us to the final and more existential leg of the problem.

The Domination of Longing: The Problem of Being

The Nature of Longing

From his earliest youth Lewis was seized with an inescapable desire for something he could not define or express. For lack of any better word, he called it Joy, and he framed his entire autobiography in terms of the attempt to satisfy the longing for it.⁸⁹ So dominated was he by this longing that he made it the subject of his first extended foray into fiction, *Pilgrim's Regress*. Therein John is compelled to begin his search by a vision of a wood,

and he remembered suddenly how he had gone into another wood to pull primroses, as a child, very long ago—so long that even in the moment of remembering the memory seemed still out of reach. While he strained to grasp it, there came to him from beyond the wood a sweetness and a pang so piercing that instantly he forgot his father's house, and his mother, and the fear of the Landlord, and the burden of the rules. All the furniture of his mind was taken away. A moment later he was sobbing, and the sun had gone in... But even while he pictured these things he knew, with one part of his mind, that they were not like the things he had seen—nay, that what had befallen him was not seeing at all.

⁸⁸ Starr, 33.

⁸⁹ *Surprised by Joy*. While it is the theme of the entire work, see in particular chapter 11. While a popular treatment of Lewis, Hein has the sensitivity to begin his discussion of myth where Lewis' own mind began—issues of longing and its redress in myth. This makes it far superior to many more expansive introductions that cite his apologetics or fiction *qua* fiction as the center of Lewis' thought, thereby confusing the consequent with the ground. Sadly, however, in its totality Hein's book fails to avoid that pitfall of so much of Lewis scholarship—tedious plot summaries that offer little insight. Rolland Hein, *Christian Mythmakers* (Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 1998), 201-246.

But he was too young to heed the distinction: and too empty, now that the unbounded sweetness passed away, not to seize greedily whatever it had left behind...and presently he went home, with a sad excitement upon him, repeating to himself a thousand times, 'I know now what I want.'⁹⁰

Lewis believed this longing, this *Sehnsucht*, for something beyond current experience represented an ubiquitous feature of being human. He describes it in *Mere Christianity*:

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us.⁹¹

It is the feature of this longing only to tantalize. It does not come for the asking, but arrives unexpectedly. Lewis records his first memory of experiencing it as a child in relation to a toy garden his brother made.⁹² It may thus manifest itself as an aesthetic experience in a sunset, a piece of music, or a lover's embrace, but before one can begin to contemplate it, it has departed—like a bird from a trap. Elsewhere, Lewis reflects on the nature of this chase in a telling essay that will need to be readdressed later,

⁹⁰ *Pilgrim's Regress*, 8.

⁹¹ *Mere*, 119. For a particularly lucid summary of the literary context of *Sehnsucht*, the Blue Flower, causeless melancholy, and other similar themes as they relate to Lewis, see Corbin Scott Carnell, "The Dialectic of Desire: C. S. Lewis' Interpretation of *Sehnsucht*" (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 1960), 1-15; or his revised treatment of the same material in Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974, 1999), 13-29.

⁹² *Surprised*, 7.

In life and art both, as it seems to me, we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive. Whether in real life there is any doctor who can teach us how to do it, so that at last either the meshes will become fine enough to hold the bird, or we be so changed that we can throw our nets away and follow the bird to its own country, is not a question for this essay.⁹³

It was, however, a driving concern for Lewis throughout his youth, and he finally found a means of expressing the problem in Alexander.

Longing and the Toolshed

Lewis indicates that he was finally able to explain the illusive nature of Joy when he met Alexander's Enjoyment/Contemplation distinction. All attempts to rationally manufacture or contemplate these moments of Joy were no good, representing nothing more than "a futile attempt to contemplate the enjoyed...I knew now that they [the sensations that accompany Joy] were merely the mental track left by the passage of Joy—not the wave but the wave's imprint on the sand."⁹⁴

Further, the reason that nothing in the wide world could be depended upon to permanently offer up the desired experience is because they were never intended to. They were only meant to teach, to press one on to Joy's true referent. "...for all images and sensations, if idolatrously mistaken for Joy itself, soon honestly confessed themselves inadequate. All said, in the last resort, 'it is not I. I am only a reminder. Look! Look! What do I remind you of?'"⁹⁵

If this is the nature of all pleasures, what then is one to do? Meilaender draws the issue to a head, "The crucial question, of course, is whether such a creature [who

⁹³ C. S. Lewis, "On Stories," in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 20.

⁹⁴ *Surprised*, 219.

⁹⁵ *Surprised*, 220.

experiences *Sehnsucht*] is an absurdity or whether this desired fulfillment is attainable. If fulfillment of the longing which is integral to our being is impossible, then we really are absurd creatures—and we would be better simply to acknowledge the search as futile and endless...”⁹⁶ What did Lewis believe the options were?

Dealing with Longing—Bad, Better, Best

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis identifies three possible ways of dealing with the phenomenon of longing. The first is “The Fool’s Way.” This person “...puts the blame on the things themselves. He goes on all his life thinking that if only he tried another woman, or went for a more expensive holiday, or whatever it is, then, this time, he really would catch the mysterious something we are all after. Most of the bored, discontented, rich people in the world are of this type.”⁹⁷

The second way is that of “the Disillusioned ‘Sensible’ Man.” This person “...soon decides that the whole thing was moonshine. ‘Of course,’ he says, ‘one feels like that when one’s young. But by the time you get to my age you’ve given up chasing the rainbow’s end.’ And so he settles down and learns not to expect too much and represses the part of himself which used, as he would say, ‘to cry to the moon.’”⁹⁸ This is, of course, preferable to the first option, in that, while making one a “prig,” one will not be so much of a nuisance to society as the aforementioned fool.

The Christian way, however, is different:

⁹⁶ Meilaender, “Theology in Stores,” 223.

⁹⁷ *Mere*, 119.

⁹⁸ *Mere*, 120. For a startling narrative illustration of this point, see “the Hard-Bitten” ghost in *Divorce* (53-57), who, having traveled everywhere, believes both heaven and hell to be little more than badly-done promotional stunts run by the same consortium who managed all the “sights” on earth.

The Christian says, ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.’⁹⁹

“Joy,” like all desires, has the form of the thing desired. Lewis had by then tried every physical and mental pleasure he could think of and found that none had the right shape. Only one possibility was left, and this realization brought Lewis into “the region of awe.”

And that is why we experience Joy: we yearn, rightly, for that unity which we can never reach except by ceasing to be the separate phenomenal beings called ‘we.’ Joy was not a deception. Its visitations were rather the moments of clearest consciousness we had, when we became aware of our fragmentary and phantasmal nature and ached for that impossible reunion which would annihilate us or that self-contradictory waking which would reveal, not that we had had, but that we *were*, a dream.¹⁰⁰

The referent for Joy was, then, the Absolute, “which is the utter Reality.”¹⁰¹ This argument from longing, claims Peter Kreeft, is, next to Anselm’s ontological argument, “the single most intriguing argument in the history of human thought,” standing as a kind of proof for both the existence and nature of God and heaven.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Mere*, 120.

¹⁰⁰ *Surprised*, 221f.

¹⁰¹ *Surprised*, 221.

¹⁰² Peter J. Kreeft, “C. S. Lewis’s Argument from Desire,” in *G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, ed. Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 249f. Kreeft’s article is particularly clarifying to the syllogistic nature of Lewis’ argument, which he lays out as follows:

Major premise: “Every natural or innate desire in us bespeaks a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire.”

Minor Premise: “There exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy.”

Conclusion: “There exists something outside time, earth, and creation which can satisfy this desire.”

In what is surely one of the finest sermons of the twentieth century, Lewis explained this reality eschatologically. A man's physical hunger does not prove he will get any bread; he may in fact die of starvation. But surely his hunger proves he comes from a land where people eat and bread exists—and that he was made for such a place.¹⁰³ To end all doubts, Lewis wrote a whole story about the eschatological fulfillment of this longing—*The Great Divorce*. Moans one distraught ghost therein, "I wish I'd never been born...What *are* we born for?" The reply, "For infinite happiness."¹⁰⁴

Says Lewis in his sermon, "At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in."¹⁰⁵

So on Lewis' account, our very being testifies that humanity was made for a genuine experience of Higher Reality. In relation to the possibility of eschatological fulfillment, Lewis says in *Problem of Pain*, "There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven, but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else."¹⁰⁶ This then is the particular hope of Christianity,

¹⁰³ C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1976, revised 1980), 32.

¹⁰⁴ *Divorce*, 61.

¹⁰⁵ "Weight of Glory," 43. Already in 1949, before *Surprised, Experiment*, or the Narniad were even published, Walsh had already identified this eschatological solution from just the Space Trilogy. Walsh, 93.

¹⁰⁶ *Pain*, 145.

that Higher Reality *will* one day break in and destroy the enjoyment-contemplation dichotomy—we shall behold the face of God and live.

Now were *this* a sermon, this would be the place to conclude. For the Christian hope of heaven is (both to Lewis and this writer) intellectually and emotionally satisfying.¹⁰⁷ One could joyfully endure great burdens in life with the knowledge of such a future beatitude...if this were a sermon. But as a dissertation, certain pragmatic questions press down immediately.

Is Lewis then saying that we have no hope of addressing the enjoyment-contemplation dilemma here and now? Can the glimpses of “utter Reality” not be contemplated with any immediacy at all? Must the experience of it remain only a “kind of copy, or echo, or mirage”¹⁰⁸ of the Absolute from which humanity is, under the tyranny of the present, existentially excluded? If humanity desires, not simply to “look at” Higher Reality, but to participate in it, how can we “look along” a reality we cannot see? How can one contemplate a reality that is resistant in the very act of contemplation?

It seems that another capacity is needed; a mode of thought other than the rational; a mode of language other than abstract proposition; a vehicle for knowing in addition to reason. In short, it is time to turn from questions to answers.

The Form of Things Unknown—the Language of Myth

The fulfillment of the human longing to be one with Reality must, in Lewis’ perspective, wait until the Christian eschaton. That does not mean, however, that humanity is without recourse now. Lewis believed that modern modes of thought,

¹⁰⁷ *Surprised*, 222.

¹⁰⁸ *Surprised*, 120.

dominated by philosophy and the sciences, suffered from an unwarranted preference for abstraction, opposing the more concrete imagery used by the ancients. Further, the lack of warrant exists because both abstract and concrete modes of discourse are equally dependent upon the use of models and metaphors to express ideas about Reality. Thus neither can fulfill the claim to be a “literal” or “final” description of Reality *in se*. The germane difference is that abstract metaphors tend to be more prosaic and less vivid (which is admittedly to define them as simply being less concrete).

In order to frame the question more precisely, Lewis’ various taxonomies must now be synthesized. The scientific mode of discourse exhibits the qualities of Alexander’s “contemplation.” Science and philosophy, in their employment of the discursive and propositional intellect (reason), excel in the examination of things from the perspective of the external observer—akin to Lewis’ “looking at.”

The other side of the taxonomy, however, has some holes. If Alexander’s enjoyment is related to Lewis’ “looking along,” which seem reasonable, two questions arise. First, what mode of discourse can be said to reflect the “looking along”-enjoyment perspective? Second, what faculty can serve as the vehicle for apprehension? The remainder of the chapter focuses on Lewis’ answer to these two questions.

The complexity of the answer requires that it be given up front. Lewis believed that the missing mode of discourse was the poetic, and the faculty responsible for its apprehension and interpretation was the imagination. Further, Lewis believed the poetic mode pressed to its distal end resulted in a type of story, which, when received by a willing imagination, could actually overcome in some degree the contemplation-enjoyment dilemma, allowing expression in a concrete form of what would otherwise

remain an abstract concept. Table 4.1 lays out the synthesized taxonomy that will be used throughout the rest of the chapter.

Table 4.1. Synthesis of Epistemological Taxonomies

	(Thesis)*	(Antithesis)*
<i>Alexander's Taxonomy</i>	Contemplation	Enjoyment
<i>Lewis' Taxonomy</i>	Looking At	Looking Along
<i>Attributes</i>	Abstract, Rational, Discursive, Propositional	Concrete, Imaginative, Non-discursive, Non-propositional
<i>Mode of Discourse</i>	Scientific, Philosophical	Poetic, Narrative
<i>Distal End of Mode</i>	Mathematics	Unknown
<i>Interpreting Faculty</i>	Intellect (Reason)	Imagination
	(Synthesis)* Myth	

*The Hegelian taxonomy is used here only for clarity of the table's elements, does not form part of the argument, and is not intended to be pressed.

Mere Language—Poetic versus Scientific Discourse

Lewis' most complete expression of his theory of poetry takes place in his debate with E. M. W. Tillyard over the "personal heresy." The nature of that debate does not so much concern here, but through it Lewis was goaded into offering up his own positive construction on the nature of poetry and language. The distinction he draws in this debate will give a new frame to all the categories discussed so far.

Lewis argued that poetry represented one of a number of particular uses to which language could be put. If conversation is the common base, scientific-philosophical language and poetical language are each alternate improvements aiming at alternate kinds

of efficiency.¹⁰⁹ He offered the following example, with conversational or common speech holding the middle point (statement 2):

1. “This is twice as cold as that” < 2. “This is cold” > 3. “Ugh! It’s like a smack in the face.”

Statement 1 turns the sensation expressed in 2 into a quantity. Statement 3, on the other hand, communicates “...with the aid of an emotive noise and a simile just that *quality* which the other neglects.”¹¹⁰ Thus a continuum of language is established. The left side of the continuum express a scientific or philosophical statement that, when pushed to its absolute end, terminates in that purely abstract language of mathematics.¹¹¹ If one, however, travels right, one produces poetry, which “exploit[s] the extra-logical properties of language.”¹¹² Whether or not an absolute end exists in this direction—a “pure poetry”—Lewis does not consider here.

The crucial point of difference between scientific-philosophical language and poetical language is “...emphatically not that the first utters truths and the second fancies.” Both are true “improvements” to common speech, but they aim at different sorts of improvements—namely the abstract and the concrete.

The language of science and philosophy is necessarily abstract. Lewis demonstrates this by reminding that they never speak of “real things” in the popular sense—things that occur in space and time. They speak of “organisms,” but the world

¹⁰⁹ *Personal Heresy*, 89. For a briefer treatment of the scientific/poetic distinction, see also: “The Language of Religion,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 129-141.

¹¹⁰ *Personal Heresy*, 89. Italics added for emphasis.

¹¹¹ Although Lewis does not make the connection, in philosophy the distal end might suggest something like logical positivism.

¹¹² *Personal Heresy*, 90f.

actually consists of only “mere vegetables, only trees, flowers, turnips, etc.” Further, there are no “trees,” but only beeches, elms, oaks, and so on. There are not even “elms,” only “*this* elm, in such a year of its age at such an hour of the day, thus lighted, thus moving...and [to the point] the man a thousand miles away who is remembering it.” Science has no power here. This elm as it is in all its particularity can only be presented in a poem. “The sort of things we meet in poetry are the only sort we meet in life—things unique, individual, lovely, or hateful.”

This is not a flaw of science, rather it is precisely its glory, for only science has the power to tell us whether or not this particular elm exists outside the mind of the poet. Thus, “in order to assert facts, i.e. to predict experiences, she [science] must infer; in order to infer she must abstract. Only science can tell you where and when you are likely to meet an elm; only poetry can tell you what meeting an elm is like. The one answers the question *Whether*, the other answers the question *What*.”

Dabney Adams Hart contemplates the movement from sixteenth century modes of thought to the scientific ones that dominate modernity. She concludes, whatever the virtues of the scientific mode of thought, the older mode is the more natural for humanity. “Scientific thinking must be learned, superimposed on man’s deepest instincts, which are the soundest guide to what is truly significant.”¹¹³

Lewis, however, means no deprecation of the particular good that the scientific mode of speech offers. His point is more nuanced. The true problem is the one Barfield articulated—that humans cannot now be both poetic and scientific at the same time. In the spirit of Alexander’s dichotomy (which he has already referenced earlier in the

¹¹³ Dabney Adams Hart, *Through the Open Door: A New Look at C. S. Lewis* (University of Alabama Press, 1984), 15.

debate¹¹⁴), he mourns, “The fact that we cannot be philosophic and poetic in any high degree at the same moment is, I take it, an unmitigated evil.” He then wonders whether there might not be creatures as far above us as we are above dogs, whose language “combines at every moment the clarity and cogency of Euclid with the warmth and solidity of Shakespeare.” But sadly we are not them.

In the end, Lewis says that what modernity lacks in its abstractions can be found in the poetic mode of discourse, for “...poetry presents *concrete experience* (which we have every day) and, in so doing, gives us an *experience of the concrete*, which is a very different matter. To find out what our experience has, all along, been really like, is to remake experience.”¹¹⁵ In short, poetry moves in the direction of the “looking along” perspective.

Further up, Further in: From Poetry to Myth

Lewis suggests that the poetic mode of discourse holds a counterbalancing position in human language to the abstracting intellect, being more concrete in its orientation. In *Personal Heresy*, however, Lewis beggars out of the question of what exists at the distal end of the poetic trajectory. While he never returns to this point anywhere else in his writings by name, strong suggestions exist of what kind of country he thought dwelt behind the sun in that direction. As a form of story, it does lie on the poetry end of the spectrum, but expresses its content without propositions at all; even the words in which it comes are negotiable. Says Lewis, “There is, then, a particular kind of story which has a value in itself—a value independent of its embodiment in any literary

¹¹⁴ *Personal Heresy*, 12.

¹¹⁵ *Personal Heresy*, 124.

work...To think about it and be moved by it is not necessarily to think about those poets or to be moved by them. It is true that such a story can hardly reach us except in words. But this is logically accidental.”¹¹⁶ Lewis refers to “myth.”¹¹⁷ Later in the chapter, the exact nature of how myth accomplishes this incredible feat will be discussed, but given the contentious nature of the term in the twentieth century, Lewis’ own ideas on what it means must first be presented.

Slaying the Northern Dragon: What is Myth?¹¹⁸

When considering Lewis’ ideas on myth, John Stahl argued that, “In Lewis’ view... myth is simply a literary genre, like allegory, fable, or fairy tale. That is, it has to do with the form of the literature, *not* with its facticity or its subject matter.”¹¹⁹ Now saying that myth is “simply a literary genre” to Lewis contains as much technical truth as saying the Apocalypse of John is “simply a dream.” Insofar as it was a dream (or may have been), it is true, but almost entirely misses the point. The role myth plays in Lewis’ epistemology is so fundamental that without it, one is no longer thinking of C. S. Lewis.

¹¹⁶ *Experiment in Criticism*, 41.

¹¹⁷ That myth is for Lewis an extension of the poetic spectrum can be established by noting that Lewis classified Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as “epic poetry” in his taxonomy of poetry. Later on he uses the term “mythical poetry” as a synonym. [*Preface*, 57, 87.] For more on the relation of myth to poetry, see Dabney Adams Hart, “C. S. Lewis’s Defense of *Poesie*” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1959), 2f.

¹¹⁸ The “Northern Dragon” is a reference to the final pages of *Regress* [190-194.], where John is sent northward to confront a “cold dragon.” It seems a fitting image, as throughout the allegory the northern lands have tended to represent various ways in which intellect and reason can betray a traveler.

¹¹⁹ John T. Stahl, “The Nature and Function of Myth in the Christian Thought of C. S. Lewis,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 7, no. 4 (1978): 331. While Ziegler is speaking more about Lewis’ own mythic narratives, his observation is far more to the point of this dissertation, “Since a narrative receives its mythic stature by the mode in which it is perceived by readers and not by specific devices employed by an author[,] any attempt to define Lewis’ works as mythic because of their structure is inappropriate.” Mervin Lee Ziegler, “Imagination as a Rhetorical Factor in the Works of C. S. Lewis” (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 1973), 68.

That caveat expressed, Stahl is formally correct that myth is *at least* a genre, insofar as it has a particular character that makes it distinct from other narrative forms. So it is a permissible place to begin.

First of all, not all stories that an anthropologist would call “myth” would fit Lewis’ definition (and vice versa). Given the ambiguity that surrounds it, Lewis is not fond of the term, but since the only alternative is to coin a new one, he attempts to work within it.¹²⁰ He identifies six characteristics of the particular stories he would so label.

1. The story is “extra-literary.” It is not tied to a particular version or preset words. It may possess such a codification as part of its history of transmission, but that is not what makes the story what it is. Says Lewis, “if some perfected art of mime or silent film or serial pictures could make it clear with no words at all, it would still affect us in the same way.”

2. The pleasure it gives is not dependent upon narrative elements such as suspense or surprise. Elsewhere Lewis actually argues that narratives that *are* driven solely by the bald excitement of surprise may in fact be “hostile to the deeper imagination.”¹²¹ The best stories do not depend upon excitement *qua* excitement for their effect, but an exclusive *kind* of excitement—that given by the uniqueness of “giants” or “pirates” or “suffocation.” Myth, however, seldom trades on surprise. Even upon the first hearing, the events possess a perceived inevitability. Lewis describes the feeling by example, “Reading Buchan [a non-mythic writer], he asks ‘Will the hero escape?’ Reading

¹²⁰ *Experiment*, All references in this section unless otherwise stated refer to pages 40-45. For Lewis’ ambivalence about the term “myth,” see also his June 7, 1928 letter to Barfield. *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 255.

¹²¹ “On Stories,” 10.

Haggard [a mythic writer], he feels ‘I shall never escape this. This will never escape me. These images have struck roots far below the surface of my mind.’”¹²²

3. Human sympathy is at a minimum. Little drive to empathize with the characters presents itself. “They are like shapes moving in another world.” We recognize that their experiences have a “profound relevance” to our life, but we do not ourselves enter into theirs. In other contexts Lewis uses the term “Fairy Story” to speak of this type of literature, and, describing his own attempts in the *Narniad* to produce it, offers this clarifying comment,

As these [mental] images sorted themselves into events (i.e., became a story) they seemed to demand no love interest and no close psychology. But the Form which excludes these things is the fairy tale. And the moment I thought of that I fell in love with the Form itself: its brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections and ‘gas.’¹²³

4. It is fantastic, in that it deals with “impossibles and preternaturals.” Here, Lewis is in sympathy with the higher critics like Gunkel who said myths were “stories of the gods, in contradistinction to the legends in which the actors are men.”¹²⁴ Wright considered this an aspect of the “numinous” as seen below in #6, saying of the mythic frame, it “...implies the existence of divine or at least superhuman beings whether central

¹²² *Experiment*, 48f.

¹²³ “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” 46f. The rhetorical univocation between “myth” and “Faery Story,” which Lewis constantly makes [as seen in “On Science Fiction,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 67.] may be the result of Tolkien’s famous essay “On Fairy-Stories” [in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C. S. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 38-89, which treats them on much the same terms as Barfield’s “myth.” Thus they feature largely overlapping semantic domains in Lewis.

¹²⁴ Gunkel, *Legends of Genesis*, 14.

or at the fringes of the story. It is not enough simply that the other characters believe in these beings; they must be capable of walking into the story at any time.”¹²⁵

5. While the story may be sad or joyful, it is “always grave.” There is no Comic myth. Lewis is simply unclear at this point whether he means “comic” in the sense of simply “farcical” or in the Aristotelian sense of fitting the comic (versus tragic) narrative arc, but it is probable he means both.

6. The experience it gives, however, is always grave; it is “awe-inspiring,” that is, “numinous.”¹²⁶ That it is so is demonstrated by the repeated efforts of the mind to “conceptualise” the “something,” often by means of allegorizing. And yet, “...after all allegories have been tried, the myth itself continues to feel more important than they.”

This list is not intended to be criteria by which to classify stories as mythical or non-mythical. Such an attempt would be “fatal,” for Lewis’ prime concern (and it is the context in which the above taxonomy is found) is “the effect of myths as they act on the conscious imagination of minds more or less like our own...” Lewis is defining myths in terms of their effect on the reader. Because of this subjective definition, what constitutes a myth for one reader may not do so for another.¹²⁷ Says Ziegler, “Myth, according to Lewis, cannot be defined structurally. It is, rather, defined functionally; that is, any work is a myth if it is received as mythic by those responding to the work.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Wright, “Cosmic Kingdom of Myth,” 36.

¹²⁶ This is a reference to Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2 ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950). For Lewis’ understanding and use of Otto, see *Pain*, 16-25.

¹²⁷ *Experiment*, 45. This is implied also in, *Letters*, 458.

¹²⁸ Ziegler, 100.

The above enumerated definition then is not really a definition. It is an *a posteriori* description of the effect a myth has on the reader. The implication then is something like, if one has need of this discursive criteria in advance like a ruler to measure whether a particular story really is myth, then it probably is not. But having enjoyed a good myth, contemplation of the experience will affirm that these criteria were indeed present and at work.

“Here, There be Dragons”: Ancient Myths and Christianity

Lewis shows in numerous places that the ancients were not as ignorant as many moderns presuppose. *Discarded Image* is a veritable catalog of refutations of many popular ideas such as that the ancients believed in a flat world (with dragons at the rim),¹²⁹ believed that the great size of the Ptolemaic earth dominated the heavens,¹³⁰ were ignorant of the laws of nature,¹³¹ possessed an anthropomorphic monotheism,¹³² and many others. Even with these misconceptions debunked, however, the fact remains that they also held to fantastically incredible mythologies (though even this, may not have been as universal as might once have been thought). How then do these stories stand in relation to Christianity, which rests on similarly incredible stories?

Lewis makes it clear that ancient pagan myth—particularly those of the Corn King, with its dying god returning to life and bringing life to the world—were a *preparatio evangelica*, “a divine hinting in poetic and ritual form at the same central truth

¹²⁹ *Discarded Image*, 139ff.

¹³⁰ *Discarded Image*, 97ff. See also *Miracles*, 48f.

¹³¹ *Discarded Image*, 92ff. See also *Miracles*, 46ff.

¹³² *Discarded Image*, 113f. See also “Is Theology Poetry?,” 131ff; *Miracles*, 158f; and “Must Our Image of God Go?,” 184.

which was later focused and (so to speak) historicized in the Incarnation.”¹³³ In fact, seeing this connection between Balder, Adonis, Osiris, and Christ was one of the key elements in his own conversion to Christianity. He describes the event in a letter to Arthur Greeves in 1931,

Now what [Hugo] Dyson and [J. R. R.] Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn't mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself... I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) similarly moved me provided I met it anywhere *except* in the Gospels. The reason was that in Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho' I could not say in cold prose 'what it meant.'¹³⁴

Starr helpfully interprets this event: “So the *fact* of the crucifixion did not communicate any meaning to Lewis, but the *myth* of it did, and that was enough to convert him.”¹³⁵ This was an epiphanic moment in a journey that had begun much earlier. One of the key moments in the rising action of his conversion is of similar accent. Lewis records the devastating effect of an overheard conversation, “...the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence of the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. ‘Rum thing,’ he

¹³³ “Religion without Dogma?,” 132. See also *Miracles*, 112ff.

¹³⁴ Hooper, *They Stand*, 427. See also “Religion without Dogma?,” 132. This is also a dominant theme throughout *Regress* (e.g. 129.).

¹³⁵ Starr, 200. A debate actually exists in the literature as to the degree to which Lewis’ post-conversion view of myth changed. While it cannot be pursued here in detail, the poles are found first in Schakel, *Reason and Imagination*, 122-127, where he argues for a significant degree of development, very nearly constituting a new view between the time he wrote *Regress* (1933) and the 1943-44 footnote in *Miracles* (133f). Starr argues on the other hand for merely a “refinement” (216-227, 267-270), the real change being Lewis’ understanding of “fact” based on his embrace of the historicity of the Incarnation. His argument is based both upon an outright disagreement with Schakel’s interpretation of Lewis’ texts, as well as Hooper’s personal reflections in his 1996 *Companion* volume (334) that did not come out until 12 years after Schakel’s study. This, of course, gives Starr’s interpretation the advantage.

went on. ‘All that stuff of Frazer’s about the Dying God. It almost looks as if it had really happened once.’”¹³⁶

Without tracing the full history of this development on Lewis’ thought, the conclusions he finally reached on the matter were that the ancient mythologies, *at their best*, were able to capture something real of what God was doing historically (“accommodation,” as Reilly calls it¹³⁷). In a sense God was preparing humanity for the moment when all this mythological speculation would come into focus as the historical event of the incarnation—Myth would become Fact.

Just as, on the factual side, a long preparation culminates in God’s becoming incarnate as Man, so, on the documentary side, the truth first appears in *mythical* form and then by a long process of condensing or focusing finally becomes incarnate as History. This involves the belief that Myth in general is not merely misunderstood history (as Euhemerus thought) nor diabolical illusion (as some of the Fathers thought) nor priestly lying (as the philosophers of the Enlightenment thought), but, *at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.*¹³⁸

Stated similarly elsewhere, one is dealing with “a real event on the one hand [Christ] and dim dreams or premonitions of that same event on the other [Balder and Osiris]. It is like watching something come gradually into focus; first it hangs in the clouds of myth and

¹³⁶ *Surprised*, 223f. Sayer has indentified this man as T. D. (“Harry”) Weldon, tutor and college lecturer in Greats at Magdalen College, Oxford. [Sayer, 222.] The reference is to Sir James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, first published by Macmillan in 1890.

¹³⁷ Reilly, 107, 113.

¹³⁸ *Miracles*, 133f. Final italics added for emphasis. See also *Mere*, 54, where he calls them the “good dreams” God left among humans in spite of their rebellion. Similarly in *Regress*, John meets the hermit who explains to him that, since no one is born being able to read the Landlord’s rules, he sends them “pictures and stirs up sweet desire and so leads them back to Mother Kirk even as he led the actual Pagans long ago.” *Regress*, 146ff.

ritual, vast and vague, then it condenses, grows hard and in a sense small, as a historical event in first century Palestine.”¹³⁹ And finally from his most focused work on the idea,

The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It *happens*—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) *under Pontius Pilate*. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.¹⁴⁰

The combined force of these three citations is that the presence of “pagan christs” in the history of culture does not show Christianity to be false, but is exactly what one should expect to be the case if it were true. It would be more problematic if they were not there. Concludes Lewis, “If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be *mythopathic*? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.”¹⁴¹ Note that the list of persons he presents ranges the spectrum of language from the scientist to the poet, from the ancient

¹³⁹ “Is Theology Poetry,” 129. See also “Answers to Christianity,” 57f.

¹⁴⁰ “Myth Became Fact,” 66f. See also Hooper, *They Stand*, 427, 437. Mary Warnack (rather viciously) critiques Lewis here for requiring the Gospels to be history rather than just letting them remain myth. She complains that “he could not allow himself to take seriously the nature of our response, that the life of Christ itself as recorded in the Gospels is a symbol, a universal-in-particular standing for something, we cannot say exactly what, but speaking to us of infinity, eternity, and the triumph over time.” [Warnock, 154.] But surely this shows a total disregard (or ignorance) of Lewis’ complete view of myth and history. Lewis believed myth’s descent into history was a breaking of Higher Reality into the Lower, thereby elevating and hallowing the Lower. She seems to think that Lewis’ position was that by becoming history, the Corn-King ceased to be myth in any sense. But this is far from Lewis’ argument. She demands an either-or, where Lewis used a both-and. The gospels are fact without ceasing to be myth. They have all the qualities of myth, and, “Oh by the way, really happened too.” This, far from being a reduction, is a greater glory—the *telos* toward which all myths strove. In fact Lewis’ critique of Bultmann (as seen in the last chapter) rests entirely upon the very step she claims he would not take. Warnack’s desired position is merely that of liberal Protestantism—a amorphous and watery Christ of Faith versus one of history, as such the demand probably says more about Warnack’s “allowances” than Lewis’.

¹⁴¹ “Myth Became Fact,” 67.

to the modern. While a full treatment of how the Gospel story reconciles myth to history is not possible at this moment, McMillan offers a sufficiently concise summary of its implications for the needs at hand: “As God raised man to a new dignity by taking on his form in the supreme act of reconciliation, so myth assumes a new dignity and significance as God’s chosen language for revealing Himself to man. Just as God became man without ceasing to be God, so Lewis says that in Christianity the myth of the ‘dying god’ becomes fact without ceasing to be myth.”¹⁴²

The implication is clear: this thing called “myth” is an irreducible category if one wishes to properly understand the currents of history—that is, it is tightly related to “Reality.” This relationship of ancient myth to Biblical narrative will be a key factor in the interpretation of the Genesis Fall in the next chapter.

Modernity has Dragons Too

To draw the above discussion back into the larger point of *this* chapter, because of modernity’s preference for the abstract language of science and philosophy, and its belief that such language is capable of speaking more sincerely about reality, the default assumption is that a myth, because of its poetical character, must be false. Lewis sees this played out whenever Christianity is compared to earlier “savage” religions. Since much in those earlier religions seem “poetical” and are *known* to be false (note the *a priori* at work), something like the resurrection of Christ, which sounds equally “poetical” must be

¹⁴² McMillan, 53f. For a useful synopsis of the implications, see 52-55.

equally false. But Lewis notes that syllogistically this is to say little more than “both are poetical, therefore both are false,” which is question-begging.¹⁴³

As discussed in the previous chapter, however, Lewis believes the modern view of the world is deeply poetic and mythical in its total view of reality. He is not referring to what real scientists mean in their precise and mathematical statements about the world (to which Lewis shows the deference of a non-scientist), but to the artificial narrative of Progress that is built upon it by the pseudo-scientist and popular author. Without disputing Darwinism as a scientific theory of change, the idea of Inevitable Progress or Scientism is “simply a myth, supported by no evidence whatsoever... What I want to point out is the illegitimate transition from the Darwinian theorem in biology to the modern myth of evolutionism or developmentalism or progress in general.”¹⁴⁴

In the face of this, Lewis desired to show that the Christian view of the world, whether ancient or Medieval, was not abandoned because modern science proved it untrue.¹⁴⁵ For one thing the developmental view of the universe preceded Darwin by a generation being present already in Keat’s *Hyperion* and Wagner’s *Ring* cycle.¹⁴⁶ Darwin only gave this preexisting myth “the scientific reassurances it required.”¹⁴⁷

Does scientific evidence then play no role in casting down one mythical universe for another? Certainly not, says Lewis. A tipping-point does exist when the amount of effort it takes to resolve scientific discrepancies with the prevailing model becomes too

¹⁴³ “Is Theology Poetry,” 127.

¹⁴⁴ “World’s Last Night,” 101.

¹⁴⁵ “Is Theology Poetry?,” 136.

¹⁴⁶ “Funeral,” 84f; and “World’s Last Night,” 103. See also *Discarded Image*, 220f.

¹⁴⁷ “World’s Last Night,” 103.

laborious or difficult. When this happens the mind or the culture will cast around for another model that may have been around for a long time that will embrace more of the data. But every age is influenced in its choice by the prevailing mindset. “No model is a catalogue of ultimate realities, and none is a mere fantasy.”¹⁴⁸ Each is attempting to deal with all the phenomena in a way that “reflects the prevalent psychology” of the age. For example, “Hardly any battery of new facts could have persuaded a Greek that the universe had an attribute so repugnant to him as infinity; hardly any such battery could persuade a modern that it is hierarchical.”

Thus Lewis argues that the old view was not “shattered by the inrush of new phenomena,” but the reverse. “...When changes in the human mind produce a sufficient disrelish of the old Model and a sufficient hankering for some new one, phenomena to support that new one will obediently turn up. I do not mean at all that these new phenomena are illusory. Nature has all sorts of phenomena in stock and can suit many different tastes...Nature gives most of her evidence in answer to the questions we ask her.”¹⁴⁹ Stated differently, “If you take nature as a teacher she will teach you exactly the lesson you had already decide to learn; this is only another way to say that nature does not teach.”¹⁵⁰

Lewis even suspects he understands the nature of the “disrelish” that provided room for the Myth of Progress to cast aside the Myth of Christianity—the rise of the anti-supernatural mood that he critiques in *Miracles*. There he argues that scientism and the

¹⁴⁸ *Discarded Image*, 222.

¹⁴⁹ *Discarded Image*, 221, 223.

¹⁵⁰ *Four Loves*, 35f. In the subsequent pages Lewis outlines how, as an atheist, he never saw the heavens “declaring the glory of God,” but he did learn about what “glory” was. The significance of this glory, however, he had to learn from other sources. (37-39.)

modern mood exclude the possibility of the miraculous not on the basis of the evidence (which as stated above is equally useful to various myths), but as an *a priori* assumption. In fact, in another place Lewis practically throws up his hands in lament, crying out, “Has it come to that? Does the whole vast structure of modern naturalism depend not on positive evidence but simply on an *a priori* metaphysical prejudice? Was it devised not to get in facts but to keep out God?”¹⁵¹ The answer to such a question is, of course, unknowable, but it helps explain the depth of Lewis’ conviction on the matter.

If, in the final telling, all grand explanatory narratives end up being mythical, the question may then become, why? Why does every age (including our own apparently) insist on selecting particular sympathetic observations from science and history and packaging them in such explanatory stories—that is, myth?

Myth: The Hardness of the Concrete

The answer to the question closing the last section contains a grand surprise that will take the rest of the chapter to unpack. Until now “myth” has been understood as existing on the poetic end of the language scale (opposite the language of science, philosophy, and mathematics), and this is true so far as it goes. Like poetic narrative, myth speaks with a concrete voice—virtuous and vicious people and dangerous beasts; apples, bread, and stones; roads, mountains, and the sea. In it, even the gods take human form. But the real potencies of myth are found beyond the poetic horizon, for Lewis suggests that the language spectrum may in fact come full circle—that in great myth the abstract has actually been presented by means of the concrete. In a sense the spectrum itself is transcended. He says, “Of this tragic dilemma [the mutual exclusivity of the

¹⁵¹ “Is Theology Poetry?” 136.

abstract and the concrete] myth is a partial solution. In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction.”¹⁵² The next section will lay bare *how* Lewis thinks it does this, but it must be clear here what he is actually asserting.

When confronted with a great myth, the hearer is not being exposed to “truth” *per se*—that is, a propositional statement about Reality—but to an accommodated form of Reality itself. The bird of longing is caught, or very nearly, for a moment—in the net of story.¹⁵³ The abstract has been translated into a concrete for *both* enjoyment and contemplation. Thus myth transcends the abstract-concrete dilemma: “Myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to. It is not like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.”¹⁵⁴

In myth then one tastes of a universal principle without stating it. The enchantment, however, can last only so long as its mythical form is maintained. To translate a myth into propositional speech by intellectual scrutiny will yield only abstract propositions; “The moment we *state* this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely.”¹⁵⁵ Starr sums this up brilliantly,

Myth communicates holistic meaning to our immediate perceptions. It bypasses the abstracting reason and linear (time bound) language (which is to say it bypasses the cognitive space between sign and signified) and enters immediately,

¹⁵² “Myth became Fact,” 66.

¹⁵³ “On Stories,” 21.

¹⁵⁴ “Myth became Fact,” 66.

¹⁵⁵ “Myth became Fact,” 66.

intuitively into our understanding so that it is not an object containing meaning, but rather *is* the concrete meaning itself. Myth allows subject to commingle with object with greater immediacy and intimacy, and it allows *thinking and experiencing to occur simultaneously*.¹⁵⁶

The reader can actually experience the force of this principle by means of a particular myth.¹⁵⁷ Orpheus, son of Apollo and Calliope, is bereaved of his new wife Eurydice. In great mourning he comes before the under-throne of Pluto and Proserpine to beg for her release. It is granted for him to lead her back to the surface on the condition that he not look upon her until they reach the upper air. With great joy, he leads her forth until they have nearly reached the outlet, then, in a forgetful moment, he turns to make sure she is still following. At the glance she disappears and is lost. So too with myth.

What is more, it transcends even the words in which it comes. Argues Lewis, “The man who first learns what is to him a great myth through a verbal account which is badly or vulgarly or cacophonously written, discounts and ignores the bad writing and attends solely to the myth. He hardly minds about the writing. He is glad to have the myth on any terms.”¹⁵⁸

In Lewis’ densest literary tome, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, he illustrates the manner in which even semi-mythic language can affect the reader. He summarizes a passage about the sunrise in the translation style of Douglas, “Saturn draws off into dim distances *behind the circulat world of Jupiter*—Aurora opens the window of her hall—crystalline gates are unfolded—the great assault is ready and marches forward

¹⁵⁶ Starr, 205. Final italics added for emphasis.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis merely cites the myth. “Myth became Fact,” 66. But it can be examined in more detail in Thomas Bulfinch, *The Golden Age of Myth and Legend* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993), 229-232.

¹⁵⁸ *Experiment*, 46. For a more extended consideration, see also C. S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 15f.

with banners spread, ‘piercing the dark rampart of night.’”¹⁵⁹ Comments Lewis, “This is not simply a better or worse way of describing what we *see*. It is a way of making us see for always what we have sometimes felt, a vision of natural law in its angelic grandeur...of the pomp and majesty mingled even in the sweetest and most gracious of Nature’s workings.”

Thus, for Lewis, myth offers the promise, not only of providing the needed “looking along” perspective for which modernity is so starved, but of actually transcending both “looking at” and “looking along” to offer real knowledge of Higher Reality *in se*. The means by which it does so is the remaining question.

Past Watchful Dragons: How Myth Works on the Imagination

In his youth Lewis’ suffered from a sort of “divided mind.” He was on one side a rationalist, with a strong belief in the utility of the human intellect and the necessity of reason as a guide to coherent thought. Yet he was also an idealist or romantic, experiencing all the emotional yearnings of the Blue Flower, and delighting in the existential search for ultimate meaning. His insistence on holding together these two incongruous traits has earned him epithets like “romantic rationalist.”¹⁶⁰ His growing up has been expressed as a journey to unify these two “hemispheres” of his conscious life.¹⁶¹ McMillan extends this attempt to what he considered the struggle of Lewis’ entire

¹⁵⁹ *English Literature*, 89. It is difficult to discern Lewis’ referent here, but it appears to be Douglas’s translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. The final quotation marks reflect Douglas’ actual translation, further translated into modern English.

¹⁶⁰ Willis, 37. See also Colin Duriez, “The Romantic Writer: Lewis’s Theology of Fantasy,” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 99f.

¹⁶¹ *Surprised*, 170. See also Hooper, *Companion*, 190f.

generation—the attempt to heal “the division between the spiritual and physical that characterizes the minds of most modern men.”¹⁶² McMillan argues that the possibility of healing for both lies in the restoration of the “sacramental imagination.”

It is well known how at nine years old, Lewis picked up a copy of George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* at a train station bookstall and found that his imagination had been “baptized.”¹⁶³ While his journey need not be chronicled here, it is sufficient to say that he ultimately found in myth the unifying principle he had sought in order to unite his imagination and his reason, poetry to science, subjective experience to objective reality. The discovery consisted in his realization, growing over many years, that he loved and even in some sense embraced many ideas that his intellect actually rejected as unreasonable or incredible. As already mentioned, he loved the death-resurrection myths of Balder and Osiris, but recoiled at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The difference was that the former stories were not being attended to by his intellect at all, but were passing directly into his mind via his imagination. Yet the claims of Christianity, in part because of childhood churchgoing, had always been addressed primarily to his intellect as propositions to be believed as true or rejected as false. As such, he did his rational duty and rejected them as incredible. In short, the demand for reverence had actually short-circuited his ability to embrace the stories.¹⁶⁴

He began to realize that a certain kind of story might overcome this dilemma. “...supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of

¹⁶² McMillan, 70.

¹⁶³ *Surprised*, 179-181; *Great Divorce*, 65; and *George MacDonald*, 20-22. Starr suggests, with just cause, that this marks the beginning of Lewis’ comprehension of “a reality that could appeal to both his reason and imagination.” Starr, 177.

¹⁶⁴ “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” 47.

their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons?”¹⁶⁵

The “dragons” here mentioned seems to be the abstracting intellect outlined previously, and mythic storytelling (as reflected here in *Fairy Story*) is the mode of delivery he discovered. The manner in which the mythic mode succeeds will here be discussed under two heads, which cover the same material, but in two different rhetorical forms.

Myth and Imagination—Echo and Response

Lewis gathered from his own personal and literary experiences the idea that the primary appeal of mythic stories was not to the scrutinizing intellect but the faculty of the imagination.¹⁶⁶ Simply defined, the imagination was, for Lewis, the “cause[ing] to exist the mental pictures of material objects, and even human characters, and events.”¹⁶⁷ The interpretation Schakel gives this is instructive: Lewis’ corpus-wide use of the term “emphasizes imagination’s involvement with the concrete in contrast with reason’s concern with abstractions; with fiction rather than fact; with making up, ‘creating,’ rather than observing, with integration rather than analysis and identification.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” 47. For an excellent introduction to the strength with which Lewis embraced the imagination as an indispensable faculty, see particularly chapter 1 of Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C. S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and Other Worlds* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002). Schakel’s particular strength therein is his use of the often overlooked *Discarded Image* to show Lewis’ commitments on imagination.

¹⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Shelley, Dryden, and Mr Eliot,” in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 29. See also “Funeral,” 91; and “On Science Fiction,” 67.

¹⁶⁷ *Miracles*, 32. It should be noted in passing that “imagination” will herein refer, not to the act of simple visualization, but to the higher “inventive,” “disinterested,” and “free” activity, which Lewis distinguishes from simply egoistic “castle-building.” For more on this difference, see *Experiment*, 52f; *Surprised*, 15f; “Language of Religion,” 138f; and “Psycho-Analysis and Literary Criticism,” in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 125f.

¹⁶⁸ Schakel, *Reason and Imagination*, 183.

Imagination Trumps Intellect

In deference to the watchful dragons, imagination's relationship to the intellect may be best illustrated by an example that does not involve Christianity. Lewis identifies this imaginative factor at work in *modernity's* preferred myth—the Myth of Inevitable Progress. In offering an explanation for the myth's vast popularity, he offers two concrete images from the external world that are used to establish the credibility of the myth.¹⁶⁹ First, while one does not see “things” becoming other “things,” one does see organisms doing so—acorns become oak trees; eggs become chickens. Second, one also sees machines progressing through constant stages of improvement. “These two apparent instances are quite enough to convince the imagination that Evolution in a cosmic sense is the most natural thing in the world. It is true that reason cannot here agree with imagination,” since these instances consist only in a kind of “sleight of hand.” The acorn was dropped by a full-grown oak, the egg by a full-grown chicken. Likewise, every invented machine, traced back to its crudest ancestor, came from a much more advanced thing—the mind of a human genius. “In other words, all the immediate *plausibility* of the Myth has vanished. But it has vanished only because we have been thinking it will remain plausible to the imagination, and it is the imagination which makes the Myth: it takes over from rational thought only what it finds convenient.”¹⁷⁰ It would seem that the imagination's threshold of assent is more easily passed (or passed in a different way) than the intellect's. But this ability of the imagination to apprehend something that the

¹⁶⁹ “Funeral,” 90.

¹⁷⁰ “Funeral,” 91.

intellect, in its own proper function, cannot embrace allows the mythic story to “sneak past the watchful dragons.”

Turning to the Christian myth, and assuming also that it is true, one is not merely dealing with a myth—but *the* myth. This myth originates in the same Creator who made the very organs that were meant to receive them. As the pilgrim John in *Pilgrim's Regress* struggles to navigate the dark passages of the mountain beyond the chasm of *Paccatum Adae*, Mr. Wisdom's voice comes to him telling that what he is doing could only be mythology. But another voice (presumably that of his Creator) answers saying, “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 chosen 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.”¹⁷¹

By way of example, Lewis illustrates myth's operation on a most difficult theological question—the freedom-determinism debate—using the Oedipus myth. He, who was prophesied would murder his father, is subsequently exposed, adopted, and, in ignorance of his true parentage, is thereby enabled to fulfill the prophecy. Says Lewis, “We have just had set before our imagination something that has always baffled the intellect: we have *seen* how destiny and free will can be combined, even how free will is

¹⁷¹ *Regress*, 169. In his breathtaking new book, Ward suggests that the Narniad is governed by the intentional master-archetype (Kappa element) of the seven medieval planets. In developing his thesis, he suggests that *Lion* is actually a response to the rhetorical weakness of the propositional approach taken in *Miracles*. To the point, he says, “By casting *Miracles* and the planets into the genre of romance he deliberately circumvented conscious intellectual apprehension...” Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 225. If he is correct, then the Narniad, far from being the just an “allegory” of Christianity (a notion Lewis vigorously rejected, but persists in popular literature), it is Lewis' own enactment of the principle herein described. Once again, Lewis' ability to speak to the subject is grounded, not only in his academic expertise or his own personal experience with myth, but in his own experience as a deep practitioner of the art—that is, one who has “looked along” the genre, not merely “looked at” it.

the *modus operandi* of destiny. The story does what no theorem can quite do. It may not be ‘like real life’ in the superficial sense: but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region.”¹⁷² Smith has well summarized Lewis’ intentions here,

He [Lewis] was concerned to dispel the popular notion that whatever is imaginative is, by its very nature, false or nonexistent. What the ordinary person fails to perceive is that there are some aspects of reality that can be conveyed in no other way than imaginatively. Inasmuch as reality itself transcends the most abstract language, the imagination can offer, when properly focused, higher integrative levels, helping to lead the receptive mind toward a supravocal apprehension of reality that draws upon the mind’s innate capabilities of recognizing truth when presented with it. Thus by imagination Lewis meant something far more important than the aesthetic experience of the fabrication of fantasies.¹⁷³

Myth’s ability, then, to bypass the intellect and speak directly to the imagination, which is itself capable of holding mythic images without reducing them to propositions, creates the possibility of a non-discursive, non-propositional aspect of knowledge.

Imagination Serves Intellect

A danger may exist at this point of thinking that Lewis is downgrading the epistemological role of the intellect. Lewis makes very clear, however, that this is not his intent:

But it must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² “On Stories,” 15.

¹⁷³ Smith, *Patches*, 136.

¹⁷⁴ “Bluspels,” 157f.

Now the argument comes full circle. Given that all language about non-physical objects must be metaphorical (including the scientific), Lewis identifies the imagination as the faculty capable of absorbing metaphorical speech and assigning to it “meaning,” thereby allowing the intellect to construct propositional truth from it and test it. This act of propositional construction, of course, ends the mythic quality of the language, but it seems to be, for Lewis, the only means the intellect has for addressing metaphor—it must first come through the imagination and be given meaning by it, for without a “meaning,” no evaluation of truth or falsity can be made. Thus the opposite of meaning is not falsehood but nonsense. To bring it first to the intellect, however, would result in its immediate dismissal as non- or sub-rational, and hence meaningless. In this then, the imagination *serves* the intellect by granting meaning to metaphorical language, which is exactly the thing the intellect cannot on its own terms do. He thus speaks of the imagination as a “maid” and reason as a “mother.”¹⁷⁵

Lewis has made this kind of argument before regarding the faculty of “sentiment.”¹⁷⁶ Lewis argues in *Abolition of Man* that external reality, due to its particular nature, can warrant particular sentiment—the waterfall truly merits the epithet

¹⁷⁵ C. S. Lewis, “Reason,” in *Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1992), 81. Starr prefers to speak of Reason and Imagination in terms of “synergy,” wherein “each having its dangers, must constantly correct each other.” [Starr, 265.] This may not be an actual disagreement with the structure presented here. Insofar as the two faculties are intrinsically interrelated in the epistemological project, Starr is very correct to speak of them coterminously. The evidence seems clear, however, that in the hierarchy of the human frame, which mirrors the hierarchy of the universe, Reason (Divine or human) is the king in his own house. Imagination may be the priest, and thus indispensable to holy governance, but a subordination of some kind is implied. Thus, Screwtape advises Wormwood to view his “patient” as concentric circles, “...his will being the innermost, his intellect coming next, and finally his fantasy.” *Screwtape*, 31. If the *voluntas* must be forced into the analogy, it would be consistent with Lewis’ thought to think of it as the moral law, which stands over even the king, “for its’ the law makes him a king.” C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1954), 190.

¹⁷⁶ *Abolition*, 34ff. Although the following comparison was arrived at independently, Meilaender makes a similar comparison between “story” and the “chest” of *Abolition* in “Theology in Stores,” 227.

“sublime.” Such sentiment is not merely a reflection of the speaker’s internal subjective mood, but rather represents the point of connection between the intellect and the passions. “The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat...of Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by the middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.”¹⁷⁷ The relationship of the intellect to imagination may bear a strong resemblance to that of the intellect to sentiment. The difference is that sentiment serves as “the chest,” mediating between the head and viscerals, whereas the imagination mediates between Higher Reality and the finite intellect by means of its non-discursive story-shaped interpretive capacities. The intellect may then contemplate it by means of its discursive propositional language faculties (admitting the loss that comes with the translation of myth into propositional speech).

This sentiment-imagination analogy is enhanced by what Lewis says in *Preface to Paradise Lost*:

Certain things, if not seen as lovely or detestable, are not being correctly seen at all. When we try to rouse some one’s hate of toothache in order to persuade him to ring up the dentist, this is rhetoric; but even if there were no practical issue involved, even if we only wanted to convey the reality of toothache for some speculative purpose or for its own sake, we should still have failed if the idea produced in our friend’s mind did not include the hatefulness of toothache. Toothache, with that left out, is an abstraction. Hence the awakening and moulding of the reader’s or hearer’s emotions is a necessary element in that vision of concrete reality which poetry hopes to produce.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Abolition, 34.

¹⁷⁸ *Preface*, 53f.

This is not then an act of mere rhetoric, for rhetoric evokes the imagination merely for the sake of arousing passions necessary for persuasion. But poetry (specifically epic or mythic poetry) arouses passion for the sake of imagination.¹⁷⁹

Some judgments—whether “sentimental” or “imaginative”—are warranted as part of the epistemological process and the objective nature of reality, but cannot arise within the intellect *qua* intellect, due to its own abstracting nature. In the end, whether discussing Sentiment or Imagination, both *serve* the intellect but do not dethrone it.

The Overthrow of Both in Myth

One further comment must be made before leaving for the next heading. Starr correctly argues (and it is one of the pivotal distinctions in his analysis) that much of the tension between imagination and intellect—between myth and truth—arises because of humanity’s placement in the hierarchy of reality. As seen earlier in the chapter, Lewis believed in an hierarchical universe—more specifically the universe asserted by Christianity. Humans are both earth-bound and fallen.¹⁸⁰ As such in the muddled sub-lunar fog, imagination and intellect appear to be in competition, but no reason exists for believing this is how it is beyond “the veil.” One of the great achievements of the Space Trilogy (and in particular *Perelandra*) is the offering up of an imaginative construction whereby, in the Higher Trans-lunar Realities, these distinctions fall away.

¹⁷⁹ *Preface*, 54. Note, in the opening pages of *Perelandra*, that the great temptation the narrator must endure on his way to Ransom’s cottage consists almost entirely of the attempt to dethrone his reason by tricks played upon his imagination. (9-20.)

¹⁸⁰ The role of fallenness is discussed in the next chapter, but Sammons identifies it as the primary cause of the division of “*how* we experience...from *what* we experience.” Martha C. Sammons, *'A Far Off Country': A Guide to C. S. Lewis's Fantasy Fiction* (New York: University Press of America, 2000), 152.

As Ransom argues with the darkness on the eve of his battle with the Un-man, he comes to a patent realization of what has been latently bouncing around in him during his entire adventure. He initially resists the idea of crass monomachy, because

it would degrade the spiritual warfare to the condition of mere mythology. But here he got another check. Long since on Mars, and more strongly since he came to Perelandra, Ransom had been perceiving that the triple distinction of truth from myth and both from fact was purely terrestrial—was part and parcel of that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall. Even on earth the sacraments existed as a permanent reminder that the division was neither wholesome nor final. The incarnation had been the beginning of its disappearance. In Perelandra it would have no meaning at all. Whatever happened here would be of such a nature that earth-men would call it mythological.¹⁸¹

Thus, in Lewis' presentation of a fictionalized adaptation of the Christian universe, the very borders of myth and truth are breached. On earth "Myth" (imagination) and "Truth" (intellect) are competing windows by which to see "Fact." Yet in Higher Reality, this competition is overthrown. As was seen earlier, the great Myth itself has broken into time and become Fact. Thus in the Incarnation, that central myth of Christianity, the thesis of Reason and the antithesis of Imagination find their *Aufhebung*. Of course, the only earthly application of the above (as opposed to Lewis' fictional use of it) is to once again thrust it forward as an eschatological possibility. Yet, according to Christianity, Myth's work now is a foretaste of that reality that humanity was created for and will one day both enjoy and contemplate. Starr summarizes this well,

Lewis's definitions of truth and myth were refined based on his hierarchical and sacramental understanding of reality. On earth, truth is abstract; in heaven it is concrete. On earth, myth is divorced from history...except in the single instance of the Incarnation of Christ—when 'myth became fact.' In heaven, myth is reality, but it is also the source of abstract truth in the 'valley of separation' here below...

In our world they [truth, reason, and language] are tools for knowing; in heavenly realms they are personifications: Truth, Reason, and Language Himself. As such, what are abstracting tools for knowing on earth are concrete realities in

¹⁸¹ *Perelandra*, 143f.

heaven. On our silent planet, truth is merely a correspondence between reality and mind...But when Language Himself...affects us [as through myth], we are connected so perfectly to reality that abstract truth is transcended and fact becomes so completely known as not to be object but meaning itself.¹⁸²

It is now time to explore this “sacramental” aspect of reality.

Higher Reality in a Minor Key: Transposition and the Sacramental Nature of Nature

The operation of myth can also be described under a second heading. It does not exclude the above discussion, but simply exists alongside it—or perhaps it may be thought of as a “model” for expressing it. As has been seen already, Lewis was at least a metaphysical dualist, believing in both a Nature and a Supernature. Myth presented a means of using the concrete imagery from Nature to communicate something of Supernature. Myth, however, is only a unique subset of things possessing this power. Lewis believed this ability was a property of all of Nature in varying degrees.

In his sermon entitled “Transposition,” Lewis attempts to offer an explanation of *glossolalia*.¹⁸³ While the concern here is not “tongues,” Lewis’ method of explanation is important. He considers how it *could* be possible for higher natures to manifest themselves within or even by means of lower natures—that is, how is it that a simple hyper-ecstatic fit and true speaking in tongues can be indistinguishable to the skeptical observer? The question may be asked of many things: how a Sacrament can look so much like simple eating of food, or the enraptured state of the mystic can be expressed in much the same language as erotic love. Or stated on the terms of the skeptic, what difference

¹⁸² Starr, 228, 235.

¹⁸³ C. S. Lewis, “Transposition,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1976, revised 1980), 91-115.

can there be between love and lust since they both result in the same act, or revenge and justice since the result for the criminal is the same?

Lewis' answer is his theory of "Transposition"—that reduction or accommodation that occurs when something from a higher reality is "transposed" into a lower reality. He explains the problem in terms very similar to "looking along/looking at," "For myself, I find that if, during a moment of intense aesthetic rapture, one tries to turn round and catch by introspection what one is actually feeling, one can never lay one's hand on anything but a physical sensation."¹⁸⁴ He offers as an example the nausea one feels from a rocking ship and that associated with falling in love. Despite the similarity (identity, even) in the biological sensation, one is pleasurable and the other is not. For Lewis, "introspection can discover no difference at all between my neural response to very bad news and my neural response to the overture of *The Magic Flute*. If I were to judge simply by sensations, I should come to the absurd conclusion that joy and anguish are the same thing, that what I most dread is the same with what I most desire."¹⁸⁵ This, of course, is not so.

Now on the assumption that the emotional life is richer or higher than the life of the sensations (not in a moral sense, but only that it is "richer, more varied, more subtle") the follow three things can be noticed:

1. Sensory nerves *do* respond to emotions both "adequately and exquisitely."
2. The available responses of the nerves are more limited than are the emotions (so defined in their more rich and subtle nature).

¹⁸⁴ "Transposition," 96f.

¹⁸⁵ "Transposition," 97.

3. Sensory nerves compensate for their inadequacy by using the same sensation for multiple emotional states.¹⁸⁶

Examples for this process abound in every area of life. When translating from a language with a large vocabulary into a language with a smaller one, some words will have to hold multiple meanings; when transcribing an orchestral piece for the piano, limited piano keys will have to stand for a diversity of instrumentation. Even attempting to reduce a three dimensional landscape to two will require artistic “perspective.” Many times throughout his writings Lewis uses Abbott’s Flatlanders to illustrate various points.¹⁸⁷ Creatures (Flatlanders) who exist only in a flat two dimensions could understand a line (one dimension) and a square (two dimensions), but a cube could only represent itself to them in their own perspective as just another square.

From all these examples Lewis derives two conclusions. First, one’s ability to understand the lower medium is fully possible only by understanding the higher one.¹⁸⁸ The pianist who knows the orchestral score has the advantage of someone who, knowing only the piano score, doubts the existence of other instruments. So too with the picture, we understand “perspective” because we exist in three dimensions. Now it is true that the two-dimensional skeptic can always claim that one is simply making things up—that the picture really is only lines in two dimensions—but Lewis’ response to such a skeptic will have to wait for the next section, for his answer rests upon the kind of person the skeptic is—or is unwilling to be.

¹⁸⁶ “Transposition,” 98.

¹⁸⁷ Edwin Abbott Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1884). See also “Bluspels,” 142ff; *Miracles*, 111; “Poison of Subjectivism,” 79f; *Mere*, 135-141; and even narratively in *Perelandra*, 215.

¹⁸⁸ “Transposition,” 100.

Second, while Lewis uses the word “symbol” for this manifestation in lower reality of the higher, not all such “symbols” are adequate in all cases of transposition. For example, hand writing communicates by a simple *sign* the much more advanced reality of spoken language. But no real relationship exists between the sign and the reality other than convention. Not so of a picture. “Pictures are part of the visible world themselves and represent it only by being part of it. Their visibility has the same source...in it the thing signified is really in a certain mode present.”¹⁸⁹ The best word for this, says Lewis, is “sacramental.” The relationship is one of correspondence—not one-to-one correspondence—but of degrees of correspondence that are both true and meaningful. His clearest example of this may come from *Mere Christianity*, where he compares the map-like role of Theology to one’s private religious experience:

The map is admittedly only coloured paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.¹⁹⁰

The point here is that the map is useful because it actually participates in the reality of the ocean, while never ceasing to be “only coloured paper.” The end result for Lewis seems to be that the entire natural order is potentially revelatory—not discursively or propositionally (or even abstractly). But in its very concreteness, it plays out with varying degrees of completeness the greater symphonies of Higher Reality—the higher

¹⁸⁹ “Transposition,” 102.

¹⁹⁰ *Mere*, 135f.

mind on the lower body, higher spiritual nourishment on the lower bread and wine, even the much higher three-personed God in the concrete terms of lower human personhood, image bearing, and even marriage.¹⁹¹ “Everywhere the great enters the little—its power to do so is almost the test of its greatness.”¹⁹² And the ultimate Higher Reality—God’s own self—intends that the natural world should so speak:

Everything God has made has some likeness to Himself. Space is like Him in its hugeness: not that the greatness of space is the same kind of greatness as God’s, but it is a sort of symbol of it, or a translation of it into non-spiritual terms...In the higher mammals we get the beginnings of instinctive affection. That is not the same things as the love that exists in God: but it is alike it—rather in the way that a picture drawn on a flat piece of paper can nevertheless be ‘like’ a landscape.¹⁹³

Of course, all this background leads to the germane question: How is myth a form of transposition? Or how is myth thusly sacramental?

Hearing the Call: Longing Knows the Tune Myth Plays

Now when it comes to works of literature, the principle of transposition still applies but with a uniquely existential twist. While even scientific language is inherently metaphorical, literature, and specifically poetic literature, is more at home in its metaphorical skin. For a sense of contrast, Lewis outlines in *Allegory of Love* two possible literary methods by which to express the relationship between things material and things immaterial—Allegory and Symbolism.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ See *Mere* 141f; and “Poison of Subjectivism,” 79f.

¹⁹² *Miracles*, 111.

¹⁹³ *Mere*, 139. Clyde Kilby makes the insightful comment on Lewis’ suggestion that Nature may exist to furnish symbols for Supernature. He says, “Talking trees in mythology are possible because there are real trees. Giants are possible because we know some men to be very large...But Lewis makes it very clear that the symbol is less than the reality symbolized.” Clyde S. Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964), 145.

¹⁹⁴ *Allegory*, 44ff.

These two methods stand in reverse direction to one another. A writer employs allegory when s/he starts with an immaterial fact (like Courage, Chastity, or Love) and “then invent[s] *visibilia* to express them.”¹⁹⁵ It is a personification of our passions, exhibited in classic works like Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Holy War*, Guillaume de Lorris’ *Roman de la rose*, and even Lewis’ own *Pilgrim’s Regress*. But if allegory is possible, then “it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world.”¹⁹⁶ This world may in fact be a copy or a picture of something else. And therein lies the difference between allegory and the symbolic-sacramental use of language, “The allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real...For the symbolist it is we who are the allegory.” Starr admirably gets to the pith of Lewis’ point, “...whereas allegory *contains* meaning, myth simply *means*.”¹⁹⁷

One will recall from the earlier discussion on longing, that in the experience of Joy, however fleeting, the reception is akin to remembering. This is the existential problem, “we grasp at a[n imaginative] state and find only a succession of events in which the state is never quite embodied.”¹⁹⁸ In this state, Myth finds us, and serves as a “net” to snare, if only for a few minutes, some piece of Reality that our intellect cannot seem to organize, reduce, and grasp. Ziegler draws the connection between imagination’s work and existential longing, “Imagination is an individual’s mental activity which metaphorically interprets sensibles or expresses insensibles, the activity often inciting

¹⁹⁵ *Allegory*, 44f.

¹⁹⁶ *Allegory*, 45. See also: *Letters*, 458.

¹⁹⁷ Starr, 197.

¹⁹⁸ “On Stories,” 20.

the experience of *Sehnsucht*.”¹⁹⁹ Thus by myth’s operation on the imagination, the reader has the emotional experience of “coming home,” having the longing satisfied, of entering the mystery—the itch scratched. Reality presented by the myth is received as something familiar, something already loved and sought. The longing exists prior to the myth, but it is that longing which recognizes itself in the myth. The reader has the profound emotional response, again fleetingly, but genuinely of Joy, for the net of myth has snared the bird of Reality for a moment.

This, Lewis apparently believed, was the point and goal of the art of storytelling, “Art, indeed, may be expected to do what life cannot do: but so it has done. The bird has escaped us. But it was at least entangled in the net for several chapters. We saw it close and enjoyed the plumage. How many ‘real lives’ have nets that can do as much?”²⁰⁰ So committed was Lewis to this singular value of literature, that Hart can conclude, “Deploing the kind of academic classification which tends to equate seriousness and difficulty with merit, Lewis affirms that any piece of writing, serious or frivolous, complex or simple, is good if it creates an image which impresses and haunts the mind of the reader as an incarnation of reality, in other words if it is mythic.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Ziegler, 30.

²⁰⁰ “On Stories,” 20f.

²⁰¹ Hart, “Defense of *Poesie*,” 4. This conclusion, as right as it is in this context, also marks a weakness in her dissertation. “Myth,” for Hart, often seems little more than an euphemism for “really good poem”—that is, that all good stories, poems, novels, and other works of art, if they are “good” in a qualitative sense, have an underlying mythic basis or form. (33.) Her treatment focuses greatly on the history of poetry in general as if myth is simply a feature of the greats. If in fact myth has this nearly ubiquitous meaning in Lewis (and Hart does not wholly persuade on the point), it is not the usage with which this dissertation has to do.

Suspending Disbelief: The Role of the Reader in Myth

When speaking of mythic storytelling, Lewis makes an important comment that both summarizes what has been said already and suggests the final component of the equation:

If it [mythical discourse] is well used by the author and *meets the right reader*, it has the same power: to generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies. But at its best it can do more; it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of ‘commenting on life,’ can add to it. I am speaking, of course, of the thing itself, not my own attempts at it.²⁰²

It seems that the success of a myth is in some way dependent upon the nature of the reader who receives it...or fails to.

In *Experiment*, Lewis lays out the precondition of being an effective recipient of any story or art—a willingness to *receive* it. Most people merely *use* a story, that is, they want to “do things with it.” They desire that it be a “self-starter for certain imaginative and emotional activity of [their] own.”²⁰³ But this, says Lewis, is the way one treats a toy or an icon, not a piece of art. When it comes to truly engaging any artistic artifact, “We must begin by laying aside as completely as we can all our own preconceptions, interests, and associations. After the negative effort comes positive. We must use our eyes. We must look, and go on looking till we have certainly seen exactly what is there. We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of any art makes upon us is surrender.”²⁰⁴ This is not to be confused with passivity. It is rather a form of active obedience. That Lewis

²⁰² “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” 38. Italics added for emphasis.

²⁰³ *Experiment*, 16.

²⁰⁴ *Experiment*, 18f.

considers this a “demand” demonstrates how sincerely he takes the role of the reader in the equation.

At this point perhaps more than any other in this dissertation, Lewis presents himself as an academic authority. Nearly half of his academic writings wrestle with the question of the reader’s role in establishing the meaning and value of a story.²⁰⁵ An exposition of Lewis’ entire theory of literature is beyond the scope of this work, but insofar as that theory impinges upon the reception of mythic literature, some account of it must be made. Ziegler gives an adequate summary of the crucial relationship between the reader and myth, “Myth, according to Lewis, cannot be defined structurally. It is, rather, defined functionally; that is, any work is a myth if it is received as mythic by those responding to the work.”²⁰⁶ Given the necessity of the reader’s proper response, it is surprising how little is said in secondary literature about it. To the best knowledge of this writer, the following taxonomy of reader-oriented problems has not been developed anywhere in the secondary literature.

Faith Like a Child: How the Adult Kills Myth

Lewis believed that the ultimate meaning or value of a book, poem, or story did not reside where many of the critics of his day put it. It did not lie in the background story of the author’s life and influences which produced the book,²⁰⁷ nor did it ultimately lie in the critical scholar’s response to it insofar as it reflects the dominant literary values of the time. The final meaning of a story did not even rest in the author’s original intention.

²⁰⁵ Consider *Personal Heresy*, *Experiment in Criticism*, *Preface to Paradise Lost*, as well as large parts of *Allegory of Love* and *Studies in Words*. Numerous articles could also be added to this list.

²⁰⁶ Ziegler, 100.

²⁰⁷ This is the argument *en toto* of *Personal Heresy*. See also “On Criticism,” 130ff.

While the author is certainly a *sui generis* authority on its content and further knows what s/he *intended* to mean, when it comes to meaning no author is in a position to judge the meaning of the work.²⁰⁸ Lewis rather, after defining “meaning” as —“the series or system of emotions, reflections, and attitudes produced by reading it,” goes on to say,

The ideally false or wrong ‘meaning’ would be the product in the mind of the stupidest and least sensitive and most prejudiced reader after a single careless reading. The ideally true or right ‘meaning’ would be that shared (in some measure) by the largest number of the best readers after repeated and careful readings over several generations, different periods, nationalities, moods, degrees of alertness, private pre-occupations, states of health, spirits, and the like canceling one another out when (this is an important reservation) they cannot be fused so as to enrich one another.²⁰⁹

Now since a story is judged to be a “good one” based on the pleasure it produces, the literary critic does not necessarily have an advantage over the lay reader, nor even the adult reader over the child. A later section will concern itself with the particular difficulties of the critical reader, for the moment it is interesting to note that Lewis believed that children may actually have an interpretive advantage over the adult reader, who has the habit of throwing stumbling blocks in his own way.

Just Like a Grownup: The Problem of Myth as Children’s Story

Lewis points out that, to Modern Man, outgrowing fairy tales is a mark of maturity and social development. To call literature “adult” is not just a term description, but of approbation. To desire the fantastic literature of one’s youth is marked by the pejorative term “childish,” and considered to be a case of “arrested development.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ “On Criticism,” 127f.

²⁰⁹ “On Criticism,” 139f.

²¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 34.

Lewis, however, rejects this notion on three grounds. First, that of simple *tu quoque*. To blush at a label such as “childish” or take pride in a label such as “adult” is itself a mark of immaturity and adolescence. For the young to possess this urge in moderation is healthy; young things ought to want to grow, but to be overwhelmed by a fear of being childish or a desire to be “very grown up” shows a lack maturity.²¹¹

Second, Lewis argues that the modern view involves a false conception of growth, for “surely arrested development consists not in refusing to lose old things but in failing to add new things.”²¹² “Growth” should instead be understood as enrichment—“before I had only one pleasure, now I have two.” Thus modernity’s insistence on the loss of the one before the gaining of the other is not growth, it is simply change. If this *were* growth, argues Lewis, then why stop at adulthood? Senility ought to be more highly valued still.

Third, Lewis argues that the association between fairy tales and children is only accidental. After all many children do not like fairy stories, whereas many adults do.²¹³ In fact the aversion to fantastic tales is entirely a modern phenomena, “just as unfashionable furniture gravitated to the nursery in Victorian houses,”²¹⁴ so modernity relegated all stories of the fantastic and preternatural to the children’s section of the library. It is a function of cultural value, not absolute value. And as is clear throughout this chapter,

²¹¹ This perspective, far more than any gender related one, may be sufficient to account for the maturing Susan’s failure to reach Aslan’s country at the conclusion of the Narniad.

²¹² “Three Ways,” 34.

²¹³ And he notes here the success of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* with adults. In a personal letter to John Montgomery, Lewis anecdotally indicates that his own fan mail bears out this fact. John Warwick Montgomery, *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel: An interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Charles Williams* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 147.

²¹⁴ “Three Ways,” 35. See also “On Juvenile Tastes,” in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 50.

Lewis believed modernity gets this wrong. He adds, “I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story. The good ones last. A waltz which you can like only when you are waltzing is a bad waltz.”²¹⁵

By way of defense, he offers the following example, “Consider Mr Badger in *The Wind and the Willows*—that extraordinary amalgam of high rank, coarse manners, gruffness, shyness, and goodness. The child who has once met Mr Badger has ever afterwards, in its bones, a knowledge of humanity and of English social history which it could not get in any other way.”²¹⁶ Note that this apologetic comes in identical terms to that which has already been used for myth. Clearly Lewis thought myth stands at this point in common with all such stories of the fantastic. As such this serves as the first preconception that a reader must abandon if s/he is really going to make the necessary “surrender” to the story—that such a story is beneath their dignity, age, or status.

The Deceptive Tyranny of “Real Life”

Lewis wrote a little piece for *Time and Tide* in 1945, recalling a train ride into the country that had filled him with an inexpressible joy. In spite of the fact that he knew intellectually that the London suburbs were just as filled with jealousy, weariness, ill temper, and anxiety as anywhere else, “...I could not help it—the clicking of all those garden gates, the opening of all those front doors, the unanalysable home smell in all

²¹⁵ “Three Ways,” 33.

²¹⁶ “Three Ways,” 36.

those little halls, the hanging up of all those hats, came over my imagination with all the caress of a half-remembered bit of music.”²¹⁷

He recognizes that he could have ignored the feeling had he chosen and focused instead on his own trouble. But here is identified by analogy a second mistake a reader can make. This so-called “real life” and this “unreasonable happiness” are usually running side by side in life. In the very midst of all the cares of “real life,” like a “ghost-compartment which we see through the windows of a train at night, there runs something else. We can ignore it if we choose; but it constantly offers to come in. Huge pleasures, never quite expressible in words, sometimes (if we are careless) not even acknowledged or remembered, invade us from that quarter.”

But within each of us abides an “inner wiseacre,” a “jailor” who wants us to decline the offer. He advises us to worry instead or not to be selfish or complacent or that we are being “adolescent” or that it is all illusion. But take note, says Lewis, “...he is only trying to muddle you. The pleasure involves, or need involve, no illusion at all. Distant hills look blue. They still look blue even after you have discovered that this particular beauty disappears when you approach them. The fact that they look blue fifteen miles away is just as much a fact as anything else. If we are to be realists, let us have realism all round.” Herein is the lesson: the appearance of things is often the point—their intended *telos*. The freshness and glory in the world is, in Christianity, what the Creator made it, and this same Creator made the eyes to behold it. It is just possible then that the stuff of creation was so made, simply to be met in the glory of its existential phenomena.

²¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, “Hedonics,” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 52.

The tendency of Modernity, however, is to probe the intangibles that stand behind these experiences, calling these abstractions the “realities.” Lewis expresses the danger of Modern Man’s position as the “disastrous discovery that we exist...I mean, it is disastrous when instead of merely attending to a rose we are forced to think of ourselves looking at the rose, with a certain type of mind and a certain type of eyes. It is disastrous because, if you are not very careful, the colour of the rose gets attributed to our optic nerves and its scent to our noses, and in the end there is no rose left.”²¹⁸

Lewis, however, would remind that, “In the theatre...the play, the ‘appearance,’ is the thing. All the backstage ‘realities’ exist only for its sake and are valuable only in so far as they promote it.”²¹⁹ In this, Lewis was clearly influenced by George MacDonald, for Lewis selected the following penetrating thought for inclusion in his anthology:

In what belongs to the deeper meanings of nature and her mediation between us and God, the appearances of nature are the truths of nature, far deeper than any scientific discoveries in and concerning them. The show of things is that for which God cares *most*, for their show is the face of far deeper things than they...it is through their show, not through their analysis, that we enter into their deepest truths. What they say to the childlike soul is the truest thing to be gathered of them. To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it—just as to know Christ is an infinitely higher thing than to know all theology, all that is said about His person, or babbled about His work. The body of man does not exist for the sake of its hidden secrets; its hidden secrets exist for the sake of its outside—for the face and the form in which dwells revelation: its outside is the deepest of it. So Nature as well exists primarily for her face, her look, her appeals to the heart and the imagination, her simple service to human need, and not for the secrets to be discovered in her and turned to man’s further use.²²⁰

Thus, returning to Lewis’ train ride, this “jailor” within every person seeks to spoil all possible joys gleaned from meeting the world as it presents itself. Specifically in

²¹⁸ “‘Bulverism,’” 271.

²¹⁹ “Behind the Scenes,” 248. For the exegetical implications of this (to be discussed in the following chapter), see *Letters to Malcolm*, 51f.

²²⁰ *George MacDonald*, 69.

relation to myth, this mindset of taking-things-at-face-value is of absolute necessity when encountering a myth. It must be embraced in its phenomena, not intellectually parsed for its credibility. This would be to submit to the jailor, whom Lewis reminds,

is a sham realist. He accuses all myth and fantasy and romance of wishful thinking: the way to silence him is to be more realist than he—to lay our ears closer to the murmur of life as it actually flows through us at every moment and to discover there all the quivering and wonder and (in a sense) infinity which the literature that he calls realistic omits. For the story which gives us the experience most like the experiences of living is not necessarily the story whose events are most like those in a biography or a newspaper.”²²¹

Now the critical scholar performs a particularly specific version of this mistake, which will be outlined in the next major section, but given the ubiquitous application of Lewis’ description here, it seemed to warrant its own place.

Horrid Red Things: Mistaking Images for Thought

One final roadblock that the modern mood casts in front of the average reader. It consists of that tendency to assume the ancients were only capable of a literal understanding of images like heavenly thrones, a divine Son ascending and descending like a balloon, and a benevolent Father in a sky-palace (an assumption which Lewis has already critiqued). The modern mind finds such belief repugnant, for science has shown the universe to be different than this picture. Further whenever modern theology answers by hedging and redefining these stories in non-supernatural ways, the modern man cries foul. “Of course, he says, ‘Once the doctrines are there, clever people can invent clever

²²¹ “Hedonics,” 55. It is most interesting that in *Screwtape*, Screwtape actually advises Wormwood to function in this jailor role—to continue to press into the “patient’s” mind the immediate but shallow matters of the ordinary—“that invaluable ‘real life,’” and further to muddle the very meaning of the term. *Screwtape*, 10. See also 142-144.

arguments to defend them...,”²²² but it would be better simply to admit the error and start over. Lewis believes this to be a fallacy that confuses the operation of the imagination with that of the intellect, and his response further highlights their relationship. Lewis proceeds by illustration to construct a three-point argument.

First, whenever he thinks about London the mental picture that accompanies it is that of Euston Station. He knows that this image is false insofar as Euston Station is not the whole of London. But the real London, due to its size, cannot be imaginatively pictured in its entirety. Yet this does not make his knowledge of London false. Similarly too with large numbers, “...when we say that the Sun is ninety-odd million miles away, we understand perfectly clearly what we mean by this number; we can divide and multiply it by other numbers and we can work out how long it would take to travel that distance at any given speed. But this clear *thinking* is accompanied by *imaging* which is ludicrously false to what we know that the reality must be.”²²³ Thus his first conclusion: *Thought is distinct from the imaginative mental pictures that accompany it and may be true even when the pictures are false.*

Second, he once knew a lady who told her daughter that taking too many aspirin would be poisonous. The girl disagreed because, when crushing an aspirin, one does not find “horrid red things” inside. The girl clearly had a mental picture of “horrid red things” when she thought of poison. This picture was false, but unlike the Euston Station example, she believed it to be true. Still, says Lewis, this does not mean her thinking about the deadly nature of poison is false simply because it also includes a false mental

²²² *Miracles*, 69. For an abbreviated treatment of the same material, see “Horrid Red Things.”

²²³ *Miracles*, 71.

picture. If she told you something was poison, you would be foolish to reject her statement simply because you knew “this child has an archaic and mythological idea of poison as horrid red things.”²²⁴ Thus Lewis concludes that: *Thought may be sound when the images accompanying it are false, even if they are believed true.*

Third, a language component intrudes that is reminiscent of discussions already offered on the metaphorical nature of language. One may *speak* of London or poison without mentioning Euston Station or horrid red things because these are both objects in the world of senses, but “...very often when we are talking about something which is not perceptible by the five senses we use words which, in one of the meanings, refer to things or actions that are,” such as the following example: “I *grasp* your point”, “I *see* your point”, “I *follow* you” all of which attempt to communicate the same intangible meaning by the operations of hands, eyes, and feet. Poets, economists, and psychologists all “...must talk of ‘complexes’ and ‘repressions’ *as if* desires could really be tied up in bundles or shoved back; of ‘growth’ and ‘development’ *as if* institutions could really grow like trees or unfold like flowers; of energy being ‘released’ *as if* it were an animal let out of a cage.”²²⁵ Thus as has been argued several times already, *such metaphors are unavoidable when speaking of “supersensibles.”*

Based on this argument, absurdity of mental images does not necessarily mean absurdity of doctrine. Lewis has already argued that the ancient mind did not always feature the material/immaterial distinction that is ever-present to the modern, but as soon

²²⁴ “Horrid Red Things,” 70.

²²⁵ *Miracles*, 73.

as it was (say, by means of an Alexandrian education), they knew which one to choose.²²⁶

Thus, while it is almost impossible that the disciples could mistake the blue sky for the throne room of God,

a man who really believes that ‘Heaven’ is in the sky may well, in his heart, have a far truer and more spiritual conception of it than many a modern logician who could expose that fallacy with a few strokes of his pen...[for] the huge dome of the sky is of all things sensuously perceived the most like infinity. And when God made space and worlds that move in space, and clothed our world with air, and gave us such eyes and such imaginations as those we have, He knew what the sky would mean to us. And since nothing in His work is accidental, if He knew, He intended.²²⁷

The points to be gathered here are first, that the imagination miscarries less often than the modern mind supposes, but, second, even when it does, it may still be framing its images in a way compatible with the truth the intellect seeks.

Oh Ye of Little Faith: How the Critical Skeptic Kills Myth

Lewis thought the modern literary and theological critic often showed a particular and multifaceted disregard or ignorance for the intrinsic nature of myth. This section in some ways picks up where chapter 2’s critique of modern theology leaves off and examines how it fairs particularly in relation to myth. Chapter 5 will bring this thread of the discussion to a close by using much of the following to compare and contrast Lewis’ thought with trajectories in modern theology.

Anti-Supernaturalism: A Precluding Prejudice

Lewis’ polemic against anti-supernaturalism as laid out in his monograph *Miracles* and the short essay in *God in the Dock* by the same name need not be rehearsed.

²²⁶ Here Lewis cites the Athanasian creed, Athanasius’ *De Incarnatione*, and Chrysostom’s *De Incomprehensibili* as evidence.

²²⁷ *Miracles*, 158.

It is sufficient to note that, given myth's intention to bring the reader into contact with Higher Reality, its success is contingent on the willingness of the reader to admit the possibility of such a Higher Reality. This act of "surrender" to the nature of the medium, however, is exactly the step the modern skeptic refuses to take. What demands explanation here is why even the well-intentioned and honest skeptic (less reputable kinds need not be dealt with) can always with integrity deny the Higher Realm on the basis of the very evidence presented for it.

As the reader will recall in the above section on Transposition, when faced with three dimensional figures manifesting themselves in two dimensional worlds, a Flatlander skeptic could always say with integrity:

You keep on telling me of this other world and its unimaginable shapes which you call solid. But isn't it very suspicious that all the shapes which you offer me as images or reflections of the solid ones turn out on inspection to be simply the old two-dimensional shapes of my own world as I have always known it? Is it not obvious that your vaunted other world, so far from being the archetype, is a dream which borrows all its elements from this one?²²⁸

In similar fashion, in the underworld of *The Silver Chair*, the Witch-Queen, aided by enchantment, argues against Aslan's travelers that the overland does not exist because all the evidence for it they can offer—a superlative light called the sun and a superlative cat called a Lion—are nothing more than fictional enhancements of things in her "real" world of lamps and house cats.²²⁹ On the basis of the material evidence presented, her argument seems unanswerable. So too with the skeptic who seems able to account for every offered evidence of the Higher Realm in terms of the material of the Lower.

²²⁸ "Transposition," 101.

²²⁹ *Silver Chair*, 147-155.

This, however, says Lewis, is exactly what one should expect. Recall that only the one who knows the higher medium (the person in three dimensions) can understand the lower (two dimensions). The person who looks only at the evidence “from below” will only and always see “the square” and not “the cube”:

The brutal man never can by analysis find anything but lust in love; the Flatlander never can find anything but flat shapes in a picture; physiology never can find anything in thought except twitching of the grey matter. It is no good browbeating the critic who approaches a Transposition from below. On the evidence available to him his conclusion is the only one possible.²³⁰

Here Lewis offers an almost Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum*—an understanding that can only come after assent has been given. So long as one demands understanding before belief, one will never see the Higher manifested in the Lower. It is precluded by prejudice.

Lewis says that a myth to the modern critical skeptic is like a pointing finger to a dog. To the dog, it can never be more than a finger. This is the problem with the abstracting intellect in isolation; all evidence indicates and can only ever indicate a finger, and the symbolic nature of the finger—that of *pointing*—is lost for lack of evidence. Continues Lewis, “...in a period when factual realism is dominant we shall find people deliberately inducing upon themselves this doglike mind. A man who has

²³⁰ “Transposition,” 104f. Royce Gruenler creatively likens such a person to the dwarfs in the *Last Battle*, who, though surround by the infinite glories of Aslan’s country, persist in their affirmation that they are only in a filthy stable. Says Aslan, “They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in, that they cannot be taken out.” C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1956), 140; and Royce G. Gruenler, “C. S. Lewis and Imaginative Theology: In Memoriam,” *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* 2, (November 1974): 102f.

experienced love from within will deliberately go about to inspect it analytically from outside and regard the results of this analysis as truer than his experience.”²³¹

This is in fact Lewis’ preferred explanation for why Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin did not find God in outer space. Lewis suggests, “The Russians did find God in space without knowing it, because they lacked the requisite apparatus for detecting him.”²³² The missing apparatus being roughly that lacked by an “idiot,” who denies the existence of Shakespeare on the grounds that he has studied the plays and not found him a character in any one of them.

The argument here is not that the skeptic must *believe in* the supernatural before s/he can understand myth, but only that to understand the myth, s/he must be willing to *suspend disbelief* and meet the myth on its own terms, without prejudice. Unless s/he engages in this “act of surrender,” s/he will, with good conscience, find nothing in the myth but incredible fantasy or perhaps an abstracted moral.

Myth and History: The Quest for *Historie*

The last major section outlined the flaw of how trying to get “back stage” can destroy the meaning of the play, because it is unwilling to meet the play in its “appearance.” Instead it roots around in the wings of the theatre looking for something more “real.” Lewis believed that modern critical scholarship often expressed a similar desire to get behind the myth. In this case the desire was for the natural origins of the

²³¹ “Transposition,” 114. Consider Uncle Andrew’s decision to convince himself that the Narnian animals simply cannot talk as a matter of *a priori* certainty, which Lewis delightfully sums up as follows: “Now the problem about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed.” *Magician’s Nephew* 112f.

²³² “The Seeing Eye,” 167.

myth—that is, the *historie*. The idea is that the myth’s value is found in discovering the historical and psychological events surrounding its origination.²³³

Lewis’ critique is not a denial that myth may have historical rootedness, but that a tendency often exists to substitute the “cause” of a thing for its “explanation” or truth value. It grows out of the idea that once causally explained, a belief becomes illegitimate. In humorous fashion, Lewis calls this fallacy a “Bulverism” after the hypothetical Ezekiel Bulver, “whose destiny was determined at the age of five when he heard his mother say to his father—who had been maintaining that two sides of a triangle were together greater than the third—‘Oh you only say that *because you are a man*.’”²³⁴

The preceding paragraph contains two moving parts—Lewis’ thoughts about both the historicity of myths and what modernity does with the historical background. Regarding the first, “history” and “myth” were not antagonistic categories for Lewis. While he admits a general lack of interest in the history behind any given myth,²³⁵ he does not deny that historical connections may exist. He admits, “I believe that in the huge mass of mythology which has come down to us a good many different sources are mixed—true history, allegory, ritual, the human delight in story telling, etc.”²³⁶ A myth

²³³ For Lewis’ thoughts in particular on psychological origins of myths, particularly in Freud and Jung, see “Psycho-Analysis,” 120-138.

²³⁴ “Bulverism,” 273.

²³⁵ *Experiment*, 45. Wright suggests that Lewis’ lack of interest in the origin of myth (along with that of his peers Tolkien and Charles Williams) is born of being, not just scholars, but practitioners of myth. As such their interests are always that of the pragmatic sort that have not been of interest to scholars, or not “at least until recently.” That Lewis and his peers may have actually changed the nature of subsequent scholarly discourse by practicing the art is a fascinating idea on its own. That she should have seen this trajectory developing as early as 1960 (four years before Lewis’ death) is prescient. Wright, “Cosmic Kingdom of Myth,” 8f. Conversely Kuteeva spends a great deal of time confirming that Lewis was uninterested in the origin of myths, but then arguing this was a deficiency in his work. Kuteeva, 270ff.

²³⁶ “Religion without Dogma,” 132.

may historically represent the beliefs of ancient peoples, be genuine history accommodated to moral or pedagogical purposes, or be simply imaginative moralizing.

Lewis believed the strategy of many modern critics (and this will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 5) is to seek the history behind the narrative in conjunction with the anti-supernatural assumption discussed above, believing that the myth's relevance lay in the history stripped of its mythological or fantastical components.

Contrary to this, Lewis believed that, whatever historical events exist that give rise to a myth, their discovery is not the key to interpreting a myth. Regarding Old Testament myths in particular he argues that, "If we *could* sort out all the fabulous elements in the earlier stages and separate them from the historical ones, I think we might lose an essential part of the whole process."²³⁷ Returning again to the theatre image, he identifies the modern trajectory in the study of Milton's epic poetry,

To look away from the effect which the poem might be expected to produce, and was calculated to produce, on the ordinary educated and Christian audience in Milton's time, and to consider instead all the connexions it may have had in Milton's private thinking, is like leaving the auditorium during a tragedy to hang about the wings and see what the scenery looks like from there and how the actors talk when they come off the stage. By doing so you will find out many interesting facts, but you will not be able to judge or to enjoy the tragedy.²³⁸

When Lewis *does* express interest in a myth's origination, he takes the "from above" look discussed earlier, not the "from below" of the anthropologist. Lewis believed ancient myths stood as early evidences of God's speech to the pagan mind—that is, a means of revelation. When addressing a question of whether ancient peoples were less intelligent and therefore more easily religious, he suggests, "As to the fabulous events of

²³⁷ "Answers to Questions on Christianity," 58.

²³⁸ *Preface*, 91f.

the Old Testament, I very much doubt if you would be wise to chuck it out. What you get is something *coming gradually into focus*... Then, in the New Testament the *thing really happens*.”²³⁹

To the point, Lewis does not deny that historical and psychological originating factors exist or have intellectual value. But he reminds that, so long as one is *more* interested in analyzing the anthropological components as an end—perhaps, best stated in terms of “looking at”—one will be blinded to the work the myth is trying to *do* within the reader by means of its own structure. The reader then has a responsibility to make an initial “surrender of disbelief” to “looking along” the myth on its own terms.

Reductions: The Quest for Propositions

Another manifestation of the problems modern critics create for themselves in approaching myth lies on the interpretive side. One may confuse the originating principles for the value of the myth as suggested above, or one may attempt to exegete the meaning of the myth in terms of discursive statements—that is, to reduce it to a moral gleaned by the intellect. Lewis admits the intellectual reduction to a moral is possible and even permissible, but it is a different and lesser good than what the myth offers. The imagination craves different food than the intellect. Myth’s primary fruit is exactly that kind the imagination loves best—things like, “irony, heroism, vastness, unity in multiplicity, and a tragic close,”²⁴⁰—none of which are as easily apprehended by the intellect. To do their work, myths must be lived with imaginatively in their totality and wholeness, and not reduced to abstract principle.

²³⁹ “Answer to Christianity,” 57f.

²⁴⁰ “Funeral,” 93.

Lewis gives numerous examples of this process. In *Discarded Image*, he works with the mythological implication of the planetary names in connection with their Roman deities (Mars, god of war; Venus, goddess of love; and so on). While a few are imaginable to the modern mind, most seem arbitrary or simply incoherent. Part of the problem is the attempt to intellectually appropriate them. Rather "...the planetary characters need to be seized in an intuition rather than built up out of concepts; we need to know them, not to know about them, *connaître* not *savoir*."²⁴¹ Likewise, on the effects of the four Medieval personality "Complexions" (the blood dominated Sanguine, the phlegm dominated Phlegmatic, and so on), "Like the Planets, the Complexions need to be lived with imaginatively, not merely learned as concepts. They do not exactly correspond to any psychological classification we have been taught to make. But most of those we know (except ourselves) will illustrate one or the other of the four tolerably well."²⁴² Similarly, in *Four Loves*, he speaks of the value of patriotic stories for youth,

The stories [of the great heroic acts of the past] are best when they are handed on and accepted as stories. I do not mean by this that they should be handed on as mere fictions (some of them are after all true). But the emphasis should be on the tale as such, on the picture which fires the imagination, the example that strengthens the will. The schoolboy who hears them should dimly feel—though of course he cannot put it into words—that he is hearing *saga*. Let him be thrilled—preferably 'out of school'—by the 'Deeds that won the Empire'; but the less we mix this up with his 'history lessons' or mistake it for a serious analysis—worse still, a justification—of imperial society, the better.²⁴³

This last quotation demonstrates the whole process rather well. Myth can be presented and received; it cannot be analyzed without a kind of loss. It may be fully

²⁴¹ *Discarded Image*, 109.

²⁴² *Discarded Image*, 173.

²⁴³ *Four Loves*, 43f.

historical, vaguely historical, or non-historical without compromising its work on the imagination. The point is that if the reader rushes into the myth with the intellectual desire to “get the point,” s/he will certainly find an abstract intellectual conclusion that may even be true, but it will have forced myth to undergo a kind of “humiliation” or “degrading” analogous to the “emptying” Christ endured in the incarnation.²⁴⁴ The “surrender” of the abstracting demands of the intellect is required in that moment so that the imagination may be nourished by the concrete imagery presented.

Lewis’ Theory Considered

So far little critique has been offered of Lewis’ thoughts. They have been presented entirely with the goal of understanding. Questions have been generally suspended out of a desire to test Lewis’ theory even in the methodology of the document. Lewis claimed that the first step to understanding an artifact is the willing “surrender” of the observer’s own prejudices and opinions to the degree that they can experience the work on its own terms and not merely as a useful “toy” or “icon.” So here the attempt was made to get at exactly what Lewis thought, and as much as is possible on his own terms, prior to allowing the critic to speak.²⁴⁵ The time has come, however, to voice a few questions and apprehensions with the goals of concluding the discussion and laying ground work for the next chapters.

²⁴⁴ “Humiliation” refers, of course, to the *kenosis* of Christ mentioned by Paul in Philippians 2. *Miracles*, 134. “Degrading” is Ransom’s label for a mythical struggle that was forced into an historical enactment. However, he quickly remembers that this is a distinction is “purely terrestrial.” In the heavens the distinction between myth and history may be meaningless. *Perelandra*, 143.

²⁴⁵ The exception as mentioned at the outset is in the structure of the argument. Since Lewis never provided a fully systematized discussion covering the ground here in view, it did not seem inappropriate to systematize his material by means of a structure that best clarified things for this author. Any flaws then arising out of the structure of this discussion is entirely the fault of the author and not Lewis.

The Malfunctioning Imagination: The Problem of False Pictures

Lewis has argued that myth aims at the imagination, which is the primary faculty of meaning. The imagination embraces the mythic narrative in its totality and concreteness and derives a meaning from it that is non-discursive and non-propositional. If the imagination's work is primarily pictorial in nature, what happens if the imagination constructs the wrong pictures? Lewis has already acknowledged that this happens in his "London as Euston Station" illustration. Recall that he argued there that "thoughts" may be true even when accompanied by "images" the person knows to be false or inadequate. He further asserts that the "thoughts" may continue to be true even when accompanied by false "images" that the person *believes to be true* (as with horrid red things as poison).

But what does this do to the reliability of Lewis' model? If the imagination is the key faculty that suggests meaning for a myth, and that myth is trying to present some aspect of Higher Reality that humanity is desperately seeking, then it seems of great importance the degree to which the imaginative faculty can be trusted. How can one have confidence that what is apprehended by the imagination is really Higher Reality and not simply imaginative, or even flawed, picture making? Does not Lewis himself draw a most dramatic picture of the threat in *Perelandra*? Therein, the largest and most effective aspect of the temptation of Tenedril is the Un-man's attack upon her imaginative faculty. If she is to Fall, it will be facilitated first by *imagining* non-lawful possibilities.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ *Perelandra*, 103-106, 125-127, 131-139.

By way of answer, Lewis nowhere asserts that the imagination is infallible any more than any other human faculty.²⁴⁷ The intellect, under the burden of illness, weariness, or injury, may get wrong sums when doing math. Tired eyes do not see well, and the faculty of memory muddles the past. Not to mention (primarily because it is addressed in the next chapter) human sin and fallenness also affects every human faculty in varying degrees.

Yet despite the known deficiencies in all our capacities, humans continue to trust their eyes, their intellects, and their memories. The imagination is subject to all the flaws common to our other faculties, plus a few unique to its own nature, and yet in the end, one is still faced with the choice of Ramandu's table.²⁴⁸ Presented with a great magical feast of unknown origin and unknown effects, Caspian and his crew are told by a strange woman that the food is good. Yet because they have had "a lot of queer adventures," they resist and ask, "How are we to know you're a friend?" She replies simply, "You can't know... You can only believe—or not."

There lies the imperfect choice as Lewis might have put it. One can either be a complete skeptic of the imagination and have in return... nothing, or one can believe that, like the other faculties, it is *generally* trustworthy under the conditions for which it was *generally* made, and *generally* enjoy the glories it offers. If one requires infallibility of a faculty before putting any in trust in it, one is quickly reduced to a lone Cartesian mind sitting in a dark boiler room wondering if it even exists.

²⁴⁷ In relation to "story" in general, Donald Glover highlights the fact that story has the power to guide or misguide, to enlighten or deceive. Donald Glover, "The Magician's Book: That's Not Your Story," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 22 (1989): 217-225. Further Lewis acknowledged this fact latently both in *Faces*, where Orual tells her own story as an unreliable narrator, and in *Dawn Treader*, where Lucy confronts both delighting and deceiving stories in the magician's book.

²⁴⁸ *Dawn Treader*, 166-169.

Belief or Something Like It: The Problem of Belief

The question presented in the last section regarding “Truth” in the face of false “images” *believed true*, raises a second question. What exactly is the role of belief in Lewis’ model? But what does Lewis mean by “believed true?” Does he mean: 1. Belief in the correspondence between the image and historical space-time (as in, the technical term *historie*)—“I believe this myth ‘really happened’ more or less as imagined.” Or 2. Belief in the profound meaning of the myth regardless of its relationship to history?

Lewis has already argued that either case *can* still result in intellectual “truth.” His example of Euston Station as London would be an example of 2, while the little girls “horrid red things” would be an example of 1. Whether or not Lewis is correct in this, it does not answer the exact question here. Can one deny, say, that Icarus’ wings or Jonah’s Whale ever existed or ever could exist, and still have the myth work? Must one believe Noah’s flood “really happened” before receiving anything from the story beyond banal moralizing?

Lewis’ whole life is a testimony to the short answer—No. All the Joy he experienced at the hands of Norse mythology as a youth came in the face of clear belief that the events “never happened.” Likewise, Lewis denied seeing any correspondence between scientism’s myth of Progress and history. Yet he considered it a very potent myth—better even than Christianity, which has “...neither the monolithic grandeur of Unitarian conceptions nor the richness of Polytheism.”²⁴⁹ He has even offered already that the demand for belief destroyed his ability to embrace Christianity for a long time.

²⁴⁹ “Is Theology Poetry,” 118. See also “Funeral,” 82ff.

Further, in *Allegory of Love*, Lewis claims the most beautiful mythological usages of the Olympian gods did not come at the hands of the Romans and Greeks who believed in them, but the Medieval poets and theologians who did not. In Rome the gods are treated as “objects of worship, of fear, of hatred; even as comic characters,” but there is little aesthetic contemplation of them.²⁵⁰ Yet the Medieval poets, who would have never desired to worship them, spent an immense amount of time striving romantically after their metaphysical meanings. After much consideration that cannot be summarized here, he concludes,

No religion, so long as it [is] believed, can have that kind of beauty which we find in the gods of Titian, of Botticelli, or of our own romantic poets. To this day you cannot make poetry *of that sort* out of the Christian heaven and hell. The gods must be, as it were, disinfected of belief; the last taint of the sacrifice, and of the urgent practical interest, the selfish prayer, must be washed away from them, before that other divinity can come to light in the imagination.”²⁵¹

Lewis’ conclusion elsewhere is the same, “In a certain sense we spoil a mythology for imaginative purposes by believing in it.”²⁵² Lewis clearly denies the necessity of a belief in sense 1 above.

It seems that only belief in sense 2 (or something like it) is required. The required act of “surrender” is not a belief in the historicity of the myth, but in its profound *meaning*. And on this point, Lewis has been consistent—imagination is the organ of meaning, not truth. The question of Christianity’s *meaning* is simply not the same question as its *truth*. Many people find Christianity imaginatively meaningful who also disbelieve its historicity—just as Lewis does for polytheism and scientism. The question

²⁵⁰ *Allegory*, 83.

²⁵¹ *Allegory*, 83.

²⁵² “Is Theology Poetry,” 120.

of myth and history will need to be probed more deeply in the next chapter as it relates specifically to the Genesis Fall.

A final point, however, can be made here. Note the “in a certain sense...” in the above citation. Lewis acknowledges, however, that belief that a myth is grounded in history does change the aesthetic nature of its experience. An historically true story provides an additional and unique satisfaction. Both the Trojan and the Napoleonic wars produce aesthetic effects, but “a believed idea *feels* different from an idea that is not believed. And that peculiar flavor of the believed is never, in my experience, without a special sort of imaginative enjoyment.”²⁵³ The conclusion for him then is that Christians (like adherents of all great controlling mythologies from Scientism to Polytheism) do experience imaginative enjoyment from their world pictures once they have accepted them as true; the enjoyment, however, is not necessarily the reason it is believed.

He Said/She Said: The Problems of Verifiability and Falsifiability

There remain whole classes of people who remain unmoved by myth. When faced with Oedipus or Adam, they do not experience any of Lewis’ predictions. They simply cannot see the story as anything other than fanciful made-up narrative, nor do they experience any of the pleasure or Joy that Lewis claims for himself, nor do they perceive themselves imaginatively in touch with Higher Reality. Lewis’ model simply does not express their experience when meeting these stories. This existential reality creates at

²⁵³ “Is Theology Poetry,” 121.

least two possible problems for Lewis. First, is there any way for the skeptic to falsify Lewis' claims, and second, is there any way for Lewis to verify them?²⁵⁴

The falsifiability question arises from the totalizing aspect of Lewis' theory, which seeks to explain not only Lewis' experience but also the skeptic's lack of it. Lewis has laid out a number of self-inflicted causes to explain why a skeptic may not receive from myth the experience he describes—such as, a lack of “surrender,” or anti-supernatural bias, or over-zealous intellect. Thus even the skepticism of the honest and honorable skeptic is included as a piece of the theory's data. But answering the skeptic with, “I knew you would say that, and it's what one ought to expect if my model is true,” seems to insulate the theory from any possible critique. This insulation from critique is a critique question for all Anselmian *fides*-type arguments—“you do not see *because* you are a skeptic.” In Lewis' own terms, however, it sounds like a reverse Bulverism—that the lack of seeing is caused, not by the truth or falsity of the arguments, but by some biographical factor—that one is a “man” or a “republican” or, in this case, a “skeptic.”

Kreeft, however, says, yes, Lewis is engaging in a sort of *ad hominem*, but it is directed against the person who refuses to admit or look, for ultimately the skeptic has insulated their experience (or lack of it) from critique to the same degree as has Lewis.²⁵⁵ Such skepticism is self-imposed. Lewis never meets head-on anywhere the question of whether his treatment of the skeptic is fair, and even his closest responses are little more than reaffirmations of his position. In *Reflections on the Psalms* he reiterates the “view

²⁵⁴ The question here need not be understood in formal philosophical terms, as in Karl Popper's critique of justificationist theories of knowledge. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge Classics, 1959, revised 2002). It employs the terms “verifiable” and “falsifiable” only in a more conversational sense of how one is to negotiate between the two perspectives here offered—Lewis' and the skeptics.

²⁵⁵ Kreeft, 251.

from below” argument mentioned earlier, this time with a different illustration. If a person existed who knew nothing of handwriting or its possibility, when faced with a poem, it would appear and could only appear to him as a series of black marks on white paper. Such a person, says Lewis, “would be unanswerable if he addressed an audience who couldn’t read... You will never find something over and above all the products of analysis whereof you can say ‘This is the poem.’ Those who can read, however, will continue to say the poem exists.”²⁵⁶ Kreeft paints the dilemma with equal polemic, “If someone blandly says, ‘I am perfectly happy playing with mud pies (or fast cars or money or political power) we can query, ‘Are you, really?’ but we can only try to inveigle him out of his childishness, we cannot compel him by logical force.”²⁵⁷ Thus Lewis places his own experience over against the skeptics as proof. That the honest and honorable skeptic will do the same as a counter-proof is to be expected. Who then can judge?

This then raises a question of verifiability. How can either party—Lewis or the skeptic—prove to the other that their experience or lack of it is “real?” To begin with, it is not a given that the burden of proof lies upon the claimant of the experience. Yes, humans are sometimes deceived by “experiences” they are not really having. But they are just as often deceived by real experiences they deny having—ask the drunk driver if he thinks he is really drunk or the anorexic if she isn’t just a bit too thin already. The skeptic can no more prove by absolutely objective criteria that s/he is not simply “listening to the jailor” and shutting down the glory being offered. After all, St. Paul offers a very similar

²⁵⁶ *Psalms*, 116f.

²⁵⁷ Kreeft, 251.

argument in Romans 1 regarding the honest skeptic who claims to have no experience of “repressing” a divine revelation they have received in nature. The apostle’s response is a short and circular, “that is, sir, because you have repressed it.” Cunningham admits Lewis’ situation without hesitation, “...the only verification of the truth of mythology is the deep, self-authenticating conviction that in the imaginative experience one has encountered reality, reality that cannot be defined, put into words, or grasped by the intellect.”²⁵⁸ The skeptic, however, is in the same boat. This is simply the nature of competing experiences.

One additional factor, however, ought to be considered before hands are thrown up in frustration. Lewis is not claiming a private experience *contra mundum*, or even one that is unique to Christians. Rather he calls this longing for Joy “common, commonly misunderstood, and of immense importance.”²⁵⁹ Summarizes Cunningham, “Lewis assumes that the desire for God is smoldering in the breast of every man—as aching, longing, wanting; as joy or, equally, unhappiness or grief; as an indescribable sense of estrangement—and that the desire is often fixed on false objects that leave it unsatisfied.”²⁶⁰ And to the degree that this experience and claims of its importance *are* wide spread throughout the philosophers, poets, saints, and commoners of the whole race, one must either conclude that the race is under a mass deception or that Lewis’ theory (or something like it) is at least credible. While this is not the kind of empirical evidence that would satisfy the hard sciences, insofar as arguments from warrant are legitimate, it does

²⁵⁸ Cunningham, 75.

²⁵⁹ *Regress*, 202.

²⁶⁰ Cunningham, 194.

not require a *sacrificium intellectum* to assent. If the “truth” demand is set aside for the moment, one will realize that the theory has high explanatory value and therefore cannot simply be dismissed out of hand as “unverifiable” by anyone other than a logical positivist, and even they, only with some peril.

In the end, it may really come down to something as unscientific as this: Those who have felt the longing Lewis speaks of, heard it answered by fleeting Joy, and subsequently found it incarnated in a grand story will need no other proof. Those who have not, if such really exist, will simply have to do with it what they can.

When All Else Fails: The Problem of Inability

The last section, however, raises a final question from the direction, not of proof, but of justice. If this means of access to Higher Reality through myth is intended by the God who made both humanity’s eyes and the seemingly infinite sky to suggest such things to the imagination, does it seem quite *fair* then that so many people honestly claim to be unmoved by mythic literature? And to be clear, not unmoved by choice or resistance, but simply unmoved, desire notwithstanding. While such a reality is not a logical defeater, it still does strike the person of good conscience as a difficulty that so many should be excluded from so valuable a thing. What does Lewis say to such a person?

While Lewis never tackles the pastoral angle the question presumes, a number of possible directions are suggested by his work. First, due to the subjective nature of myth (that it is defined by its effect on the reader), Lewis admits that what is myth to one

person may not be myth to another.²⁶¹ It is subject to all the preferences readers have about all sorts of literature. Speaking particularly of Lewis and Tolkien's own mythical worlds, Wright expands on the fickle nature of myth-as-genre...

Whether or not the vision strikes the reader as having the semblance of reality depends partly on the author's literary skill and partly on the reader's own notion of what reality is like. It hardly needs pointing out that such writing is highly charged emotionally (not necessarily in style but in subject matter) and is therefore highly vulnerable. The reader's response is not entirely based on religious preference, but more on his preference for having the nature of ultimate reality presented in imaginative form. If he does not like it, it will probably appear to him as overgrown allegory or pseudo-mysticism.²⁶²

Second, in light of the above, that one has not heretofore experienced what Lewis describes is no argument that it may not be experienced tomorrow—and even by a different medium. Lewis believed that all Nature possessed this sacramental potential.²⁶³ Joy may be met around any corner and in anything, unexpectedly and by surprise. While myth as a form of literature has a particular quality unique to it, it is but a specific example of the larger thing called Nature, which is also inherently sacramental.

A third factor to remember is that, myth, while finding its greatest glory through concrete embrace of the imagination, is not totally inaccessible to the intellect. It may be stripped of much of its compelling power when subjected to the abstracting intellect, but this is not without value. If one is unable to “look along” the myth to the aspect of Higher Reality of which it speaks, value remains in “looking at.” To have “contemplated” Lewis' theory of myth, even if one is skeptical of the “enjoyment” of which it speaks, is itself valuable. As Lewis conceded regarding other kinds of disagreements, “One may still

²⁶¹ *Experiment*, 45. This is implied also in, *Letters*, 458.

²⁶² Wright, “Cosmic Kingdom of Myth,” 175.

²⁶³ *Mere*, 139.

disagree...but one now sees for the first time why anyone ever did agree. One has breathed a new air, become free of a new country. It may be a country you cannot live in, but you now know why the natives love it. You will henceforward see all systems a little differently because you have been inside that one.”²⁶⁴

One final comment can be made on this point that is relevant for the next chapter. None of the above thoughts reflect the clear and parallel fact that that all good capacities from athletics to music are distributed unequally over the human family. That this is so, is, in some cases simply a matter of diversity, but it also may reflect a consequence of human rebellion against that God who (we presume) does desire these experiences for all people. That some people do not perceive the power of myth may simply be an evil that a certain segment of humanity endures, like color-blindness, tone-deafness, and eczema. That humanity may have brought this condition on itself, however, is a subject better treated in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The content of this chapter has not been presented for its own sake, but has served as an overview of what Lewis meant by “myth” and its function. This material will be brought to bear on Lewis’ interpretation of the Genesis Fall in chapter 4, and by way of comparison to his theological contemporaries in chapter 5. By way of making this application easier for the reader, the chapter has been summarized below as nine propositions that outline humanity’s existential condition, myth’s role in addressing it, and modernity’s particular difficulties with it.

²⁶⁴C. S. Lewis, “The Empty Universe,” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 86.

1. Higher reality or Supernature exists, that is, a reality beyond that of sensory experience that can only be spoken of in metaphorical language.
2. Humanity has been made for enjoyment of this Higher Reality, hence it is haunted by a longing (*Sehnsucht*) which cannot be satisfied by anything in Nature.
3. The sacramental nature of Nature allows humans to periodically interact with Higher Reality, producing the emotional recognition of having the longing satisfied—that, is “Joy.”
4. Joy, however, cannot be fully possessed. It is fleeting, for it is impossible to both “enjoy” and “contemplate” it at the same time.
5. As an act of Divine revelation in concert with some historical process, some aspects of Higher Reality are embodied in great mythic pictures/stories.
6. This myth conveys Higher Reality to the reader non-discursively and non-propositionally by means of the narrative and totalizing capacities of the imagination, rather than the abstracting intellect.
7. The imagination meets, in the concreteness of the myth, some aspect of Higher Reality that could only otherwise be expressed as an abstraction.
8. Since myth, like Nature, possesses a sacramental quality, it brings the reader into touch with Higher Reality and the possibility of Joy, thereby working against the reader’s separation from Higher Reality.
9. Modernity’s preference for abstract thought over concrete and its resistance to the supernatural and necessary intellectual “surrender of disbelief” tends to thwart myth’s work, robbing humanity of the possibility of knowing both Higher Reality and great Joy.

As a final attempt at clarity, Table 4.1 is here reproduced.

Table 4.1. Synthesis of Epistemological Taxonomies

	(Thesis)*	(Antithesis)*
<i>Alexander's Taxonomy</i>	Contemplation	Enjoyment
<i>Lewis' Taxonomy</i>	Looking At	Looking Along
<i>Attributes</i>	Abstract, Rational, Discursive, Propositional	Concrete, Imaginative, Non- discursive, Non-propositional
<i>Mode of Discourse</i>	Scientific, Philosophical	Poetic, Narrative
<i>Distal End of Language</i>	Mathematics	Unknown
<i>Interpreting Faculty</i>	Intellect (Reason)	Imagination
	(Synthesis)* Myth	

*The Hegelian structure is used here only for clarity of the table's elements, does not form part of the argument, is not intended to be pressed.

CHAPTER 4

LEWIS' TREATMENT OF THE FALL NARRATIVE

The previous chapters stand as preparation for this and the final chapter. The goal of this chapter is to reflect specifically on Lewis' understanding and interpretation of the Genesis Fall in three ways—historically, theologically, and mythologically. It is thus easily seen how the previous chapters have set the stage for this task. Chapter 1 established a theological environment for the discussion—that of the mid-twentieth century. Chapter 2 set Lewis into this context by outlining his general responses to such issues as evolutionary Darwinism, the Bible and history, and various manifestations of higher criticism. Chapter 3 rehearsed Lewis' understanding of myth as a kind of literature. Insofar as the Genesis 3 Fall intersects with all of these discussions, they become preparatory for the discussion of this chapter. Chapter 5 then will place the conclusions of this chapter into the theological context of Chapter 1 to examine where Lewis may contribute to the question of a “mythical Fall.”

Lewis himself patently establishes the three levels of analysis in a single location. In *Problem of Pain*, he makes the following statements, “The story in Genesis is a story (full of the deepest suggestion) about a magic apple of knowledge; but in the developed doctrine the inherent magic of the apple has quite dropped out of sight, and the story is simply one about disobedience,”¹ and a few pages later, “What exactly happened when

¹ *Pain*, 71.

Man fell, we do not know; but if it is legitimate to guess, I offer the following picture—a ‘myth’ in the Socratic sense, a not unlikely tale.”²

These two citations identify the three levels for discussion. First, by “the magic apple,” Lewis is referring to the mythical nature of the story. Second, he formally distinguishes this from “the developed doctrine”—that is, its theological treatment in church history. Third, he identifies the category of “what exactly happened,” wherein he is asking the historical question, what might have actually happened? This chapter will explore what Lewis meant at each of these three levels.

Finally before the analysis begins, four topic limitations must be drawn due to space. First, while gender questions are unavoidable given the respective roles Adam and Eve *qua* male and female play in the story, no attempt will be made to enter or moderate the seasonal storm of “Lewis on gender.” The topic is too significant to tackle partially here. Interested readers can see its complexities for themselves by consulting the squall that consumed *Christian Scholars Review* in 2007 as well as the monographs and articles to which it gave birth.³

Second, a significant portion of Lewis’ perspective is gleaned from his work on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Lewis notoriously took up a contrary position to many of his literary peers on Satan’s character and role in the epic poem. While this material is of some importance to understanding Lewis on the Fall, no attempt will be made to determine whether Lewis’ read of Milton is superior to that of other literary theorists.

² *Pain*, 76f.

³ *Christian Scholar's Review* XXXVI, no. 4 (Summer 2007). See also Chapter 2 of Holt; and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *A Sword between the Sexes? C. S. Lewis and the Gender Debates* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010).

How Lewis understood Milton is an important question, but not as much so here as the question of how Milton affected Lewis.

Third, while any consideration of the Genesis Fall is bound to raise questions of theodicy and the problem of evil (and Lewis has something to say on both), this chapter will not treat it. It simply is not the topic at work here. These questions will be allowed to intrude only insofar as they directly relate to Lewis' treatment of the narrative.

Finally, in recent years the agnostic scholar and story-teller Phillip Pullman has been a vocal critic of Lewis' alleged low view of humanity, even offering a Lewis-like trilogy of fantasy books that offer a functional critique of established religion.⁴ Some of his belief that Lewis' worldview is "life-hating" is rooted in Lewis' belief in a human Fall from grace. This chapter will not enter into this debate, first because it has been well considered by others,⁵ but more importantly because of this writer's profound lassitude toward it. Pullman's ultimate complaint is against Christianity (or religion) in general,⁶ and Lewis only insofar as he is an effective *literary* voice that chafes Pullman's more metaphysically reductionistic and "source-of-life-hating" perspective.

"What Really Happened": Lewis and the History behind the Fall

Given the mythic status Lewis grants the Fall narrative, combined with Lewis' own discussions on the impossibility of the search for the history behind a myth, it is remarkable how thoroughly he ruminates on the historical events that might stand behind

⁴ Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2001).

⁵ For a straightforward exoneration of Lewis from Pullman, see Mary R. Bowman, "A Darker Ignorance: C. S. Lewis and the Nature of the Fall," *Mythlore* 24 (Summer, 2003): 62-78.

⁶ For a revealing look at Pullman's thoughts on the central story of Christianity, see his recent work, Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., 2010).

the Genesis story. It is further remarkable that to date almost nothing has been written in secondary literature specifically aimed at Lewis on the historical question. As shall be seen, nearly all reflection on Lewis on the Genesis Fall consists of his doctrinal or mythological understanding of it. Yet, insofar as the historical status of the narrative is a dominant question, Lewis' thoughts on it must be laid out.

Lewis' earliest and most complete discussion of what he believes the history behind the story might have been is contained in *Problem of Pain*, published in 1940.⁷ Indeed, with the exception of *Reflections on the Psalms* and a number of personal letters, nearly all of Lewis' reflection on the history question takes place in the decade of the 1940s. Given *Problem of Pain*'s dominant place in the topic, it will serve as the initial skeleton for Lewis' ideas with his other works muscled in where needed.

On Human Origins

The first part of chapter 2 of this dissertation demonstrated that Lewis did not believe the Genesis story reflected an unaccommodated historical account of the events. The primary thrust of that discussion was to demonstrate that Lewis was not an enemy of modern science or even Darwin's theory, insofar as they were free of cult-like scientism or the myth of inevitable progress. In addition, chapter 2 presented a possible history as Lewis conceived it that led up to the subject in focus here. The discussion here picks up in that wake—the Fall understood as “what happened next.”

⁷ While *Regress* was published nearly a decade earlier, with its discussion of the *Peccatum Adae* (71-74), the notoriously allegorical nature of the work makes any use of it here highly suspect. Whatever use may be made of it will be made later under discussion of Lewis' theological and mythic uses of the Genesis story.

To summarize the germane elements of chapter 2, Lewis' structure in *Problem of Pain*⁸ involved a theistic evolutionary approach whereby God guided a sub-human mammalian creature over a long period of time to a place where it could then be endowed with the special and supernatural gift of "human nature." To use Aristotelian taxonomy, God used evolution to produce the "animal" and a miracle to make it "rational."

Such creatures (and there may have been many so endowed) may have still been "primitive" in terms of their technology and society [79] but, because of the divine endowment, would have also exhibited the following remarkable characteristics. They would have possessed complete mastery of their physical organisms down to even the level of "digestion and circulation" [77f.]. This capacity would have likewise expressed itself outwardly toward the rest of creation in a priestly mastery over the physical and animal world—"the mediator through whom they [the creatures] apprehend so much of the Divine splendor as their irrational nature allows" [78]. Further, they would have experienced "rich and varied" relationships with their fellow-humans dominated by "charity and friendship and [even] sexual love" [78]. And most importantly, they would have been perfect in "obedient love and ecstatic adoration" of God, "perfectly enacting in joy and ease of all the faculties and all the senses that filial self-surrender..." which Christ would perfectly picture later on [78f.] .

To this picture rehearsed from chapter 2 should also be added the following suggestions from a later chapter in *Problem of Pain*. In his discussion on animal pain, Lewis says, "The origin of animal suffering could be traced by earlier generations, to the Fall of man—the whole world was infected by the uncreating rebellion of Adam. This is

⁸ *Pain*, 69-88. Subsequent paginal references in this section will be cited in textual brackets .

now impossible, for we have good reason to believe that animals existed long before men. Carnivorousness, with all that it entails, is older than humanity” [133]. It is clear from this that Lewis was committed to an old earth with extensive animal history prior to the arrival of humanity on the scene. With careful caveats on what constitutes “pain” for a non-rational animal and what sort of animal might be expected to experience it, Lewis assumes (without actually saying it) that a state in which animals experience predatory suffering cannot have justly been their original state. This assumption is the basic premise that drives the whole book—the existence of meaningless pain (for animals as well as humans) is an evil, not attributable to the Creator, whose presence must be explained or else become a defeater for the Christian story. This, however, creates a problem for Lewis. If suffering is not a part of the animal’s original nature and state, but something that came as a disruption of it and yet preceded the creation of humanity, what can be its historical origin?

Lewis’ suggests that the theological tradition of the prior Fall of a rebel angelic power would explain this disruption in the animal kingdom. In his words, “it seems to me, therefore, a reasonable supposition, that some mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe, or the solar system, or, at least, the planet Earth, before ever man came on the scene...” [134]. This then raises the possibility that humanity may have arrived in a world already in need of some redemption at humanity’s own hand.

If it seems illegitimate for Lewis to insert such a mythological solution into what is suppose to be a reconstruction of possible history, Lewis reminds, “...the doctrine of Satan’s existence and Fall is not among the things we know to be untrue: it contradicts

not the facts discovered by scientists but the mere, vague ‘climate of opinion’ that we happen to be living in” [134]. In short, Lewis, the stalwart apologist for the miraculous, believes that the Fall of Satan (or something like it) is not necessarily contradictory to the historical record—it is one of the things that “might have happened” in space-time. Thus Lewis attempts to harmonize modern science’s view of an extended terrestrial history and the church’s tradition on the Fall of Satan.

The History Behind the Fall

One discovers in *Problem of Pain* that the only reason Lewis has delved into the question of origins at all is to set the backdrop for his apologetic on human fallenness. Lewis admits at the outset, “What exactly happened when Man fell, we do not know; but if it is legitimate to guess, I offer the following picture—a ‘myth’ in the Socratic sense, a not unlikely tale” [77]. By “what exactly happened” Lewis surely means “the actual historical events.” As mentioned in chapter 2, his use of the term “Socratic myth” is highly distracting, even given his clarifying footnote that he does *not* mean by it what Reinhold Niebuhr does. The use of the term “myth” here has thrown off the scent such immanent scholars as Cunningham and Knickerbocker, who both claim that Lewis is saying that the actual Genesis story is nothing more than a “Socratic Myth.”⁹ Nothing could be further from Lewis’ meaning. He is here contrasting both the doctrinal use and mythological meaning with his own teaching picture of a possible history behind them both. By “not unlikely tale,” Lewis really intends “that which could have possibly

⁹ Cunningham, 113; and W. E. Knickerbocker Jr., “The Myth that Saves: C. S. Lewis and the Doctrine of *Theosis*,” *Touchstone* 13, no. 6 (July-August 2000): 32.

happened as history,” thus it is a *guess* at historical possibility, not a doctrinal or mythological interpretation.

Now it is true by definition that Lewis can offer no evidence for this history. No one possibly could, and Lewis does not pretend to speak better than he can know. It is “historical” only in the sense of being “historically possible.” It is a story which includes *the sorts of events* that might have been, such that its content might serve as a backdrop for what became the Genesis myth. More must not be claimed of it than this, and Lewis makes clear repeatedly that the history behind a myth is its *least* important aspect.

Nevertheless, Lewis plows ahead with his story. It is unknown how long these newly rational-animals maintained their perfect “Paradisal state” [79]. Lewis suggests that at some point, “Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods—that they could cease directing their lives to their Creator and taking all their delights as uncovenanted mercies, as ‘accidents’ (in the logical sense) which arose in the course of a life directed not to those delights but to the adoration of God” [79f.].

The “someone or something” is an unacceptable vagary. Since no historical data can be cited to determine the source of such a suggestion, Lewis hazards no guess—asserting only its non-contradictory nature. Yet the picture he paints in the following pages gives the impression that such a suggestion could arise, not merely as an external solicitation by a tempter-proper, but as an existential reality of creature-hood—that is, it could arise from the internal resources of the creature *in se*. It does not seem then for Lewis that an historical theory requires the identification of an external tempter. It is conceivable purely on the basis of the existential situation of being a volitional creature.

Guessing then at the nature of the historical act is a further difficulty. It would have to be “very heinous” given the terrible consequences that follow, yet would have to be something possible even for “a being free from the temptations of fallen man” [80]. Lewis believes “turning from God” fulfills both conditions. The existential situation of being a creature with a will consists of the creaturely requirement of an act of “self-surrender” to its Maker, rather than that of “self-idolatry.” Lewis calls this “the ‘weak spot’ in the very nature of the creature, the risk which God apparently thinks worth taking” [81]. Paradisal Man was called to surrender himself to God. But it is possible for him not to do so. His failure to do so would be “heinous” because “the self which Paradisal man had to surrender contained no natural recalcitrancy to being surrendered” [81]. Such self-surrender would have been, says Lewis, an easy choice for the creature, opposed by nothing in its nature¹⁰—but it is a choice nonetheless that had to be made.

Significant doctrinal and theological questions arise here regarding what it means to “turn from God” in this sense; questions which must be postponed for a moment. But given that such an ancient human fore-bearer (or a group of them) made such a choice at some historical point (and Lewis admits, “For all I can see, it might have concerned the literal eating of a fruit, but the question is of no consequence.” [80]), the question that here follows is what the historical result of such a choice would be.

Lewis paints that result in terms of surprise. The creature must have believed that it could rebel against God, taking ownership of its own life, and still maintain all the benefits and capacities of its original nature. It could not. Given that God wanted to govern the creature’s organism and its broader terrestrial environment through the

¹⁰ See also *Mere*, 157f.

creature's own will, when that will rebelled, it could not retain control over any of the areas entrusted to it. Thus God "began to rule the organism in a more external way, not by the laws of spirit, but by those of nature" [82]. Thus physical degradation, senility, and death enter human history.

Further, instead of the desires of the organism being ruled by the reasonable will, the process was reversed. The will was now subjected to a physical organism dominated by unruly passions and affections. "And the will, caught in the tidal wave of mere nature, had no resource but to force back some of the new thoughts and desires by main strength, and these uneasy rebels became the subconscious as we now know it" [82]. In summary,

the total organism which had been taken up into his spiritual life was allowed to fall back into the merely natural condition from which, at his making, it had been raised... Thus human spirit from being the master of human nature became a mere lodger in its own house, or even a prisoner; rational consciousness became what it now is—a fitful spot-light resting on a small part of the cerebral motions. [83]

The end result then was that the loss of this "original specific nature" was passed on to all future generations. Being more than a biological variation, it was the emergence of a new kind of human—"A new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence" [83].

Lewis on History Analyzed

A number of interpretive observations should be made at this point. First, while it does seem ironic that Lewis offers this analysis despite his antipathy toward source-criticism, a subtle distinction may exonerate him. Lewis is not arguing from history to myth, but the reverse. Given both the mythic form of the narrative and current scientific assessments of terrestrial history, he asks what might an underlying history look like. Thus in this historical construction, Lewis is attempting to maintain both a sympathy with

the dominant science of his day and Christianity's long-held belief in humanity-as-special-creation and its unique status within creation.

Second, it seems then that the chief value of this theory is not doctrinal or theological, but apologetic. Lewis believes that the existence of a coherent historical possibility removes warrant for disbelieving the claims of Christianity. "Our present condition, then, *is explained by* the fact that we are members of a spoiled species" [85—italics added]. He is not here asserting that humanity is suffering divine punishment—a decidedly theological claim. Rather he is offering an explanation of the atrocious and verminous conduct of the human race toward itself and its world. His summary makes this clear, "the thesis of this chapter is simply that man, as a species, spoiled himself, and that good, to us in our present state, must therefore mean primarily remedial or corrective good" [88]. His goal (as it is throughout the whole of *Problem of Pain*) is to offer a compelling argument to the reader that the Christian idea of the human fallenness (and its accompanying suffering and pain) is intellectually tenable, not just to the fideist, but to any person of rational mind.

In terms of coherence, Lewis succeeds in his limited task. If this history or something comparatively similar *did* occur, it would very easily explain both the fractious nature of humanity as witnessed everyday on the world scene, as well as our loathing of that reality. It is also conceivable that such an history might eventually be codified into literary form bearing a similarity to the Genesis story. At the level of an internally coherent possibility, it is plausible.

Yet, as an apologetic aimed at the modern mind, it would still founder at the level of presupposition. While such a story would have all these explanatory benefits, the

modern mood would reject the very assumption that it is possible. It is very much not “a not unlikely tale;” but an *impossible* one. His theory makes no attempt to avoid the miraculous. On the contrary, it embraces it at every turn. From a divinely-guided evolution, to a preter-human Fall of Satan, to a supernaturally dispensed endowment, to a divine rulership of the animal organism *via* the creature’s own will, Lewis’ “not unlikely tale” contains exactly that material the modern mood finds incredible.

At the very least such an argument would need to be preceded by the apologetic for supernaturalism offered in the broadcast talks (eventually *Mere Christianity*) and *Miracles*, neither of which had yet appeared. Thus Lewis does not seem to succeed in this place in offering a possible history that, when used as an apologetic, would be compelling to the modern skeptic. Of course, its merits might change upon appropriation of his later defense of the miraculous, but that is a question beyond the scope here.

On the other side, to the person already amenable to the possibility of miracles, the theory may meet one of two responses. First, to the person who believes the Genesis story must tightly reflect historical events (in the manner chapter 1 presented), Lewis’ explanation would fail from the opposite direction. The distinction between Lewis’ “not unlikely story” and the Genesis text is of sufficient difference as to reduce the narrative to a parable containing a kernel or moral to be extracted from the story. Lewis’ use of the Fall of Satan, the pre-human animal kingdom, and multiplicity of early-men would likely seem to such a reader as incompatible with a literal reading of the Genesis story.

Second, to the person who does not require a strong relationship between the Genesis text and history, Lewis’ theory becomes merely interesting—a curiosity of little importance—and for exactly the reasons Lewis outlined. Understanding the historical

events behind a myth is abstractly interesting, but does not answer the more pressing questions of meaning and appropriate response. To this person, the myth itself or perhaps the resulting doctrine is that with which one has to do, not the history behind it.

Thus from all directions, Lewis' possible history behind the Fall seems to be either unconvincing or insignificant, even if it should happen to be true. As Kilby rightly observes (although not about Lewis), "the great historians quite agreed that to state the *facts* of history may be to leave out its essence, since history is made up both of objective, overt actions and also the joys, agonies, and deep motives of the human soul."¹¹ Lewis of course agreed and admits in the chapter's conclusion that this interpretation of the events is "a shallow one," and that both the mythological and doctrinal aspects of the story are more significant. But in the context of *Problem of Pain* he does not feel capable of tackling either of these.

The History's Relation to the Story

The germane question here then becomes what is the relationship of the extant story of the Fall to any possible history Lewis can envision? The question will take on its fullest color later in this chapter when the mythic implications of the story are discussed. It must be clear here, however, that Lewis did not see myth and history as incompatible. Myths rather can provide deep meaning for historical events long after the details are lost. Thus the loss of the historical detail is of negligible concern because the events are given their most substantial interpretation in the myth. As Wright reminds, history is not just an

¹¹ Kilby, 154.

event, it is event plus interpretation.¹² Having this status, then, myth can present a more meaning-filled account than the historical events themselves would have done to an actual observer. Hart summed this up well saying, “Myth is a story of what *happens* as distinguished from, but not contradictory to, the history of what *has happened*. The relationship between myth and history is complementary, in that each is a human vision of events forming a pattern. The patterns of myth are more universal than those of history, their appeal on a deeper level.”¹³

The myth of the Genesis Fall, however, has an additional feature for Lewis that increases the reader’s confidence in this principle. Lewis believes this myth stands as a *divinely appropriated* interpretation of the lost history. Says Lewis, “When a series of such re-tellings turns a creation story which at first had almost no religious or metaphysical significance into a story which achieves the idea of true Creation and of a transcendent Creator (as *Genesis* does), then nothing will make me believe that some of the re-tellers, or some one of them, has not been guided by God.”¹⁴ Thus, unlike comparable myths among the nations, a compilation like early Genesis is not “merely natural,” but has been “raised by God above itself, qualified by Him and compelled by Him to serve purposes which of itself it would not have served...all taken into the service of God’s word.” This is the practical outworking of the idea of transposition discussed in the last chapter and something very akin to divine inspiration by means of appropriation.

¹² Wright, “Cosmic Kingdom of Myth,” 139.

¹³ Hart, *Through the Open Door*, 13. This comment is taken *en toto* from her dissertation on Lewis, Hart, “C. S. Lewis’s Defense of Poesie,” 17.

¹⁴ *Psalms*, 111.

The story's value or message therefore cannot be judged by its historical relationship to prior stories and their historical status. Regardless of the relationship of the Genesis text to the historical events that inspired them, something miraculous has now occurred. God has "raised" the story up, embraced it, made it worthy and capable of being divine Word. It is an analogous journey to what Lewis has already argued occurred for humanity itself. From its bestial status, formed and guided over long ages, God worked a miracle, endowing it with the glorious capacity to be *imago*.¹⁵ And in a further image, just as human life was taken up as a vehicle for divine life in the incarnation, so too were the stories of Genesis taken up as a vehicle for divine Word. "If the Scriptures proceed not by conversion of God's word into a literature but by taking up of a literature to be the vehicle of God's word, this is not anomalous."¹⁶

Thus the Genesis Fall is historical in the sense of being rooted in human history as a datable event in principle, but the historical event itself has become inscrutable to the historian. This understanding of Lewis is widely recognized within the scholarship.¹⁷

Carnell draws out the further point that in Lewis the human tendency to set history and mythology into dichotomy is itself something enabled by the Fall.¹⁸ The concern over whether myth is historically false is a product of the inability to believe that "Arch-nature" can impinge upon "Nature" by means of fantastic narrative. Although Carnell does not make the connection, his analysis stands in harmony with Lewis' "Barfieldian" commitments as seen in chapter 3.

¹⁵ *Psalms*, 110.

¹⁶ *Psalms*, 116. See also *Miracles*, 133f.

¹⁷ See Wright, 138; Kilby, 154; Kuhn, 193f.; and Kreeft, 259f.

¹⁸ Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality*, 107.

“What to Believe”: Lewis and the Doctrine of the Fall

This chapter intentionally treats Lewis’ understanding of the developed doctrine of the Fall prior to his understanding of the mythological aspects of the story. A strong case could be made that this ordering is wrong. After all, does not the myth precedes the doctrine both logically and historically just as a text precedes a commentary on the text? Thus the theological mind very sensibly grants the myth a preliminary status to that of the developed doctrine. Whatever the virtues of such a method, it will not work here for one reason—Lewis believed the primitive myth to be of greater significance than the developed doctrine. In *Problem of Pain* he relates the myth to the doctrine in the following manner:

The story in Genesis is a story (full of the deepest suggestion) about a magic apple of knowledge; but in the developed doctrine the inherent magic of the apple has quite dropped out of sight, and the story is simply one about disobedience. I have the deepest respect even for Pagan myths, still more for the myths of Holy Scripture. I therefore do not doubt that the version which emphasizes the magic apple, and brings together the trees of life and knowledge, *contains a deeper and subtler truth* than the version that makes the apple simply and solely a pledge of obedience. But I assume that the Holy Spirit would not have allowed the later to grow up in the Church and win the assent of great doctors unless it also was true and useful *as far as it went*. It is this version I am going to discuss, because, *though I suspect the primitive version to be far more profound*, I know that I, at any rate, cannot penetrate its profundities. I am to give my readers not the best absolutely but the best I have.¹⁹

Thus, while Lewis had great respect for the established doctrine surrounding the Fall, he believed that the myth understood on its own terms has a deeper significance—even if he could not penetrate it. The significance of this last clause will be dealt with in the next section. It is sufficient here to note that by discussing the “doctrine” after the “history” but before the “myth,” this chapter reflects the spirit of Lewis’ own priority.

¹⁹ *Pain*, 71f. Italics added for emphasis.

The theologian may instinctively find the mythological material anticlimactic placed after the doctrinal, but such a structure will better represent Lewis own literary sensibilities.

That said, and while faithfulness to Lewis' perspective possesses methodological virtue, it is not beyond critique. As cited previously, in "On Criticism," Lewis asserts that when judging the meaning of a piece of literature,

the ideally false or wrong 'meaning' would be the product in the mind of the stupidest and least sensitive and most prejudiced reader after a single careless reading. The ideally true or right 'meaning' would be that shared (in some measure) by the largest number of the best readers after repeated and careful readings over several generations, different periods, nationalities, moods, degrees of alertness, private pre-occupations, states of health, spirits, and the like canceling one another out when (this is an important reservation) they cannot be fused so as to enrich one another.²⁰

This is an interesting proposal, which Lewis does not seem ready to apply to the doctrine-myth question. Would not Lewis have to concede that a "developed doctrine" would approach such an "ideally true or right 'meaning?'" Surely the developed doctrine of the Fall story at the hands of generations of the church's most dedicated and educated readers would approximate such a meaning if one was to be had. Thus Lewis' preference for the impenetrable mythology over the interpretive voice of the church may be at odds with his own theory of literature. The point need not be pressed further. That the theologian finds theological interpretations more vital than literary ones (and literary scholars the contrary) is to be expected. For the theologian, however, who seeks a profitable read of Lewis, a "surrender" of one's preferred perspective for the duration of

²⁰ "On Criticism," 139f. To be fair to Lewis, Walter Hooper argues that this essay, published posthumously, was written late in Lewis life [xxi], and thus stands at the greatest possible distance from his statement in *Pain*. Hooper does not seem even to be aware of it in 1965, based on its absence from Walter Hooper, "A Bibliography of the Writings of C. S. Lewis," in *Light on Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), 117-160.

the argument is not an onerous expectation. Thus this chapter proceeds by subordinating for the moment the doctrine to the myth.

The Doctrine and Its Proper Use

Lewis' most direct discussion of the doctrine of human fallenness comes in the apologetic arguments of *Problem of Pain*. He offers the Biblical Fall as the primary source of human suffering. This doctrine states in fine that "...man is now a horror to God and to himself and a creature ill-adapted to the universe not because God made him so but because he has made himself so by the abuse of his free will." [69] He then goes on to assert that this is the only appropriate use of the doctrine (illegitimate uses to be seen in the next section). Its function is to guard against two "sub-Christian" theories on the origins of evil—Monism and Dualism.

The Monist answer to suffering asserts a single source for both good and evil—namely, God. The Dualist asserts two independent but roughly equal powers—one for good and one for evil. Why Lewis believes these two alternatives are inherently problematic is a question for his larger apologetic.²¹ It takes little imagination, however, to see why they conflict with the dominant vision of God in Christian thought. The first sullies divine goodness by placing the origin of evil within God's own being; the second sullies divine power by inserting a true competitor to God (i.e. an evil or anti-God) into the most fundamental level of ontology. At point here is that against both of these (and by means of this doctrine) Christianity asserts the absolute goodness of God. Thus Lewis asserts that the primary goal of the doctrine is as an apology for the goodness of God, not the defunct nature of humanity *per se*.

²¹ Lewis does not here discuss the intellectual incoherencies he sees in each, but see *Mere*, 43-51.

What is odd about this claim is that it stands in some tension with the very terms of the doctrine as Lewis has already outlined them. The goal of his articulated doctrine seems at least as well suited for bracketing away Pelagian ideas of moral fortitude or perhaps those of innate human goodness as they were later articulated in Liberal Protestantism. It is perhaps a small myopia, but one Lewis himself cannot maintain. The remnant of his doctrinal discussion focuses entirely on the question of human nature, not the divine one.

Further, it seems clear in the following discussion that Lewis thought the developed doctrine was rather unrelated to actual narrative details, now being only a story of “simple disobedience.” From this reductive view, the following doctrinal assertions are made: (1) “Man, as God made him, was completely good and completely happy,” but (2) “he disobeyed God and became what we now see.” [72]

He dismisses scientific challenges to the paradisal history that this presupposes by noting again the difference between a “brute” in the sense of being technologically underdeveloped and being “brutal” in the cultural and moral sense. Science can make only very modest claims about the technological state of the first humans and is absolutely unable to judge their spiritual and moral nature. [73f.]

He likewise brushes aside the more philosophical argument that the idea of sin presupposes the idea of a “law” to sin against, and that the “herd-instinct” necessary for “law” would take centuries to develop. On the contrary, says Lewis, this presupposes the relationship between virtue and the “herd-instinct” and (more to the point) that the first sin was *social* in nature. The doctrine, however, has always asserted that the first sin was “...against God, an act of disobedience, not a sin against the neighbor.” [75] Further, if

Augustine was right, that sin is a result of pride, the creature “requires no complex social conditions, no extended experiences, no great intellectual development”—only an awareness “of God as God and of itself as itself.” [75] Such a sin is committed by children, peasants, and social recluses alike. All people everywhere all the time are engaged in the work of forgetting that all they have and are is only so because of God. “Thus all day long, and all the days of our life, we are sliding, slipping, falling away—as if God were, to our present consciousness, a smooth inclined plane on which there is no resting, and indeed, we are now of such a nature that we must slip off, and the sin, because it is unavoidable, may be venial. But God cannot have made us so” [76].

Original Sin and How It Reveals a Central Principle in Lewis’ Method

To say the reader’s nature is “unavoidably” corrupt raises the question of “original sin,” and Lewis admits the label, if not the usual contents...

Our present condition, then, is explained by the fact that we are members of a spoiled species. I do not mean that our sufferings are a punishment for being what we cannot now help being nor that we are morally responsible for the rebellion of a remote ancestor. If, nonetheless, I call our present condition one of original Sin, and not merely one of original misfortune, that is because our actual religious experience does not allow us to regard it in any other way. [85]

Even if one cannot have helped arriving in the world so “spoiled,” our condition is lamentable. That a child was made a spoiled brat at the hands of another does not make his bullying and sneaking acceptable or lovable. He himself, if ever he mends, will rightly feel shame over what he used to be.

Thus it seems Lewis does not argue for any sort of imputation of forensic guilt. He limits the damage of the Fall to the imputation of a defunct nature—bad raw material, so to speak, for which one is not culpable. But the situation is, of course, still unacceptable to God and alienation persists. This is precisely how he treats the subject in

Mere Christianity.²² People are born into the world with all sorts of “bad psychological material.” This is not a sin, but a disease that must be treated by, say, psychoanalysis or other means. What one does with what one has been given is the real issue. God alone, who knows the innate capacity in each, can judge the merit of any good or evil act that flows from that nature.

He confesses his inability to parse I Corinthians 14:22, “In Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive,” and casually rejects both the Patristic doctrines of seminal (and by implication the later federal) presence of humanity in Adam as well as Anselm’s “legal fiction.” “These theories may have done good in their day but they do no good for me, and I am not going to invent others” [86]. On the other hand, he does not think this “in” can be parsed in terms of “metaphor, or causality,” but must be understood “in some much deeper fashion.” [87].

Herein a consistent picture of Lewis’ priorities begins to form. The primary weakness of seminal, federal, or other such doctrinal models lies, to Lewis, exactly where the last chapter predicted it would. Such models attempt to picture the unpicturable. They produce analytical constructions which, though *helpful*, are certainly not the thing in itself—the *fact*. By this same logic he resists identifying as adequate any particular Atonement Theory (that is, any *doctrine* of the Atonement).²³ The *fact* is what one needs to embrace. If a particular image is helpful, use it; if not, “drop it.” He explicitly attributes the problem of doctrinal constructions to the futile attempt to make sense of “the highest spiritual realities...in terms of our abstract thought” [86f.].

²² *Mere*, 83-87 (particularly 85f.), 176ff.

²³ *Mere*, 56-61.

The source of Lewis' antipathy to doctrinal constructs in general (and that of the Fall in particular), in the light of the previous chapter, now becomes clear. Doctrine, by its very nature, consists of a scientific rather than a poetic form of discourse. It is rational and therefore abstract. These terms should not be read pejoratively, only descriptively of the kind of things theology and doctrine are. As such, for Lewis, they will be useful in all the ways scientific language is always useful, but they do not probe the essential quiddity of the matter from the inside. Doctrine can only "look at" our Fallenness, not "look along" it. From it, one may learn the definition of "fallenness," but one does not have the experience of what it means to be a fallen person. A poetic mode of discourse will be needed if one wishes to understand the deepest implications of the Fall story, and, of course, to Lewis that means myth. Before turning to that material, however, other doctrinal aspects must be probed.

Misuses and Misunderstandings on the Doctrine of the Fall

Lewis identifies a number of theological and philosophical uses of the Fall story he considers illegitimate. The first two are found in *Problem of Pain* [70f.]. "Was it better for God to create than not to create?" Lewis wonders whether the question has any real meaning. Earlier in the book [35f.] he identified the nonsensical nature of the question. There he says, "I am aware of no human scales in which such a portentous question can be weighed. Some comparison between one state of being and another can be made, but the attempt to compare being and not being ends in mere words, 'It would be better for me not to exist'—in what sense 'for me'? How should I, if I did not exist, profit by not existing?" [36]. But if forced to answer, given the goodness of God, the answer, if there is one, must be "Yes" [70].

The doctrine is also misused to show that it is just to retributively punish an individual for “the faults of their remote ancestors.” Both in *Problem of Pain* [93f.] and in other contexts,²⁴ the question is not one of the legitimacy of “retributive justice” itself. Given the choice between “just dessert” and therapeutic rehabilitation, he vigorously supported the former. The question rather is whether or not it is just to retributively punish persons for the crimes of their forebearers—stated theologically, that all humans are in a state of forensic *guilt* for the sin of Adam and Eve and, therefore, justly merit punishment for it. While Lewis acknowledges that the church fathers sometimes spoke of being punished “for” Adam’s sin, they more often spoke of us sinning “in” Adam. Recognizing the difficulty in understanding what they intended, he says, “I do not think we can dismiss their way of talking as mere ‘idiom.’ Wisely, or foolishly, they believed that we were *really*—and not simply by legal fiction—involved in Adam’s action” [70]. Such a seminal idea may be unacceptable to modern sensibilities, but whether it is a “confusion” or a “real insight into spiritual realities beyond our normal grasp” is a separate question. Even if the latter, it necessary to assert it in order to make *his* particular point in *Problem of Pain*.

Lewis mentions a third misunderstanding about the doctrine in *Mere Christianity*. He says there, “Some people think the fall of man had something to do with sex, but that is a mistake.”²⁵ While Lewis does not identify who these “some people” might be, it probably refers to either or both of the following. First, this motif is not infrequently

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 287-300. For a narrative treatment of this idea, see the treatment of Ivy Magg’s husband in *Hideous Strength*, 42f., 220f., 317, 350f.

²⁵ *Mere*, 53.

employed by ancient Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria.²⁶ Another more proximate source, and one that better fits the immediate context of *Mere Christianity*, is the Freudian Viennese schools of psychotherapy, dominant in the late 1930's, which saw the biblical material's primary value as an expression of psychological evolution. It is clear from *Mere Christianity*, Lewis had read something of psychotherapy, and his feelings toward it were not wholly negative.²⁷ Nevertheless, as to why he believes this use of the Fall story a mistake, he says, "The story in the Book of Genesis rather suggests that some corruption in our sexual nature followed the fall and was its result, not its cause."²⁸ That the human nature would lose the faculty of constancy or chastity in its rebellion against its Maker—that is, as a consequence, rather than a cause—is consistent with his Socratic teaching-story as outlined in the last section.

The Effects and Consequences of the Fall as Seen in the Doctrine

With a typically provocative flourish, Lewis sums up the results of humanity's rebellion, "A new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence."²⁹ Humanity's "original specific nature" was altered by the rebellion of Genesis 3. But in what ways was this nature altered? What now constitutes "fallen human nature?" Before

²⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis: Books One to Three*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. John Ferguson, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 85 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 315. This "sex-motif" is effectively traced throughout Jewish and ecclesiastical history in Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, see in particular 57f.

²⁷ *Mere*, 83ff. See also "Psycho-Analysis and Literary Criticism," 120-138.

²⁸ *Mere*, 53. This question is not exactly the same as whether permissible sexual activity occurred prior to the Fall. Augustine argued that it would have been permissible, but did not actually occur [*De Civitas*, XIV, 26]; In *Paradise Lost* Milton suggested that it had. Lewis is torn on the question, but is sure that Milton aesthetically failed to capture its glory, nor could have he succeeded. *Preface*, 122-124.

²⁹ *Pain*, 83.

outlining Lewis' understanding about the Fall's affects, one particularly egregious misunderstanding needs first to be cleared away.

Total Depravity and Lewis' Total Misunderstanding of It

Lewis denies the doctrine of total depravity.³⁰ To be clear, his resistance is not to the idea of "depravity," (which he affirms) but to "totality," as he understands the concept. The reason for his disbelief is as follows: "...if our depravity were total we should not know ourselves to be depraved, and...because experience shows us much goodness in human nature." Further such a belief would mean that all concepts of human goodness were absolutely incompatible with goodness as God knows it.

In such a claim Lewis demonstrates his status as a theological non-professional,³¹ not because he could not understand the doctrine, but simply that he has not read thoroughly enough to correctly use it. The Dutch Reformed Synod of Dort in its confrontations with the disciples of Jacob Arminius produced what may arguably stand as the most forceful presentations of humanity's depraved condition. In the third and fourth heads of doctrine, they argued,

Article 3. Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation.

Article 4. There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, or natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to

³⁰ *Pain*, 37ff, 66f.; "Christianity and Literature," in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 7.

³¹ "Christianity and Literature," 6.

bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and hinders in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.

The combined force of these two articles is hardly what Lewis has articulated. It asserts humanity's absolute inability to please or return to God of its own accord, but that even in its miserable state, humanity retains a sufficient understanding of goodness to render it culpable. It does not argue that no goodness is to be found in fallen humanity, much less that humanity is utterly unable to recognize good from evil. Thus one of the traditions most noted for "total depravity" does not, in its defining documents, frame the topic as Lewis presumes.

That Lewis could produce some particular writer who articulates the doctrine in the drastic terms he describes is not to be doubted. Many have said many things. But as he never actually does, his critique feels like a castigation of a broad, though only vaguely understood, tradition. And that tradition's own documents seem to exonerate it in some degree from his critique. Thus whatever the doctrine of total depravity may be (and it is diversely understood even within the Reformed tradition), the point is that it does not appear to be what Lewis thinks it is.

What Lewis seems to have done, as Doug Falls has correctly summarized, is mistaken "the doctrine of *total* depravity for *utter* depravity."³² Although generally an affirming critic, Cunningham agrees that Lewis has missed the point here, citing it as "an example of Lewis' occasional insufficient grasp of the finer points of theology."³³

³² Doug Falls, "C. S. Lewis on Total Depravity: A Case of Mistaken Identity," *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 34, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 1.

³³ Cunningham, 114.

Willis' claim that Lewis affirmed "the essential goodness of people...[while] well aware of their potential or excessive evil" seems to be an understatement of Lewis' position in the other direction.³⁴ He made clear throughout *Mere Christianity* and *Problem of Pain* that he believed the human machine quite broken and corrupted—"wicked" even—and that only an infusion of divine grace and strength will enable the human to mirror its creator.³⁵ What this brokenness consists of can now be treated.

Lewis' Description of Post-Fall Human Nature

This subject was introduced in the last section while discussing Lewis' Socratic teaching-history. It remains here to fill out the picture. To review, the original holy human creature was fully the master of itself, down to the biological processes. God ruled the creature's body through the creature's own will. In the creature's rebellion, it forfeited this control, which belonged to it only through gracious gift of and free submission to its Creator. How should the details of this forfeiture be framed?

First, and this can be seen above in Lewis' view of total depravity, humanity's knowledge of what is right has been affected, but not been utterly destroyed. He believed the scriptures speak more about humanity's inability to obey the Law rather than a destruction of our knowledge of it.³⁶ The knowledge may be imperfect, but it is not blindness. To Lewis this means that the maxims gained by practical reason—that is,

³⁴ Willis, 57. See also White, 126.

³⁵ *Mere*, 33ff; *Pain*, 55ff.

³⁶ "Poison of Subjectivism," 79. For more on human morality and the Fall in Lewis, see Thorson, "Knowledge' in C. S. Lewis's Post-Conversion Thought," 91-116.

morality in its broad strokes—maintain “absolute validity.”³⁷ Human culpability is established on humanity’s knowledge of the law and its unwillingness to obey it.

Second, this unwillingness manifests itself in a systemic recalcitrance to all acts of submission, to any act that seems to jeopardize the autonomy of the self. He expresses this in the strongest terms in *Mere Christianity*, where he speaks of the self as that which refuses to die, even in the face of promised life, like the “obstinate toy soldier,” who refuses to be brought to life because he can only conceive of it as a destruction of his tin frame.³⁸ He continues, “The natural life in each of us is something self-centered, something that wants to be left to itself: to keep well away from anything better or stronger or higher than it, anything that might make it feel small.” Here Lewis is reflecting the Augustinian tradition of sin as pride, or as he puts it in *Preface to Paradise Lost*, “incessant autobiography.”³⁹

Third, this propensity works its way out into all human endeavors—into the human family and human culture. Without entering the controversy over Lewis’ hierarchical view of marriage, he identified both a husband’s desire to abuse his headship and a wife’s unwillingness to submit to it as manifestations of the same pride the Fall produced.⁴⁰ But further, the whole of the human cultural endeavor is hamstrung by humanity’s original attempt to “set up on their own” and be like God. He continues, “And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money,

³⁷ *Abolition*, 61.

³⁸ *Mere*, 154ff. See also 53f.

³⁹ *Preface*, 102. See also *Pain*, 79f.

⁴⁰ *Mere*, 95ff; *Four Loves*, 148f.; and for a narrative representation of this commitment, see his treatment of Jane Studdock in *Hideous Strength*, particularly 144-149.

poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”⁴¹

Fourth, humanity’s abdication of his original nature has furthered the destruction of the created order.⁴² “Nature,” which is “partially interlocked” with the destiny of humanity, has likewise fallen into disorder and sorrow. Says Lewis of the Fall (particularly the angelic one), “The doctrine...helps protect us from shallowly optimistic or pessimistic views of Nature. To call her either ‘good’ or ‘evil’ is boys’ philosophy. We find ourselves in a world of transporting pleasures, ravishing beauties, and tantalising possibilities, but all constantly being destroyed, all coming to nothing. Nature has all the air of a good thing spoiled.”⁴³

Finally, humanity has become a creature fit only for death and hell. That Lewis believed humans could warrant the retributive punishment of hell can hardly be doubted,⁴⁴ but is not the precise observation here being made. Although Lewis speaks of hell in terms of “just desert” or destination, just as often he speaks of it as an inevitable consequence of the humanity’s unwillingness to submit itself to God. It is not so much a place God sends one as it is a state of mind and being to which one consigns oneself through the demand for autonomy. In agreement with the Milton-esque dictum “...the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*,”⁴⁵ Lewis repeatedly represents hell as the (il)logical end of the road of autonomy and self-deception. From dwarfs trapped in a

⁴¹ *Mere*, 53.

⁴² *Miracles*, 121f.

⁴³ *Miracles*, 121.

⁴⁴ *Pain*, 120ff. See also “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment,” 287-300.

⁴⁵ *Pain*, 127. See also *Divorce*, 71f.

smelly stable of their own mental-making,⁴⁶ to Uncle Andrew's "making himself stupider than he really is,"⁴⁷ to the self-deception of nearly every character in *The Great Divorce*, Lewis doggedly worries the idea that broken human nature loves itself and would love itself right into nonbeing rather than submit to God. Perhaps Lewis' most powerful statement of this principle is found in *Mere Christianity*:

Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.⁴⁸

Thus the picture Lewis draws of fallen human nature is that of a self-deceived creature on its way to misery, despair, and even nonbeing, unable to see its situation for what it really is, terrified of anything that would question its absolute autonomy, and willing to drag all loves, hopes, and treasures into the abyss with it in the desperate attempt to retain them on its own terms.

Reilly's Thesis

Robert Reilly has offered an interesting (if not finally compelling) theory on Lewis' thoughts on the post-fallen human nature synthesized both from Lewis'

⁴⁶ *Last Battle*, 128-140.

⁴⁷ *Magician's Nephew*, 112-114.

⁴⁸ *Mere*, 86f. See also *Screwtape*, 87f., for the diabolical perspective. Says Screwtape, "Nothing matters at all except the tendency of a given state of mind in given circumstances, to move a particular patient at a particular moment nearer to the Enemy or nearer to us."

apologetic works and his fiction. It deserves some consideration here, if for no other reason, its ingenuity.⁴⁹

Reilly works out a possible historical implication of Lewis' belief that pagan mythologies become fact in Christ. He sees *Till We Have Faces* as a narrative demonstration of the point. Of the book he rightly asserts that "all the characters in the book are subject to a revision of the pattern; they are malleable, they have not hardened yet; they are, as the title suggests, without individuality, without faces, the molten lead not yet poured into the mould" [126]. All the pieces of the ancient human perspective are present. They have rationality (the Fox and consequently Orual), the capacity for the numinous (Glome and priests), as well as the felt need of religion. "The only thing lacking is what Psyche has always felt: the longing, the desire for what she can only call death, the wanting to be both with God and in another world" [127.] Reilly argues that humanity itself is thus pictured in motion from mythical humanity (without faces) to factual humanity. He thus concludes that for Lewis "man is finally created when human consciousness is capable of not only human love, rationality, apprehension of the numinous, and need for religious solace, but when it is capable of an intense otherworldly religious desire which can only be comforted in monotheism" [127].

Juxtaposing the story with actual human history, Reilly suggests that the story is historically set between Aristotle and Christ, that is, in roughly the last few centuries BC. He continues, "If this is the case, and if the myth suggests (as I think it does) that man is not really man until a certain religious consciousness has been reached, then man arrived at his final stage of evolution (and really became man) only at about the time of Christ"

⁴⁹ Reilly, 126-129. Paginal references to Reilly in this section will be noted in textual brackets.

[127]. Or at least, he qualifies, this is so with “western man.” Thus the ancients were in a sort of limbo, “little bats’ voices twittering and squeaking in the shadows of the underworld,” awaiting the restoration of human nature. The incarnation then occurred as soon as it could, as the moment of humanity’s recreation [128]. And why *re*-creation? From Lewis’ teaching-myth in *Problem of Pain*, Reilly notes that, having once been in complete possession of its being, fallen humanity has lost its “original specific nature.” From these two sources, Reilly constructs his final thesis, best read in his own words.

If I read the myth of the later book [*Problem of Pain*] rightly, and if I may presume to stretch Lewis’ tentative theories of mythology, then what may have happened at the Fall was that man lost *all* consciousness, so became no longer man, and then was (so to say) recreated over aeons as consciousness returned slowly by stages of evolution. This postulates a hiatus between the Fall and the Incarnation if we regard both events as historical occurrences, as Lewis presumably does: there must have been an indeterminate time when man, morally speaking, did not exist, the time coming to an end at the Incarnation. [128]

Then the further conclusion, “...as soon as man is re-created he is in the state of original sin and needs redemption. Orual stumbles onto her own responsibility, the fact that she has sinned—and immediately arrives at the awareness of a single, redemptive God.”

[129] Thus Reilly uses the teaching myth from *Problem of Pain* and the historical context and plot from *Till We Have Faces* to offer a kind of historicist construction of a humanity, subsequently destroyed, then remade by a gradual process, climaxing in Christ’s redemptive work.

Reilly’s Thesis Considered

Reilly’s thesis has not been considered by any Lewis scholar with the exception of White, who merely brushes it aside with a “No, this is not what Lewis meant by the

Fall.”⁵⁰ While this chapter will ultimately agree with him, White’s dismissal is premature. In Reilly’s favor, what he describes could also be gleaned from *Perelandra*, which likewise asserts as a backdrop the “coming of age” of humanity in the Incarnation—it is after all the “corner” of all worlds.⁵¹ Further it might possess some of the flavor of the Apostle Paul’s “last Adam” theology from *Romans*. Nevertheless, it does not ultimately work for several reasons.

First, Reilly’s assertion that at the Fall humanity lost “all consciousness” is not the same as the loss of an “original specific nature.” Lewis does not assert that humanity ceased to be a conscious creature at the Fall. In fact, he seems to argue the opposite—that our conscious moral life continued, but that what was lost was the power to obey it.⁵² Whatever the loss of the “original specific nature” means for Lewis, it precisely cannot mean the loss of humanity’s consciousness, as such a loss would also leave humanity unaware of its loss by definition. Lewis describes such an un-conscious life in his description of animal pain, and it is irreconcilable with the documented humanity of the ancient world.⁵³

Second, it is beyond anything Lewis even suggests to say that humanity is in a state of “re-creation” between the Fall and Christ. Lewis speaks a great deal of humanity being restored, repaired, and set right in *Mere Christianity*, but the entirety of the discussion assumes a post-incarnation setting, which if it were to be pressed in the way

⁵⁰ White, 119.

⁵¹ *Perelandra*, 62.

⁵² “The Poison of Subjectivism,” 79.

⁵³ *Pain*, 129ff. See also his treatment of the bear Mr. Bultitude in *Hideous Strength*, 306-308, 350f.

Reilly desires would seem to imply that “re-creation” of humanity does not begin *until* the incarnation.

Finally, while Reilly’s suggestion is provocative in its own way, it is itself almost a mythological read of Lewis, assuming historical analysis from a work Lewis himself entitled “A Myth Retold.” It is an interesting step, loosely based on Lewis, but without question *beyond* his actual intention.

Lewis on the Causality of the Fall

The question of what would cause wholly good creatures to cease to be good is a question that has consumed great thinkers long before Lewis. His answer is therefore neither novel nor innovative, but rather wanders well-worn paths in traditional Christian thought. If it is more compelling here than in other sources, it is so only for his style, which is as lucid and provocative as always.

Divine Causality

What is God’s relationship to the Fall? Does God “cause” it in any efficient sense? Is it part of the Divine Will that humanity should sin? Lewis is not to be bated into a simple answer, but ramifies the question by noting that it is possible for something to be in accordance with one’s will in one sense but not another. Like a mother who wants her children to keep their room clean, but will not intervene when the children fail to do so. “...it is her will which has left the children free to be untidy. The same thing arises in any regiment, or trade union, or school. You make a thing voluntary and then half the people do not do it. That is not what you willed but your will has made it possible.”⁵⁴ That

⁵⁴ *Mere*, 52f.

humans would willingly rebel is a thing which God certainly knew would happen, yet still thought it “worth the risk.” To disagree with God on the point ends in a conundrum—to believe that the very source of one’s reasoning power is guilty of faulty reasoning. It seems that Lewis is equivocating in a rather muddled way several different senses of “will” from expressed preference to absolute decree. Additionally, he does not explain how something God foreknows can still constitute a “risk.” The point he is trying to make, however, seems to be that the evil of the Fall, although divinely foreknown and permitted, is not efficiently caused by the divine will nor is it morally culpable for it.

Human Freedom

Here in the realm of moral freedom Lewis plants the flag of culpability. That God gave humans the freedom to choose good or evil is as close as he comes to answering the question of causality. He finds it incredible to assert that God could create a world with free creatures who are yet unable to sin. “Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible.”⁵⁵

Engaging again the question of why God would so endow humanity with this ability, he replies that only such freedom makes “possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures who worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Mere*, 52. In this argument he is perhaps prescient of Alvin Plantinga’s similarly constructed “Free Will Defense” a generation later in *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), 1977.

⁵⁶ *Mere*, 52. See also *Miracles*, 121f.

Temptation

A final and obvious element in the causality of the Fall is the role of temptation. As mentioned earlier, at times Lewis suggests the temptation was grounded in the human existential condition. That humans are volitional creatures under the requirement of submission to their maker is sufficient to create the logical possibility of temptation. At other times Lewis approximates the traditional idea of the external tempter—the “someone or something [who] whispered that they could become as gods.”⁵⁷ Traditionally such external temptation is attributed to the devil. Lewis did not think the existence of fallen angels incredible on the basis of any evidence, but rather believed that the state of the world could be more coherently explained by acknowledging them.⁵⁸

Lewis on the Doctrine Analyzed

On the Basic Nature of the Doctrine

Lewis’ opening volley regarding the doctrine of the Fall is pejorative, that it has ceased to be a story about a “magic apple” and has become one “solely about obedience.”⁵⁹ Yet chapter 1 showed how a number of church fathers (some of them particularly central in the doctrinal development) take very seriously the narrative issues—right down to the meaning of the two special trees (and not merely as allegory). To say the doctrine is “solely about obedience” may confuse the conclusion for the analysis. The story is “about obedience” insofar as it is the subject of the story. If the myth is about “obedience” (a reasonable possibility), then would not the doctrine, seeking

⁵⁷ *Pain*, 80.

⁵⁸ *Mere*, 51. See also *Pain*, 133-136.

⁵⁹ *Pain*, 71f.

to interpret the meaning of the myth, also have to be about obedience? Lewis himself says the meaning of the myth is too dense for him to penetrate in the context of *Problem of Pain*. Why then does he presume others have not been able to and determined that the basic issue suggested in the myth is one of “obedience?”

He ironically fails to understand the narrative possibilities inherent in doctrinal development. Is doctrine only abstract? Now living in a period where the term “narrative theology” has become nearly oxymoronic, it seems clear that it need not be. Yet such a dialogue did not really exist in Lewis’ day for him to interact with.

On the Causality of the Fall

Lewis’ comments on why the Fall occurred do not seem to really answer the question. To imply that the Fall occurred *because of* free will or temptation threatens to confuse material causality with efficient causality. The argument seems to say little more than that “Adam chose evil because he was a creature endowed with choice,” which is only true insofar as the endowment of choice was a precondition of him making any choice at all. Might not Adam just as (perhaps more) easily obeyed? And would not that obedience in the same sense be “caused” by his “free will?” A will is necessary (materially) for choice to occur, but its presence does not explain (efficiently) the particular choice for evil—especially in the case where, as Lewis asserts, the default position of the human will was originally one of inclination toward God.⁶⁰

Whence then comes the desire to rebel? Neither does “temptation” answer the question, except again in terms of material causality. The juiciest steak is of little

⁶⁰ It is interesting how this distinction between moral freedom as material rather than efficient cause remains undistinguished in Lewis scholarship. For example, see White, 122.

temptation to a committed vegan, unless, of course, some deficiency in the veganism already exists. Does not Aristotle argue that the truly virtuous person would experience no temptation because of his overwhelming love of the good?

In the end this is not a problem unique to Lewis. The question of why a wholly good creature would cease to be good has stymied the greatest theological minds in history. On the question of the efficient causality of the evil will, Augustine obliquely commented, “Let no one, then, seek to know from me what I know that I do not know; unless, perhaps, he wishes to learn how not to know that which we should know cannot be known.”⁶¹ If in the end it is an insoluble problem, Lewis cannot justly be faulted for not giving a compelling answer.

On the Unsurpassed Value of Human Freedom

His statements about the value of moral freedom, however, does stand in need of critique. His comment that a world of “automata” would “hardly be worth creating” is simply an overstatement beyond his ken. In what balances would he weigh the value of these two possible worlds against each other? On Lewis’ own logic, the empty millennia before humanity appeared and where only non-volitional creatures existed would be a world “hardly worth” existing. But this is ridiculous. The Psalmist [19:1] makes clear that even the heavens—as “auto-matic” a creation as one could imagine—declare the divine glory. A child’s love for its parent is hardly “freely chosen,” flowing rather from its nature, yet no parent would on that account consider the child or its love “hardly worth

⁶¹ Augustine, *City of God*, 507f. See also Anselm, “On the Fall of the Devil,” in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian and G.R. Evans Davies, Oxford World’s Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193-232.

having.” It is not obvious that any love that consumes a human was ever freely chosen—whether of ice cream, stamp-collecting, or the tragic *femme fatale*.

It is reasonable to assert that volitional creatures display a *different* glory—that is, a glory proper to their nature, but to say that non-volitional creatures are hardly worth creating is sloppy and imprecise. Worse, it assumes that God’s greatest possible glory and joy is derived only from creatures who are metaphysically humaniform—a form of species egoism that fails to compel as soon as it is conceived.

Short of a full blown excursus on whether or not God must create the best possible world (and assuming such a thing is conceivable at all), it is simply beyond Lewis’ ability to assert with apologetic precision what sorts of creations are more or less preferable to a Creator who has freely filled the world with myriads of both volitional and non-volitional creatures. That a freely-willing creature with its accompanying risk of privation is preferable to a non-free one who does not possess such risks might not be obvious to those who endure atrocities at the hand of their “free” human neighbors. Many would surely consider the non-volitional life of the beasts more glorious and preferable to the unjust torments they consciously suffer.

Conclusion

Despite provocative and suggestive reflection on the doctrinal aspects of the story, Lewis is clearly hampered by misunderstandings of the actual theological discussions. At the very least, Lewis’ doctrinal consideration takes place primarily in apologetic works or works written to lay people. As such the genre itself tends to work against clear and precise exposition. Whatever Lewis’ greatest contribution will be on the subject, it will

not likely be found in his doctrinal analysis. But then again, he himself recognizes and confesses this. So then onto the area to which he was uniquely qualified to contribute.

“What of Experience”: Lewis and the Myth of the Fall

As outlined earlier, Lewis believes the meaning of the Fall narrative is most powerfully apprehended in its mythical form. That the stories of early Genesis are mythical in form to Lewis can hardly be questioned. He says they possess the form of a “folk-tale,”⁶² contain “fabulous elements,”⁶³ are “legendary,”⁶⁴ and are the sorts of myths “found among most nations.”⁶⁵ The final section of this chapter is dedicated to teasing out the implications of this belief. In one sense, this task must not be attempted. As laid out in chapter 3, discussing a myth by means of the abstracting intellect will spoil the myth for imaginative purposes, robbing it of its most valuable currency. In *Problem of Pain* he confirms this difficulty by saying this narrative of “a magic apple of knowledge” is “full of the deepest *suggestion*.”⁶⁶ Thus the method is clarified. To get at the deepest implications of the myth, one must not expound, parse, or ramify—one can only “suggest.”

Lewis provides an example of this necessity in *Preface to Paradise Lost*. Milton does not give a straight-forward description of the paradisaal garden. He rather talks around it, giving inference and suggestion. This is necessary, says Lewis, because,

⁶² “Dogma,” 42.

⁶³ “Answers,” 57f.

⁶⁴ “Is Theology Poetry?,” 129.

⁶⁵ *Psalms*, 110f. See Chapter 2 for discussion on Lewis’ genre categorization of the Fall narrative.

⁶⁶ *Pain*, 71. Italics added for emphasis.

his own private images of the happy garden, like yours and mine, is full of irrelevant particularities—notably, of memories from the first garden he ever played in as a child. The more thoroughly he describes those particularities the further we are getting away from the Paradisal idea as it exists in our minds, or even his own. For it is something coming through the particularities, some light which transfigures them, that really counts, and if you concentrate on them you will find them turning dead and cold under your hands. The more elaborately, in *that* way, we build the temple, the more certainly we shall find, on completing it, that the god has flown. Yet Milton must *seem* to describe—you cannot just say nothing about Paradise in *Paradise Lost*. While seeming to describe his own imagination he must actually arouse ours, and arouse it not to make definite pictures, but to find again in our own depth the Paradisal light of which all explicit images are only the momentary reflection. We are his organ: when he appears to be describing Paradise he is in fact drawing out the Paradisal Stop in us.⁶⁷

This indirection is nonnegotiable if one wishes to allow the imagination to feed on the myth. This is the manner in which myth sneaks past the “watchful dragon” of the intellect. That said, as with Milton, a dissertation cannot assume to use Lewis’ ideas about the Fall and then say nothing in particular about them. Some dragons must be braved, regardless of their watchfulness.

The Genesis Fall and the Incarnation: Myth Becomes Fact Again

As seen already, Lewis was a strong defender of the historicity of the incarnation and resurrection as recorded in the gospels. Insofar as Christianity has always held that the Genesis Fall stands in some irreducible relationship to the Incarnational work of Christ, how can one hold to the historicity of the one and the mythical (and seemingly non-historical) nature of the other? Can history flow coherently out of non-history?

Lewis emphatically says, “yes,” and further, it is exactly what one should expect. That Myth should become Fact, although shocking and wonderful, is in no way incoherent. Chapter 3 outlined Lewis’ beliefs regarding ancient dying-god myths and the

⁶⁷ *Preface*, 48f.

incarnation—their function as a *preparatio evangelica* and as foreshadow. The mythical content preceded that same content’s historical actualization. It was an apples to apples comparison—how does the mythical dying god of the pagans become the historical dying God of Christianity?

The question here is a bit more complicated. Lewis nowhere argues that the Genesis Fall story *becomes* historical in the same sense as the dying-god myth does. Myths of human failure in the ancient nations do not become fact in Christianity by being historically actualized in the Genesis Fall event (at least Lewis does not say this). The question here is how the mythical Fall story of Christianity is related to the historical dying-God event in the same Christianity.

Answering this question is complicated by the fact that Lewis does not seem to distinguish the two questions (1. mythical dying god to historical dying God, and 2. mythical Fall to historical incarnation). He often deals with them in the same space in a manner that suggests he did not differentiate them. When asked specifically about the value of the “fabulous elements” of the Old Testament, he answers the question but also lapses into the dying-god discussion in the middle of his answer by way of example.⁶⁸ But if Lewis can so easily conflate the two questions in discussion, what is the link? How can the second question be answered by discussing the first?

Even removing his insertion of the pagan dying-god aspect of his answer so to isolate only his response to the Fall, one still finds Lewis’ suggestion to be that the relationship between the fabulous Old Testament narratives and the historical New

⁶⁸ “Answers,” 57f.

Testament is still one of “something gradually coming into focus.”⁶⁹ But what is the “something” to which he refers? Lewis does not clarify here, but a remarkable answer arises out of a key passage in *Miracles*. After asserting that a non-miraculous Christianity is simply a relapse into “mere ‘religion,’” he adds a tantalizing footnote that says in part, “...just as, on the factual side, a long preparation culminates in God’s becoming incarnate as Man, so, on the documentary side, the truth first appears in *mythical* form and then by a long process of condensing or focusing finally becomes incarnate as History. This involves the belief that Myth in general is...at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.”⁷⁰ Here the dying-god motif of the pagans and the biblical documents are brought together in his answer. Yet they are not conflated, but compared. As with the dying-god trajectory, *so too with* the documentary trajectory.

His following argument is key insofar as it makes no use of the dying-god motif, but focuses specifically on the documentary material—namely the movement from a “chosen people” (Israel) with their “chosen mythology” (that is, “divinely appropriated” as seen earlier) to God becoming man in the incarnation. The documents themselves proceed from the highly mythological (and historically improbable) toward the historical incarnation in a “process of crystallization.” No clear dividing line exists between the myth and the history—no absolute moment where the text ceases to be one and becomes the other. David’s courtly records ring of history, while the later Jonah seems fabulous. Thus the whole biblical narrative (in a comparable way to the dying-god motif of the

⁶⁹ “Answers,” 58.

⁷⁰ *Miracles*, 133f.

pagans) is in movement from mythological to factual—the very text of scripture moves from Myth to Fact.

Thus with a brilliant stroke, Lewis argues (without actually saying it) that the whole biblical narrative follows exactly the process outlined in chapter 3 for getting past the “watchful dragons” of the intellect. It begins in the realm of the imagination—the poetic, the fantastic, and the concrete—that is, myth. And having drawn the reader in by evoking the imagination, it then proceeds to gradually move toward the historical, climaxing in the Incarnation.⁷¹ Because the process is gradual, neither the imagination nor the intellect realizes the movement until one wakes up suddenly in the middle of the gospels with the shock that God has indeed become Man. Myth has become Fact at the very level of the canon.

Such a literary vacillation between what the imagination can embrace and what the intellect can concede is a feature of the greatest literature in history. Lewis identifies something similar at work in Homeric poetry to enlightening effect:

The general result of this [the use of permanent phrase repetition] is that Homer’s poetry is, in an unusual degree, believable. There is no use in disputing whether any episode could really have happened. We have seen it happen—and there seemed to be no poet mediating between us and the event...[consider a girl impregnated by Poseidon, who has said,] ‘Lo, I am Poseidon, shaker of the earth’. Because we have had ‘shaker of the earth’ time and again in these poems where no miracle was involved, because those syllables have come to affect us almost as the presence of the unchanging sea in the real world, we are compelled to accept this. Call it nonsense, if you will; we have seen it. The real salt sea itself, and not any pantomime or Ovidian personage living *in* the sea, has got a mortal woman with child. Scientists and theologians must explain it as best they can. The *fact* is not disputable.”⁷²

⁷¹ Lewis traces this logic in brief in “Is Theology Poetry?,” 129f.

⁷² *Preface*, 23.

This movement from myth to history explains for Lewis why the New Testament “is, and ought to be, more prosaic, in some ways less *splendid*, than the Old Testament; just as the Old Testament is and ought to be less rich in many kinds of imaginative beauty than the Pagan mythologies.”⁷³ This is how, says Lewis, the story of Christ is able to satisfy not only the reader’s religious and historical expectations, but the imaginative ones as well. He concludes the footnote with, “One of its functions is to break down dividing walls.” Here, “walls” seems to serve the same rhetorical function as “watchful dragons.” The movement from the mythic to the factual breaks down the walls the intellect raises when being told it has to embrace the incredible.

Thus the Genesis Fall, standing near the head of the biblical metanarrative, serves by means of its mythical form to draw readers into the narrative and set them on a road that will end with the imaginative *and* intellectual embrace of the Christ of the gospels. It is therefore (as with the dying-god motif among the pagans) a *preparatio evangelica* in the grandest sense. Beyond whatever its content may be, its very style, voice, and genre are central and nonnegotiable to its religious function within the canon.

Lewis’ Exegesis and His Lack Thereof

This is actually the most deficient and disappointing aspect of Lewis’ treatment. Nowhere in his corpus does he present an exegesis of the actual narrative in Genesis 3. Such an absence would seem at first blush to torpedo any attempt to locate “Lewis on the Genesis Fall.” Yet it may not be so. One must remember that Lewis is not an exegetical commentator—he does not pretend to be. He authored no commentary on Genesis. Nor has he been presented herein as an exegetical authority, a claim he would have denied.

⁷³ *Miracles*, 134.

His primary contribution to discussion on the Genesis Fall is exactly *not* as an exegetical commentator. To expect it of him is to misunderstand his program.

His interest is in how the text works—specifically how this mythical text goes about achieving its desired end and what that end is. He speaks, not on what the myth means (how could he, given his beliefs about how myth function?), but rather how it ought to be treated and used—what manner of thing this myth wants to do in the reader.

He trusts, with frightening consistency to his presupposition, that the honest, open-minded, and intelligent reader will get the “subtler and deeper” meaning from the story. It will do its proper work. What must *not* be done, when desiring to understand its mythical content, is to exegete it by means of the abstracting intellect. As such, that Lewis offers no direct exegesis is what one ought to expect from him.

That said, Kilby has probably provided as succinct a interpretation of Lewis as any. He draws together all three planes of discussion here (history, doctrine, and myth), when he says, “The historical correlative for something like the Genesis account of the Creation and Fall of man may be disputed. But the theological validity of the myth rests on its uniqueness as an account of real creation (out of nothing), on its psychological insight into the rebellious will of man, and on its clear statement that man has a special dignity by virtue of his being made in God’s ‘image.’”⁷⁴

Lewis’ Own Mythic Interpretations of the Event

What Lewis lacks in straight-forward exegesis he compensates for in his own imaginative exploration within his literature. Rather than arouse the skepticism of the abstracting intellect by expounding exegetically the meaning of the biblical story, Lewis

⁷⁴ Kilby, 155.

rather follows his own method and offers his own mythic material, intending that the imagination will appropriate the truth suggested therein. Of course, caution is called for here because it is dangerous to assert the author's perspective based on those held by his characters. Additionally, Lewis' own literary images have the same problem as the biblical ones—they must not be parsed too directly lest they lose their own mythic power. That said, Lewis repeats the themes so often, it would be incredible to believe that he did not intend them to speak *en masse* to the same body of human experience that the Genesis Fall is meant to address. The following does not represent an exhaustive list of Lewis' use of the Fall theme, but is sufficiently illustrative to establish his trajectory of thought. Identifying the same three texts here dealt with, Cunningham, by way of preview, offers the following summary of their overriding message, "The very diversity of Lewis' myths of the Fall indicates that, whatever the particular act or series of acts, the Fall was prompted by the Paradisal Man's desire to become a god, to mark off a corner of the universe for his own, to turn from adoration and obedience to God to himself. Pride, then, is the great sin, and all other sin flows out from it."⁷⁵

The Pilgrim's Regress

As Lewis' only true allegory, *The Pilgrim's Regress* is both the most direct and most misleading source of Fall consideration. It is the most direct insofar as narrative details are intended to represent specific things external to the story; in addition it possesses an "autobiographical component."⁷⁶ As such, it can, of all his fiction, most be

⁷⁵ Cunningham, 113.

⁷⁶ *Regress*, 209, notwithstanding Lewis' clarification that not everything in the book is intended to be autobiographical.

relied upon to approximate the author's own opinion. Yet because it is allegory, the necessity of identifying the correct referent is greater. When meeting a loosely constructed parable, readers can let the details slide away without concern so long as in the end they get the point. But with allegory, misinterpreting a detail or grabbing at the wrong referent can destroy the intention of the work. In part because of this, when Lewis reviewed the work ten years after its 1933 publication, he added (not without reservations)⁷⁷ "a running headline" at the top of each page as a "key" to his intentions.

While the implications of the Fall weave like the thread of a hem throughout the whole work, the event of the Fall itself is represented as a past event, preceding John's life by many centuries. Thus John's position approximates that of the reader, living in the long shadow of the event. The history of the tragedy is therefore given as a flashback in the mouth of Mother Kirk, as she explains the origin of the impassable canyon and the dismal state of the Landowner's country.⁷⁸ The heading on the page lays out the intended interpretation. It reads, "The Sin of Adam."

She tells the story of a Landowner, who, desiring to share the glories of his beautiful land with others, lets it to tenants. For the refreshment of himself and his mountain-born children, he had caused to grow in former times trees throughout the whole valley that bore a "very strong" fruit not suitable for the tenants' digestion. Rather than deforest the whole land, he simply told the tenants to not eat of the fruit, hoping that they might "learn sense" from the refraining.

⁷⁷ *Regress*, 207f.

⁷⁸ *Regress*, 71-75.

Yet the Landowner had quarreled with one of his own children, and this recalcitrant “land-grabber” persuaded them to eat. That disobedient eating caused an earthquake that resulted in the formation of the great canyon, whose original name is *Peccatum Adae*. Further, the tenants, now discontent with just eating the fruit, had grafted the tree into every other kind of plant in the valley so that “every fruit should have a dash of that taste in it.” Thus nothing in the valley is now free of the infection, and John has never known anything wholly free of its taste.

Whatever the allegory may lack in its cumbersome style, little doubt can remain as to its referent (with or without headlines). It is clear that God’s command to refrain from eating was intended entirely for the good of humanity. Equally clear is that humanity’s rebellion did not end in a single act of disobedience, but abounded in a systematic privation of the goodness of the whole land. The story evokes feelings of both pity and reproach on the part of the reader—followed by the haunting remembrance that this is fiction only to a point. Beyond the pages of the story, the atrocious behavior of our race has been asserted and explained before the intellect has had time to put up its proud defenses.⁷⁹

Perelandra

The theme of human fallenness is ubiquitous in the *Space Trilogy*. Yet so as to prevent the discussion from degenerating into banal plot summaries, the focus here is specifically on *Perelandra*. *Out of the Silent Planet* juxtaposes fallen humanity with an unfallen world, whereas *That Hideous Strength* focuses on the results of human rebellion

⁷⁹ For further consideration of *Regress* as Lewis’ interpretation of the Fall, see Willis, 48f.

when pressed to their (il)logical ends. *Perelandra* focuses precisely on the question at stake here—the moment of temptation and possible Fall.

Having been transported to Venus, Ransom finds himself in an aquatic Garden of the Hesperides, and therein meets with pleasures of eating and bathing in such exquisite newness and degree that he desires to repeat them indiscriminately. Yet he discovers an unexpected resistance within himself to heedless repetition of pleasures for their own sake. “He had always disliked the people who encored a favourite air in the opera—‘that just spoils it’ had been his comment. But this now appeared to him as a principle of far wider application and deeper moment. This itch to have things over again, as if life were a film that could be unrolled twice or even made to work backwards... was it possibly the root of all evil?”⁸⁰ Ransom here experiences in fine what becomes a dominant theme of the book—the desire to possess a real good, but in a wrong way.

While dwelling on the floating islands of Venus, he encounters the Green Lady, the motherly Eve of her world, who has been forbid by holy Maleldil from overnighing on a solitary fixed land in the midst of the planet’s trackless seas. In a quick succession of events, they are joined by Weston, a maniacal scientist from earth whose obsession with Life-force evolution opens him up to possession by the great evil archon of earth.

A rigorous temptation ensues, with the demonically-dominated Weston oppressing the Green Lady with the glories of living on the fixed land in defiance of Maleldil’s command. Thus the Garden of the Hesperides has become Eden, thick with the threat of diabolical overthrow. As Ransom listens to and rhetorically intervenes against the “Un-man’s” increasingly belligerent tactics, he has a realization...

⁸⁰ *Perelandra*, 48.

It was suddenly borne in upon him that her purity and peace were not, as they had seemed, things settled and inevitable like the purity and peace of an animal—that they were alive and therefore breakable, a balance maintained by a mind and therefore, at least in theory, able to be lost. There is no reason why a man on a smooth road should lose his balance on a bicycle; but he could. There was no reason why she should step out of her happiness into the psychology of our own race; but neither was there any wall between to prevent her doing so.⁸¹

Certain themes become clear in the exchanges. First, the arbitrariness of the prohibition—just as with the fruit in Eden, no inherent reason seems to exist for this command as opposed to some other.⁸² The question is wholly one of obedience and trust in the Lawgiver. The arbitrariness here envisioned is, of course, central to the theological point. Richard Hodgens is merely being obtuse when he implies the arbitrariness is only a result of literary need, saying with unjustified vehemence, “It has no meaning. It’s just a story. The rule is there simply because the plot needs one. Such silly questions spoil the story.”⁸³ Second, the questionable motive of the Lawgiver—The Un-man uses a warped free-will argument to suggest that perhaps Maleldil *wants* her to disobey so to demonstrate her growing autonomy both from him and her husband. Third, the over-significance of the lady’s own role in the story—the Un-man spends a great deal of time trying to convince her that this act would bring with it a nobility and undying glory which would be hers long after her own death (death itself is ennobled in the argument).

Thus Lewis uses this mythical construction to imaginatively explore the same content explored discursively by others throughout church history—the Fall as pride

⁸¹ *Perelandra*, 68.

⁸² See White, 122; and Bowman, 65-67.

⁸³ Richard M. Hodgens, “On the Nature of the Prohibition in *Perelandra*,” *Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 16, no. July & August (1985): 1.

(Augustine),⁸⁴ unbelief (Calvin),⁸⁵ idolatry (Luther),⁸⁶ selfishness (Strong),⁸⁷ and so on.

Yet caution must be exercised here beyond that needed in *Pilgrim's Regress*. While *Pilgrim's Regress* is intended to be an allegory of the terrestrial Fall, *Perelandra* presumes it a past historical event. The events of *Perelandra* are not to be seen as a repetition of the event (as Ransom himself concludes),⁸⁸ but an exponential manifestation of it. Thus the commentary is more indirect. Kilby, for example, misses the distinction when he equates them pragmatically by saying, "[Lewis] suggests they [temptation and Fall] were the result of deep-seated and flawlessly logical arguments thrusting at the very nature of mankind. We are led to believe that the fall was no quick and accidental affair but rather the result of a nice balancing of dialectic in which the ego and will of man colluded to reject the notion of their dependence upon God."⁸⁹ Kilby thus equivocates the Perelandrian temptation to the Edenic one in a manner that Lewis certainly did not intend. The conclusion of the story could not make the distinction between the two

⁸⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, 608-610; and Augustine, "On Nature and Grace," in *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. Peter Holmes, Robert Wallis, revised by Benjamin Warfield, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 132. See also White, 122; Cunningham, 113; and Bowman, 68. Myers, on the other hand, argues that Lewis got the idea from Milton. Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), 61. Given that both Milton and Lewis were versed in Augustinian perspectives, it may be a distinction without a difference.

⁸⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 152f. See also Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight, Library of Ecclesiastical History (London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 2002), 81-83.

⁸⁶ See Martin Luther's *Small & Large Catechism* on the first command. See also Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 141ff.

⁸⁷ Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1907), 549, 559, 567.

⁸⁸ *Perelandra*, 140ff.

⁸⁹ Kilby, 100. See Evan Gibson for an underscoring of how *Perelandra* is more than a recapitulation of Eden. Evan K. Gibson, "The Centrality of *Perelandra* to Lewis's Theology," in *G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, ed. Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 125f.

narratives clearer. In the end the lady is freed from further seduction by Ransom's pugilistic intervention—a decidedly unexpected deviation from the Genesis story, but necessary for the plot to unfold as a story of temptation ultimately resisted, that of *Paradise Retained*.

The Magician's Nephew

The Magician's Nephew represents a Creation/Fall cycle set within the Narnian universe. The epicenter of the book features the great lion Aslan singing the Narnian cosmos into existence. Yet even on the day of its birth, amid all its glory, evil is already present. The English boy Digory has stumbled into Narnia. In his entourage is a ruthless Witch, who, detesting what the lion represents, flees into the hills of the new country. Knowing she will return one day, bringing trouble, Aslan dispatches Digory to a walled garden in the far west of the land to collect a magic golden life-giving apple that will protect the land.

Lewis' image is again more that of the Garden of the Hesperides than Eden, yet the use he puts it to is much more akin to the Genesis material. For when Digory arrives at the walled garden, he finds a sign on the gates that reads:

*"Come in by the gold gates or not at all,
Take of my fruit for others or forbear.
For those who steal or those who climb my wall
Shall find their heart's desire and find despair."*⁹⁰

The implication is clear; he must not eat the fruit himself. Entering, he discovers the witch has already entered by climbing the wall and eaten one of the apples herself. The dialogue that ensues possesses all the character of the Edenic temptation. The witch

⁹⁰ *Magician's Nephew*, 141.

argues that the fruit offers a great good to the one who eats (immortal youth and life), further that Aslan is selfishly withholding this good from Digory, and that therefore Digory ought to defy the lion and take the fruit back to England to heal his sick mother—all in contradiction of the lion's intentions.

Thus Digory, like Eve, is caught in the throes of a quandary. What the tempter suggests in both stories is a qualified good—knowledge or life. Digory becomes muddled in the suggestion that a greater good can be achieved by defiance than by obedience. Unlike the serpent, however, the witch makes a rhetorical blunder that reveals her base character and disenchants Digory. Had the serpent said similarly to Eve, “You needn’t share any with your husband, you know,” perhaps she too would have seen the temptation for what it was.⁹¹

What Lewis has presented by means of these examples is a powerful commentary on what it means to be tempted with a good—but a good obtained in the wrong way. It is reminiscent of Screwtape’s complaint that all hell’s research has never been able to produce a single pleasure. Pleasure is the invention of “the Enemy,” and all a tempter can do is “to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden.”⁹² As the story plays out, it becomes clear, as in *Perelandra*, that the Lord of Narnia does not intend to withhold the good from Digory, only that the good should be preceded by the obedience and the trust proper to its effect.

⁹¹ It is interesting that Milton allows Eve to contemplate this very permutation. *cf. Preface*, 125.

⁹² *Screwtape*, 41.

On Using a Story to Interpret an (Inspired) Story

It may seem initially fruitless to use allegorical and fantasy stories as a means of interpreting a mythical one. It may be argued that one has only moved from one vague narrative footing to another. What ground has been gained? But this misunderstands the imaginative function of myth. Since it is not the myth itself that is the point, but the truth (Fact) that is to be imaginatively apprehended in it, the particular language of the myth is negotiable. As Lewis has already pointed out, “The man who first learns what is to him a great myth through a verbal account which is badly or vulgarly or cacophonously written, discounts and ignores the bad writing and attends solely to the myth. He hardly minds about the writing. He is glad to have the myth on any terms.”⁹³

The corollary to this seems to be that it is possible to cast the mythic material into a supplementary narrative context and thereby increase the chances of imaginative appropriation. If the imagination fails to get precisely what the myth of the Genesis Fall is saying (one of those “bad images” discussed in the last chapter), Lewis’ interpretive narrative (insofar as *he* has properly understood Genesis 3) serves as a corrective to the imagination, guiding it toward the real intention of the Genesis material. By laying his own narrative overtop the biblical text, he offers a kind of hermeneutical grid that further brackets away bad images, drawing more immediately into the foreground the key components of the biblical myth. So as it turns out, Lewis *has* written a commentary on

⁹³ *Experiment*, 46. For a more extended consideration, see also *George MacDonald*, 15f.

the text after all, albeit one of a different type—poetic, rather than scientific; concrete, rather than abstract; aimed at the imagination rather than the intellect.⁹⁴

As a Christian, however, Lewis must deal with an additional critique. The myth he seeks to clarify by use of his own narrative commentary is an “inspired” one. Without becoming mired in questions of inspiration or even of Lewis’ view of scripture, does this strategy imply that the inspired myth of the Genesis Fall stands in need of some interpretive assistance? Does this assert the poor quality of the biblical material? Is Lewis’ own narrative more reliable for producing “good images” in the imagination than the inspired text?

Obviously this would be of concern only to persons with particular views of inspiration, inerrancy, and authority, but to forestall any concerns, Lewis recognized a difference between his own fantasy literature and the biblical text—what’s more, between “inspired myth” and all other myths. In reference to the early Genesis material, he says in *Problem of Pain*, “...I have the deepest respect even for Pagan myths, *still more* for the myths of Holy Scripture.”⁹⁵ Further Lewis speaks on several occasions of the unique status of the biblical words as divine speech—things he would never claim of his own material.⁹⁶ If it is so, as here asserted, that Lewis’ own mythic works serve the function of a non-discursive *commentary* on biblical material, then they need claim no more or less

⁹⁴ That Lewis should offer a narrative interpretation of a propositional subject is not a scandalously unique claim. Ward argues that Lewis wrote *Wardrobe* as a response to the weakness of the propositional approach of *Miracles*, and by doing so “...deliberately circumvented conscious intellectual apprehension...” Ward, 225. Further, Jacobs very nearly gets to this same conclusion in his consideration of *Perelandra*. Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin: A Cultural History* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 41-44.

⁹⁵ *Pain*, 71. Italics added for emphasis.

⁹⁶ *eg. Psalms*, 112-115. For a more aesthetic angle on this, see C. S. Lewis, “The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version,” in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 49.

authority than any scientific commentary would. Neither Augustine's nor Calvin's nor Gunkel's commentaries on Genesis claim an authority or inspiration superior or equal to scripture. They serve as lenses by which the proper meaning of an inspired text may be more clearly seen. Lewis' work is similar, the difference being only the type of commentary he has offered—a poetic rather than a scientific one.

That one may legitimately use a story, parable, or myth as a commentary on another event or story is a technique at least as old as Nathan the prophet (I Samuel 12). And it is worthy of note that Nathan's story works in the exact way Lewis predicts. David's dragonish intellect is caught napping as Nathan uses David's own imagination to arouse his ire against injustice. By the time his intellect has awaked to the propositional referents of the story, he is already condemned. Again Lewis sums up the principle in his essay title, "Sometimes fairy stories may say best what's to be said."

On the Use of the Myth

One final area of examination is needed to conclude the chapter. For Lewis the germane aspect of the Fall narrative is not what it means (in terms of how each detail ought to be exegeted), but what the total narrative is intended to do within the reader, and by corollary, how the reader is to respond to the story. Thus the final question here regards the proper attitude of the reader as s/he encounters Genesis 3. Stated in terms from the last chapter, what "surrender" is expected of the reader if s/he is to obtain to the Fact of our fallenness?

The last chapter argued that, whatever this act of surrender is, it does not necessarily consist of a belief that the story reflects unvarnished history.⁹⁷ The demand was there shown to be more of an acknowledgment of “the profound meaning of the myth regardless of its relationship to history.” But this principle needs further exploration as it relates to the Genesis story.

One may not have to “believe,” but one must be willing to “suspend disbelief,” which is by no means the same thing.⁹⁸ While Lewis’ preferred term might be something more positive like “imaginative embrace,”⁹⁹ the implication is much the same. It approximates the “looking along” perspective spoken of in the last chapter. The reader, coming to Genesis 3, must not have as the driving force of her mental energy the idea that such things never did and never could happen. Rather one must throw the self into the story *as if* it had occurred.

Specifically applied to the Genesis Fall, Lewis knows and admits that the Genesis account does not reflect an unaccommodated history. Yet in the throes of the existential moment, this knowledge must be brushed backward into dustier parts of the mind, lest it arouse the dragonish intellect from its slumber. The conclusion for the reader is then, whether or not one believes the events of Genesis 3 happened in space-time as recorded, one must act *as if* they did when meeting the narrative. To make the first stop of

⁹⁷ See *Experiment*, 45f.; and “Is Theology Poetry?”, 127-129.

⁹⁸ The idea is usually credited to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: William Pickering, 1847), 65ff. Lewis had read Coleridge and speaks of him positively in several contexts, the most famous perhaps being his use of Coleridge and the waterfall throughout *Abolition*, chapter 1. See also *Regress*, 201, 204.

⁹⁹ “Myth became Fact,” 67; and “Is Theology Poetry?”, 151f.

interpretation that of asserting the story's status as "could not have happened" is to thwart the work of the myth by assuming the "looking at" perspective.

If this seems a *sacrificium intellectum* then it is one common to all people of all times. Any person who would contemplate their state of mind while enjoying any deeply loved fictional book or movie will be forced to admit that the enjoyment is not generated by the intellectual knowledge that the story "never happened." No, surely the dominance of such a thought is tantamount to a destruction of the narrative experience whether in poem, book, or movie. Lewis believes, *consensus gentium*, that the imagination has the power to silence the intellect and respond to the story *as if* it had or could have happened—moreover, the imagination longs to assume such a stance; it is the nature of the organ. Anything less is to treat the Genesis Fall story as something that it is not, and if a cardinal rule of interpretation exists from Aristotle even unto the higher critics, it must be something like "treat all things as their particular character demands."

Conclusion

This chapter has purposed to examine how Lewis treats the Fall story of Genesis 3. It has followed a three-fold structure derived from Lewis' own treatment of the subject, examining first the story's relationship to the space-time events of history, followed by a consideration of its doctrinal implications, and finally by its mythic import.

On the historical question, Lewis believes the Fall is an historical event, but the story in Genesis 3 is not an unaccommodated record of that history (it is rather a myth "about" it). Lewis accepts a theory of guided evolution, climaxing in an act of special creation wherein the human metaphysical package is divinely bequeathed upon a specially prepared hominid (or group of them). He likewise believes it warranted to assert

that at some point these creatures did in fact rebel against their creator in an act which is historically undiscoverable. In this act, the first humans lost that ability to govern their own organisms and, as an additional consequence, human relationships and society. Thus humanity has become something it was never intended to be—a race of self-absorbed and self-deceiving creatures who acknowledge no authority beyond themselves even to the point of their own destruction. While Lewis does not believe the historical events behind the myth are the location of its greatest meaning, he does use his “not-unlikely” history as an apologetic to show that nothing historically incoherent exists in the Christian claim that humanity is a once-good-now-wrecked species.

Regarding the doctrine, Lewis believes the only proper use of it is as a means of articulating humanity’s hopeless position in relation both to itself and its creator. Lewis believes that doctrinal structures, although authorized by the Holy Spirit and useful to the church, are ultimately inferior to an imaginative appropriation of the myth itself. Doctrine is by nature discursive, propositional, and scientific. Doctrine then tends to approximate the “looking at” perceptive. Given the mythic nature of the Fall story, its most subtle meaning will only be appropriated by means of an exegetical method more friendly to myth—one that draws the reader into the story to experience rather than analyze it—the “looking along” perspective.

Thus in relation to its mythic structure, Lewis places the Fall story at the head of a scripture-wide progression. The Bible as a whole begins in the mythic voice and progresses toward the historical incarnation by means of a gradual and imperceptible shift. By this, the very text of the Bible succeeds in bypassing intellectual resistance until a point where the imagination has already delivered its content. As such nowhere does

Lewis seek to exegete the passage; rather he demonstrates this imaginative sneaking past the dragonish intellect by means of his own imaginative works. Lewis' recasting of the Fall story into other narrative settings provides the opportunity for him to offer a unique kind of commentary on the biblical story—one that is non-propositional and non-discursive.

The demand on the reader of such a story is not necessarily to believe in its historicity, but only to willingly suspend his disbelief while engaging the story—to embrace the story *as if* it happened in this way. This act places the reader on the inside of the story to experience it from within—an approximation of the “looking along” perspective.

In conclusion, Lewis' chief contribution here is not his work with history or doctrine, all of which has been said before by professionals in those fields. Rather what Lewis offers is the suggestion that a non-propositional, non-discursive read of the text by means of the mythic imagination, rather than the scientific intellect, may furnish the reader with access to the “subtler” meaning of the narrative, aided perhaps by narrative commentaries which can guide the imagination without raising the incredulity of the intellect. Thus in many ways Lewis casts the reader back upon the strength of narrative itself, rather than upon the critical exegete for the text's grandest meaning. Whether Lewis is right or wrong to do this can best be seen by bringing his thoughts into conversation with the theologians and movements illustrated in chapter 1, which is the purpose of chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

LEWIS MEETS THE THEOLOGIAN

The final chapter of this dissertation brings Lewis into conversation with the theological trajectories and persons discussed in chapter 1. Several questions will be examined here. First, how does Lewis' structure compare to each of these trajectories? That is, to what degree is his interpretation of the Fall narrative "traditional," "critical," and so on? Second, how does his structure critique and advance the dialogue in each of these trajectories? Third, how does Lewis' work surpass the options of his historical milieu with an eye toward his ultimate contribution to the subject? This question contains the corollary question of his legacy on the topic. How was Lewis' work both prescient of and influential upon theological assumptions at work today? The chapter will proceed roughly along the same lines as did chapter 1 with the question of Lewis' legacy tackled in the end zone.

Trajectory 1 Considered: Lewis Meets the Tradition

The central feature of pre-Enlightenment interpretation of the Genesis story was its historical rootedness. Whatever allegorical, tropological, or other meanings the text contained, they stood atop the "literal" meaning, rather than replaced it. The narrative then possessed the same historical reliability as the courtly records of David or the Acts of the Apostles. This trajectory survives in the mid-twentieth century in various branches of fundamentalism, evangelicalism (old and new) and many theologically conservative denominations. How does Lewis compare to this trajectory?

Lewis' position was nuanced in such a way as to affirm the historicity of the *event* of the Fall, but not the historicity of the biblical *account* of it. Lewis is clear that a real historical (and in principle datable) event took place wherein humanity moved from a state of blessed submission to its creator to a state of rebellion and brokenness.

The biblical account, however, is not for Lewis an unaccommodated historical record of that event, but a mythic and perhaps theological interpretation of it. Since Lewis possesses a high view of scripture—that it is divinely authored—he further believes that the scripture's interpretation is theologically and imaginatively authoritative. Thus no need exists to get behind it to some more basic history.

This distinction between the event and the account (and it is by no means unique to Lewis) creates room for him to engage the conclusions of the modern sciences regarding an extended terrestrial history, while still maintaining that the biblical record governs authoritatively all theological discourse. The Fall narrative ultimately teaches that "...man is now a horror to God and to himself and a creature ill-adapted to the universe not because God made him so but because he has made himself so by the abuse of his free will."¹ This reflects the general conclusion of the traditional trajectory, albeit arriving there by a route both Augustine and Calvin would probably found overly rocky. This observation, however, is of only marginal use, since it presumes that, if Augustine and Calvin were anachronistically confronted with the same scientific data as was Lewis, they would have persisted in their interpretations unchanged. This is, of course, impossible to know.

¹ *Pain*, 69.

Coming closer to his own historical milieu then, one might be tempted to label his position a form of “inerrancy” (a term he surely would have disliked as a literary barbarism) insofar as he believed the bible was ultimately true and trustworthy—that is, without error in any final theological sense. But his understanding of the exigencies of the genre produced a very different understanding of what constitutes a “true” text than dominated Warfield’s or the Hodge’s treatments. The Genesis Fall narrative is absolutely true, being free of any unreliability, so long as (and herein lies the difference) one recognizes the literary distinctions between a mythic interpretation of an historical event and an unaccommodated account of that same event. What constitutes “error” in a myth is different than that which constitutes it in a formal history. This distinction may not have saved his job if he had been employed at Princeton Seminary at the turn of the twentieth century, but it does perhaps underscore the immense role “genre” can play in the hermeneutical process, which, never being the forte of pre-modern exegesis, created the backdrop against which the *Formgeschichte* school found its hearing.

In the end it seems that Lewis’ difference with the “traditional” approach is not ultimately one of doctrine, for he embraces the same assumptions on the text’s authority as the church fathers and reformers and even their overall theological conclusions on its meaning. His difference lies more in his method of exegesis—that is, how the text functions and how meaning is derived from it. And it should be recalled that this was exactly the sort of difference that separated the fathers from the reformers—a question that persists even to this day within most theological traditions.

Thus the conclusion here is that Lewis reflects traditional orthodoxy both (1) in his belief that the text is holy, inspired, and authoritative and (2) in his conclusions

regarding the ultimate theological meaning of the Genesis Fall. Insofar as (3) the correct method by which to derive meaning from an holy, inspired, and authoritative text is a perennial debate even within traditional orthodoxy, it seems a category mistake to fault Lewis here. By definition one cannot be un-orthodox in the absence of dogma.

Trajectory 2 Considered: Lewis Meets Kant and Niebuhr

C. S. Lewis, Immanuel Kant, and the Noumenal Fall

Lewis clearly knew Kant's thought.² And while Lewis does not always speak of him with approval,³ aspects of their thought were similar. Both argued the insufficiency of pure reason to pierce the noumenal realm ("higher reality" for Lewis), but expressed confidence in practical reason's ability to establish warrant for it.⁴ By specific application, both constructed a moral argument for the proof of God's existence.⁵

Similarities exist too on their treatment of the Fall narrative. For Kant the Fall narrative is uniquely suited to take the self out of its phenomenal-historical bondage and give it a glimpse of what a noumenal choice would look like. While Kant is not formally interested in the genre question and so does not use "myth" language, he clearly sees the narrative as functioning in an analogical (versus historical-literal) way. Its function is not to give history with all the resulting complications of original sin, but to allow rational

² For a smattering of evidence, see "Weight of Glory," 26; *They Stand*, 384; *Studies in Words*, 45; and *Miracles*, 29.

³ See *Miracles*, 154; *Pain*, 99f.; and "Bluspels," 156f.

⁴ As Reilly shows. Reilly, 5, 139ff.

⁵ *Mere*, 17-39; and *Abolition*, 25f., 56-64. For consideration of Lewis' Kant-like moral argument, see Reilly, 139ff; and Milad Zerky Philipos, *C. S. Lewis' Moral Argument for the Existence of God* (Montgomery: E-Book, LLC, 2005). For an excellent analysis of Lewis' moral theory in general, see Gilbert Meilaender, *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1978, revised 1998), 189ff.

contemplation of a supra-temporal event—the choice with which “everyman” embraces the predisposition to evil.

Similarly, Lewis does not treat the exegetical details as the greatest point of meaning for the story. Rather, he too is concerned with the story’s proper function. Since Reality *in se* is inaccessible to the senses for Lewis (for reasons similar to Kant), a medium is needed. For Lewis patently and Kant by implication, a medium can be found in particular kind of story. For Lewis the story is appropriated by the imagination, for Kant probably (he does not precisely say) by practical reason.

It is the opinion here that Lewis’ structure is better adapted to explain this event than Kant’s. What Kant gets out of the story is still the result of practical reason’s efforts. That is, the story is still to be understood “rationally,” with the primary target being the intellect. Yet it seems problematic to claim this, and then to ignore the significance of the exegetical details of the passage. The Fall narrative in Kant’s hands gives a general sense of the human situation—its flavor, but should not be pressed at the level of the textual details. This, however, runs counter to the nature of the intellect, which thrives on the contemplation and organization of the details, seeking their coherent arrangement. Kant then is still “looking at” the story from without.

Lewis, however, by suggesting the imagination is the story’s target, is relieved of this pressure. The imagination is by nature less interested in particularities. It delights in involvement with the story. It apprehends it in its totality—the details, even the very words, are negotiable. The reader “is glad to have the myth on any terms.”⁶ All the story demands is that the reader enter it imaginatively—suspending disbelief and tasting it

⁶ *Experiment*, 46.

from within. In short, Lewis' demand that we "look along" the story to that to which it points (as opposed to Kant's insistence on "looking at" it) reveals our existential condition with clarity. Lewis is equally uninterested in the picayune details of the exegete, but for him such lack of interest is now warranted and explicable. Thus Lewis' theory of the imagination provides a more consistent explanation of our existential identification with the text.

One further point of difference should be noted. Lewis does not, as Kant ultimately and inevitably must, disregard the historical backdrop of the story. Kant's method denies him the ability to relate the story to time-space history except by analogy (or metaphor) to each individual's existential condition, making it, as Green says, "essentially ahistorical."⁷ Lewis tastes of the cake without having to consume it. He too can bring the implications of the Fall story to bear on the existential reality of the reader, but does not need to completely divorce the story from a possible *historical* event which it interprets. The possible history is for Lewis of the most minor consideration, but it brings him into conversation with traditional approaches in a way Kant is perennially critiqued for having had to abandon.

This difference is, of course, predictable given their differing views of Supernature's intrusion into history in the miraculous. That the noumenal and phenomenal are mutually exclusive for Kant is so by definition. For Lewis their intermingling in myth and miracle is necessary and to be expected.

⁷ Green, "Myth, History, and Imagination," 22.

C. S. Lewis, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the Existential Fall

While historically Reinhold Niebuhr should actually follow the section on higher criticism below, he is considered here instead because of his similarity to Kant in his treatment of the Fall narrative as shown in chapter 1.

It is clear that much stands in common between Niebuhr and Lewis. First, both advance beyond Kant's rigid metaphysical ramification in their recognition of the unique implications of a mythic text for the imagination. Like Lewis, Niebuhr believed that "myth" could mediate the dialectical relationship between Spirit-Eternity and Nature-Time (his analog to Lewis' Nature-Supernature distinction and his closest point of contact to Kant's noumenal-phenomenal distinction). To this Niebuhr adds the notion of myth's "symbolic" role, which he articulates in language almost identical to Lewis' "transposition" theme—"one dimension upon which two dimensions must be recorded."⁸ Thus for Niebuhr a deception inherently exists when speaking of the greater dimension by means of the lesser. Thus those who believe are "deceivers, yet true." One must speak *as if* it is so, even knowing that it is not, for the "*as if*" is truer despite its perilous tendency to "deceive."

Second, beyond Kant, Niebuhr suggests that the best appropriation of myth is not by the rational center. The great advantage of Christianity to Niebuhr is that it was able to take over pagan myths and use them "without fully rationalizing them."⁹ This claim has the familiar ring of Lewis' ideas on the utility of the imagination over the intellect.

⁸ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 6.

⁹ Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, 7.

He is not, however, wholly compatible with Lewis. Consider again Lewis' citation of Niebuhr in *Problem of Pain*.¹⁰ While introducing his "Socratic myth" of a possible history behind the Genesis story, Lewis indicates that his "myth" should not be confused with Niebuhr's sense. Clarity is needed here on two points, lest one misread the exact nature of the distinction to which Lewis refers.

First, as stated earlier, Lewis' own use of the term "myth" here is *sui generis* within his own canon. The story of the magic apple is for Lewis properly and precisely the "myth;" what he is about to present is a teaching story about a possible history that is itself to be distinguished from the biblical myth. Thus Lewis is not only using the term differently than Niebuhr, but he does not mean what he will predominantly mean even throughout his own writing.

Second, even given this distinction, Lewis' treatment of the Genesis Fall myth-proper is distinct from Niebuhr's in significant ways. Lewis says that Niebuhr defines myth as "a symbolical representation of a non-historical reality." This is a fair representation of Niebuhr at two germane points. First, the myth is a symbolic representation of some truth. Lewis and Niebuhr agree on this point, as already seen. That the reality is "non-historical" is a point of both agreement and disagreement.

If "non-historical" means merely transcendent or "higher reality," then Lewis would agree. Good myth does put the reader in contact with the Real or an external Fact. Insofar as that Fact may be something of "Higher Reality," even more so. Yet for Lewis no necessary conflict exists in asserting a myth's historical rootedness, as, say, an accommodated version of some historical event. This is clearly the point of distinction

¹⁰ *Pain*, 77.

that Lewis intends in the *Problem of Pain* citation, and this distinction—the level of willingness to allow myth be related to historical events—produces at least three points of divergence between the two men’s treatment of the Fall narrative.

First, that the text is unrelated to a particular historical space-time event may be sufficient explanation for why Niebuhr makes such a Kantian *usage* of the text. No interpretive controls exists on Niebuhr for what the text can mean other than those imposed by his creativity (or more fairly, his existential need). It is clear that he already has his own ideas on the nature of sin and fallenness, and to the degree that the biblical narrative was useful in supporting it, he used its language. Upon realizing that his use of the Genesis 3 story had caused his modern reader to misunderstanding him as actually advocating the story’s veracity (that is, that it was historical in the traditional sense), Niebuhr repents of having employed the biblical material at all.¹¹

Second, the greatest (and perhaps only) use to which Niebuhr can put the text is an existential one—which is what he does. Niebuhr, like Kant, makes a highly individualized application. The story is a symbolic representation of how each person succumbs to the Anxiety of our existential experience.

Third, if the existential condition of Anxiety lacks historical rootedness—that is, no time existed before this condition arrived in history—then it is essential (in the Aristotelian sense) to humanity. The race never was other than it is now, nor it would seem could it ever be. This seems in Niebuhr to place a non-historical pressure on the whole trajectory of redemptive history. He speaks not only of the Fall as one of the “permanent myths” that enlivens Christianity, but also of incarnation, cross, and

¹¹ Niebuhr, *ND* I, xxv.

redemptive love.¹² Niebuhr seems to want to move the entire core of Christian belief into the realm of myth, which for him severs it from history.

To be sure, all that Niebuhr has said may be true of humanity's existential condition (at least this author has always found it insightful and useful), but he could have said all of it without employing the Genesis story at all. Thus the Genesis story may be helpful, but is more likely to be a source of distraction and misunderstanding.

The conclusion here then is that Lewis, primarily because of his willingness to allow the mythic story some rootedness in a possible terrestrial history, is able to achieve all the existential rumination that Niebuhr possesses, but with a more sincere treatment of both this text and the whole of redemptive history. Lewis can argue for a textual and historical movement from myth to Fact—in this case toward the fundamental historicity of the gospel accounts. Because the Fall is rooted in some possible history, a time existed before humanity became as it is now. Because of this, an historical redemption is possible and warranted—we can possibly be something other than we are now.

Finally, the probable connection between the story and some primeval historical event creates an interpretive constraint on the text for Lewis. The story seeks to impose some Truth upon the reader—a Truth not of the reader's design. Thus, while Lewis does not make use of it to engage in textual exegesis, the process of formal exegesis could move forward in a more controlled manner in Lewis' model than in Niebuhr's.

¹² See Patterson, *Sin and Grace*, 46.

Trajectory 3 Considered: Lewis Meets Higher Criticism

C. S. Lewis, Hermann Gunkel, and the Ignorant Ancients

In Gunkel's version of higher criticism one initially meets a kindred spirit to Lewis, at least insofar as both were deeply moved by the literary qualities of the text and less concerned about its value to dogmatic construction. The kind of interaction between Gunkel and Lewis then has a different flavor than with the more metaphysically-oriented Kant and Niebuhr—that is, the discussion focuses more on what kind of text it is and less what the text is trying to do.

Gunkel possessed a deep appreciation of the extant story's beauty and superlative literary effect. He perceived that "myth" is not synonymous with "lying," rather it is a form of "poetry."¹³ All this is consonant with the mature Lewis, who had himself been converted away from his youthful belief that such fairy stories were produced by merely "breathing a lie through Silver."¹⁴

The cause of this literary beauty, however, reflects a great difference between the two men. To Gunkel the power and beauty of myth were accidental qualities that occurred almost despite the myth-maker. They are rather results of primitive modes of thought, as evidenced by their brevity and scarcity of detail. Ancient humanity was simply unable to sustain the artistic detail of the modern novel, for they had not yet "acquired the intellectual power to distinguish between poetry and reality."¹⁵

¹³ Gunkel, *Legends*, 2f.

¹⁴ Attributed to Lewis by J. R. R. Tolkien in "On Fairy-Stories," 71. See also Hooper, *They Stand Together*, 428.

¹⁵ Gunkel, *Legends*, 39f., 54.

As has been shown, Lewis harangued against this view on a regular basis. He believed that *mythopoeia* was a natural product of human creativity in every age and that its existence said little about the intellectual capacities of the ancients. Fairy-stories today, including his own, preserve this quality by shunning “close psychology” and reveling in the Form’s “brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections and ‘gas’.”¹⁶ If anything, Lewis believed the ancients had the imaginative advantage for their ability to hold concrete and abstract forms of thought together in single concepts in a way now disagreeable to moderns.

It is clear that Lewis lacked Gunkel’s nuanced taxonomy—the movement from “myth” to “legend” to “history,” which would be so influential on later theologians. Yet since for Gunkel these terms were not merely descriptions of distinct genres, but of the intellectual evolution of the race’s capacities (a point Lewis rejected), it is no surprise and perhaps no loss that Lewis should shun them.

C. S. Lewis, F. R. Tennant, and the Suspension of Disbelief

The more theologically-oriented F. R. Tennant shared Gunkel’s belief in the primitive nature of the myth-maker, yet without much interest in the aesthetic aspects of the story. Still, he offers one germane advance on Gunkel; Tennant believed the original myth-maker was indeed aware that he was spinning scientific untruths—he merely ignored the fact. What is more, he wanted the reader to do the same. The Fall narrative was known at the time of authorship to be non-historical, but is intended to be a “working

¹⁶ “Fairy Stories,” 46f.

substitute for history.”¹⁷ Regardless of the text’s relationship to history, the myth-maker desired that the reader approach the text *as though* it were history, or at least “the equivalent of history.”

At this point Lewis is poised to make a profound contribution to the discussion. The point here is not that Lewis has said something similar—that the Fall narrative, though being non-historical itself is meant to stand as an interpretation of some unknown historical event—for it is not at all clear that Tennant believes the Fall narrative is related to an actual historical anything.

The key is in the “*as though*.” Tennant seems to be advocating a position that he is not willing to assume himself. Tennant’s analysis has all the character of the “looking at” perspective—standing outside the narrative examining it scientifically and historically for its original character—but knowing in advance that it “isn’t really true.” He can recognize the original author’s intention that the reader should suspend their disbelief and enter the story *as if* it had really happened. Tennant, a sensible modern researcher, however, knows this suspension only as an historical aspect of the text. He does not perceive the need to do so himself as a reader. It is his job to remain disinterested and uninvolved, to preserve his scientific objectivity. He does not seem to suspect that his reluctance to engage in such an act of submission costs him anything worth having.

Lewis, on the other hand, takes this as a basic requirement of reading a myth. It is not enough to know the fact that the myth-maker demanded such a concession of the reader. Rather, the act itself is the only reliable method of seeing what the text is trying to say. If one wishes to experience its power and receive the truth it speaks, one must

¹⁷ Tennant, *Sources*, 79.

suspend disbelief and “look along” the story as if it is one’s own. One must enter it and embrace it on its own terms *as though* it really happened as stated. This is the only way to sneak past the cynicism of the abstractly dragonish intellect. Lewis might even agree with Tennant on his abstract scientific conclusions regarding the text; yet he surpasses him by actually performing the act of imaginative submission to that text that Tennant claims was the text’s original purpose.

If Lewis is correct, the devastating implication to the modern theologian is that so long as the theologian stands outside the story examining it as a scientist, its most powerful and profound implications will remain unperceived. Intimates Lewis, to read myth from Tennant’s perspective is to ask ‘Will the hero escape?’ To read it from Lewis’ is to apprehend “‘I shall never escape this. This will never escape me.’”¹⁸

Tennant himself may be proof of this, for by the end of his lengthy monograph he has constructed only an “history of the doctrine of the fall;” he is not moved by the more basic realization that “I am one who is so fallen.” The scientific and historical value of the former is not to be underrated, but to remain unaware of the latter is to remain ignorant of the doctrine’s most vital point. At the risk of overstatement, Lewis may here give, not just an irreducible key to exegesis, but to redemption itself.

The Myth of Demythologization: Lewis Meets the Barth-Bultmann Debate

C. S. Lewis, Rudolph Bultmann, and Demythologization

Of all the theologians with whom Lewis is to be compared, he himself had the most to say about Rudolph Bultmann—most of it teetering between critical and outright

¹⁸ *Experiment*, 48f.

caustic. Chapter 2 outlined in some detail Lewis' analysis of Bultmann while laying out Lewis' larger critique of higher criticism. Given that Bultmann was a New Testament scholar, he cannot be compared to Lewis on the Genesis Fall directly. Yet as Bultmann made a career of tackling myth as a biblical genre, a number of important correlations ought to be made.

Their points of agreement ought to be identified first, being the more diminutive list. First, Lewis and Bultmann agreed that the content of the gospel (or more generally, that truth which the myth contained) was not aimed at the intellect. For Lewis it is aimed at the imagination, for Bultmann to the "hearer as a self." So even here one is not actually dealing with a point of agreement, other than the admission that the intellect has limits. But the point should not be undervalued as it set up for both the ability to subvert modern assumptions about the sufficiency of the scientific analysis of the Bible.

Second, both acknowledged that a myth may have an historical origin or be rooted in a lost historical event. Further they agree that the myth was intended as an interpretation of the event—at attempt to give it meaning. But again, differences appear immediately. For Lewis the myth stands as a non-negotiable and irreducible means by which to apprehend some truth of Higher Reality, which is objectively true and in principle common to all people of all ages. For Bultmann the myth was intended to bring the original hearers into some truth *about themselves*—a truth that modern persons cannot hear because they do not share the original worldview.¹⁹ Bultmann thus believes that both the history *and* the myth are only of second tier importance to the existential application of the story's ultimate meaning. Of the two, however, the historical is more important as

¹⁹ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 35.

it is the originating event that gives rise to this ultimate meaning, which is its “abiding significance.”²⁰ Thus Bultmann is interested in the existentially relevant moral truth to be liberated from the myth; Lewis is interested in objective Higher Reality understandable only by means of the myth *qua* myth.²¹

Recall that Bultmann was characterized for the sake of this study as a “hybrid” of both the Kantian and the Higher Critical trajectories. He stands within the trajectory of higher criticism insofar as he acknowledges the history undergirding a myth, and shares Gunkel-Tennant’s assumptions about the literary and scientific inabilities of pre-critical peoples. Lewis (like Barth²²) condemned with many words what he perceived as latent and unwarranted anti-supernaturalism and historical elitism, which seemed to generate much of Bultmann’s need to be free of mythological trappings.²³ Yet unlike many highly academic biblical critics, Bultmann is to be commended for having as his primary concern, not just the analysis of the text’s historical *Sitz im Leben*, but rather its faithful apprehension by the modern Christian church.

²⁰ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 37.

²¹ Freshwater’s claim that Lewis and Bultmann had a lot in common seems from this analysis simply wrongheaded. He claims, “...Lewis showed that the Christian story has a mythic power that is independent of the historical reality. Thus, both Lewis and Bultmann recognized the *kerygma* and radical obedience to it as the essence of Christianity.” Freshwater, 123f. This, however, is flawed in two different ways. First, the area of agreement Freshwater has identified is roughly equivalent to the Poacher and the Park Ranger agreeing that a deer lives in the woods. Bultmann claims one had to shoot the mythological deer in order to eat the meat it contained. Lewis wanted to contemplate the living deer in motion. Second, Lewis never gives any impression that the Christian ethic (i.e. obedience to Christianity’s *kerygma*) had any value outside the objective reality of Christianity’s metaphysical claims regarding resurrection and redemption. Freshwater repeatedly throughout his final chapter treats historical and mythical as opposites, thereby muddling the whole point of the relationship between them in Lewis. Of course Lewis will not fare well under these conditions. It misses entirely the idea that myth *might* have historical roots without ceasing to be myth. Heron was far closer to the truth when he said simply that Lewis and Bultmann are “irreconcilable.” Heron, 87.

²² Barth, “Rudolph Bultmann,” 109.

²³ Evans reached a similar conclusion in his comparison of Lewis and Bultmann. Evans, 398.

Thus he glances off Kant's methodology as well. Kant lifts the import of the story into the noumenal realm; Bultmann too lifts, but not quite so high. The height is only that of our own existential situation. Biblical myth does not reflect transcendent realities, as Bultmann was most suspicious of these, but timeless moral truths. Stripped of its mythological accretions, the narrative can be used by the careful interpreter to address the existential situation of the modern person.

As expected then, much of Lewis' disagreement with Bultmann parallels those with Gunkel-Tennant and Kant. On one hand, Lewis rejects that myth is produced because of scientific ignorance, as well as Bultmann's belief that modern man has no myths. On the other he rejects that the primary intention of a myth is to teach the reader something about themselves. Rather, it teaches something about external objective Higher Reality. That such a truth once seen would be of vital importance to the reader, Lewis concedes as a matter of definition. Good myth puts readers in touch with something for which they deeply long, as his theory of *Sehnsucht* explains. No Heideggerian process of existential discovery is required; in fact, such a process only reinforces a particular generation's *perceived* need, which might only bolster the blind narcissism of which Lewis believed the modern age as a whole was guilty.

In the end Lewis' relation to Bultmann is very nearly antipodal. Lewis might be said to be engaged in a *re-mythologization* project that is the inverse of Bultmann's. Thus no real conversation could have existed between them (as Barth found out) as they were entirely at odds about the function of the mythic form. If one believes that the message of the text is irreducibly integrated into its form, one cannot follow Bultmann. If message

and form are separable in any meaningful way, one has parted company with Lewis at the level of definitions.

That said, the choice between them is not simply one of preferences. Bultmann's whole case rests on the idea that modern culture has outgrown the old superstitious worldviews, thereby necessitating the hermeneutical adjustments he proposes. If Bultmann was correct, humanity might be expected to become increasingly rational and non-mythical over time. Yet a scant generation or two later, the evidence of *fibula cupido* at book stores, movie theaters, and in video games seems only to be increasing. This is admittedly anecdotal, yet if subsequent research were in fact to show that "post-modern" persons are generally more myth-loving than their modern predecessors (and this is by no means a far-fetched thesis), which of the two proposals would better describe the phenomenon?

Without a doubt, Lewis has offered a more compelling description of how the mind (specifically the imagination) processes myth and why it longs for it in its mythic Form—and has done so with a robustness Bultmann simply lacks. Rather than being something humanity is outgrowing, Lewis claims the epistemological need for myth's activity on the imagination is common to all people—ancient, modern, and by corollary post-modern as well. While it would require more sociological data than a document like this can muster, the thesis that the Modern Age may have been overly committed to rational and scientific methodologies and that this commitment is now crumbling under the forces of multiculturalism, quantum mechanics, Form-less art, and all things "post-modern" does not seem scandalous.

In terms of simple staying-power and explanatory value, Lewis' model seems superior to Bultmann's as a total position. But if further, Lewis' belief that humans are irreducibly myth-shaped creatures is actually *true*, then it was true at the very moment Bultmann was busy buttressing the myth of modern mythlessness.

C. S. Lewis, Karl Barth, and (Non)Historical Revelation

In many ways Karl Barth and C. S. Lewis reached similar conclusions on the nature and function of this type of literature.²⁴ Barth preferred the term "saga" (or sometimes "legend") to "myth," primarily in response to Gunkel-like distinctions, which played little part in Lewis' thought. His use of "saga," however, approximates effectively what Lewis meant by "myth." Thus, even though a fundamental difference will make their models mutually exclusive in the end, their points of agreement are numerous.

First, they agreed against Bultmann that modern humans are as myth-oriented as humans in any age. As a consequence both denied that the presence of saga-myth (a compromise term for this section) in the ancients says anything about their intellectual, literary, or scientific capacities. Second, they agreed on the central and nonnegotiable role of the imagination in the creation of saga-myth.

Third and most significantly, they agreed that saga-myth was intended to serve as the authoritative meaning-filled interpretation of an historically impenetrable event. They said this for opposite reasons, however. For Lewis the relationship was (or may have been) straightforward—the myth interprets an historical event that has been lost. An

²⁴ Heron argues that Barth had far more in common exegetically with Lewis than Lewis ever realized, and says with tantalizing vagueness, "Dorothy Sayers could have taught him better!" Heron, 87. White, argued similarly twenty years earlier, suggesting that Lewis was turned off by the early Barth, and had he persevered in reading him in to the later *The Humanity of God*, he would have found much to appreciate. White, 32f.

inspired myth is the lost event's authorized interpretation—its true meaning. In Barth's language (for which Lewis has no analogue), the saga reflects, not the *historie*, which is hidden from the eyes of the historian, but the *Geschichte*. It is the meaning-filled witness to a supra-historical divine act of which the inscrutable *historie* is only the external form.

The force of the difference might be expressed as follows: for Lewis the *historie* was lost because it is the nature of most historical events to be forgotten—that is, its loss is incidental. For Barth, however, the event is inscrutable because it must be and could not be otherwise. That the event remain historically impenetrable is a theological necessity, for if it could be probed by the historian, it would cease to have the character of *Geschichte* and be reduced simply to *historie*. This difference may appear minor at the outset, but is actually sourced in the irreconcilable difference outlined later.

As all this would then imply, efforts to reconstruct the precise historical event behind the saga-myth was of little priority or use to either of them. For neither believed the meaning of the event was contained in the *historie*. Lewis condescended to ruminate about it for apologetic purposes more so than Barth, but neither considered it necessary. The inscripturated saga-myth itself is the account which must be taken at face value and worked with. Whatever *historie* may stand behind it, the reader does not need it to understand the message. Thus the saga-mythic Form in which it comes is irreducible to its meaning. The act of demythologizing defeats itself.

The aspect of agreement and disagreement at work here can be seen in their treatment of Adam as an historical man. Neither deny the possibility that an Adam lived and breathed as a man in the time-space *historie*. But it is exactly his historical existence that is irrelevant to the theological discussion. For Lewis the narrative's use of "Adam" is

merely the mythic device to get at the idea of an intact human nature that historically and truly preceded the event of the Fall. Says Lewis, “God have made *many* such creatures.”²⁵ That they rebelled is the point of the story. With a decidedly more theological flourish but with the same net result, Barth is careful in his discussion in “leaving out of account what may have occurred to the historical Adam.”²⁶ If an historical Adam existed, make no mistake, he was a rebel like the rest of us, and was only a first example of that rebellion. For Barth the real significance of Adam is his supra-historical relationship compared to (more precisely being “brought to naught” in) Christ—that is, the Adam of *Geschichte*, not *historie*. The point is that both Lewis and Barth believed deeply that one must wrestle with the story of Adam and his apple as one meets it in the text, not by means of some historically verifiable Adam behind the story.

A final point of agreement may be considered if it is not forced too heartily. Barth’s view that the Redemptive Covenant was the very content of *Geschichte* is in some ways comparable to Lewis’ idea of Myth moving toward Fact in the biblical canon. At least this is so to the degree that the Reformed Covenant of Grace bears resemblance to what the Anglican Lewis would have recognized as redemptive history. In Lewis the Fall narratives are mythic, but redemptive in the sense that they confront and convert the intellect with the claims of the historical Christ. To do this the myth directs its message initially to the nondiscursive imagination, thereby allowing the unreasonable aspects of the grander story to sneak past the dragonish intellect and be embraced. For Barth the Fall

²⁵ *Pain*, 79. Italics added for emphasis.

²⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 171.

participates in the redemption by being given its meaning proleptically in Christ. Now points of divergence have begun to emerge.

The first and less significant distinction rests upon the tangent of contact between Barth and Kant that was mentioned in chapter 1. Both have opted in their own way for a transcendental Fall, that is, a Fall that is not considerable as a phenomenal or historical event. Yet it was there argued that Barth bests Kant by allowing for an intersection of *Geschichte* with *historie* in a way Kant could not by definition allow the noumenal and phenomenal to intersect. This gave Barth confidence to speak of “knowledge” whereas Kant could speak only of “warrant.” The importance of this distinction between the two is a larger subject, but insofar as they both intersect with Lewis, it is a real difference.

Lewis argues that a Fall event is in theory observable, concrete, and datable (even though it is not the first concern), thereby establishing the possibility of historical time prior to its occurrence. Barth’s categories, like Kant’s, allow for a logical discussion of a pre-Fall reality, but not an historical one. For Barth no real *time* exists before the Fall.²⁷ Human rebellion is the historical beginning of humanity. The idea of pre-fallen humanity certainly plays a logically necessary role in theology as a category (eg. for the defense of Divine goodness and as antithesis of *das Nichtige*), but has not an *historical* referent (outside Christ). Meynell summarized him as follows:

The tales and pictures constitutive of myth are embodiments and expressions of what happens always and everywhere, and do not allude to actual particular events. And what myth immediately describes or depicts is always by way of condescension and accommodation; intelligent persons are expected to penetrate through the veil of myth to ‘its true non-historical, timeless, and abstract sense.’²⁸

²⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 168, 171, 181; *CD IV/1*, 495; *Word of God*, 166.

²⁸ Meynell, 135. Meynell uses “myth” here instead of the more precise “saga” because it is the common word shared by the various people he is reviewing.

For Barth the Genesis Adam (one cannot exactly call him “first” in Barth’s structure) speaks of a condition that is existentially true of all humans at all times—we are and always have been rebels. The idea of an historical unfallen humanity outside of the Christ event was repugnant to Barth for reasons mentioned below.

This seems, however, as problematic for Barth as it was for Kant and Niebuhr. If humanity’s deficiency is existential, then of what value is the original created human nature? What of its narrative role and function to redemptive history? What of the restoration aspect of redemption? These critiques are not new, and Barth is not, of course, without a response to all of them. But it seems Barth’s approach is needlessly complicated, as though it is a necessarily deduced position held in order to preserve some other greater value.

This “greater value” is exactly the point of real incompatibility between Lewis and Barth. Barth’s well known dislike for anything smacking of natural theology would have made Lewis’ whole epistemology anathema to him while still in the gate. Lewis’ epistemology of myth rests upon the idea that the imagination is a human capacity perfectly suited to derive meaning from myth. It can be wrong, faulty, or fallen, but it is a truth-facilitating faculty at least as reliable as the fallible intellect. And it is so in its natural state, as the pagans adequately demonstrated. As such, good myth working on a properly-functioning imagination is capable of facilitating knowledge of Higher Reality—in the case of the Fall narrative, of human fallenness.

This whole idea is absolutely incompatible with what may be Barth’s most basic theological presupposition—that no human capacity in itself and as such (that is, outside of the act of divine revelation) is capable of anything other than idolatry and pride. Barth

asserts the necessity of imagination for the myth-maker, but nowhere attributes to it a role in the reader. Although Barth does not say it directly, the imagination left to itself can only be as unreliable and idolatrous as the intellect or the affections, about which he says much. Thus Barth can say very little about the process of how saga-myth works upon the reader because such conversation is excluded by his theological *a priori*.²⁹ The Holy Spirit makes the biblical witness profitable to the reader in the act of revelation, but the “hows” of it are inscrutable.

It seems that one has met here two incompatible presuppositions that must be judged by criteria beyond what this dissertation can afford. Suffice it to say here that if one finds Barth’s absolute resistance to natural theology compelling, then admittedly Lewis’ model will offer no help, because no problem has been admitted. To the reader (and there are many) who, despite Barth’s compelling arguments, continue to believe that scripture teaches and human experience affirms that some aspects of humanity have been divinely designed for contemplation of that divinity, then Lewis has offered a compelling model for how this might work.

Lewis’ Contribution Considered

It is remarkable to consider how many theological methods Lewis advocated that, although not the dominant assumptions of his day, have become so. He argued the unavoidability of models and metaphor in theological discourse long before Avery Dulles and Sallie MacFague. He practiced narrative theological methodologies long before Hans

²⁹ Meynell suggests that this issue of natural theology is exactly the center of Barth’s and Lewis’ differences on the nature and function of saga-myth, saying that Lewis’ view is more akin to “Catholic and Liberal Protestant views.” Meynell, 139f. The later, of course, is who lay in the early Barth’s crosshairs.

Frei and George Lindbeck.³⁰ He demonstrated the fecundity of cross-disciplinary thinking long before David Jasper and Ralph Wood. He held to the centrality of the imagination in theological thinking a generation before Garrett Green, and stressed the legitimacy of myth as literature before Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye found a hearing.³¹

Rather than being a cause of these trends, however, Lewis seems to have simply foreseen them.³² He was no futurist; rather his penetrating mind simply recognized that the theological presuppositions of modernity were not sustainable. They worked against some of our most vigorous human instincts; they were parochial, prejudiced, and ignorant of the fact; They asserted facts where they ought to have maintained hypotheses. Reading Lewis feels at times like an explorer who believes he is forging a path through virgin jungle, who pushes out of the undergrowth, beholds a sublime waterfall, and then sees a sign that says “Kilroy was here.” Said Gruenler already in 1974,

In light of a decade of scholarship and reflection following his death in November, 1963, C. S. Lewis appears to have been one of those gifted forerunners who see things clearly and well in advance of the rest of their contemporaries. Beyond his apologetic interests as a Christian scholar, he had a phenomenological interest in letting things be themselves in all their multidimensional richness. According to Lewis’s hermeneutical view, the Bible must also be allowed to be itself, to function within the spiritual as well [as] in the empirical and intellectual domains. Anything less, he felt, amounts to a serious misrepresentation of the meaning and intention of the Story.”³³

³⁰ With thanks to Green, who by omission of Lewis, allowed for the observation. Green, “Myth, History, and Imagination,” 23.

³¹ With thanks to Hart for the observation. Hart, *Through the Open Door*, 12.

³² Kuteeva mourns that as recently as 2000, Lewis’ insightful approach to literary criticism remains unappreciated by literary scholars. Kuteeva, 278.

³³ Gruenler, 104. In the other direction, Heron outlines how a number of the trajectories Lewis critiqued are still alive and well and bearing ugly fruit. Heron, 98ff.

That future theologians would independently find themselves taking positions he advocated a half century ago seems a bit of soft evidence that his thought may have been superior even in its day.

This brings the dissertation to its final point of synthesis where the question posed at the outset is given its final frame. How does Lewis' more nuanced theory on the nature myth and the human imagination help mediate the question of how to treat the Genesis Fall narrative once it has been declared a "myth," as was the dominant conclusion of much of mid-twentieth century theology? Lewis' total model offers the following advantages and possibilities:

First, it takes seriously all parties at the table, yet is uncritical of none. To begin with, Lewis' approach treats the text of scripture with utmost seriousness, recognizing it as divinely authored and authoritative. Unlike much of higher criticism, he believes he must embrace the text in its preserved form, not some theoretical substrata of it. Yet he does not foist a naïve literalness on the text either, which was at times present in theological conservatism of his period. Further, he takes with great seriousness the contribution of the ancient mind as well as that of "the tradition." He gives them opportunity to subvert modern parochialism by not prejudging their contribution simply on the question-begging grounds that they are pre-modern. But he is not their epigone either. The Ptolemaic cosmos was glorious and insightful, but it was also wrong. This means Lewis can take seriously the work of the sciences, archeology, and even textual criticism. He affirms their legitimacy when they adhere to the limits of their discipline and are circumspect in their conclusions, critiquing them only when they become

arrogant or over-reaching. Thus Lewis' ideas have a higher probability of being correct because of the inclusivity of the voices to which he was willing to listen.

Second, Lewis' conclusions are lucid and have high utility, yet remain humble. To even have to assert the virtuousness of clarity underscores the abstract state of theology in the mid-twentieth century. As Fred Graham wrote with panegyric force in 1974,

Tillich wrote of the theological *a priori*. No one could have guessed what it meant from his own works. Lewis gave it opportunity on every page. Someone has disparagingly described Lewis's own literary criticism as belonging to Peter Pan. That is, he always judged books by criteria adopted in his childhood and never given up for more educated norms. Yet I suspect that many a professional theologian will agree that Lewis's romp in Narnia, or his space trilogy, or his twice-told Psyche myth *revealed* more theology to him or her than all the great books we have read on the subject. We nodded our heads in agreement with the Germans; we felt awe, tenderness, joy with Lewis.³⁴

A corollary to this comparison exists in Lewis' treatment of myth. As opposed to several of the theological trajectories surveyed, Lewis' does not merely observe the presence of myth in the Bible, but offers a deeply considered explanation for how it works, thought out to the ruddy end. Higher criticism sought to explain how the myth came about; Kant and Niebuhr (in a way Bultmann as well) used the myth to describe a human condition discovered independently of the myth; Lewis, however, begins a methodological step earlier by suggesting why such a story is compelling and necessary in the first place, thereby explaining its utility to a degree theologians simply assume or deny. Yet, Lewis does not attempt an exegesis beyond his ability, offering a final or

³⁴ W. Fred Graham, "Fantasy in a World of Monochrome: Where C. S. Lewis Continues to Help," *Christian Century* 39, no. 26 (November, 1975): 1081. Graham was less complementary of Lewis' apologetics. He says, "The problem is not their orthodoxy. Rather, it has to do with the inevitable narrowing and flattening effect, the prosaic quality that results when anyone must treat great and often paradoxical themes in brief compass." That many, like Graham, would find his stories more powerful than his apologetics, is something Lewis could have predicted.

definitive interpretation of its details. His theory admits that such work cannot be done for the reader. The reader must encounter the text personally if s/he wishes to understand. This models the admirable and humble restraint of mature Socratic midwifery in a manner at odds with the frequent audacity of modern higher critics.

Third, in Lewis' hands the story can serve the existential need, yet without abandoning the interpretive limits of the text. The story for Lewis is not something to be used; it is something to which one submits. It is not a thing the reader does something with, but an agent that works upon the willing reader. As such, it will (as was Bultmann's laudable concern) address the existential situation of the reader. If readers have cast themselves upon the story, and if Lewis is correct about what awaits them there, what they shall find will be of shattering significance to them. Yet it will not be (as was Barth's laudable concern) something of their own making. It will bring the reader faithfully into, in this case, a knowledge of human rebellion against God. This reflects a staggering trust in the power of the text that theologians of every stripe claim for scripture, but often deny by their utilization of it.

Fourth, Lewis treats the ontology of human language with a robustness not often found in the theologians of his day. The theological discourse of Lewis' day generally traded in abstract, recondite, and scientific language. While this has great merit so far as it goes, Lewis identified a presuppositional myopia in the commitment. His suggestions regarding the necessity of the non-discursive and poetic in theological discourse has become well recognized since his day. And again, here Lewis not only observes the fact, but offers a very early construct for how it works psychologically.

If the exegete-proper insists on identifying a flaw in Lewis, it may be that his entire treatment of the Genesis Fall myth does not contain an ounce of textual exegesis. It stands only as a doorstep to exegesis—a description of its pre-conditions. This may, however, be no more than to say that much remains for the theologian to do after Lewis is done. Setting aside the suggestion that Lewis has in fact offered a form of exegesis by means of his own tutelary stories, this lack of exegesis-proper is as it should be. Lewis confessed he was not a theologian. But he understood words and stories, and as the material with which theologians must work comes inexorably in the form of words and stories, Lewis has in a way outlined the prolegomenon of our task.

A Suggested Application

As a final point, Lewis' model might have ongoing value for theological consideration. Although a number of interesting possibilities could be suggested, space considerations limit the suggestion to a single aspect of his thought. And it should be underscored that this final section intends only to *suggest* the sorts of dialogue that might open up on the basis of Lewis' structure. If the application is in the end flawed, it may still be fruitfully so.

The suggestion concerns Lewis' development of the "looking at/looking along" distinction, which herein has been used as a short hand for the whole scientific/poetic, abstract/concrete, rational/non-discursive, intellect/imagination distinction that underpins this whole work. While it is so that myth trades on the "looking along" side of the continuum, and thus has been dealt with more generously throughout, Lewis confessed the necessity of both modes of thought to the epistemological project.

While several others might be considered, the suggested application of this taxonomy is to two loci of current theological debate: 1) Classical versus Social Trinitarianism, and 2) the eternity versus the temporality of God. In both of these cases the alternatives are treated as mutually exclusive, which is understandable given that it is supremely hard to say something like “God is both temporal and atemporal” at the same time and in the same sense. Yet it bears remembering that to the lay person the assertion that light seems to be made entirely of particles *and* waves of energy at the same time seems equally impossible (by whatever master metaphor an actual particle physicist imagines this is by definition unavailable to the neophyte). The bulk of consideration will be applied to the Trinity question, followed by a short excurses showing how the conversation might proceed similarly on the eternity question.

At least insofar as I can make out, Classical Trinitarianism offers little to the imagination. Whatever the unity and simplicity of the divine essence “looks like,” the imagination cannot tell us, for by definition all mental images are divisible and complex. That distinctions within God are “logical” but not “real” may be true, but it remains as unimaginable as “east” and “west” are logical-but-not-real places. The classical view of God then is, and intends to be, a rational, discursive, even scientific (in a non-pejorative sense) attempt to speak of God as God is in the abstract absoluteness of God’s being—at least insofar as weak human language can attempt. It has all the rhetorical quality of “looking-at” God.

The Classical model produces a real sense of awe and foreign otherness, but Social Trinitarians are quick to notice how far removed (regardless of its truth-value) this seems from the way God is represented in scripture. The God represented in scripture

seems highly-interactive and relational even within God's own self (as the incarnation shows). This vision of a community of three divine perichoretic persons is a highly imaginable picture. It is narrative, poetic, and familiar to the human imagination. It has the rhetorical quality of "this is what it would be like to experience God's self." It thus approximates a sort of "looking along" the experience of God—sharing and participating in it.

One can perhaps begin to detect how this changes the nature of the discussion. The question of "which is correct" now looks a little different. Might it be possible that both models are merely reflecting the predictable and proper results of the method employed from the start? When the Classical claims of God's self-unity drawn from scripture are pressed to their necessarily abstract end, one has thrust human language to its absolute discursive limit, even to the point (interestingly) of creating a *mathematical* problem ($1+1+1=1$).

The Social model tells a story of God that is compelling, emotive, and sympathetic—exactly the right and proper conclusion expected from an epic myth—the poetry of experience. And when the intellect is restrained, the imagination feasts and even participates in the concrete reality in profound ways. Yet when the intellect enters the story it immediately wonders if the unity of the divine essence has been compromised by concessions to the affections and a problematic anthropomorphism.

Is it possible that some of this debate consists in the attempt to speak of God in two different modes of thought—the abstract and the concrete? If so, asking which mode of thought is correct may still be the wrong question. Like the particle-wave problem in physics, it may become a matter of which conversation is needed at the moment. These

two models, neither of which may reflect the Divine *Ding an sich*, may both be indispensable to proper theological thought—not by means of a *via media* or a compromised version of either, but each model in all the strength of its scandalous claims. It is possible the intellect when pressed moves *inevitably* toward divine simplicity *because* it loves abstractness, while the imagination moves *inevitably* toward sociality *because* it loves concreteness.

That one thinker has a default preference for one model or the other hardly needs explaining, being little more than a unique mixture of romanticism and rationalism in that person's outlook. But how then does one know which model is appropriate in a given conversation? The answer might be nothing more or less than "wisdom." At times it is right and necessary to speak of God in a full scandalous simplicity, simply acknowledging the absence of the imaginative attraction of the communal mythology. At other times it may be right and necessary to speak of God in the full scandal of divine community, recognizing that the intellect may balk at the overly de-centralized images (the "horrid red things") that inevitably accompany it.

Moving to the question of eternity, a similar argument might be constructed. Recognizing that eternity and simplicity hang together in traditional responses, the argument can be repeated. To posit "eternity" as a concept is to suggest to the imagination precisely nothing. To a temporal creature's imagination the idea of "eternity" is a place holder for "we know not what." At least any attempt to create a mental picture of such a state inevitably produces temporal images. When Aristotle's rational dialectic meets the mythological Greek gods, the mythology dies and the abstract

Unmoved Mover is born. Thus eternity may be the inevitable and proper result of the abstracting intellect's attempt to communicate the otherness or transcendence of God.

Yet the human imagination has always favored the interactive gods of the stories. Christian scriptures are no different in this regard. Their narrative structure unavoidably presents a God interacting within the human temporal stream to a degree that seems to foil mere literary "accommodation." That God should be presented *as if* in time is inevitable if the imagination is to do anything with it. It is not as though the biblical writers had an "atemporal" vocabulary they could have used, but chose a "temporal" one to show that indeed God was "inside" time. Only temporal vocabulary exists. Thus, whatever God is in God's self, if it is to be expressed in human language, it must by definition then be represented as temporal. The biblical writers telling stories—or myths as herein defined—of God's interaction with humanity is exactly what the human imagination desires. And when the intellect is held at bay, the biblical myths of God's temporal nature are fecund with meaning. But this, as the atemporalist reminds, is not the same as speaking in an unaccommodated way of God's nature as God knows it.

In the necessarily limited form presented here, these proposals will surely be unattractive to all parties. Thesis and Antithesis by nature prefer autonomy to Synthesis. The suggestion, however, is a modest one seeking not a "solution" so much as an invigorating new plane of discussion.

Conclusion

Lewis embraced sincerely the implications of the Genesis Fall story, even though they were in no way complimentary to his person. From his apologetics to his correspondence, from John's regression through Puritania to Screwtape's diabolical

finagling, from the moral corruption of Belbury to the bloody altar of Ungit, Lewis believed and taught that we are a “spoiled race,” each having now become “a horror to God and to himself and a creature ill-adapted to the universe not because God made him so but because he has made himself so by the abuse of his free will.”³⁵ Further he believed that this knowledge had been powerfully and inescapably revealed in the story of Adam and his magic apple to anyone who was willing to suspend their disbelief and cynicism and plunge themselves into the story’s depths. He believed that this imaginative submission to the narrative was not a concession to superstition or a *sacrificium intellectum*, but a liberating act which could ultimately free even the intellect to revel in possibilities heretofore thought absurd. By this idea he sought to liberate his generation from its uncritical and unwarranted commitments to abstraction, skepticism, and intellectual autonomy. And he saw all this from outside the world of theology, from the perspective of one who simply understood the power of words-written, of literature as an expression of human nature, of what it means to be creatures who read, whose meandering lives are temporal and story-shaped.

Thus my final argument is that the theological world would do well to consider more deeply Lewis’ view of scripture, myth, and imagination—not because he stood thigh-deep in the professional world of theological abstraction and technical jargon, but precisely because he did not.

³⁵ *Pain*, 69.

APPENDIX

Propositions from the Dissertation

1. Some truths, if directed primarily at the intellect, will be dismissed as incredible, yet will be lovingly embraced if addressed first to the imagination...these are often the truths of greatest import.
2. Critical exegesis is not the only valid means of producing effective commentary. The recasting of the text into an epic narrative form provides for the possibility of a non-discursive commentary that may have the power to draw the reader even more deeply into the center of the text's intention.
3. The very epic and mythic form of the Fall narrative is itself a *preparatio evangelica*, leading the reader toward the Fact of the incarnation, thereby sneaking the whole of the biblical narrative past the dragonish intellect.
4. Nature, with all her good and holy pleasures, is sacramental, desiring to thrust us beyond her into that greater glory of which she ceaselessly speaks. Modernity's fault was its contentment with the means rather than the end.
5. All generations and cultures embrace defining myths. Modernity's greatest and most self-reinforcing myopia may be its belief that it is myth-less.
6. The sanctioned models by which something is understood, whether in science or theology, inevitably reflect the values of their advocates at least as much as they reflect the facts they are meant to image.
7. The demand for a willing suspension of disbelief and a treatment of the text *as if* it happened as recorded is most greatly needed and warranted at precisely the point the modern critic is most inclined to be cynical.

Propositions from Graduate Work

8. In nearly all discussions that truly matter Aristotle is a more useful guide than Newton.
9. The Medieval/Ptolemaic view of the cosmos was not so much wrong as it was a reflection of different values. In the end, they may have been closer to the truth that really mattered than was the Copernican West.
10. Karl Barth's work is beautiful, powerful, and useful, often exactly in the places where he is dead wrong.

11. Scotus was correct. Because God is a just King, divine command and natural law have the same content in their original iteration (but for one pedagogical exception). The Fall is the source of competition between the affection for justice and the affection for advantage.
12. Aristotle was correct, and Einstein confirmed it. Insofar as God lacks the attribute of motion, he lacks the attribute of time. The theological debate, with its Newtonian view of time, is an entire worldview behind.

Additional Propositions

13. Feelings of deep piety and reverence may only be as far away as a third cup of coffee...this does not necessarily delegitimize them.

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