

IMAGE AND CONTENT: THE TENSION IN C. S. LEWIS' *CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*

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C. S. Lewis rightly understood the nature of imaginative literature. If fantasy is to work its magic on the reader, if it is to so enchant its public that it becomes myth for them, then it must be read "in a sense, 'for fun,' and with (one's) feet on the fender."¹ In this regard such stories are similar in their demands to that of any work of art. In order to receive what the work presents, the reader must surrender himself to it. "Look. Listen. Receive," says Lewis. "Get yourself out of the way. (There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.)"²

Many Christians (or those predisposed toward Christianity) who read C. S. Lewis' series of seven children's stories, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, are indeed able to put their "feet on the fender" and to participate receptively in the Narnian myth. Like Chad Walsh, they find that as a result of this experience their imaginations are baptized; they get "the taste and smell of Christian truth."³ But for a good percentage of the post-Christian adult world the magic, the "taste and smell," of these stories is lacking.⁴ True, the tales are still widely read. In fact, in the last four years since an American paperback edition of the Narnia series has been published, there has been growing interest shown in these children's stories. Walter Hooper reports that in 1973 sales were running over one million copies a year.⁵ A certain charm is apparent in the *Chronicles* to both the Christian and the non-Christian reader. However, that charm is for many not what Lewis intended, namely the enchantment of a new myth. Rather it is simply the joy of good literature. Instead of remaining within the total experience of the tales, instead of viewing the narrative from an "internal" standpoint, the modern secular reader is often too conscious of Lewis' skill in putting old truths into new surroundings in order to help shape his audiences' opin-

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¹C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," reprinted in C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 34.

²C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961) 19.

³C. Walsh, "Impact in America," *Light on C. S. Lewis* (ed. J. Gibb; New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965) 107.

⁴By "post-Christian" man I mean to suggest that growing number of people in our western culture who are acquainted with Christ and the Church but who do not believe Christianity to have any significant validity or value for our day. The numbers of such people have grown to such a proportion that many speak appropriately of our post-Christian era.

⁵W. Hooper, preface to K. Lindskoog, *The Lion of Judah in Never-Never Land: The Theology of C. S. Lewis Expressed in His Fantasies for Children* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 13.

ions.⁶ Rather than remaining within the parameters of the story itself, such readers feel compelled to bring to their experience with the text criteria from beyond the fantasy world, i. e., they make use of "external" standards in seeking to understand and receive the tale. Living in an age of advertising "myth-makers" who continually attempt to capture one's imagination (and money), modern man is conscious of the message behind and in the medium. Aware of the Christ-story and unresponsive to it in any meaningful way, post-Christian man often assumes a critical stance toward Lewis' *Chronicles* (even while enjoying them), for they are heavily laden with Christian analogy and symbolism. In the process, such a reader destroys the mythic possibilities that Lewis envisioned in the writing of these stories.

In developing this thesis more fully, this essay will venture into the world of the *Chronicles of Narnia* in order to better understand Lewis' desire to have these stories be received as myth. It will then consider two of Lewis' reasons for turning to the writing of "myth." Finally, it will suggest what factors were at work in Lewis himself that encouraged him to give to his stories their specific Christian content, thereby inhibiting their reception as myth by much of the post-Christian world.

I. THE CHRONICLES AS MYTH

As a boy in grade school, C. S. Lewis wrote a series of fantasies about Boxen, a country filled with talking animals. He wrote the text in ruled exercise books, illustrating his stories with water colors. After completing a seven-hundred-year history of Boxen, the boy Lewis turned to exploring the lives of his principal characters, particularly a noble frog by the name of Lord Jim Big. With such a start in life, it is no real surprise that Lewis returned in his later life to this first love—children's stories—and wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of seven works.⁷

Narnia, where most of the stories take place, is a land in which lampposts come to life and grow like trees; in which animals, but not all animals, talk; and in which trees are personalities that walk and sing. It is a land of richness, alive and free, with plashing glens, loyal fawns, and breathtaking centaurs. Narnia is the kingdom of memorable animals. Of Aslan, the lion who is "not a tame lion," who allows children to play in his golden mane and yet is not beyond scratching them. Of Reepicheep, the mouse who meets all danger with bravery and who stands with his paw resting on the hilt of his long sword. And of Puddleglum, the marsh-wiggle who is something like a frog or a man, who is always predicting catastrophe despite his reputation among the other marsh-wiggles as "too flighty" and too full of "high spirits."

Narnia is that magical world which Digory Kirke and Polly Plummer,

⁶This might equally be true for the majority of Christian readers who fail to let the stories increase their awareness through myth by constantly analyzing how clever Lewis is in bringing in "Christian truth."

⁷The seven books in the series are: *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (1950); *Prince Caspian* (1951); *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1952); *The Silver Chair* (1953); *The Horse and the Boy* (1954); *The Magician's Nephew* (1955); and *The Last Battle* (1956). These books are available in a Collier Books edition (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

two English children, first discover, and which others—like Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy Pevensie—also visit. Some critics have complained that the characterizations of these children are flat, two-dimensional. Lewis is not unaware of this fact and to a large extent supports such an evaluation:

Every good writer knows that the more unusual the scenes and events of his story are, the slighter, the more ordinary, the more typical his persons should be. Hence Gulliver is a commonplace little man and Alice a commonplace little girl. . . . To tell how odd things struck odd people is to have an oddity too much. He who is to see strange sights must not himself be strange.⁸

It is for this reason that Lewis makes his English children predictable and straightforward.

The plots of the Narnia tales are far-ranging and fantastic, and thus difficult to summarize adequately. If one desires to participate chronologically in the adventures of Narnia, he must begin with *The Magician's Nephew*. Actually the sixth book in the series, it recounts how Digory Kirke and Polly Plummer magically discover other worlds. Being analogous both in its general shape as well as in occasional specific occurrences to the Biblical account of creation, the Garden of Eden and Eve's temptation, this tale recreates for its reader the birth of the Kingdom of Narnia. Following this adventure of witnessing the beginning of Narnia, Polly and Digory return to England, and it is not until fifty years or more later that Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy Pevensie visit Digory, who is by this time a respectable professor, and accidentally discover a way back into Narnia through a magic wardrobe. Entitled *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, this story then relates the children's plight in a Narnia frozen by a White Witch into a perpetual winter—a Narnia in which Christmas never comes. Father Christmas does arrive in his time, however, and brings with him the power to overcome the curse of winter and to re-establish freedom and life. As in the Biblical account, Good Friday and Easter are the culmination of Christmas, and the death and resurrection of Aslan the lion become a second focus of the tale.

Lewis has suggested that *The Horse and the Boy* should be read next in the sequence. It is probably the weakest of the *Chronicles* and is the least integrated into the corpus. Although Peter, Edmund, Lucy and Susan are still present, the story chiefly concerns two other-world children, Shasta and Aravis, who are fleeing from Calormen to Archenland because they have been mistreated. The children escape on Narnian talking horses who have been wrongfully enslaved. Helped by friends, by the Pevensies and by Aslan, the four reach Archenland where they defeat the evil Rabadash who is threatening the city.

After living again in England, this time for one year in the earth's chronology, the four Pevensie children return to Narnia through the magic of a railway station. Discovering Narnia to be generations beyond

⁸C. S. Lewis, "On Science-Fiction," quoted in P. Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 39.

that time when they were last there and occupied by invaders, the children reconquer the Kingdom for its rightful ruler, Prince Caspian. They obtain the help of Aslan, as well as such loyal Narnians who have been forced into hiding as Truffle-hunter (a badger), Pattertwig (a squirrel), Nikabrik and Trumpkin (two dwarfs), Reepicheep, Wimbleweather the giant, Glenstorm the centaur, and the Bulgy Bears. This tale is entitled *Prince Caspian*. In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* Edmund and Lucy, along with their cousin, Eustace Clarence Scrubb, sail with Caspian to the unknown eastern seas of Narnia in search of seven faithful lords who have disappeared. Eustace, not wanting to be along on the voyage, tries to escape to an island but soon finds his "dragon-like" ways have actually turned him into a dragon. Aslan, who created Narnia and who is central to all of the stories, has compassion on him, however, and transforms him back into a boy. After other equally fantastic adventures, the group accounts for all seven of the lords and sails through the Silver Sea to the very end of this world before returning home.

In *The Silver Chair*, Eustace Scrubb and a young friend, Jill Pole, escape their unhappiness in an English experimental school and become involved in the rescue of Prince Rilian from the underworld and the curse of the Green Serpent-Queen. Enlisting the help of the marsh-wiggle Puddleglum, Jill and Eustace travel from Narnia to the north. There, after encountering cannibalistic giants, the three find an entrance into the underworld, free Prince Rilian, and kill the serpent. Their mission complete, the children return to their school, but only after seeing Caspian, Prince Rilian's father, resurrected from the dead by Aslan into a new life, invigorating and joyous.

Lewis' final take is appropriately entitled *The Last Battle*. It is considered unique among children's stories in that it records the death of its principal characters. Eustace and Jill return to the Narnia of still another age as it is being taken over by Shift, a clever ape. The ape persuades the other talking animals that a donkey he has disguised in a lion's skin is Aslan. Using this subterfuge, Shift entraps Narnia within his power and opens it to the evil Calormens. King Tirian (the reigning king of Narnia) and the children are not fooled, however, and Narnia's last battle ensues. Slaughtered or forced into a stable that is to be their death, those loyal to Aslan find themselves, instead, in a stable that is bigger inside than out, and which allows them to go "further up and further in" to a new, more beautiful Narnia that is eternal. The children, wishing never to leave, are told by Aslan that they can remain, for a railway accident in England has not only been their means of entry into Narnia this time but it has ended their lives there as well. Now they too can begin their new life with Aslan, which will be part of the *Great Story*.

To continue with this analysis of the *Chronicles of Narnia* according to their plot, however, or to discuss further their setting and characterization (one could include tone, or point of view—which I have neglected—as well) would prove to be quite inadequate as a means of entry into these stories. For the nature of "story" as Lewis understood it centered not in the tone, plot or characterization but rather in the at-

mosphere created by the tale.⁹ A story is, or should be, more than the succession of events we call plot—more, even, than any excitement felt. A story is the embodiment or mediation of the “more,” i. e., that which lies beyond the perception of the reader, that horizon or atmosphere which frames our conscious critical day-to-day existence. For the reader, a story is or should be his entry into a larger world of the imagination. Plot is important, but only as “a net whereby to catch something else,” says Lewis. “The real theme may be and perhaps usually is something that has no sequence in it, something other than a process and much more like a state or quality. Giantship [in “Jack and the Beanstalk”], otherness, the desolation of space [in H. G. Wells’ *First Men in the Moon*], are examples. . . .”¹⁰ This something more is not an escape from reality, though it is a reality baffling to the intellect. “It may not be ‘like real life’ in the superficial sense,” Lewis states, “but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region.”¹¹ When young boys, for example, read of enchanted woods, they do not begin to despise the real woods. Rather, “the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.”¹²

In weaving this net called plot, good “stories” will often introduce the marvelous or supernatural. This supernaturalness is not there in order to fool little children (or naive adults) into believing impossibilities but because such things as giants, or talking toads, or other worlds, are indispensable to the literary creation, i. e., to the story. “Jack and the Beanstalk” could have all the same excitement and action without introducing a giant, but it would be quite a different story. The whole quality of the reader’s imagined response, suggests Lewis, depends on the presence of such things as giants.

Such fantasy stories should not really be considered as children’s stories at all. For if a story is worth reading at ten, it will also be worth rereading at fifty. The only real distinctive in children’s stories that Lewis recognizes is that the author will exclude in such stories what a child would not understand or like. If fantasies are, in fact, only read by children today, this is because they alone are indifferent to literary fashions and respond to their desires more honestly.

⁹I am indebted to Wesley Kort for this division of the novel for purposes of discussion and analysis into tone, plot, characterization and atmosphere. In his unpublished manuscript, *Liminal Forms*, he suggests that in a given work any one of these aspects can be dominant. It is what the work itself emphasizes that should be the focus of our analysis and discussion, i. e., either plot, character, tone or, as in our present case, atmosphere.

¹⁰C. S. Lewis, “On Stories,” *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (ed. C. S. Lewis; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 103.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹²C. S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” reprinted in C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1968) 30. In his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” J. R. Tolkien makes a similar point to that of Lewis. In order to capture this same idea of a story’s enchantment, Tolkien uses the word “Faerie.” “Faerie,” he says, “contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: Tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves mortal men when we are enchanted.” Fantasy, which is “the making or glimpsing of Other worlds,” is the heart of “Faerie’s” desire. J. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, pp. 42, 63.

Lewis believes that a good story will have a "very simple narrative shape, a satisfactory and inevitable shape, like a good vase or a tulip."¹³ Its pleasures will rarely depend on suspense or surprise. In fact, reading it will usually bring the feeling of inevitableness. While providing pleasure, the story will not often evoke in the reader real human sympathy. Though the reader will feel the story's life pattern to be relevant to him, he will not imaginatively transport himself into it. Rather, the sense of the more will be experienced as part of the reader's own world.

To such stories that emphasize atmosphere, that have a certain inevitability to their shape, a relevance in tone that nevertheless does not often compel human sympathy, and most importantly a capability of transporting the "more" from the literary work to the reader's own world—Lewis says he finds it difficult to give any name except "myth."¹⁴ And with this word "myth" we find ourselves at the heart of Lewis' intent in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. *Lewis' children's stories are primarily his attempt to ensnare a more ultimate reality in the net of fantastic images transformed into story by the connective fabric of plot*. It is, in particular, myth's mediative function of allowing its reader to experience the highest qualitative reality, i. e., the more, that Lewis stresses concerning a good story. Myth alone is capable of transporting "adjectivally" that concrete reality that has too rich a meaning to be reducible to concepts and nouns. It alone can transfer an atmosphere (a *Weltanschauung*) from the world of the literary work to that of the reader. In his introduction to an anthology of George MacDonald's works, Lewis writes of the mythic quality of good stories:

It arouses in us sensations we have never had before, never anticipated having, as though we had broken out of our normal mode of consciousness and "possessed joys not promised to our birth." It gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives.¹⁵

As myth depends on the reader as well as the teller (for the underlying atmosphere must not only be presented but also encountered), the same story will be myth for one man and not for another. The only verification of myth will be a self-authenticating one, a conviction that in the imaginative experience one has glimpsed a larger reality than he previously knew. That self-authenticating encounter, which Lewis experienced in his own life, he has labeled "joy."¹⁶ Joy was known to Lewis primarily as a longing until he read MacDonald's *Phantastes*. Lewis describes it thus:

¹³Lewis, *Experiment*, p. 42.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (ed. C. S. Lewis; New York: Macmillan, 1954) 16-17.

¹⁶This, in fact, becomes the unifying thread of his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised By Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955).

It was as though the voice which had called to me from the world's end were now speaking at my side. It was with me in the room or in my body, or behind me. If it had once eluded me by its distance, it now eluded me by its proximity—something too near to see, too plain to be understood, on this side of knowledge.¹⁷

The voice of joy had spoken to Lewis at other moments before, but only at a distance. He had heard it fleetingly while gazing as a boy at a flowering currant bush that reminded him of his brother's toy garden, in discovering the autumn of Beatrix Potter's *Squirrel Nutkin*, when reading the epic poem, *The Saga of King Olaf*, and through involving himself in Wagnerian Romanticism.¹⁸ Now this joy, which had eluded him due to its distance, rose out of Macdonald's story and enveloped Lewis, transforming his real world.

Lewis had sought this joy out; but in a more fundamental way, it also had seemed to find him. Through reading a story, Lewis had broken out (or better, been broken out) of his normal mode of consciousness and been possessed of new joys. Here is the paradigm of what Lewis was attempting to recreate for his readers through his children's tales. Just as Macdonald had been his Vergil leading him into mystery beyond, so Lewis wanted to be through his *Chronicles of Narnia* a Vergil to modern-day Dantes, opening up their horizons in order that they might find Beatrice waiting there. He was trying to create, as it were, not the cause but the condition of truth.¹⁹ It was an initiating, not a confirming, task that he envisioned.²⁰ Through his myth Lewis wanted modern man to again hear the voice of joy rising from without, but also this time from within his own world, in order that that world might become more real.

II. TWO REASONS FOR WRITING MYTH

Lewis' desire to create stories that could become myth for his readers is directly related to two conceptions that we must now more fully develop: first, a belief that modern man's present myths are inadequate and false—that is, incapable of truly performing the mythical task; and secondly, and on the positive side, a belief in the unique role myth can play in the process of man seeking to understand reality—a belief we have briefly mentioned above. Modernity, in Lewis' opinion, has cut man off from his roots and his destiny, falsely narrowing his boundaries on the real to too small a focus. In doing so, it has made man little more than a "trousered ape."²¹ Many have enclosed themselves in tiny, windowless universes that they have mistaken for the only possible

¹⁷Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 7, 16-17, 73.

¹⁹This distinction is made by R. Cunningham in his book, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).

²⁰This distinction is made by G. Urang in his book, *Shadows of Heaven* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1971).

²¹C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," quoted in P. Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis*, p. 19.

one. For them "there are no distant horizons, no mysteries."²²

A great deal of Lewis' attitude toward modern culture is included in the *Chronicles of Narnia*: Modernity comes under Lewis' satiric attack. In *The Silver Chair*, for example, Puddleglum, after hearing of the Green Witch's falsely empirical and bounded universe, says:

"Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing . . . ; four babies playing a game can make a play world which licks your real world hollow."²³

Contemporary man, like the Green Witch, has created for himself a subworld which is in important respects inferior to his own children's play world. His desperately practical perspectives of expediency and efficiency have made him blind to reality about him, like the Emperor in "The Emperor's New Clothes."²⁴ To see reality again, man might well have to become as a little child. Here, it seems, is a chief motivation behind Lewis' children's stories.

In his inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1954, Lewis attempted to describe the myth of modern man, "the Emperor," which prevented him from discovering reality. It is, he felt, "a new archetypal image. It is the image of old machines being superseded by new and better ones. For in the world of machines the new most often really is better and the primitive really is clumsy." What other ages would have called "permanence," the Emperor calls "stagnation." Such "chronological snobbery" with its belief in a universal process from imperfect to perfect is only one result of the myth for Lewis.²⁵ Mass conformity, a government by advertisement rather than justice, a religion without God, an educational system that seeks to "adjust the gears" rather than to educate people, and ultimately "the abolition of man" are other consequences of this destructive myth.²⁶

Lewis believed that not all myths lead to such detrimental consequences, however. In his essay "On Stories," Lewis discussed such tales as the Oedipus cycle. In it, he says,

we have seen how destiny and free will can be combined, even how the free will is 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.²⁷

²²Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," p. 23.

²³Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, p. 159.

²⁴The use of "The Emperor's New Clothes" in this context is mine, not Lewis', though it is consistent with and expressive of his ideas.

²⁵C. S. Lewis, "De Descriptione Temporum," quoted in P. Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis*, p. 15.

²⁶Ibid. Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947). This is the title of a series of lectures Lewis presented at the University of Durham, England.

²⁷Lewis, "On Stories," p. 101.

Story received as myth, of which Oedipus is but one possibility, does what rational statement cannot. It opens our imagination to that reality which is fundamental to all of life, and from which all meaning emerges. Remembering our previous discussion of Lewis' experience of joy, we might say that myth permits both man to enjoy and God to express his joy toward us. Not only does myth allow man's spirit to reach outward, but it also creates the context in which man can hear that "voice from the world's end calling (him)." ²⁸ Myth permits man to break out of his "normal modes of consciousness" and through his imagination to grasp reality precritically, "on this side of knowledge." ²⁹

It is in this dual context of the present destructiveness of our modern myth on the one hand, and the creative possibilities for myth on the other, that the *Chronicles of Narnia* must be viewed. Modern man with too narrow a focus and, thus, no awareness of mysteries outside of his singularly tunneled vision has limited himself to the near horizon of man's knowledge, to this-world facticity. Lewis, opposed to this modern revisionism, tries through his children's stories to allow the imagination sufficient freedom to again break through and glimpse the "more."

III. A PROBLEM YET TO BE OVERCOME

In any discussion of C. S. Lewis, it is not enough merely to speak of him as a romantic or a myth-maker, for undergirding his imaginative side and indissolubly united with it is a rational one as well. Our discussion of Lewis' belief in the inadequacy of modern myth has already hinted at this other side of Lewis the storyteller. For according to Lewis, a story is not only a "poiema (something made)" to be experienced, but also a "logos (something said)" in the experience.³⁰ Thus in his Narnia tales one discovers not only potential myth-creating images ("poiema") but also a distinctly Christian content or shape ("logos").

We described above, for example, how in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* we have the story of Aslan who arrives at Christmas, bringing with him the power to overcome the curse of winter and to re-establish freedom and life. And as in the Biblical account, where Good Friday and Easter are the culmination of Christmas, so in this story, the lion Aslan's death and resurrection become the culmination of the Christmas event. Not only through the general shape of events, but through recurring incidents within the *Chronicles*, the reader is repeatedly reminded of the Christ-event and of Christian theology more generally. In *The Silver Chair*, to give but one example, Aslan beckons Jill to drink of the only stream of life. Then he says to her, "You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you." ³¹

²⁸Lewis, *Surprised*, p. 180.

²⁹Ibid.; Lewis, "Introduction," *George Macdonald*, pp. 16-17.

³⁰Lewis, *Experiment*, pp. 82, 83 ff.

³¹Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, pp. 16-19.

Given this general Christian shape for the stories as a whole, we must ask ourselves the question, "Why did Lewis include such a specific Christian content within his tales, which he wanted to be mythic?" Why did he feel constrained to demonstrate a rational, as well as an imaginative side, within his storytelling? We have already begun to answer these questions when we suggest that Lewis might best be labeled a "reasoning romantic." Believing that the intellect and the imagination are inseparable aspects of man's fundamental unity, Lewis sought to en flesh that understanding in his stories. Modernity has sought to bifurcate man by polarizing his ways of knowing and speaking into the poetic and the scientific, the concretizing and the abstracting. By divorcing the quantity from the quality, the "logos" from the "poiema," modern thought has been forced into a dualistic epistemology—into asking "whether something exists" on the one hand and "what a thing is like" on the other. The result was in Lewis' day (and still is in ours) an emphasis on the "whether" over the "what," on the truth over the meaning.³² We have already noted that this fact seems a determinative one in Lewis' attempt to write meaning-making myth. But to emphasize meaning to the exclusion of truth would be almost as unsatisfactory for Lewis, if possible at all. Instead, the imagination and the intellect must be reunited and held in creative tension. Or to be more accurate to Lewis, reason and imagination need to become aware again of each one's continuing relationship with the other. It is not that man has become bifurcated; it is only that people believe this to be true. Lewis, wishing to reassert his belief in man's fundamental wholeness, seeks through his stories to portray anew this necessary interrelation of reason and imagination within all people.

Lewis' combining of the rational and the romantic, the intellectual and the imaginative, though not unique to his children's stories, should be considered, nevertheless, as fundamental to them. A recognition of this fact helps one place in perspective Lewis' comments regarding his stories. For example, Lewis states that in writing his fairy tales he had no moral or religious truth in his intentions that he sought to express. Rather his stories were the result of pictures and images that he carried for many years in his imagination and that sought expression in words. The rational was there only as "the whole cast of the author's mind." He says, "At first there wasn't anything Christian about them [the images] . . . ; that element [the Christian content] pushed itself in of its own accord. It was part of the bubbling."³³ Lewis' rational, explicitly Christian framework, if we are to accept him as his own critic, forced itself out from the background of the author's whole life. This content, along with the images, combined to form the stories as they now exist. What had started on the imaginative end of Lewis' literary continuum had been forced to admit the basic literary place of these children's stories as mythic.

³²R. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis*, makes some of these same points as they relate to Lewis' apologetic effort.

³³C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," reprinted in Lewis, *Of Other Worlds*, p. 37. Cf. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," p. 30.

In a letter Lewis wrote in December, 1958, to a friend, the process of "bubbling" that Lewis refers to above is put in a somewhat different perspective, however. In challenging the assertion that the Narnian tales are allegory, Lewis states:

If Aslan represented the immaterial Deity in the same way in which Giant Despair represents Despair, he would be an allegorical figure. In reality however he is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, "What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in *that* world as He actually has done in ours?"³⁴

Lewis' first draft of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* contained no mention of Aslan.³⁵ Instead, through the world of Narnia it brought to light, as he said, the images and pictures Lewis carried in his imagination. But rather than the Christian element spontaneously bubbling up (an act of the imagination), Lewis here gives the alternate explanation that the figure of Aslan grew in response to the question, "What might Christ be like in a world like Narnia?"—certainly an act of Lewis' will. To the romantic, Lewis consciously conjoined the rational. To the imaginative, he deliberately added the intellectual. His "romance" was given a "logic."

Regardless of the exact context that gave rise to the *Chronicles of Narnia* it is the *result* of Lewis' imaginative efforts, not his labor, that is important to us, his readers. It is always dangerous for the critic to confuse literary *process* with the literary *product* that emerges.³⁶ Rather than being mythical—"fictional" or "mimetic" if you like—as Lewis' own description of his creative process might imply, his tales are for many quite rational—"thematic" and "didactic," as it were. What started as a creation of the imagination for Lewis and remains thus for him and many of his followers has in fact been read by others as an exercise of his intellect. While Lewis believed that mimetic could become the didactic without sacrificing any of its mimetic nature, it has yet to be demonstrated.

What then can be concluded? To view these tales as merely a rational endeavor would certainly seem an over-exaggeration. One need only read the Narnia stories receptively, as a child would, to dismiss such extremism. But on the other hand, Lewis and many of his admirers seem equally to misread the tales in emphasizing solely their pictorial nature. It is true that Lewis began with the images. But as they appeared and reappeared in his imagination he, himself, confessed that something else entered into the equation: "Then of course the man in me began to have his turn [i.e., the rational]." Lewis goes on to state, "I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had

³⁴C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (ed. W. H. Lewis; New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966) 283.

³⁵W. Hooper, preface to K. Lindskoog, *Lion*, p. 12.

³⁶G. Urang, *Shadows*, makes a similar point with regard to Lewis' science fiction.

paralysed much of my own religion in childhood."³⁷ Lewis reasoned that by casting Christianity within an imaginary world, stripping it of its "stained-glass and Sunday School associations," he could help the reader recapture the potency of the gospel. Thus, to the process of seeing images came the process of reflecting on their significance, and the merger of the intellectual and the imaginative endeavors is the product we now possess. Rather than being on the far imaginative end of the literary continuum, Lewis' children's stories certainly are closer to the center for the majority of their readers.

Gunnar Urang has labeled Lewis' imaginative writing "didactic fantasy." I would use the term "mythical allegory." Lewis would probably have wished it to be called "analogical myth." Whatever the nuance, wherever precisely we find the stories falling on Lewis' literary continuum, their general shape seems clear. And it is this shape, born of Lewis' unique union of the rational and the romantic, that for many of his readers ultimately destroys Lewis' mythic endeavor. Wanting to create the possibility of a new myth for modern man, Lewis for clear reasons added a content to his storytelling unacceptable to much of the audience he was trying to reach. Wanting to enrich his story with satire and allegory, he in fact impoverished it for many of his readers by their inclusion. *In Lewis' stories, the birth of the numinous is aborted by too strenuous a rational exercise, too early in the myth-making process.* Modern secular man, having rejected overt Christian rationality, rejects the covert rationality he finds in the tales.

Stella Gibbons, in her essay on Lewis as an imaginative writer, admits that the "tremendousness of the allegory" seems to mar "the artistry of the tale." However, she goes on to surmise, "I imagine the accusation would pass Lewis by completely. He would not have thought that it mattered."³⁸ If by "the artistry of the tale" Gibbons means only its literary qualities, I might agree, with strong reservation. But if by the phrase she is implying that the story's ability to create myth in the reader's imagination, i. e., its true purpose, would have been irrelevant to Lewis, I must disagree. For Lewis, throughout his imaginative career, seems to have been wrestling with the "tremendousness" of his imaginal-rational unity in its relation to the rise of the mythic in his tales. Lewis desired modern, bifurcated man to experience the mythic as a unified imaginal-rational creature. If anyone could have succeeded in such a venture, it would have been a man such as he. Unfortunately, the task seems tantamount to putting Humpty Dumpty together again.

³⁷Lewis, "Sometimes," p. 37.

³⁸S. Gibbons, "Imaginative Writing," *Light* (ed. J. Gibb) 101. J. R. Tolkien disliked the seven *Chronicles* for a similar reason, believing that the stories were flawed by allegorical overtones. See C. Forbes, "Dulling the Numinous," review of K. Lindskoog, *The Lion of Judah in Never-Never Land* and C. S. Lewis: *Mere Christian*, in *Christianity Today* (December 7, 1973) 41.