TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF MYTH: MYTHOPOEIC STRUCTURE IN THE FICTION OF C. S. LEWIS AND CHARLES WILLIAMS

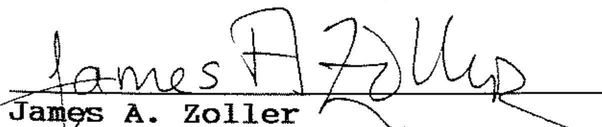
by
Kevin A. Eaton

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Major Honors in English

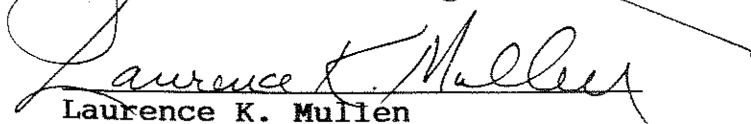
Houghton College, Houghton, New York
May 1993

Honors Committee:

Charles E. Bressler, Chair



James A. Zoller



Laurence K. Mullen

Oriole
PR
6023
.E926
Z644

Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: The Relevance of Myth to Life 3

Ernest Becker and the "Twin Ontological Motives" 5

Frank Kermode's Theory of Fiction 10

A Survey of Myth Scholarship 19

Carl Jung's Exegesis of the Mythic 19

Myth: Joseph Campbell's Position 26

Claude Levi-Strauss: The Structure of Myth 36

Myth and Archetype in Northrop Frye 42

A Methodology for Mythic Study 49

The Nature of Metaphor 49

Questions to Ask of the Text 53

Chapter 2: A Statement of Personal Aesthetics and Parameters of Mythic Literature 55

Chapter 3: C. S. Lewis and Myth 62

The Chronicles of Narnia: A Myth or a Fiction? 64

Lewis's Adult Fiction 78

Chapter 4: Charles Williams and Myth 100

Chapter 5: Conclusion 123

Works Cited 136

Introduction

The mention of the word myth evokes a cacophony of images. We may first think of Greek gods and goddesses, and nymphs and satyrs, and stories that explain the origin of our world. Myth might refer to an oral tradition of storytelling or a collection of primitive beliefs. Or often, we hear the word myth indicating the erroneousness of a belief; the opinion that frogs give boys warts, for instance, might be called a myth.

As myth carries multiple meanings in many contexts, I will, in my study of myth, arrive at a working definition and in particular, a definition of mythopoeic literature. My study of myth will attempt to answer several questions: "What is Myth?" "What relevance does myth have to life?" "How does mythic literature interact with its reader?" and "What can we learn about ourselves through the study of myth?" In attempting to answer these questions, I will investigate the major scholars in the field of mythic studies and then formulate my own literary interpretive schema.

After I have surveyed the field of mythic scholarship, I will apply my understanding of myth in addressing the

fiction of C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams, both authors claiming to be mythic. Further, I will evaluate their use of myth and determine whether or not they are successful in their attempts to write mythopoeic novels. Moreover, I expect that my study of Lewis and Williams will in turn shape my own understanding of mythopoeic literature.

In this study, I will assume a working knowledge of the vocabulary used in literary studies as well as a working understanding of literary criticism and its accompanying terminology. And finally, in my discussion of Lewis and Williams, I will also assume Louise Rosenblatt's concept of transactional reading, a process that declares that reading and interpreting is a dynamic event in which the experiences of the reader enter into a dialogue with the text. Meaning does not, then, exist exclusively in the mind of the reader, nor in the text alone, but in the interaction between the two.

Chapter 1

The Relevance of Myth to Life

This endlessly elaborating poem
Displays the theory of poetry,
As the life of poetry. A more severe,

More harassing master would extemporize
Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
Of poetry is the theory of life

As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
In things seen and unseen, created from
nothingness,
The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for
lands.

--Wallace Stevens,
"An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"

Are the arts existentially important to us? Is art simply a way to escape into a world of sensual and aesthetic enjoyment? Is the study of myth more than an enigma for cultural anthropologists or a distraction for the

intellectually interested? These basic questions deserve attention before my study of mythopoeic literature begins.

As the study of art often begins and ends without the slightest consideration of why it should deserve our attention and/or passion, I will begin by suggesting that in art we discover what it means to be human. But so as to sound less etherial, an understanding of art, we will see, provides an understanding of human needs. By understanding how the most fundamental and existential conflicts inspire the creation and experience of art, we will learn that the creation of art is not different from the creation of the ways of knowing about the world around us. The central problems of art, then, are the central problems of the human psyche, the problems that surface, perhaps, each day that we are alive.

Humans are, of course, conscious of the world around them, unlike their "lower" animal counterparts. Attempting to discover all there is to know about the world around us, significance to this concrete world. But how incomplete is our knowledge of the concrete world, let alone our relation to it! If we relied only upon our empirical knowledge of the world, our lack of sense-making ability would cause insanity; our needs would be untouched.

Even when we have learned all there is to know about the mechanical processes which occurred to make things as they now are, our minds grow restless for something more

than this mechanical knowledge; indeed, our understanding of the concrete world may all the more intensify the questions which we cannot so easily articulate: "So I am this flesh, but how can I be contained and limited to this contingent matter? How can my god-like consciousness reside in this body which eats and hunts and procreates and defecates and rots?" We know much about how our body works (what makes it tick), but is that not at times all the more haunting? Can we know this much about our bodies and still be bound by a dying vessel? We are simultaneously faced with the necessity of the animal fate and god-like possibility of innovation and greatness. Ernest Becker calls this conflict "the twin ontological motives:" we resist the notion that we are purely physical and limited creatures so we try and establish ourselves in the world of possibility. We do, however, need the identification with the communal while at the same time longing to transcend this identification with the species.

Ernest Becker and the "Twin Ontological Motives"

> . . .Superman, has become extremely popular, especially because of his double identity; although coming from a planet destroyed by a catastrophe and possessing prodigious powers, Superman lives on Earth in the modest guise of a

> journalist, Clark Kent; he is timid, unassertive. . . . This humiliating camouflage of a Hero whose powers are literally unlimited revives a well-known mythical theme. In the last analysis, the myth of Superman satisfies the secret longings of modern man who, though he knows that he is a fallen, limited creature, dreams of one day proving himself an "exceptional person," a "Hero." (Eliade 185)

I have attempted to introduce a central conflict both for the human psyche and for art. In The Denial of Death, Ernest Becker identifies this existential conflict (that between mortality and possibility). He writes:

> . . . man is a worm and food for worms. This is the paradox: he is out of nature and hopelessly in it; he is dual. . . . Man is literally split in two; he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. (26)

Becker's words reflect all that we are able to know about our life through empirical understanding. Regardless of what world view we might embrace, we see those we love die; experientially our eyes tell us that they are gone, and we bury their carcasses because we know they will soon decay

and smell. They who have uttered meaningful language, they, who have assured us of our personal worth, they who have laughed and read and wrote and conceived of thoughts, they from whom new and individual life has emerged now spoil lifelessly like leftover food. Their consciousness has parted from their bodies, and we are left to obtain some resolution, some truth about the significance (if any) of this merciless biological cycle.

So humans simultaneously experience life aware of their identity as biological animals, but at the same time they feel uniquely above their biological fate: humanity, writes Becker, is "half animal and half symbolic." Here, I will introduce what Becker calls "the twin ontological motives." In short, these two motives are to "tuck in" and to "stick out." Becker claims that these motives, or urges, are inherent and necessary to human consciousness but actually oppose each other. Later, we will find that such oppositions and their resolution comprise the center of art and of myth.

The first of the twin ontological motives, according to Becker, is the individual longing to transcend one's inherent lone-ness, or sense of personal insignificance, and limitations by identifying with and merging with something much larger than oneself. According to Becker, this motive comes from our fear of isolation, our fear that we must experience life and die alone, a fear that alone we will

leave our place in the world and never have found any sense of belonging or lasting significance. We fear our weakness and our limitations, we feel "small and impotent in the face of transcendent nature" (152). But if one gives in to the "natural feeling of cosmic dependence," the desire to be part of something that transcends self, then one is able to feel safely included in something larger and less contingent than self. With such a feeling of belonging, one's value becomes intact and not contingent upon personal survival but one with transcendent nature. Our microcosmic and transient lives, then, become united with a stable and uncontingent macrocosm; we have gained a sense of immortality.

But from the feeling of unity and humble belonging arises another urge. If an individual gives in to this desire to merge, what has become of individuality? In absolutely merging, one would have no sense of uniqueness, thus the drive for individuation, which requires the individual to find distinction from the rest of nature. But one cannot turn completely to the urge for uniqueness leaving behind the need for likeness and belonging, for the isolation would become unbearable. The tension, then, occurs when one can neither surrender completely to a larger force, which would deny the development of self, nor can one abandon "the healing power of gratitude and humility that he must have for having been created, for having been given the opportunity of life experience" (153).

The difference between the two motives, says Becker, becomes a burden; the difference "accents the smallness of oneself and the sticking out-ness at the same time, creating a "natural guilt." The person senses this in the form of "badness" or "unworthiness," because the need for individuation has forced one to push away, to some extent, the larger force to which the individual feels indebted for the opportunity to live. Humans make various attempts to resolve the tension, but as Becker writes:

> You can see that man wants the impossible: He wants to lose his isolation and keep it at the same time. He can't stand the sense of separateness, and yet he can't allow the complete suffocating of his vitality. He wants to expand by merging with the powerful beyond that transcends him, yet he wants while merging with it to remain individual and aloof. . . . (155)

Accordingly, in Becker, we find a fundamental tension that lies at the core of myth itself: that we are both worms and gods and thus strive to both "tuck in" and "stick out." Similarly in Frank Kermode's <u>The Sense of An Ending</u>, a work that has helped reshape the twentieth-century's theory of fiction, we will discover that we create "fictions" that allow us to obtain significance by both belonging to a larger schema and possessing an important role in that schema. This tension discussed by both Becker

and Kermode--the need to achieve individual significance while belonging to something larger--becomes the central tension in mythic literature, a rudimentary tension that underlies many other such tensions in myth.

Frank Kermode's Theory of Fiction

> . . .whether you think time will have a stop or that the world is eternal; there is still a need to speak humanly of life's importance in relation to it--a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end. (Kermode 4)

Frank Kermode, a twentieth-century literary theorist, critic, and author, suggests that humans find personal meaning and significance by creating and utilizing what he calls "fictions." By imposing a story line over an otherwise nebulous reality, we are able to conceive ourselves as important in relation to our past, present, and future. Imagining a beginning from whence we came and by envisioning an end for which we must prepare, we cope with a reality that does not empathize with our desire (or need as some argue) for a meaningful and lasting relation to the physical matter which surrounds us and is us. As Steven Crane writes in his poem "A Man Said to the Universe:"

A man said to the universe:

"Sir, I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

"The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation." (McMichael 663)

Though Crane's words are few and the scenario is an ironically charming personification of nature, we see that his meaning is not so charming. We might, in fact, understand the poem to say: "'Sir, I exist!' But the universe was silent."

This sense of experiencing the seemingly unempathetic world around us Kermode calls "Chronos": a sense of time passing in pointless waiting--shapeless time. According to Kermode, an effective fiction will allow us to escape from "chronicity." "Chronos" time merely observes the passing of meaningless and disconnected events; if we were to experience life only as chronos, we would feel neither personal concords between beginnings and ends nor our relation to each. Chronos is time devoid of intentionality; it is the sense that our lives equate to nothing more than our passing animal presence on the earth, ending when our arbitrarily occurring life cycle ends. But by establishing "kairos" time, we imagine that our lives relate closely to our imagined origin and end. Whereas chronos is time spent devoid of meaning, kairos denotes those moments filled with important crisis or significant events which place our life-

cycle into a larger story-line governed by some larger than human force. By experiencing kairos, then, the duration of our lives becomes more than an arbitrarily occurring series of biological cycles--birth, growth, life, decay, death, and so on; we will instead view ourselves as having an important place on a significant time line on which we play an important role in progressing from the past into an intentional future.

In order to create the sense of kairos, says Kermode, we must first embrace a fiction or a story applied to a linear reality with a beginning, a middle and an end. Further, we will believe ourselves to be central characters in this story line, so that we observe our origins and actively participate in the middle of the story which will then arrive at an end. In Kermode's terms, we will establish ourselves as residing in the "middest," which is the most central point of the plot structure. Supposing that we represent an integral part of reality's story--a story much larger than ourselves or our life-span--we are able to establish a sense of importance, even immortality. Similar to Becker, then, Kermode recognizes both the need to merge with something larger and to maintain individual identity. A fiction accommodates both of these needs by allowing an individual to view one's experience in the context of a transcendent, intentional story, while

remaining central in the plot of the story so the individual contribution is obvious.

Christianity is a primary example of a world view that might operate as a fiction, whose members live important lives in relation to the concrete world. A Christian espouses, first, a significant origin, the creation of the world performed by the Judeo-Christian Deity. In this case, humanity arose from the mouth of God himself, a God who had from the beginning a specific plan for humanity. To explain, then, the unpleasant and unempathetic state of present reality, the Christian proposes a "Fall" in which humans degenerated from the original purpose and into confusion, weakness, and death.

Commissioned by a supposed divine origin, a contemporary Christian appears at the middest part of the story, after the creation and fall, and before a world of apocalypse and restoration. In this way a fiction will render a sense of being in the "middest," this crucial moment of transition to progress from the past and achieve a projected and anticipated future. The Christian might, for instance, imagine that coming from a heavenly and then a fallen origin, one must do what one can to restore the world to its intended order while saving those who do not understand that we must all prepare for this visionary end. Such an individual has obviously imposed a story-line, a mental structure overlaid upon an undefined reality and

believes he or she plays a crucial role in relation to the supposed beginning and end. In doing so, this person no longer passively experiences chronicity, but instead has established the intensity of kairos.

According to Kermode, this fiction must be more than an imposition upon a nebulous reality; a fiction must carry on dialogue *with* reality. Being also a dynamic process, the fiction must constantly be questioned and must anticipate its own shortcomings lest it become a catalyst for stagnation and ignorance, for a legitimate fiction cannot eradicate the inconsistencies and paradoxes inherent in our experience of reality. Here, we must carefully note that Kermode uses the word "fiction" to denote what Joseph Campbell, one of the foremost mythic scholars of the twentieth-century, will call "myth;" that is, both refer to a story line which serves to allow humans to understand and live with the world around them. Kermode, however, will use the term "myth" pejoratively to denote a fiction that has degenerated into an obsession with order. For Kermode, myth results when a fiction becomes too intent upon form and no longer functions with a dynamic process of questioning and learning about an unsure reality. Kermode explains:

> Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is the sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for

> finding things out, and they *change* as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of *stability*, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. (39)

So as order comforts us, it may remove us too far from reality. For example, as Christianity may serve as a fiction, it may also degenerate into a myth in some form of a dogmatic and inflexible account of reality. As myth, Christianity would not, then, seek to discover reality (or what Kermode calls the "Is," the state of reality as it exists independent from human understanding), but it would assume an order which presupposed total and adequate knowledge of reality.

Tension occurs, then, between form which helps us explain and form which privileges comfort and ignores need for explanation; this is the tension between fiction and reality, "a kind of crisis in the relation between fiction and reality, the tension or dissonance between paradigmatic form and contingent reality" (133). Kermode's myth thus draws an operative fiction in the direction of order and form, while an undefined reality (the "Is") also makes demands upon the fiction: that the fiction remain flexible enough to pay credence to the existential sense of chaos. To Kermode, this is a central question in the theory of

fiction: "How to do justice to the chaotic, viciously contingent reality, and yet redeem it?" (145).

According to Kermode, a fiction (the "as if," a theoretical and incomplete vision of reality) will never be equal to a wholly accurate understanding of reality (the "Is"). We can imagine a fiction that would fully explain reality. Though this fiction be only theoretical, Kermode dubs it a "supreme fiction," one that would equate to an absolute and perfect understanding of reality. And since, asserts Kermode, our knowledge of reality will never be absolute, a fiction must continue to grow. If it does not, a fiction will stagnate and degenerate into Kermode's concept of myth. In dialogue with the undiscovered reality, it will change its shape, and its form will adjust with its discoveries of the "Is." It is only myth, says Kermode, that pretends to be a supreme fiction and ignores ambiguity.

In order for us to embrace a fiction, then, it must not be "too good to be true;" it cannot deny our existential experience of chaos, chronos, formless existence, and weakness. Kermode suggests that a fiction can be kept in check in several ways, one being peripeteia. Peripeteia, says Kermode, is the interruption of expected or traditional form in a novel or fiction; "it is a disconfirmation followed by a consonance" (18). By having our expectations falsified, we are given the hope for a new realization by an unforeseen and enlightening avenue:

> The more daring the peripeteia, the more we may feel that the work respects our sense of reality; and the more certainly we shall feel that the fiction under consideration is one of those which, by upsetting the ordinary balance of our naive expectation, is finding something out for us, something *real*. (18)

Peripeteia, then, allows a literary fiction to be called into question. The form that we expect to comfort us and to make sense out of our world is interrupted, thus paying credence to contingent reality and enabling us to accept the fiction as true. Cordelia's death in Shakespeare's King Lear, for example, demonstrates peripeteia. Some critics have decreed that the death of Cordelia lessens the quality of the play; we find no poetic reason, they say, why Cordelia should have died. But according to Kermode, this particular falsification of our expectations serves as "a way of finding something out that we should, on our more conventional way to the end, have closed our eyes to" (18). The surprising death of Cordelia attends to a ruthlessly contingent reality, and consequently, we are able to embrace more firmly as true that which we have experienced and learned in King Lear.

Kermode has here drawn a parallel between the fictions by which we live and literary fictions. Literary fictions package reality and impose causality, development,

intentionality, and an important past, all overseen by the author's god-like intentions. In both literary and non-literary fictions, we see that nature is humanized and ordered. While making sense of reality with the aid of this mental structure, the fiction must do justice to contingent reality by representing that contingency. This representation of reality (the "as if") will "induce the proper sense of horror at the utter difference, the utter shapelessness, and the utter inhumanity of what must be humanized" (145). At the same time, though, the act of form will temper the horror.

We will find in the following sections that Kermode's fiction shares many elements of myth as defined in the mythic scholarship of Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Northrop Frye. All of these mythologists claim that myth (synonymous with Kermode's "fiction") arises from universal conflicts in the human psyche. Also common with Kermode, these theorists search for ways in which old mythic forms can be readapted by modern authors and made acceptable to a contemporary audience. In short, like both Becker and Kermode, these mythologists study the ways in which we adopt ways of knowing that both deal honestly with an ambiguous reality and provide some sense of individual worth and orientation.

A Survey of Myth Scholarship

Carl Jung's Exegesis of the Mythic

Carl Jung claims that myth with its accompanying symbols has distinct origins which we can deduce through the study of repetitive images in mythology. He finds that the language of myth has evolved throughout the evolution of humanity, and the study of myth, says Jung, is central in understanding the nature of the human mind and in coming to terms with the limitations of our understanding. For as I have suggested in the discussion of Becker and Kermode, myth finds its roots in fundamental human struggles.

To begin, myth does not, for Jung, have one distinct source; it does not originate from a transcendental signified. Myth is, rather, the product of a evolutionary process beginning with the experience of the earliest humans and then cumulating to become a reservoir in the human psyche from ages past. Studying the evolution of myth, Jung finds recurrent themes that correspond directly to characteristics deep within the human psyche and actually owe their existence to fundamental conflicts of human experience. Further, both religious symbols (public symbols) and the symbols derived from unique individual experiences (private symbols) demonstrate striking

repetition in themes and images. Jung attributes such repetition to inherited archetypes.

Because Jung assigns a distinct usage to various words, clarification of his terminology is essential. First, a symbol is ". . . an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way. . . ." In other words, a symbol "attempts to express something for which no verbal concept yet exists. . ." (Spirit 70), or ". . . an intuition striving for expression" (97). Mythic literature is rich in symbols, for in Jung's definition of a true symbol, we find the function of myth: to touch upon our untenable experiences by representing the elusive resolutions of paradoxes and contradictions inherent in our perception of reality. Whereas a symbol is a specific incidence of such an inexplicable expression, an archetype may be referred to as a recurring skeletal structure of various symbols. An archetype is, therefore, a disposition for humans to respond in a given way to a given situation. This inherited disposition does not determine a precise prototype of a symbol arising from individual human experience, but rather the shape and function of particular symbols. An archetypal image will, then, recur in many different forms, all bearing a similar structure and function but differing in surface structure.

Jung suggests that these inherited dispositions, or archetypes, survive in human consciousness by means of the

collective unconscious. According to Jung, two layers comprise the unconscious psyche of the human mind: the personal and the collective. The personal unconscious consists of an individual's forgotten or repressed experience, including experience unique to the individual. The collective unconscious, on the other hand, includes an entirely inherited structure composed of archetypal predispositions, residue from centuries of human experience. In Jung's words:

> The deposit of mankind's whole ancestral experience--so rich in emotional imagery--of father, mother, child, husband and wife, of the magic personality, for dangers to body and soul, has exalted this group of archetypes into the supreme regulating principles of religious and even of political life, in unconscious recognition of their tremendous psychic power. (Structure 156)

Archetypes, then, represent the unconscious presence of inherited paradigms which shape our ways of representing and coping with ubiquitous human struggles.

Archetypes become, for Jung, the basic unit of myth. As archetypes denote universal dispositions in coping with inherent human conflicts, myths will utilize archetypes to serve a greater function, "the transcendent function." This function refers to the act of the union of the unconscious and the conscious mind (69). As archetypal images rise up in the mind of the artist, the unconscious reservoir of

primordial images inexplicably subsumes the conscious intent of the author. Such is the case in what Jung calls "extroverted art," art in which the subconscious images rather than authorial intent control the process of artistic creation; the unconscious images that arise in the process of creation will take precedence and actually subordinate the conscious mind of the artist.

Jung, then, espouses a distinction between two types of art: the "introverted" and the "extraverted." "The introverted attitude is characterized by the subject's assertion of his conscious intentions and aims against the demands of the object" (73). Jung recognizes, in this case, that a work of art may be the cumulative result of an author's careful attempts to create and that the creation may be identical with the conscious attempts to create a specific product.

But introverted works of art will not be the focus in a study of myth simply because introverted works are not mythic. And Jung views extraverted art quite differently than the introverted art of technical and conscious process. Jung asserts that mythic forms arise and take over in extraverted art, and that during its creation the author becomes amazed at the images that force themselves upon the work. The author consciously attempts to shape the work, but "his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement;" the work has brought with it its own form, so

"anything he wants to add is rejected, and what he himself would like to reject is thrust back at him" (Spirit 73). These images carry such force, says Jung, because they come not from the conscious mind, but from the archetypal imagination of the collective unconscious. We learn, further, that the creation of extraverted art appears to originate from some suprapersonal force appearing to be alien to the artist.

Jung claims, however, that this meeting of the unconscious and the conscious reveals to us our true nature. Of the author of extraverted art, Jung writes:

> Yet in spite of himself he is forced to admit that it is his own self speaking, his own inner nature. . . . He can only obey the apparently alien impulse within him and follow where it leads, sensing that his work is greater than himself, and wields a power which is not his and which he cannot command. Here the artist is not identical with the process of creation. . . as though a person other than himself had fallen within the magic circle of an alien will. (73)

Here, the author acts as a vessel through which the experience of all might be communicated: "Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices (82)." The images have come to the artist because they are part of the human psyche; they occupy the mind without our knowledge.

But these images are not exclusively the artist's, for they have been acquired from generations past, and once tapped, will demand to speak for themselves. Arising and cloaked in a new surface structure, these universal themes will emerge to tell their own story which we cannot fully comprehend.

It is not, therefore, the author who will become the center of attention but the creative process which "moved" the author to create the work. And that which moved the author will do the same to the reader, for the archetypal imagination is not exclusive to the artist; we all possess the primeval reservoir. So in experiencing a mythic (or extraverted) work, we too should be prepared to find ourselves subordinate to the work as "something suprapersonal" transcends our comprehension.

As the author's conscious intentions become secondary in the process of creation, so our conscious mastery of the text will become subordinate as the mythic images strike the "chords" deep within our own minds (75). As these psychic chords resound, we too become, says Jung, emersed in something that transcends the individual:

> . . .when an archetypal situation occurs we suddenly feel an extraordinary sense of release, as though transported, or caught up by an overwhelming power. At such moments we are no longer individual, but the race; the voice of all mankind resounds in us. (82)

According to Jung, this is the secret of great or mythic art; the process of artistic creation consists of the awakening of the archetypal image in the minds of both the artist and the reader. By giving new form to old images, the artist "translates it into a language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life" (82).

As Jung explores the mystery of artistic creation and experience, we see that his psychological interest in myth remains distinct from Sigmund Freud's, his teacher. This is an important distinction in that psychological criticism is often mistakenly limited to Freudian conflicts. While Freud endeavors to psychoanalyze literature closely to discover various complexes unique to the author's mind--any psychological dysfunctions of the author--Jung seeks to understand the healing and balancing powers of myth.

Unlike Freud, Jung posits that the true value of art lies in its ability to compensate for the "inadequacy and one sidedness of the present." The artist "seizes on this image, and in raising it from the deepest unconsciousness, he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries. . ." (82-83). Every age, he continues, has a distinct "attitude" which reveals its necessary bias; each age envisions itself to be moving in a particular "direction." But as both attitude and direction imply bias

and one-sidedness, Jung suggests that some psychic elements fail to play their part because they do not cohere with the attitude or direction of the age. Art, then, speaks to its age, telling it of its real psychic needs and guiding it to fulfill them. Just as a dream might remind a driven person that he or she is neglecting real needs in the name of success, so art attempts to redirect an epoch which has found its own values and obsessions and has become unaware of some of its true needs.

Throughout his writings, Jung repeatedly asserts that this process of studying and experiencing myth must have toleration for experience that cannot be fully expounded; "You will not expect psychology to do the impossible and offer a valid explanation of the secret of creativity" (77). Jung admits, that like the other sciences, "psychology has only a modest contribution to make towards a deeper understanding of the phenomena of life, and is no nearer than its sister sciences to absolute knowledge" (77).

Myth: Joseph Campbell's Position

Myths, in Campbell's terms, serve as "the supports of their civilizations, the supports of their moral orders, their cohesion, vitality, and creative powers." For Campbell, the value of myth is not equivalent to its Truth content, but rather its truth content; truth is relative and

there is no Absolute. Myth becomes valuable by virtue of its function in the lives of humans who maintain myth. Myth, then, is not a literally read story line which imparts knowledge regarding *the* Absolute, but a symbolic language from which we may draw lessons about our human significance in relation to our world. In short, myths inform us of the contents of our inner selves.

Though myths have appeared in great variety since the beginning of human history, Campbell suggests that all myths combine to form what he calls a "monomyth" (a term Northrop Frye uses referring to the single story of human experience); that is, "they come from every culture but with timeless themes. The themes are timeless, and the inflection is to the culture." Common to all mythology and therefore all humans is the recognition of mortality and the need to transcend it. The general myth of the community becomes the myth of the individual. One, then, submits one's life to "a superorganism into which he must allow himself to be absorbed, and through participation in which he will come to know the life that transcends death." Campbell continues, describing the ongoing universal themes that appear in mythic literature as well as cultural discourses:

> In every one of the mythological systems. . . these two fundamental realizations--of the inevitability of individual death and the

> endurance of the social order--have been combined symbolically and constitute the nuclear structuring force of the rites and, thereby, the society. (Myths to Live By 21)

Just as Becker claims we need to "tuck in" and "stick out," Campbell realizes that the "recognition of mortality and the requirement to transcend it is the first impulse to mythology" (20). Amidst this conflict the individual strives not only for "unity of our species," but also for "differentiation" (21).

With the ubiquitous character of myth in mind, Campbell adds that surface structure of myth varies from culture to culture depending on such things as the geographic location of a given culture and its ways of surviving the elements of nature. Simply put, myths will vary according to where a people at a given point in history live and how they die. Similarly to Jung, then, Campbell claims that the surface structure varies, but the deep structure remains constant.

Another thread of similarity throughout the history of myth is the mythological hero. The path of this hero mimics the formula in the rites of passage: separation, initiation, and return. According to Campbell, then, we can draw clear and tangible parallels in the relation of myth to social organization. These three elements common to both myth and social rites--separation, initiation, and return--claims Campbell, might be called the "nuclear unit of the

monomyth" (The Hero With a Thousand Faces 30). In the case of the mythic hero, the hero travels from a quotidian world into a place of supernatural wonder. There, the hero encounters fantastic forces through which initiation occurs, followed by a victorious return at which time the hero shares the new-found revelation with the community (30).

Arising in several varieties of surface structure and possessing a constant framework, myths, Campbell warns, are not to be read literally. We do not learn, says Campbell, from taking literally the surface structure of any given myth. Instead, we look past the surface structure, past the individual characters and the details of their lives, and into the metaphorical truths which appear in the deep structure. We find this demonstrated in Campbell's discussion of religious mythology.

For example, Campbell espouses that religious myths speak not of absolute transcendent gods or of divinely inspired humans; myths speak not of actual events, but of "themes of the imagination" or "permanent features of the human spirit" (Myths to Live By 24). A literal reading of myths (interpreting myths as actual events in time and space) leads to a misinterpretation. According to Campbell, a literal interpretation weakens the myth's meaning displacing the metaphorical message of myth onto "some secondary thing" which then takes on to itself the reference of the symbol. Therefore, a "sanctified stick, stone, or

animal, person, event, city or social group" is only a means to divulge a deeper message, the mythic theme (24). In other words, Campbell asserts that these stories of magic are not there to teach us of existing magical objects or gods, but of truths pertaining to the real world of the past and the here and now; so a story about a magical staff and its carrier should not lead us to contemplate the actual stick and its owner, but of some metaphoric message we might learn by means of such a story.

Campbell will thus read the Biblical account of Eden, for example, not as a factual encounter between an actual man, a woman, a snake, and a tree, but proposes instead a metaphoric reading which he considers to be more apropos. Rather than Eden representing a geographic location, it refers to "a landscape of the soul;" "that Garden of Eden," writes Campbell, "would have to be within us" (25). Campbell continues that our conscious minds cannot enter this psychic garden to "taste eternal life," because we experience our world in terms of "good and evil." For Campbell, then, the concept of eternal life represents a state of mind that considers living as being valuable in the moment--a freedom to experience life at its fullest in spite of mortality and the pressing of time. Campbell continues:

> Yet our conscious minds are unable to enter it and enjoy there the taste of eternal life, since we have already tasted the knowledge of good and

> evil. That, in fact, must then be the knowledge that has thrown us out of the garden, pitched us away from our center, so that we now judge things in those terms and experience only good and evil instead of eternal life--which, since the enclosed garden is within us, must already be ours even though unknown to our conscious personalities. (25)

Campbell asserts that we have been "pitched" from our "center." Since he does not posit a transcendental signified, this center does not refer to any Absolute reality, but to a healthful state of the psyche (not because any transcendent being has created the mind, but simply because there is a state in which the psyche best functions). Like Jung, Campbell suggests that each epoch neglects some of its psychic needs due to its one-sidedness. And also like Jung, Campbell espouses that the function of myth is to suggest how we might attend to those neglected needs to attain a balanced and healthful psyche.

Campbell suggests that the one-sidedness of any given people might be overcome in part by reading mythic literature outside one's own familiar religion so that myths can "teach [us] that [we] can turn inward and begin to get the message of the symbols" (The Power of Myth 6). Reading the myths of one's own religion, one tends to read in terms of facts. But by reading unfamiliar myths, one's

understanding is freed to interpret further messages underlying the symbols of myth. Myth, then, "helps [us] to put [our] minds in touch with this experience of being alive. It tells [us] what the experience is" (6). Campbell also maintains Jung's suggestion that our consciousness is focussed outward in order to meet the demands of the day, but myths bring us back in touch with our inner selves.

But though we may find myths as life-enhancers, according to Campbell, myth may also stagnate and diminish life. Much like Kermode's idea of a "myth," we may presumingly rely upon the structure of ritual to offer meaning and security; we may be "drawn by inherited myths away from the world of modern consciousness, fixed in patterns of archaic feeling and thought inappropriate to contemporary life" (Myths to Live By 13). By questioning the content and relevance of our consoling ritual, we can maintain an active dialogue between form and reality, between the "as if" and the "Is." According to Campbell, if such a dialogue does not exist, "The ritual that once conveyed an inner reality is now merely form" (The Power of Myth 7). Myth, then, should catalyze a dynamic process of self awareness; like Kermode's fiction, Campbell's myth is a tool that helps us to discover an always ambiguous reality.

As myth serves as a dynamic and transactional catalyst for new understanding, myth, for Campbell, facilitates four functions. First is the mystical function: "realizing what

a wonder the universe is. . . experiencing the awe of nature" (31). The second dimension of myth is the cosmological: "showing what the shape of the universe is, but showing it in such a way that the mystery again comes through" (31). The third is the sociological function, which validates social order. And finally the pedagogical function. Myths are life models. It is this pedagogical function which distinguishes myth from tales, for myths are essentially tutorial whereas tales are primarily entertaining (The Flight of the Wild Gander 17).

Campbell's definition of myth can, then, be summarized in the following passage:

> What human beings have in common is revealed in myths. Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. . . . We all need to understand death and to cope with death. . . . We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are. . . . What we're seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues [myths] help us to find. (The Power of Myth 5)

Much like Becker, Kermode, and Jung, the importance of myth is found for Campbell in the function that myth plays in bringing together the parts of the psyche in light of the conflicts inherent in being human: coming to terms with personal fate and with the prospects of helplessness and insignificance. Consciously, we are disabled in understanding our own minds by the necessary focus on daily tasks; we cannot get in touch with that which rests in the unconscious. According to Campbell, we need myths to bring us back in touch with our own selves.

And that ambiguity becomes fundamental in the study of myth, for myth is the expression of inexplicable truths--that interrelation of rational discursive truth to the nonrational elements of the human psyche. Campbell suggests this idea by writing that a mythological symbol does:

> . . .not point to an only partially understood knowable term, but directly to a relationship between two terms, the one empirical, the other metaphysical; the latter being, absolutely and forever and from every conceivable human standpoint, unknowable. (The Flight of the Wild Gander 70)

Further acknowledging ambiguity in the study of myth, Campbell adds that an image may signify various referents in various contexts of meaning (and in various minds). And a number of different symbols may be said to share the same

referent. We could not, for example, assume that any given word will evoke the same distinct concept in the minds of two listeners who share a common language. Nor could we assume that the words "infant" and "baby" or "spirit" and "soul" refer to the same concept in the minds of every reader. As language does not evoke a single, uniform meaning in all minds, neither will the language of myth be assumed to evoke a uniformity of responses. Accordingly, Campbell says that interpretation cannot be so systematized as to maintain a stable meaning of a myth (64).

Contending with the instability of language, Campbell nonetheless maintains that myth represents multitudinous expressions of universal themes of human conflicts. Like Becker and Kermode, Campbell states that at the root of mythology are the needs to belong to an organization larger than the individual and at the same time to establish differentiation which allows for individual importance as well as identity through unity. Like Jung, Campbell proposes that we cannot be consciously in touch with all of our psychic needs and that myth serves to connect us with our unconscious deficiencies.

Claude Levi-Strauss: The Structure of Myth

Claude Levi-Strauss, a structural anthropologist, analyzes the structure more than the content of myth. To the structuralist, literature can be systematically analyzed and broken into parts. Similarly, language, like literature, has its own internal structure and systematized rules. Langue, according to Levi-Strauss, represents the rule system of a language shared by all who speak it while parole becomes an individual speaker or writer's own use of langue. The concern of the structuralist is not with the individual occurrences of parole, but rather, with langue; of course, the structuralist must study specific incidences of parole in order to arrive at the larger picture, or langue. Further, Levi-Strauss maintains that myth and language share a common structure. The study of myth, then, will resemble the systematic study of language.

We will, then, need to define how it is that structuralism views language and how it goes about analyzing a text before we can understand Levi-Strauss's definition of myth. First, unlike the mimetic theory of language which claims that language has a natural link to that objective world and that every sign equals an object in the objective world, structuralism asserts that language is made up of signs (words and symbols) which do not simply equate to

objects in an objective world. Instead, the sign is made of the signifier (the word itself) and the signified (the concept in the mind which correlates to the word). For instance, the sign "cow" is not equal to the actual grazing animal, but to both the signifier (the series of phonemes in the word itself) and the concept of "cow" which is evoked in the mind of those who understand the language. The relationship of the signifier to the signified is arbitrary; there is no natural relationship between the word "cow" and the concept "cow." So the sequence of phonemes in a word, says structuralism, is arbitrarily assigned to represent its signified idea.

Further, we recognize signs by their difference. "Cat" differs from "chat" as "face" does from "place." So as much as we understand words by their similarities (containing common letters and sounds), we must also recognize their difference in order for them to have any meaning. Different variations of these same twenty six letters somehow allow us to share an infinite number of ideas by following the rules and codes that govern language.

The primary task of the structuralist critic, then, is to analyze the grammar and the system of rules that allows literature to have meaning. But Levi-Strauss suggests that the rules of language are the same rules which govern all human social and cultural practices, including communication. It is no wonder, then, that structuralism

claims that myth can be studied much like language as a whole. Using such clear cut analysis, structuralists claim to "demystify" literature by objectively analyzing how readers interpret the text, leaving no room for mystical interaction between text and reader.

To draw a comparison between the composition of language and that of myth, Levi-Strauss believes that as language is made of common phonemes (the smallest meaningful unit of language), myth is derived of myththemes (the smallest meaningful units that recur in myth). Just as people unconsciously master the rules that determine how phonemes are combined to make language, people unconsciously master the rules that govern the construction of myththemes to form myth. Levi-Strauss is not, therefore, concerned with the historical content of myth but rather with the unconscious nature of the shared phenomena of language; he seeks to discover principles which are universally valid for all human minds. Like Jung and Campbell, Levi-Strauss seeks to find the ways in which myth is universal, but Levi-Strauss refers less to the corresponding human conflicts and more to the science of language in relation to myth. Though he maintains that we share these universal rules of understanding myth and language, our technologically advanced society has "through attending school or university. . . overlaid the universal logic of primitive thought with all kinds of special logics required by the

artificial conditions of our social environment" (Leach 59). So to get at the uncontaminated form of this primitive logic, says Levi-Strauss, we need to examine the very primitive, technologically unsophisticated. In that way, we can find the common denominators, these universal principles of myth true for the primitives as well as for ourselves.

But, according to Levi-Strauss, we cannot simply read the manifest content of a myth in order to discover its relation to myth's universal rules. This is a central problem for Levi-Strauss: we cannot take any collection of mythological tales at their face value because myths contain events which are inconsequential when they stand alone. Levi-Strauss will, then, claim that behind the "manifest sense" of myth, there lies "non-sense," or "a message in code." In this way, Levi-Strauss maintains that a myth is a type of collective dream which must be interpreted to find its hidden meaning.

If we successfully read past the surface structure of a particular myth and into the deep structure, we will, according to the structuralists, find "binary oppositions" (i.e., above/below, this world/other world, culture/nature, etc. . .) at work in the text. Just as structuralism believes we understand the meaning of signs because of difference, Levi-Strauss claims that the same is true on a larger scale in binary oppositions. These oppositions are simply dichotomous mental structures that form our

understanding of concepts by focussing on the difference between opposite concepts or opposing forces. We understand light, for instance, as the absence of (as differing from) darkness, or good as the absence of evil.

In myth, Levi-Strauss asserts that binary oppositions serve the function of mythical paradox. Paradoxes occur in myth when two opposing forces of the binary become interdependently connected to form a single, connected sphere; this non-rational unity is achieved through the process Levi-Strauss calls mediation. Though rationally we recognize that the two sides of the opposition represent separate and polar forces, the non-rational and separate mediating element undermines the rational opposition.

This process of opposition and mediation becomes the fundamental function of myth for Levi-Strauss:

> All the paradoxes conceived by the native mind, on the most diverse planes: geographic, economic, sociological, and even cosmological, are . . . assimilated to that less obvious yet so real paradox which marriage with the matrilateral cousin attempts but fails to resolve. But the failure is admitted in our myths, and there precisely lies their function. ("The Story of Asdiwal" 27-28)

For instance, religious myth might represent death as "the gateway to eternal life," thus embracing life and death as

two parts of a whole. Death, then, becomes acceptable--even desired--rather than despised. In the words of Edmund Leach, a structuralist critic, "when considering the universalist aspects of primitive mythology we shall repeatedly discover that the hidden message is concerned with the resolution of unwelcome contradictions of this sort" (62). Levi-Strauss's basis for myth similarly centers around universal conflicts of the human psyche.

As a myth is systematically broken down into several binary oppositions, Levi-Strauss declares that the matrix of oppositions should connect with the unified system of mythology as a whole. But the ultimate conclusion of the analysis is not that " 'all the myths say the same thing' but that 'collectively the sum of what all the myths say is not expressly said by any of them, and that what they thus say (collectively) is a necessary poetic truth which is an unwelcome contradiction' " (77). As we study an individual myth, then, the whole language of myth (langue) will not present itself. But as we read an individual myth (parole), it will provide clues that will make sense when viewed in light of mythology as a coherent and single system. Further, for Levi-Strauss, myth publicly expresses "paradoxes in disguise," paradoxes which ordinarily remain unconscious.

Levi-Strauss, then, claims that the primary function of myth is opposition and mediation. We find this to be true,

says Levi-Strauss, by an objective analysis of the language of myth. Structuralism does not concern itself with the historical content or the Truth content of a myth; Levi-Strauss does not posit the existence of an Absolute reality, nor does he search for one in the study of myth. But he maintains that in our systematically studying individual examples of parole, we can make sense of a myth in the larger context of langue.

Myth and Archetype in Northrop Frye

Like Jung, Northrop Frye, the father of archetypal literary criticism, uses the archetype as the common thread of all mythic literature. By using the notion of archetype, Frye proposes that all literature resembles recurring patterns of structure and theme and tells a single, ongoing story of human experience, or a "monomyth." Further, in myth, we find that the archetype is rudimentary to all literature to such a degree that all major literature consistently returns to it. So even while mythic structure may be cloaked in modern realism, the mythologist's role, according to Frye, is to identify the mythic structures in all works, thus placing them into the larger picture of the unified body of literature.

Frye claims that literary theory lacks a "coordinating principle," or metatheory, which would deal with individual

works of art as integral parts of the whole literary cannon. This principle would work much like a theory of evolution might in biology (Fables 9). For Frye, literature becomes an intelligible and unified body, for he tries to provide such a metatheory which would enable us to view an individual work of art in coherent relation to all other works in a unified cannon.

In order to achieve such an understanding of literature as a whole, the critic will "stand back" from an individual work of art. So unlike New Criticism, Frye does not suggest a close reading of the text. Instead, standing back from the text we find the commonalities of the individual work to all literature. Frye declares in Fables of Identity that, "This inductive movement towards the archetype is a process of backing up . . . from structural analysis, as we back up from a painting if we want to see composition instead of brushwork" (31). In backing up, Frye intends us to see within the text archetypes that exist in all of literature. Frye, then, uses the archetype to compare an individual work of art to the whole body of literature. An accomplished myth critic, says Frye, will easily find archetypal patterns beneath the surface of any work.

Frye borrows his ideas of the archetype from Jung who gave birth to the concept, but Frye's use of archetype will diverge far from Jung's. Both commonly use the word to refer to those human character traits that appear throughout

all myth and literature, and they both hold similar ideas of the various archetypes involving birth, family, death, etc. . . . But while Jung claims that the archetype is a product of the collective unconscious, resembling an inherited collection of human experience, Frye will find its origin elsewhere. And where Jung claims that we have an intense and irrational reaction to archetypes due to these inherited racial contents of the psyche, Frye, on the other hand, will acknowledge no such collective unconscious.

Not relying on the notion of the collective unconscious to explain the existence of archetypes, Frye maintains that myths and archetypes originated with humanity's attempts to give human form to nature. Such anthropomorphic creations were needed, says Frye, because we felt both curious and afraid of a world that had no human shape or meaning. Being curious, our reason created such fictions. Our emotions, being "unreasonable," then used the imagination to create a more sympathetic environment. According to Frye, this process of creation of myth took on a natural rhythm in accordance with life cycles: birth, survival, and then death, and on to new life. Accordingly, myth, from the start of its evolution, began to assume certain structure, one that would become permanently human. For Frye, then, myth is a "systematic attempt to see nature in human shape" (Fables 31).

A natural consequence of the creation of myth and its resulting rhythm, declares Frye, is the distinction between a hoped for reality and one that we fear. Frye writes in The Educated Imagination:

> And as poetry continues to express not merely the rhythm of what we see around us but what we feel as a part of ourselves, a second principle begins to operate, a principle which tends to separate what we hate or fear from what we want or love. (Critics 215)

From the imagined hoped for and feared worlds will emerge what Frye considers to be the four fundamental types of imaginative experience: romance, tragedy, comedy and irony. Believing that our experience will always be mythic, Frye asserts that the fundamentals of myth will remain intact as long as humanity struggles with the same life cycles and as long as humans have need and fear.

Since literature evolved from early myth, it maintains the same fundamental structures. But instead of using the Jungian archetypal imagination, Frye will explain such continuity by referring to a "verbal culture." Not only do we experience the ongoing fundamental rhythms of being that recur in mythic literature, but the artists of our time also refer to the ongoing history of verbal form. Frye asserts:

> Every society has a verbal culture, which includes ballads. . . folk tales. . . legends, and the

> like. As it develops, a special group of stories, the stories we call myths, begins to crystallize in the center of this verbal culture. These stories are taken with particular seriousness by their society, because they express something deep in that society's beliefs or vision of its situation and destiny. Myths, unlike other types of stories, stick together to form a mythology . . . . . . Literature as we know it, as a body of writing, always develops out of a mythical framework of this kind. (Stillman 5)

Even our contemporary literature, Frye claims, refers to the mythology that has become the center of our verbal culture, the "matrix of literature." And not only does all of literature continue in this verbal culture, but, Frye continues, "In every age poets who are thinkers. . . can hardly find a literary theme that does not coincide with a myth" (Fables 36).

While archetypes remain present in contemporary literature, Frye admits that the archetype is most apparent in pure myth (Denham 59). But he goes on to say that literature is simply "displaced" myth. Frye refers to this displacement as "the technique a writer uses to make his story credible, logically motivated or morally acceptable" to a contemporary audience (36). While fiction may make concessions to an unaccommodating reality, it maintains the

fundamentals of archetype. Modern fiction, then, cloaks mythical form in a manner more believable to its culture. As Frye recognizes, myth is an "abstract pattern" whose "characters can do what they like. . . there is no need for logical or plausible motivation. The things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories" (31). But though myths are imaginary, they reveal to us real human needs, and consequently, we have much to gain through the study of myth.

When Frye speaks of the tension between fiction and reality, we find common ground between Kermode and Frye; Frye's displacement resembles Kermode's notion of clerical skepticism and peripeteia (the interruption in form for the sake of verisimilitude). As the modern writer in Frye strays from the idealism of pure mythical form through displaced myth, Kermode will say that the author is careful to create illusions that are not too perfect to be believable. The tension in both might be best summarized by Kermode: "a kind of crisis in the relation between fiction and reality, the tension or dissonance between paradigmatic form and contingent reality" (Kermode 133).

Frye has, then, suggested that we create and experience myth much in the same way that the earlier myth-makers and their audiences did. But while mythic form empathizes with various human joys and predicaments, literature displaces pure myth, so that we find the comfort of myth in a

believable package. As Kermode asserts, we create illusions to satisfy real needs, and for this reason we embrace the comfort of form while challenging the form so that we might take honest comfort. That becomes the task of the contemporary artist: to restate mythic archetypes in a form that we can embrace.

A Methodology for Mythic Study

The Nature of Metaphor

To begin, I admit that my own definition of myth is in process and therefore incomplete. In reading the supposed mythic works of C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams, I will attempt to combine my findings with the suppositions of the preceding mythologists to arrive at my own tested working definition of myth. At this point, then, I will discuss my untested ideas in regard to myth and metaphor.

To refer to a particular story-line as mythic is no more an accusation that the story in question is untrue or meaningless than it is a statement that the story is invariably factual. On the contrary, a myth refers to a truth whose reality seems to be larger and less obvious than the characters and objects in the myth. The term "mythic" does not, then, refer to a question of verisimilitude. Myth, rather, refers to the medium in which a story is told; it attempts to use symbols that refer to something eluding our physical, descriptive, and empirical knowledge of reality. As Campbell maintains, myths speak not of actual events but of "themes of the imagination" (Myths to Live By 24).

But pertaining to religious myth, in particular, the place and function of metaphor is often confused and rejected in fear that metaphor is weaker or less true than factual accounts of supernatural events. Campbell has responded by saying that a literal reading of myth leads to a misinterpretation, one that misguides the force of myth onto secondary objects which standing alone carry no special meaning.

Accordingly, the same objects of myth viewed metaphorically might guide us to recognize some truth which we have not yet been able identify. As Jung notes that a symbol is ". . . an intuition striving for expression" (Spirit 97), a metaphor represents something that cannot be fully understood or explicated. And through metaphorical language, we find words denoting objects which we can understand and thus help us to sense some truth about the more elusive referents of the metaphor.

In the case of myth, metaphors rise to our aid, and mysteriously, the unknown and inexplicable object is the contents of our own minds and the concrete reality that surrounds us. Empirically, we can only know the painfully obvious: that we are born, that we breathe, grow old, and die. Empirically, we know nothing else, not of immortality or lasting worth, not of the empathy of some transcendent being, not of a caring cosmos. It has become common understanding in contemporary scholarship that we know so

little empirically that most of what we claim to know is based on some hunch, presuppositions that we could spend the rest of our lives identifying. Regardless of our world view, only the ignorant or insane claim to make few assumptions about reality; if we were truly free of presuppositions, would not every discussion begin with Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, and Leibnitz? Would we not have to question forever the reliability of our senses? Those empiricists could far from satisfy our honest query if we devoted our thinking to the skepticism of the Pyrronists who claimed to refrain from any judgement in lieu of knowledge.

Common to the preceding myth scholarship is the recognition of our reliance upon fictive belief that we cannot espouse empirically. Certainly, if one is interested in the study of myth, the question will stand clearly before the study begins: "Does myth teach some literal truth, or does it have a metaphoric message?" It seems that those people who claim the former might also deny that their myths are myths, or fictions in Kermode's sense; they might bitterly turn their ears against the suggestion that their beliefs should be referred to as "myth."

But any story-line that does not refer to some truth outside itself is limited to describing mundane events, for what events without referring to some additional meaning could teach us anything? My suggestion is that all language is metaphorical to some degree; all signified concepts must

refer to similarities to other concepts, and all words must rely upon other words for their definitions. When we define a word, we do so by anchoring it firmly to concepts we already know; thus, we define words by using a form of metaphoric language. All words are meaningless scribbles if they cannot be understood in terms of other words in the language.

Similarly, the events in a narrative hold no meaning unless we choose to draw some significance in relation to meaning outside the events themselves. The statement "The cat ran down the street" would have no meaning if we were unable to define each word in the sentence in relation to others words. Further, the statement would be one of mere description without an attempt to find additional meaning in terms of something that existed outside the cat. If we assume that the statement is simply a description of the event, we have gained the awareness of one temporal event.

Neither does the statement "Jesus died on a cross" obviously perform more than a descriptive function; the sentence tells its reader that a person called "Jesus" ceased to live while on a cross. Only when one decides that dying on a cross could represent something other than one man's death could the statement become meaningful to its hearer. Biblical myth is full of such metaphors. Indeed, it would have no strength if it only referred to the events of long-dead people. So even the most avid "believer" of

Christ's divinity would have to agree that His story is metaphorical and represents some other truth by means of analogy.

I assume in my study of myth that myth has no value of its own if not viewed as metaphor. There are, however, infinitely varying positions on deciding what the metaphor should represent. Perhaps this is something that we must sense to be true; if the scholarship is at all correct, then myth should ring true, and perhaps we will fail to explain why. I suggest that myth rings true because it mediates those conflicts which we cannot rationally resolve. Rationality seems to let us off too early, leaving many gaps and inward desires for sense. Myth is that which undermines those rational holes and reconciles it to the irrational human psyche.

Questions to Ask of the Text

In my investigation of Lewis and Williams, I will first attempt to discover whether or not the works are in fact mythic. Drawing from the various theorists, I will attempt to find evidence proving that the works in question are displaced myths. If so, I will then look for the variations of surface structure and similarities to the deep structure of myth. I will then investigate why their particular alteration of surface structure seems either effective or

defective in making the universal mythic forms acceptable to a contemporary audience.

Further, I will explore how each author utilizes metaphor and to what truths the author's metaphors seem to refer. What truths about the human psyche arise, if any? What sort of mediation of fundamental conflicts occurs in the text? And does the author indicate the existence of a transcendental signified? Does the author claim that the "as if" can equate to the "Is" in a supreme fiction? Does there exist some knowable or unknowable Absolute Reality? How does the author handle the relationship between the rational and the nonrational? Where do the two meet in the text, if at all? And does the author make an attempt to explain this relationship? Finally, do the scholars and the artists view myth differently, and was the scholarship useful in characterizing and broadening an understanding of myth?

I assume that I will find some interrelation between the texts and the authors. In the case of each, I will compare the work to the various theories of mythic literature in order to decide if any viewpoint appears to be relevant to the actual reading of mythic literature.

Chapter 2

A Statement of Personal Aesthetics and the Parameters of Mythic Literature

The fundamental question I ask of Lewis and Williams' works is "Are they mythic?" My definition of myth is one in process, and likely it will always be. And as one finds myth more alluded to than defined, the task of defining myth is a vulnerable one.

Discursive scholarship may refer to myth as a genre with qualities "A" through "J." We could take that list and hold our preconceived template up to a given work of art to find that the work is mythic or that it is not. And I cannot abort such an attempt to identify characteristics and compare them to the works in question. But the greatest difficulty in my analysis of myth is that myth, in large, must be felt to be myth in order to be mythic. Would we not be grossly depriving art if we were to distill it to discursive language alone?

I, then, begin my attempt to define myth by admitting that my ideas will be led by intuitions which cannot always be clearly explained or even recognized. As we experience art, we might find such intolerable joy welling up or anxiety that makes the pulse quicken. At the time of such

an experience it would be self defeating to define the experience. So after the fact, we try to comprehend what has struck us or what within us has been struck. Why anxiety? Why longing? Why tears and joy? I confess that such "irrational" experience is my motivation for this study. The irrational does much of the moving and changing of the soul, and the rational tracing of the experience is often an anxious attempt to understand what we have gained . . . or what we have lost or been missing.

I am referring to what Jorge Luis Borges calls the "aesthetic phenomenon":

> Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces belabored by time, certain twilights and certain places try to tell us something, or have said something that we should not have missed, or are about to say something; this imminence of a revelation which does not occur is, perhaps, the aesthetic phenomenon. (188)

Art moves me in ways that I do not know. I sense a language that speaks intently to me, but I cannot make out what our minds are being told or why I feel the joy and pain upon experiencing certain plays or novels. Perhaps the corresponding anxiety occurs because I know that beauty is temporal. I experience the intensity of kairos for a moment, but I feel chronos pressing in the periphery of my vision--in the rusty door that reads "fire exit" and the man

with the smoker's cough three rows down. And the show ends and now it is time to pay for parking and taste late night coffee; and these worlds clash; I sense an insatiable longing. My deepest desires have been clarified, spoken out for all to hear, shared with the world and my lone-ness is bridged.

But art offers more than a quick flirt and the tease of what we wish could be. Art can direct us, show us what we want and show us that our lives are acceptable. Art can show us kairos where we thought there to be only chronos. Art can reflect the joy in our struggles, the acceptability of life as it is. And art may have something to teach us with is temporality. Perhaps we need to learn to embrace beauty in spite of its brevity and life in spite of its shortness.

As I have suggested, art moves in ways we cannot clearly understand. Art may affirm our lives or clarify our desires for our lives. We may leave the show feeling in love with the commonalities of our own life, or we may leave with a longing for closer relations with people. I will not claim that all art achieves or attempts to achieve these life-serving functions. But in narrowing my definition from art to mythic literature, I claim that the latter will do these things.

As I have suggested in the first chapter, myth corresponds to fundamental human needs to belong, to be

unique, and to have a meaningful relation to reality. Mythic literature expresses, in its various forms, these desires. In my evolving understanding of myth, I believe that myth affirms the conditions of our lives rather than negates them. Myth does not reject life's apparent contradictions and struggles, but it embraces them. Myth, then, is a full embrace of reality. It is an existentially honest depiction of reality which offers hope, empathy from the voice of an other. Myth does not deny ambiguity, confusion, pain, loneliness, or joy, but provides healing somewhat like that of the Negro blues. One can join in and admit his or her hardships; one can weep while shedding communal tears. In the midst of a larger rhythm, we find our own heart beating; we find our own voice in the communal voice of humanity.

In order for us to sense that it is our own life that is represented in myth, the myth must accurately represent our problems and offer feasible answers. As Kermode suggests that an effective fiction must both give form to reality and do justice to the experience of chaos and confusion about reality, I suggest that myth must do the same. Myth must first speak to us by saying, "This is your own life of which I speak--with all its frustration, confusion, longing, and joy." Our problems must not be trivialized or resolved too simply, for there is no hope in solutions we know will fail.

A meaningful analogy of myth's empathy came to me when I recently saw a father with his baby daughter. As the child wept, the father whispered softly, "I know, I know, I know." I felt surprised at the tears in my eyes. After thinking about that simple incident, I began to understand why the interaction between the father and his daughter were touching; those words say to the child, "You are not alone, your sorrow is understood, it will be okay, it's okay to be sad, and I feel with you." How coarse and uncomforting are the words "You have nothing to cry about" or "Grow up," or "What's the big deal?" or "Here's a toy; now be quiet!" The greatest comfort comes not in a denial of the problem or a simplistic solution, but in the simple affirming and empathetic recognition of a sorrow.

In large, I will use Kermode's fiction as a model for mythic literature. A myth (Kermode's fiction) must, then, admit ambiguity and recognize weakness and struggle inherent in our experience, assign form and meaning to reality without dogmatically insisting that all questions have been annihilated, and affirm life and validate our personal experience of the "Is." As myth is roughly equivalent to Kermode's fiction, myth will be sharply juxtaposed to what Kermode terms myth: that vision of reality which dogmatically imposes form, oversimplifies reality, and ignores complexity and ambiguity. Kermode's myth does not

fairly represent existential reality but superimposes a tidy, make-believe reality in its place.

I can do nothing about my subjective biases but admit them. Though myth is said to have a universal quality, I may perceive that a work is mythic while many will not agree; I have my own experience on which to work; my level of skepticism may differ from the next, and I may demand a more or less sophisticated representation of reality than the next. By skepticism, I mean that hesitation to accept a pure paradigmatic answer based upon our experience which has often defied paradigmatic solutions. This is what Kermode has called "the skepticism of the clerisy:" or the skepticism that educated people are likely to have which challenges formulaic explanations of reality.

What I consider to be an accurate depiction of the chaotic world may be a mockery to a person with different experience. In our modern world our individual experiences of reality differ as never before. And even in cases when our experience may be nearly identical to another's--a sibling for instance--our personal rendering of a myth would nonetheless exist at differing levels according to individual personalities and levels of cognitive and emotional maturity. I cannot, then, declare a work to be mythic for everyone, for my declaration would be tainted with biases that I could not count. But rather than attempting a psychoanalytic approach which seeks to reveal

the why's and wherefore's of my interaction with the text, I will qualify my judgments by admitting that I cannot fully understand the workings of myth and that my understanding of myth is in process.

Chapter 3

C. S. Lewis and Myth

That C. S. Lewis claims to be a mythic author is fact, though his work must be evaluated on its own merit, independent of his assertions made in his nonfiction. There is no doubt that all of Lewis's works end happily with the conflicts of the stories all neatly resolved. Nor is there doubt that Lewis deals with fundamental or mythic themes such as death, weakness, loss of love, and reunion. These so-called "mythic" works depict pain and confusion, but Lewis's response to this pain and confusion, or put another way, to "existential reality" is to present a utopian scenario in which the hell of this world becomes the precursor of a fulfilling afterlife. _The Chronicles of Narnia_, for instance, depict sorrowful events, such as Digory's sadness about his dying mother in _The Magician's Nephew_, but we never doubt that every conflict in the _Chronicles_ will end happily; in fact, Digory's mother is healed, and ultimately all of the conflicts which occurred throughout the _Chronicles_ end with the final words of _The Last Battle_: ". . .the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. .

. . and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after" (184-85).

But when an author presents us with a fantastic solution that defies our existential experience of "this" world with the promise of a world to come, we must ask ourselves if we are truly embracing life or despising it. If such a work embraces life, I assert that we are in the midst of myth; if a work despises life, myth, I believe, cannot successfully function. Lewis, an overt Neo-platonist, suggests that the life we now experience, the one we touch, see, and breathe, is actually a far inferior shadow of Reality. What makes life great, says Lewis, is in that which we cannot see; life's greatness, in a way, lies in its antithesis, in some alternate, intuited reality.

When we are considering Lewis's vision of reality that unquestionably asserts the eternal reality of God who promises us eternal life and joy in ultimate Reality, we can hardly ignore the challenging criticism of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche writes in _The Anti-Christ_ that religion is rooted in "the hatred of the natural" and is "the expression of a profound discontent with the actual" (135). When an author's solution to reality's dilemmas is consistently antithetical to much of our experience of reality, reality is not only left undealt with but is also condemned in the process. Lewis's hopes for life after death may be his tools for justifying his failure to accept

reality. In the following discussion of his works, I question whether or not Lewis depicts reality with existential honesty and embraces his experience, or whether he rejects his experience of reality by clinging to an alternate and less honest vision of this reality. I will not attempt to judge, however, the reality of Lewis's hope for an after-life or the accuracy of his neo-platonic ideas. My assumption is that all of our fictions fall short of the "Is." Instead, I hope to discover whether or not Lewis provides workable fictions in his novels, fictions that we can dub mythic.

The Chronicles of Narnia: A Myth or a Fiction?

Lewis wrote The Chronicles of Narnia for children, but an adult audience, it is said, can enjoy them as well. They are no doubt pleasant tales for both children and adults, but they are unlikely to catch the adult unaware, to take us into a mythic world of deep human truths. For Lewis, I believe, did not successfully depict a believable reality for both adults and children; at least he does not manage to create a fictive world to which I am able to assent.

In The Chronicles of Narnia we have direct access to Aslan, a character who is simply never wrong. Similarly, in the space trilogy we hear Lewis's didactic voice from an obviously more intelligent life form, the Sorns or Oyarsa,

for example, which dictates reality with a capital R. But this is not our experience of reality, at least not mine. For the most part, in this life we are not fed such direct information from an objective knower; hence, when reading Lewis's fiction, our struggle with finitude is not mediated, and we return from Lewis's fantasy having been merely entertained.

We find, then, a need for balance; for a mythic work implies some dissonance from reality, but it must not take us too far into the world of fairy tales, tidy plots, and happy endings. This, according to Kermode, is ". . . a kind of crisis in the relation between fiction and reality, tension or dissonance between paradigmatic form and contingent reality" (133). A mythic work must do justice to the chaotic while giving it form.

Narnia, however, is a world of simple dichotomies--of nice good guys in white and treacherous bad guys in black. Told from a third person, omniscient point of view, the Chronicles provide a secure world for the reader; there is little representation of ambiguity, and a God-like narrator seems always to be in control and aware of where the story is to end. Consistently throughout the tales we are given hints as to who will live and who will die, and who will finally win.

Lewis, however, is on several accounts not true to the ways humans experience reality. A fictional account can

affirm life or damn it. The affirming fantasy, we find, can serve to bring meaning to our actual experience of reality; a character enters a world of fantasy embarking on a mythic journey and brings back some meaningful resolve to his or her mundane life. The mythic hero is then able to accept his life which before the journey was unacceptable and devoid of satisfactory meaning. The benefit of a myth, then, is not that the character (or the reader) is able to reside forever in the world of fantasy, but that the character is able to return from the fantasy world to find new fulfillment with the mundane.

But Lewis's fantasy world seems to damn the human condition and teach few lessons of the beauty of real life experience. Here, fantasy can serve to merely provide escape, its heroes never to return to accept the mundane and embrace the whole of human experience. Such a fantasy can represent an undying discontent with reality--a refusal to accept existential experience--and thus serves the opposite function of myth. As myth (Kermode's fiction) embraces life and makes sense of chaos, the life rejecting fantasy (Kermode's myth) futilely demands experience to be something else, something better, something utopian. Lewis attempts to mold reality into his own image and proposes an alternate dream reality that denies the real experience of people.

A life-affirming myth, for instance, mediates conflicts like life versus death, good versus evil, and strength

versus weakness. Myth recognizes the struggle in our lives but affirms life nonetheless and finds meaning in our toilsome existence. Shakespeare's _King Lear_, for instance, displays the power of mythic literature. In _Lear_ we find no denials of reality, of loss, of human weakness, of death. But in _Lear_ we find life meaningful and embraceable in spite of death and in spite of weakness. As _Lear_ shows humanity to be frail and in need of comfort, Lewis depicts a fantasy world that ignores, even blots out the real struggles of humanity. In short, we read _Lear_, and we weep. We say, "That is my life," and we mourn it and joy in it. We leave the play and hear Lear's own words of resolution, and those words become our own ways of accepting reality. But we read Lewis and do not often recognize his reality; of course we wish it could be ours, but it is not, and that makes us bitter toward the real ground that we walk on. Lewis does not teach us to love our world: he teaches us that it is simply not acceptable. We have not learned how to accept the loss of a lover's life or how to accept our existential experience of mortality.

King Lear, on the other hand, accomplishes this task of mythic mediation in which contradictions are mediated rather than denied. Some critics have decreed that the death of Cordelia lessens the quality of the play; we find no poetic reason, they say, why Cordelia should have died. But according to Kermode, this particular falsification of our

expectations serves as "a way of finding something out that we should, on our more conventional way to the end, have closed our eyes to" (18). The surprising death of Cordelia attends to a ruthlessly contingent reality, and consequently, we are able to embrace more firmly as true that which we have experienced and learned in King Lear. Our learning through Lear would have been much lesser if Shakespeare did not depict life for what it is--complete with its mortality, loss, joy of reunion, joy in companionship, and call for more honest communication. Lear learns that he is not "ague proof;" he faces chronos and greets his animalness. Upon his honest glance into the eyes of his situation, he found himself able to love and he found true companionship. So why did Cordelia have to be dead in his arms--didn't he learn to love? Couldn't the story end without such sorrow?

> And my poor fool is hanged: no, no, no, life?
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never. (1103)

Lear begrudges the death of his daughter, and we, like Kent are left asking "Is this the promised end?" (1103). And why did Lear himself have to die?

The play finds its power in just such honesty, for we can accept its resolutions because it has depicted our own lives, lives which can become whole, lives filled with grief

and joy, lives with hope and hopelessness, chronos and kairos, and lives that end. Shakespeare does not ask us to believe that a story can go on happily ever after. Instead he offers resolution, mediation that accepts life as it is, not as we wish it could be. Myth, then, does not ask us to lie.

In The Myth of Sisyphus, Albert Camus likewise offers us hope not by ignoring the plight of humanity, but by paying attention to existential experience and then showing resolve in spite of it or even because of it. What could we learn from the tale if Sisyphus did not have to turn to face the stone again as we, ourselves do, not knowing when the weight of the stone should let up. Like Sisyphus, most of us must toil to survive without certainty that our work is not in vain, or absurd in Camus' terms. But as in Camus' portrayal of Sisyphus, we might find that "the struggle toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart," for "happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth" (90-91).

Both Sisyphus and King Lear show us resolution amidst the chaos of human experience. Both are true to human experience, to joy, weakness, mortality: Sisyphus finds no escape from his rock, and Lear makes no great escape from reality. Myth, then, must be true to our experience. It cannot only offer some hope for an afterlife without recognizing the agony of the casket lid closing for the last

time. It cannot be a fantasy so far removed from real grief that it does us no good when we close the book. But to recognize that grief, even embrace it, learn from it, and use it to see that our lives are acceptable--then we can learn about our experience rather than deny it.

Lewis's works, on the other hand, frequently do not provide such mythic mediation. For example, _The Magician's Nephew_ tells a story of Narnia's creation. Narnia is created and overseen by Aslan, the God-like Lion. The land is perfect but for the entrance of the fallen son of Adam (Digory) and daughter of Eve (Polly) who bring evil (in the form of an evil queen) with them into the blemishless land. With the help of Aslan, the evil queen is conquered for the time being and Narnia is again at peace.

The story is empowering for children, because in the tale the two children are primary movers and shapers in the plot; Digory and Polly are in the "middest" when their actions are essential to recognizing the visionary end of restoring the land of Narnia back to righteous order. The question arises here whether or not a fiction can be workable for children and not for adults. Does Lewis here write a literary fiction which meets the needs of childish skepticism but not that of adults? And if so, could there have been a way in which Lewis could have provided a workable literary fiction for children without oversimplifying reality to that of its simply being black or

white? These questions may well be best answered by child psychologists.

But the Chronicles, some critics assume, can be read on several levels; children can enjoy a more literal level of the text while the adult readers can enjoy a "deeper" level of philosophically rich metaphor. Certainly Lewis has included meanings which he never intended for children. In The Magician's Nephew, for instance, he provides two levels of meaning--the literal and the figurative, one for the child's literal understanding and one for the adult's:

> "The Atlantean box contained something that had been brought from another world when our world was only just beginning."
>
> "What?" asked Digory, who was now interested in spite of himself. "Only dust," said Uncle Andrew. "Fine dry dust. Nothing much to look at. Not much to show for a lifetime of toil you might say." (20)

While the child audience will probably read only of a magic box filled with dust, Uncle Andrew's words remind us, as the cliche goes, that our bodies will, after a lifetime of labor, return to dust.

If these "deeper" meanings were intended for adult readers, should we not put them to the tests of adult skepticism? But even if I decided to approach the Chronicles as if they could meet the demands of adult

skepticism, I cannot observe all various levels of skepticism among millions of adult readers. Nor can I even approach a specific group's skeptical demands, such as layman in a conservative Christian church or those in the field of literary criticism. Those tasks are too large; admittedly, then, I must work from my own skepticism, biases, and abilities to assent to elements of Lewis's fictional world. I, then, work on this assumption: that any reading of the text is transactional, and a discussion of whether or not a work is mythic implies a reader response reading.

In my reading of The Magician's Nephew, I find that Lewis does, at times, deal with mortality and the weakness of humanity in a meaningful way, a way that does not trivialize grief. Lewis depicts Digory, for instance, preoccupied with his mother's sickness. We are, in fact, introduced to Digory with tears drying on his face, just after he has been "blubbing." Digory momentarily informs Polly, his new-found companion, that his father is away in India and that his mother is ill and is "going to--going to--die" (3). Only three pages into the novel, Lewis informs us of a major conflict which, for Digory's sake, we hope will be resolved.

We have seen, from the outside, Digory's teary face; we have heard him "blubber" about his situation. But in order for the work to mediate the sorrow of sickness, it must

represent pain enough in order that the reader be drawn into the experience of the character. The reader must not stay on the outside of the protagonist who is experiencing grief. The author must, instead, draw the reader in with believable pain; the reader must forget that the work is fiction and assent to the fictive world. This union of the reader and the text occurs when the author has mimicked "real" life enough so that the lines between fiction and reality are temporarily blurred. But as an adult reader, my defenses have already risen, for Lewis has begun the story as a paradigmatic fairy tale: "This is a story about something that happened long ago when your grandfather was a child." Unlike myth, the fairy tale trivializes grief and overcomes it with a tidy precision after the good guys win and live happily ever after.

As a reader, I have already, then, become suspicious of the depth of Digory's grief, for as the paradigm would have it, his mother is sure to get well again, and the two are sure to live happily ever after; in the final chapter "The End of This Story and the Beginning of All Others," Digory brings his mother the magical fruit sent from Aslan, and as expected his mother is healed. A child reader may sleep well after such a bed time story, for there is, perhaps, no conflict between this fictional paradigm and the personal experience of life.

But we cannot once again become children to judge whether or not Lewis's representation of grief can bring a young reader to assent to the fictional world. I must imagine a child's world where there is little need for peripeteia and representation of chaos and hopelessness. A child will not likely be walled in with his or her own skepticism, a skepticism which, for adults, doubts the adequacy of healing answers. Adults are ready to hear just how the "magic" trick was performed or what small print undermines the advertisement for a "free" product. For myself, that small print reveals that mothers do die and families do collapse; my own mother did die when I was roughly Digory's age, and though many told me she would be divinely healed, she died as scheduled by the doctors. Despite the doctors' analysis, these believers surrounded her and trusted in her healing, but there came no magic fruit and she died, and Aslan could have only been an escape.

My own reading of this text suggests that mediation does not occur for me because my life does not appear in the pages of the book; in fact, the text may do little to mediate the loss of a loved one for even a child reader, for that child knows already that mother was left in the ground, and the smell of the dirt and grass is more powerful than the claims of paradise. The surviving child may also need a more complex representation of the loss of family; the need

for peripeteia has been already established. Could Lewis have been truer to the experience of reality even in this children's book? Could a child accept a mediation of death rather than a denial of it?

In The Last Battle, however, Lewis does depict the reality of our situation, that everyone does die, but just as soon as we find that out, we are climbing "further up and further in" to Narnia and in the process we are already witnessing reunion between the dead and their survivors, now all dead. Death was but a slightly noticeable "bump," and Lewis has skipped the years in between. What about the years of despair when it does not feel possible that the dead are alive? What about the frustration that at sometime we all will feel in our absence of sure knowledge about the meaning of life and the significance of death? I remember the least comforting words at my mother's funeral: "She is in a better place now and you will see her soon." I found the most comforting words to be "I know it is hard and sometimes we don't know what to do." Those words sounded much like the father's words to his crying daughter in arms gently whispering "I know, I know." I hear Lewis's words mimicking the former and not the latter; hopes are fine, but they must include the experience of loss in order to be mediating.

Albeit, Lewis does provide us with some incidence in the Chronicles in which the pain is not whitewashed or

driven away with fantasy. In The Magician's Nephew, for instance, we find that Aslan is not only an omniscient being who embodies strength, but he is also a feeling creature, capable of tears. Digory's hopes for his mother's cure were fading. His plea, at one point in the tale becomes desperate, and at that point we see Aslan's power juxtaposed to his ability to feel, to empathize with the unsure sorrow of a human:

> "But please, please--won't you--can't you give me something that will cure Mother?" Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great front feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself. (142)

Aslan here becomes that empathizing father; he continues, "My son, my son," said Aslan. "I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. Let us be good to one another" (142). "I know" is a whole sentence--a complete thought. The two words are not abruptly followed by some easy conclusion. Before Aslan offers Digory a word

of consolation, he empathizes with him, for that empathy is perhaps what we need most.

Lewis's account of Aslan's empathy resembles the mythic account of Christ's raising Lazarus from the dead. In the Gospel of John, chapter 11, the author writes:

> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her were also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. (Oxford RSV)

Like Aslan, Christ is one who mediates power and weakness, strength and tenderness. Having the power to revive Lazarus from the dead, Christ did not start with consoling answers. First, he addressed the existential experience of the people; he did not tell them not to grieve. Like Lewis, the author of this Gospel expresses Christ's empathy as one complete thought, a whole sentence, "Jesus wept," a complete thought which deserves our attention. Why is the healer--the incarnated God and the giver of life--so moved by the tears of these people? The Christian account would fail to be mythic if Christ did not first validate our experience of reality before dispensing the answers to human dilemmas. The reader, then, finds that the grief can and should be embraced, for our ways of experiencing and feeling are acceptable, even God-given.

The Magician's Nephew does, like the account of Lazarus's resurrection, represent grief as acceptable and part of the process of mythic mediation. But we must keep in mind that for the adult reader, this depiction of grief will be found in small doses. But for a younger reader, this may be ample representation of sadness, in which case the child reader will find life well enough represented to assent to the fiction and find mediation for sorrow and joy.

The Chronicles may, then, perform mediation, but we must consider the audience, their needs, probable experience, and level of skepticism. Children may have little reason to question paradigmatic form; for children, reality is paradigmatic form: knowledge received from authorities who dictate reality shaping formulas. No wonder, then, Lewis would not represent at length adult experience of chaos, and it is no wonder that Lewis would not include peripeteia that could meet the demands of adult skepticism.

Lewis's Adult Fiction

We clearly know Out of the Silent Planet and Till We Have Faces, his last fictive work, to be adult fiction. We expect, then, more of these literary works in terms of clerical skepticism. In these works, Lewis's depictions of reality are far more complex; however his didactic voice

perpetually pronounces itself. And as myth *conveys its message to its reader by showing rather than telling*, Lewis's didactic voice can hinder the possibility of mythic mediation occurring in his fiction.

Furthermore, Out of the Silent Planet, in particular, is more moral in tone than mythic. Having been accosted and taken aboard the "flying" machine by Weston, the scientist, and Devine, the financial backer of the trip, Ransom, the protagonist, encounters life forms on the planet Malacandra whose moral character, as Lewis would have it, far outweigh those of earth creatures. The three different species on the planet--the Sorns, the Hrossa, and the Pfifltriggi--live in perfect harmony, unlike the fallen creatures of earth. We learn that the "Silent Planet" is earth--the planet gone bad and hence out of harmony with its surrounding planets and the universe.

I find myself unable, however, to assent to Lewis's world of Malacandra. On Malacandra, the morally superior life forms simply regurgitate Lewis's prescribed morality; and thus Lewis does not create a believable, mythic world and present it to his audience, but instead forcefully imposes his dogma upon all of the characters in the novel and hence upon the reader. Is it the weakness of his vision which provokes him to such dogma?

His representation of Weston during the meeting with Oyarsa, the spiritual leader of the planet, for instance,

reduces Weston to speaking like an infant. While his treatment of Weston is entertaining, it reads like a grammar school fantasy in which the antagonist is made to look ridiculous. Lewis has not clearly explained why we should reject Weston's thinking--his drive for progressive scientific knowledge--but nonetheless our image of Weston is tainted with mocking laughter as Weston cannot even utter a whole sentence. Again, this reads more like the grammar school argument in which one mockingly repeats the opponents words with a ridiculous tone. Soon, Oyarsa suggests that Ransom translate for Weston, and at that time, we hear Weston speak intelligibly, but his words are translated into the moral implications of his words rather than his own words. Weston, then, only takes part in one level of the discussion and has no opportunity to defend the moral implications of his philosophy.

Instead of showing us why we should accept his claims about reality, Lewis sets up a hierarchical system of authority: Maledil the Young, the creator of the planet, and Oyarsa, the acting authority on the planet, followed by the Sorns, and so on. Lewis thus empowers his own voice; now the voice is not only that of C. S. Lewis but that of the gods of other worlds. Humanity on earth is fallen and cannot understand Lewis's fiction (as Lewis would have us believe), so Lewis takes us off the planet to receive a moral lesson from alien races; rather than showing us the

human experience of chaos and contingency, Lewis objectifies his own view, making his "as if" the "Is." Lewis, as the master of his fiction, uses the third person omniscient narrator, thus giving the work an objective tone. But this divorces us too far from reality, for in our experience we never escape our limited view from one pair of eyes, and taking place only in one mind of limited understanding.

But in Out of the Silent Planet, we meet the Eldila, translucent creatures of light which are hardly visible to the human eye. The protagonist, Ransom, through whom we experience the events of the novel, becomes a close ally with the all-knowing network of morally perfect creatures. One could not conclusively reject the existence of an ontological being, a suprahuman force that oversees the cosmos, but Lewis depicts a world where we become overtly in touch with this force. Lewis could have more effectively created a fiction overseen by this force if he made more sense out of our experience in which we do not come into such close contact with objective reality. Lewis takes us from our world, in which we scrape for tangible reason to believe in a transcendental signified, to a world where there is no struggle at all in assuming the existence of a transcendental signified.

As Weston, Devine, and Ransom arrive on the prelapsarian planet, Malacandra, we find a moral order that

is matter of fact to all of its natives. We are taught, for example, the morality of sexuality from the Hrossa:

> Among the hrossa, anyway, it was obvious that unlimited breeding and promiscuity were as rare as the rarest perversions. At last it dawned upon him that it was not they, but his own species, that were the puzzle. That the hrossa should have such instincts was mildly surprising; but how came it that the instincts of the hrossa so closely resembled the unattained ideals of that far-divided species Man whose instincts were so deplorably different. (74)

Lewis seems to have in mind that after we return from the journey with Ransom in the strange planet, we will bring back a new understanding of objective morality. That is a primary function of myth, after all, to take resolution from the mythic journey back to the mundane. But can we learn from this "mythic" journey? A reader, if he or she becomes aware of Lewis's moral, may lose patience with Lewis's picture of reality; for many of us struggle to establish a basis for morality in the midst of a multi-cultural world.

Again, we are back to the biases that we have as individuals. I, for instance, was born into a conservative protestant culture which, for the most part, operates on a divine command theory of morality. Like Lewis's world, my world was one in which I was expected to derive my morality

from authority: the church, my father ("head of the household" and disciplinarian), or an interpretation of Biblical passages (an interpretation which my church assumed to be objectively true). My inquiries into the reasoning behind this basis of morality often got me in trouble; I was called "smart alleck," "sinner," "doubter," "tempted by Satan himself."

We can compare this model of received knowledge, knowledge derived from assumed authority figures, to the authoritarian model of parenting. The authoritarian parent is one who expects compliance *because* he or she is mom or dad: "Don't you dare talk back to me!". . ."because I said so; you don't need to know why!" Reason does not play a large part in such learning of "morality" (if we dare call it that). The child is not given practice in moral reasoning, only in obeying orders. While learning by example may be a valid way for children to learn an ethical system, at some point the child must learn also to reason through the issues which he or she has learned only mimetically in the past. If a child does not learn to *reason* through moral issues, his or her belief system remains arbitrary and received.

Out of the Silent Planet, too, demonstrates a model of reality which is hierarchial and authoritarian, for Lewis himself does not sound as though he is in process of discovering reality, but as though he has found it and can

now teach it to its last detail; this is Kermode's myth, not fiction. We do find individual characters, especially Ransom, in the process of discovering reality, but such characters are learning a reality which Lewis has already charted out. Lewis's world is one where the females cook--even on Mars (77), the good guys obey their assumed authority, and the universe is ordered into a hierarchy of authority: Oyarsa, Eldila, and Maledil the Young. In his perfect fictional world, Lewis's presumptions create a life of imaginary clarity, whereas in our experience we often find ambiguity and disorder regarding issues such as morality and our relation to a transcendent being.

From the start of the novel to the end, we witness Ransom's discovery of Lewis's preconceived reality. If the reader were, then, to join the protagonist in his struggles and discoveries, the end product would be a discovery of Lewis's depiction of objective reality. In such a case, Lewis himself would become the authority; Lewis would teach the reader. But myth must become the voice of its reader, not only teach its reader. Myth rings true because we see our reality in it, and so it can speak for us, with us. But Lewis places the reader on a lower level than himself, and his didacticism repels us from assenting to his fiction. Lewis's moral tone in _Out of the Silent Planet_ and in the other space trilogy novels keeps us on our guard rather than absorbing us into the fiction. It is impossible for me to

read the novel as one who does not have my biases, one with more sympathy to Lewis's certainty of objective reality. But if we assume a transactional reading of the text, we must call to our attention our own biases which affect our reading of the works. Interestingly, the "poem" that arises when I read the work has much to do with my perfect attendance in Sunday school and the types of grammar school teachers that taught me.

In Lewis's early fiction--the Chronicles and the Space Trilogy--Lewis gives us his Neo-platonic interpretation of reality. In such an interpretation, our life experience equates to the shadows on the wall of the cave while the essence of reality exists outside the cave and out of our sight, except for the shadows which appear on the cave walls. Our experience would be the only hint at that more essential reality, so it would make no sense to assume the contents of the elusive reality outside the cave except in discussing the shadows, our only experience of the supposed reality outside the cave, and our only experience of anything. But in the Chronicles Lewis pays little credence to the alleged shadows; in fact, he magically takes us right into the world of the real, right outside the cave. There would be no problem with such a journey if he had included what it is about the shadows--our experience--which would suggest such a reality outside our cave of experience. When Lewis then tries to resolve the conflicts of our experience,

such resolution has little effect because we have not been participating in the journey, for it did not empathetically begin with our experience.

Though Lewis still writes as a Neo-Platonist in his last work of fiction, Till We Have Faces, he begins and ends discussing the journey in terms of our experience, what he calls the shadows. He no longer asks us to journey into the reality without relating the voyage directly to our own reality (whether or not they be shadows). Nor does Lewis dichotomize reality into easy categories of good and evil. In his earlier fiction, the protagonist could be sure of his or her relation to an ultimate reality because it is plain to see who is bad, who is good, and who is in charge. Those who disavow this supposed ultimate reality are referred to as ignorant or evil. But in Till We Have Faces the experience of Orual does not rest tidily within an obvious ultimate reality, and those who envision life differently are not assumed to be excluded from the Good. This last novel, generally thought to be Lewis's best work of fiction, far exceeds his other fiction in terms of representing the complexity of human experience. And unlike the Chronicles or the Space Trilogy, Till We Have Faces does not overwhelm the reader with the voice of the author showing through in the voice of the narrator. Instead, Lewis writes Till We Have Faces from the limited point of view of Orual's experience, and throughout the novel, Orual hears many

voices representing pieces of reality--all making sense but no one capitalizing truth and no one being simply evil or nonsensical. In this way, Lewis more effectively represents real human experience: subjective, limited, and unsure. Because real experience is represented in the novel, it can better provide its reader with empathy and mediation than any of Lewis's other works.

Rather than overpowering the reader with Neo-platonism that ignores the "shadows" of our mortal life all together, Lewis, in this work, deals directly with the here and now--the perplexing experience that we live. And instead of the dichotomous array of characters that we see in the earlier fiction, being either good or evil, he shows us characters all with partially true visions: Fox, who embraces the classical reasoning of the Greeks; Redival, mistaken by Orual to be a merely selfish and shallow; and Bardia, a highly superstitious and loyal servant of the royal court:

> . . .I had. . .taken both Bardia's explanation and the Fox's. . . for certain truth. Yet one must be false. And I could not find out which, for each was well rooted in its own soil. If the things believed in Glome were true, then what Bardia said stood; if the Fox's philosophy were true, what the Fox said stood. But I could not find out whether the doctrines of Glome or the wisdom of Greece were right. . .I saw that for years my life had

> been lived in halves, never fitting together.
> (150)

Neither the Fox's philosophy nor Bardia's philosophy provides for Orual a complete and perfect vision of reality. Accordingly, Lewis in Till We Have Faces does not depict an all-wise giver of knowledge as he did in the Chronicles or the Space Trilogy.

By representing the complex, limited, and uncertain lives of the characters, Lewis portrays a more believable interpretation of the intricate reality in which we live. Consequently, in Till We Have Faces, we find that Lewis represents love and hatred and good and bad with far more complexity than in his previous works.

We find this complexity, for instance, in Lewis's Orual who has her "father's hot blood," and hence reacts with hot jealousy when she becomes frustrated; Orual's father appears to be the most sinister and selfish character, for he has killed a slave boy as a mere exercise of his anger for not having his own male child, and he appeared relieved when his daughter was called for sacrifice rather than himself. But though he appears to be an "evil" person, Lewis suggests more complexity regarding this character, for Orual, too has her father's temper and his selfishness. We see in her, nonetheless, a humanity to which we can relate. Seemingly what appears to be evil in people is often a mere product of insecurity, fear, and hurt; hence, we are more able to feel

compassion for others who are like us, limited and weak. And though Orual does have her father's hot blood, ". . .her angers were all the sort that come from love;" we cannot simply accept her actions, nor can we call her motivations evil, nor can we accuse Lewis of simplistic, dichotomous thinking as found in his earlier fiction.

Dichotomous thinking is often the root of prejudice and separation. When we think of ourselves or our select group as being distinctly better and morally superior to those whom we categorize as different and inferior, we have not found a sense of "tucking in" or belonging to our world; perhaps we have gone overboard on the "sticking out" end of it. If we become elitist in our categorizing people out of our privileged reality, then we will find ourselves at battle with the world at large and juxtaposed awkwardly to it. But if we are able to see the complexity of our relation to humanity and to the cosmos, we will be more able to participate in a fiction which includes us as a member of humanity rather than an enemy of it. We long to view the world as the Fox; "They and it are all part of the same web, which is called Nature, or the Whole (85).

Because Lewis vividly depicts the struggles of his characters in Till We Have Faces, we are more able to feel a compassion for them and thus less apt to judge them. Because we are able to look into characters and find that they have similar struggles as we ourselves do, we are able

to focus on the commonalities of humanity rather than the distinctions that separate humans from each other. Lewis seems to accomplish this by questioning the pure formula of good versus evil. He uses a peripeteia which disrupts our sure relation to good or evil and blurs the lines of the categories. Once we are able to think past the categories and simple dichotomies, we are less likely to condemn and more likely to feel compassion.

Lewis, then, attempts to blur the lines of the good/evil dichotomy, but in so doing, he does not dismiss the notion of a transcendent good force, but he does, through peripeteia, make the reality of the good force more believable to our experience in which the good and bad are not so overt. In so doing, Lewis departs from the fairy tale paradigm where the good guys fight the bad guys (and each group is distinctly so) and the good guys, of course, win. Admittedly, we would like to embrace such a perfect form (the fairy tale wish fulfillment fantasy) but we cannot accept it in its pure form without peripeteia and without bridging the gap between our experience and the paradigm of the fairy tale.

As Kermode says, the paradigm must be called into question or else we will drift too far into the comfort that the form offers. Kermode suggests that we must have the form, but it must be a tool for figuring things out, and that is exactly what happens in Till We Have Faces.

Kermode's myth (not his fiction), being that which does not change as our needs to discover change, does not take into account that the structure that we find in experience changes as we find that some of our ideas are simply wrong and that our ability to know is not perfect. So to mimic our experience, a fiction will account for that humble aspect of learning and living: that we will change our minds, that we will be wrong, that we are to some extent egocentric and misjudge people.

At the beginning of Till We Have Faces, Orual has taken a firm stance against the gods; on the first page she writes that the following account is a condemnation of the gods. Orual repeatedly asks the reader to be the judge and to decide more objectively whether the gods are cruel and self-interested, that the gods are "viler than the vilest men" (71). But her tone tells us that she has little doubt of her own position, and she assumes the reader to agree. And why should we not agree? Have we not all been angry at the cosmos, and have we not all felt at times that the universe is either indifferent or terribly cruel? At that point we find it not hard to assent to Orual's point of view, for if nothing else, it has represented at least our emotional frustration (regardless of our world view) with our world and how it seems to "treat" us; as Orual writes, "There must. . .be something great in the mortal soul. For

suffering, it seems, is infinite, and our capacity without limit" (277).

And further, in Orual's displeasure with the gods, Lewis's voice does not show through in a didactic tone telling us that she is foolish. On the contrary, her point of view makes sense and will be heard in its own right; Lewis's knowledge of his ending (if he is aware of it throughout the writing of the book) does not mock the process of discovering with smug finality. The fact that we are all at times disgusted with reality must be admitted regardless of a belief in a transcendent being; a denial of our occasional or even constant frustration and hopelessness would repel us from any fiction--with or without a God.

Though Orual, at the beginning of the novel, rests assured that she has correctly judged the behavior of the gods, she, through a serious of confusing events, learns that her understanding of reality is wrong:

> Since I cannot mend the book, I must add to it. To leave it as it was would be to die perjured; I know so much more than I did about the woman who wrote it. What began the change was the very writing itself. Let no one lightly set about such a work. Memory, once waked, will play the tyrant. I found I must set down (for I was speaking as before judges and must not lie) passions and thoughts of my own which I had clean forgotten.

> The past which I wrote down was not the past I thought I had (all these years) been remembering. I did not, even when I had finished the book, see clearly many things that I see now. (253)

As Kermode has claimed, shaping the "as if" to be more like the "Is" is a dynamic process and not something that can be handed to us in packaged form. Once we assent to a fiction, as Lewis does Christianity, we will still, as individuals, have to shape our own experience into the fiction and vice versa; the metaphors will gradually take on personal meaning as we learn to integrate our experience with the fiction. Belief, then, becomes a process of personal struggle; we are not spoon fed from a transcendent being. In Till We Have Faces, Lewis depicts coming to terms with reality as an example of this difficult dynamic process.

The first part of the book represents Orual's own experience in conflict with the fiction that Psyche was able to embrace. The experience of Psyche and the experience of Orual do not lead them to believe the same things about the gods and their world. By the end of the novel, however, we note how the seemingly contradictory experience of the two sisters can fit into one coherent fiction. Psyche's experience had told her of the love of the gods and of the place of mortals in the cosmos. Psyche speaks of her "longing for home." She sees her death not as "a going, but

like going back." "All my life," she says, "the god of the Mountain has been wooing me" (76).

But Orual looks at the world in which Psyche lives and finds "a sickening discord" between her own reality and Psyche's, "a rasping together of two worlds, like the two bits of broken bone" (120). And where Psyche finds death to be the climax of sweet wooing, Orual discovers in it only horror and separation. Orual cannot simply join in with the supposed good guys, the gods or the priests, because she is not sure they are the good guys. Not knowing what should be a true sign of the gods, she asks, "What is the use of a sign which is itself only another riddle?" (132), and "If they had an honest intention to guide us, why is their guidance not plain?" (134). Similar to Orual's experience, we too are bombarded with a cacophony of voices--religious, intellectual, and so forth--voices all telling different stories. And it is a life long task to cipher through these voices in order to discover our own fiction.

In our grappling, we must know more than how to "pick the good guys," or "pick the correct vision of reality;" is that most people's intent? The very task is to find the good guys and/or a more complete understanding of reality. We do not need to be told to want these things. In the Chronicles, for instance, we are not faced with the task of ciphering voices, but only with the task of picking the obvious good guys and avoiding people who made grass wilt

under their feet. But in Till We Have Faces, part one ends with Orual's despair in her grappling to hear and cipher voices. She cannot incorporate her experience into the fiction which Psyche has embraced, and only the rasping together of two different worlds remains.

> I say, therefore, that there is no creature (toad, scorpion, or serpent) so noxious to man as the gods. Let them answer my charge if they can. It may well be that, instead of answering, they'll strike me mad or leprous or turn me into beast, bird, or tree. But will not all the world then know (and the gods will know it knows) that this is because they have no answer? (250)

Part one, then, ends in discord.

But in part two, Orual's enigmatic journey culminates when she begins to develop her own "face" and fit her chaotic experience into the frame of a larger fiction. What Orual discovers is her own ability to come to terms with her experience, her own brand of the fiction which Psyche has embraced. When Orual looks into the mirror, she sees only Ungit's face, "queen of the shadows," for Orual has yet to develop a face of her own.

In acquiring her own face, Orual has to question the accepted mythology and either find a fiction of her own or embrace the accepted mythology as personally relevant. Ultimately, she rejects the mythology surrounding Ungit as

unintelligible. To her the metaphors do not speak to her experience, and the ways in which people speak of Ungit seem incomprehensible; "If that's all they mean, why do they wrap it up in so strange a fashion?" (271).

Dreams inform Orual, however, that she has misunderstood much about her supposed love for Psyche. She realizes that she is, perhaps, Psyche's worst enemy because of her selfish love for Psyche. But these dreams, which appear to Orual as more real than "real" waking life, extend Orual's view. No longer is there a conflict between the long-heard voices of the Fox and Bardia. The Fox is one of reason, of justice, and Bardia spoke of the irrational relation of gods and humanity. Now the two halves that would not fit together fuse at last. Orual now finds her anguish acceptable, she having born the anguish, but Psyche having achieved the tasks. This is not justice, as Orual discovers, but finally Orual becomes thankful for that fact.

In her dreams, the Fox tells Orual that "We're all limbs and parts of one Whole. Hence of each other. Men, and gods, flow in and out and mingle." At last we have the key to Lewis's fiction. We unwittingly demand justice, but it is grace that we need; justice allows us to get what is ours and keep others from infringing upon our rights. Justice says that we should pay for our actions and that we should all be treated equally. But now, Orual can be thankful that the gods do not operate on the principles of

justice. She had loved, but only for her own sake; her love meant ownership. Now Orual realizes that love is found in the act of giving and submitting, rather than owning and dominating.

With the discovery of grace, Bardia's voice becomes one with the Fox's now, for neither was completely correct. Though the concept is rationally incomprehensible, Orual finds truth in the notion that all are of one body and could attend to one another's needs as one would for herself. Paradoxically, then, Orual finds that the only way to love herself is to love others selflessly, to let justice fall and bear the anguish of others and to give even when it makes no rational sense to do so.

This central theme of Till We Have Faces, the paradoxical nature of love, may best be summarized in the words of Edwin Arlington Robinson's poem, "Cliff Klingenhagen:"

> Cliff Klingenhagen had me in to dine
> With him one day; and after soup and meat,
> And all the other things there were to eat,
> Cliff took two glasses and filled one with wine
> And one with wormwood. Then without a sign
> For me to choose at all, he took the draught
> Of bitterness himself, and lightly quaffed
> It off, and said the other one was mine.
> And when I asked him what the deuce he meant

By doing that, he only looked at me
And smiled, and said it was a way of his.
And though I know the fellow, I have spent
Long time a-wondering when I shall be
As happy as Cliff Klingenhagen is.
(McMichael 918)

Robinson does not attempt to make a rational case for the paradox which he presents to us. But nonetheless it rings true; somehow contentment comes not from our seeking our own contentment, but it is a byproduct of selfless love. Orual's resolve is similar to this, and neither does Lewis debate the issue through rational discourse. Instead, he presents us with a life (Orual's) which is full of pain, loss, and confusion (true to our chaotic array of experience), and a conclusion that cannot be proven.

Of all Lewis's fiction Till We have Faces is by far the most successful in representing the experience of real people; Orual's experience of reality depicts our own experience of a continual dialogue with the "Is." Lewis's attempts to perform mythic mediation in Till We Have Faces are, accordingly, more effective than his attempts in his early works, for Orual found mediation through struggling and synthesizing many seemingly contradictory voices.

On the other hand, in Lewis's earlier works, he uses authoritarian characters to represent a clear-cut, ultimate divine will: Aslan, Oyarsa, Kings of Narnia, and so forth.

Till We Have Faces, however, departs from the strict hierarchy of the earlier fiction and shows us more realistic, more human characters. While the earlier fiction, I believe, is more didactic than mythic, more fairy-tale than myth, _Till We have Faces_ achieves mediation by identifying with our lives rather than providing a wish-fulfillment fantasy which ignores or negates our experience.

Chapter 4

Charles Williams and Myth

"Without finally believing it, he accepted it until he should discover more."

Charles Williams, The Place of the Lion

Like C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams was a member of the Inklings, a group of scholars and writers who met for their weekly Thursday afternoon gathering at the Eagle and Child Pub in Oxford, England, to read and critique each other's writings. Totaling about 25 authors during their decade of meetings, the Inklings and their writings focus on the nature of reality. Most believed that reality with a capital R exists and can be both found and known. The process of discovering this Reality and its nature, however, differs from author to author. Unlike Lewis who provides for his readers a clear, well-delineated concept of this Reality and the process whereby one can enter into a personal dialogue and relationship with this ontological being or concept, Charles Williams presents a less didactic, less restricting, but more dynamic and imaginative approach to his understanding of this Reality or what he often calls God.

Throughout his handful of novels, Charles Williams utilizes five recurrent themes which depict his perception of Reality and God: 1) the Affirmation and the Negation of images, 2) "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou," 3) the Doctrine of Substitution and Exchange, 4) the Doctrine of Co-inherence, and 5) the Ideal of the City. First, we find Williams' characters in search of God in two basic ways: the Affirmative Way and the Negative Way. The Affirmative Way declares that all images declare the glory of God, yet not any sole image encapsulates this Reality. To know God, then, is to marvel at and in all images in creation, since all images were created by and therefore reflect this Reality. But another path to this Reality is also possible: the Negative Way. In this approach, a character denies images and seeks pure contemplation. In his or her quest for Reality, any character journeying on the Negative Way negates images and concentrates on prayer and meditation, hoping to seek God and God alone. Though these two paths to knowing and understanding Reality appear to be contradictory, Williams rejects the notion that one approach is correct or even better than the other to seek and find God: both are equally acceptable. Further, because Williams declares both in his fiction and in his theological writings that God's image is reflected in all created things yet not one entity purely and solely is capable of reflecting who God really is, Williams asserts that "This

also is Thou; neither is This Thou." In other words, God is present at all times, both in the seemingly good and the seemingly bad situations of life. In all objects, all events, and all of life's circumstances, God is present, even when this Reality does not appear to be so to our senses. According to Williams, this Reality loved and still loves humanity so much that through the Incarnation, God's coming in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, the perfect Christ exchanged himself for the weakness of humanity. Accordingly, Christ's substitution empowers people to act lovingly toward each other and to bear the afflictions of others as Christ did for humanity. Once a person becomes open to love and thereby able to love, then he or she lives in co-inherence, placing others' concerns and needs before their own. Through a life of service, posits Williams, comes the byproduct of joy. And it is the possession of this byproduct that serves as the signifying mark or characteristic in and on those who are living in co-inherence. By living in co-inherence, a person is then enabled to live "in the City;" that is, living a life that recognizes the organic unity and wholeness of love, of Reality, and of God. Those who live "in the City" are, in essence, experiencing heaven on earth, for they love and exist interdependently in perfect love.

In dialogue with reality, Williams' many characters perceive reality disparately and therefore seek truth in

different ways. Reality for them and Williams is not monolithic or wholly understandable. Unlike many of the other Inklings, Williams does not represent either positively or negatively many of his characters' ways of searching and knowing reality, such as the Affirmative or Negative Way or other rational or nonrational searching, questioning, and finding the characters' concepts of Reality. Williams does not, then, knowingly tower over his characters as if he thought only one way to be correct. His fiction, consequently, is not in danger of stagnating into what Kermode terms myth, for he is ever questioning the completeness of his concept of reality.

In Williams' fiction we find what I call Williams' built-in peripeteia in the form of his depiction of a multi-dimensional reality and the transient nature of our perceptions. By suggesting that our understanding of reality will always be incomplete, Williams asks us to question persistently the shape that we assign to reality. Like Kermode's peripeteia, Williams' fiction challenges our paradigmatic vision of reality. And like Kermode, Williams assumes that a fiction will always be in the process of evolution because of the limitations of human knowledge.

That Williams accept Kermode's definition of fiction is best illustrated by Jonathan's painting in Williams' novel <u>All Hallow's Eve</u>. In this novel Jonathan's painting becomes a central image and is interpreted differently by several

people and even perceived differently by the same character from one hour to the next. The painting is, first of all, a product of Jonathan's perception of reality. But then, though the painting itself does not change, it affects change upon those who view it. For instance, Richard, Jonathan's best friend and Lester's husband, perceives the painting differently each time he views it:

> He thought he could have been easily persuaded that the shapes were more definite, that the mass of color which had overwhelmed him before now organized itself more exactly, that the single unity was now also a multitudinous union--but he would not by himself have been certain. (148)

Jonathan, then, attempts to explain the seeming change of the painting:

> I suppose, if things--if everything is like that, I suppose colors and paints might be. They must be what everything is, because everything is. Mightn't they become more themselves? mightn't they? It was what I wanted to do, because it was like that. And if the world is like that, then a painting of the world must be. (149)

Jonathan and Richard contemplate that what once seemed fixed--the physical matter in a painting, for instance--now seems transient. Regardless of whether their perceptions have changed or whether the painting itself has changed,

they are called to question their perceptions about it as well as reality as a whole.

Similarly, in another of Williams' novels, Many Dimensions, Williams challenges our causal concepts of time and space. The Stone of Suleiman, originally purchased by Sir Giles Tumulty, represents the power of the supernatural manifested in our world. As in most of Williams' novels, the plot of Many Dimensions revolves around the protagonists' task of restoring balance in the relation of the supernatural and the natural. The protagonists who face this task in Many Dimensions are Lord Barclay, the Lord Chief Justice of England, and Chloe Burnett, his close friend. Together, they learn that the Will of the Stone does not correspond to their own rational sense of reality; the Stone acts upon a greater reality that transcends the rules of time and space. Further, Chloe and Arglay learn that they must submit their personal wills to the supernatural Will of the Stone in order to achieve harmony with the supernatural. Sir Giles, the one who bought the Stone originally for his own selfish means, also learns of the Stone's great power, but he is not able to reconcile his own will to the ways of the Stone. As the Stone eludes his understanding, Giles is only frustrated even more by his attempts to master it.

Giles, for instance, experiments with the Stone's capacity to travel through time. Upon arriving one half

hour in the future but having the memories of that lost half-hour, Giles struggles to grasp the power of the Stone:

> Every minute made all that had happened in that half hour more of a memory; but had it happened at all or was it memory to begin with? And was what was happening now actually happening or was it merely foresight?
>
> Sir Giles in a burst of anger, and something remarkably like alarm, realized that he didn't know. (90).

Giles will never learn of the real power of the Stone, for he continuously attempts to subvert the larger reality into his smaller understanding of reality. Because Giles is never able to understand that the power of the Stone cannot be harnessed for personal means, the Stone's power ultimately destroys him in his attempt to control it. Lord Arglay, on the other hand, learns that he must submit his own subjective reality to a transcendent reality which he does not understand, for the ways of the Stone function in "many dimensions." "So, if there is indeed a path for the Stone," says Arglay to Chloe, "in the name of God let us offer it that path, and let whatever Will moves justly in these things fulfil itself through us if that is its desire" (258). Chloe and Arglay, then, realize that one cannot fully understand the Reality of God or manipulate the power of God/Reality to one's own will.

Providing peripeteia that makes us reluctant to embrace a vision of reality, Williams' fiction does not end with the disconfirmation of form, however. We would not expect myth to offer us nothing: no resolution and no form. On the contrary, peripeteia is not the destruction of form, but is a "disconfirmation followed by a consonance." Peripeteia disrupts expectations and form not to dismantle meaning but to provide it believably. We do not need to be told that truth is elusive nor that we have, in the past, found ourselves in error about something of which we have been sure. Williams affirms these ideas but adds that in spite of the multiplicity we might find truth in our experience, and that yes, discovery of the nature of reality is a process, not something to be achieved in one fell-swoop in the assent to a codified belief or systematic theology.

Peripeteia, then, provides legitimacy for resolution; it makes us believe that resolution can happen in the contingent world that we experience, but what is the resolution that Williams presents? Williams does not depict resolution in the fulfillment of the American dream nor in a vision of a utopian future. Resolution, for Williams, comes in our present capacity to attain co-inherence: no magical spell or wish fulfillment fantasy or unknowable divine code.

Williams does discuss his resolution in terms of God, of good, and of evil, but he does not accept the concepts of good and evil as arbitrary conventions handed to us from

God. Essentially, evil, according to Williams, is the will to power and possess, while good is the will to submit to the power of love. But these qualities are not edicts carried to us on stone tablets; Williams' depiction of the City explains to us that the ideas of good and bad might be rephrased to mean "what is life-affirming" and "what is not life-affirming." And further, Williams does not condemn the will to happiness or contentment; he only suggests the ways that we might find contentment.

Ultimately, maintains Williams, we can draw no distinction between what benefits ourselves and what benefits others. The City is an organic whole, and to become a member is to enter into symbiotic relation with the City as a whole. To love the whole is to love others as well as one's self; grace becomes omnilaterally received. Qualities that we call good, then, lose their ring of arbitrariness, since good is that which is most beneficial for all. And evil is that which separates individuals from the City, for one person cannot see to his or her own needs, and ownership of self leads directly to self destruction.

As Williams pays credence in his fiction to the striking subjectivity and transience of our perceptions, he seeks to find what is not transient in the form of a reality that transcends our limited perceptions. He warns that "Illusion, to the magician as to the saint, is great danger" (All Hallows' Eve 240). We are justified, says Williams, in

settling for any concept of reality only because it suits an individual; Williams thrives to wade through limited perception to find what is true, and he does not begin by limiting where truth might be found or who might divulge such truth. In his well-known words, "This also is Thou. Neither is this Thou," Williams expresses that we may find God in any thing, but any thing may act as an illusion if taken as an end in itself.

"This also is Thou," then, refers to the idea that God is in all things. In another of Williams' novels, The Place of the Lion, the protagonist, Anthony Durrant, will eventually not turn from images that are loosed in the city but will affirmingly confront them as semblances of God, parts of an organic whole.

Because Williams is a Neo-platonist, we will find it helpful to discuss his fiction in terms of Plato's analogy of the cave. As the shadows on the wall of the cave are only reflections of the forms outside of the cave, in each shadow, nonetheless, one may always see a part of the larger Reality. Accordingly, in The Place of the Lion, Mr. Foster, a man whose imbalanced lust for power eventually degenerates him into a beast-like form, speaks to Anthony:

> "Some men will welcome it," Foster said. "As Mr. Tighe has done--as I shall do. And they will be joined to that Power which each of them best serves. Some will disbelieve in it--as I think

> Damaris Tighe does; but they will find then what they do believe. Some will hate it, and run from it--as you do. I cannot guess what will happen to them, except that they will be hunted. For nothing will escape." (55)

Foster describes both the Affirmative way, or the Affirmation of images, and the Negative Way, or the negation of images. Anthony best represents one who follows the Affirmative Way; he seeks the proper balance of created images which allows him to approach the ideal of love. He is thus able to confront and learn from the images as one keeps another in check; he is, for example, able to confront the power of the Lion, because he also utilizes the wisdom of the eagle. Unlike many of the other characters, he does not take the images as ends in themselves and is therefore able to embrace these images: the power of the lion, the wisdom of the eagle, the innocence of the lamb, etc. . . . Anthony, then, does not seek to manipulate the images for his own gain while simultaneously declaring himself god, but allows them to work as parts of God's reality. For instance, because he does not desire the power of the lion for his own purposes, he is able to obtain harmony among himself, the lion, and the other images. In this way, Anthony achieves a symbiotic equilibrium which allows him to embrace all created images.

"Neither is this Thou," however, reminds us that each shadow is not Reality; the images of our experience are not God/Reality. We find this to be true as various characters become absorbed in single images; Mr. Foster, for instance, seeks the power of the lion without balance or context. If one isolates any image in creation as an end in itself and without the context of how it might operate in the larger organic whole of reality, says Williams, then the image becomes destructive and evil, and perverse.

Because any image taken as an end in itself becomes a perversion of the Will of God, Williams then provides justification for the Negative Way, or the negation of images; those searching for truth in this way seek to discard all that is not God so that they might discover what is quintessentially God. In order to do so, one would have to reject images of God and look for Reality itself. And Williams believes that one is justified in negating the images as not God and looking for reality in purer form. Mr. Richardson, the bookseller in The Place of the Lion, best characterizes the negation of images, for he walks into the fire at Berringer's house in order to free himself of all images and materiality to find Reality in its pure spirit form.

While we will see various characters portraying both the Affirmative and Negative Ways, Williams does not propose that one is better than the other. He suggests, instead,

that there is more than one correct way to find God. As Anthony and Richardson depart for the last time, just before Richardson walks into the fire, the author writes:

> They shook hands. Then Anthony broke out again. "I do wish you weren't--No; no, I don't. Go with God."
>
> "Go with God," the other's more sombre voice answered. They stood for a moment, then they stepped apart, their hands went up in mutual courteous farewell, and they went their separate ways.
>
> No-one saw the young bookseller's assistant again; no-one thought of him. . . . Alone and unnoticed he went along the country road to his secret end. Only Anthony, as he went swiftly to Damaris, commended the other's soul to the Maker and Destroyer of images. (195)

In this interaction between Anthony and Richardson, Williams reveals that the two seemingly disparate ways are not at odds, and one cannot judge one to be God's way. Instead we see the two as complementary philosophies.

Williams' recognition of both ways is in keeping with his Neo-platonic view of reality, for if the shadows imitate forms--if our lives' experiences are only hints at Reality--then we should be able to see the Reality of Forms in every shadow. But further, the Reality of the Forms will not be

fully represented in the shadows which we see and experience.

Because Williams depicts reality as multi-dimensional, he provides a sort of built-in source of peripeteia. Williams posits that the "Is" includes the reality of a transcendent being. He believes that God has certain qualities and that humans can participate in God's intentions for humanity. But Williams depicts a large God, and he never takes the liberty of representing the 'Is' apart from limited human perceptions; for humans there is only the 'as if,' and the evolution of the fictional 'as if' depends upon an inductive process of dialogue with the "Is."

For Williams, the affirmation of images and the negation of images, are, of course, only means to the City, to the interdependent sharing of God's love. And regardless of one's approach to God, Williams believes that the discovery of God will always be an act of one's will; one must submit one's self to Reality. The love of God is, then, interdependent upon the will of humans to receive it and share it, for God, as an authority, becomes more a guiding force than and authoritarian ruler. Further, we ourselves, if we are to receive love, must always be interdependent upon the love of God *and* upon human God-bearers, those Williams defines as living in balance and thus living in the city. We see in the searches of the characters in The Place of the Lion, for example, that

people are free to seek what they choose and how they choose towards ends of their own choice.

For Williams, then, to live in the City is to live in grace, freedom, and mutual submission with other God-bearers, for even God, in the form of Christ, submitted himself in love to the will of humans. Accordingly, Williams asserts that rank, justice and hierarchy are not of the ways of the City and thus evil. Rank and justice pertain to the hierarchy of evil, asserts Williams, not the interdependent body of God's love. The force of God as represented in Williams novels is not a force which subverts its subordinates, but nurtures and empowers them. This is the doctrine of substitution and exchange; in the form of Christ, God has submitted himself to the vulnerable act of love. And because God has submitted to us in the form of Christ, we are able, through mystical relationship with the body of God, to bear the strength of Christ's substitution to fellow humans.

Unlike Christ's substitution for humanity, Simon, a leader of his own rising cult in Williams' novel <u>All Hallows' Eve</u>, idealizes himself as a powerful authoritarian leader of his people. And unlike those who live in the City, Simon's followers do not willfully submit to his "love;" Simon is their authority who claims power over them and manipulates their conscious wills to suit his own ends. Simon's love, though, is unlike the love of Christ, a love

of submission and freedom. As Williams writes in _All Hallows' Eve_:

> The hierarchy of the abyss does not know anything of equality, nor of any lovely balance within itself, nor (if he indeed be) does the lord of that hierarchy ever look up, subordinate to his subordinates, and see above him and transcending him the glory of his household. (166)

Simon's hierarchy of power contaminates the system and separates from the City not only those who submit to the authority but the authority itself. Lester, a woman who is dead from the beginning of the novel, learns in the after life that the authority of God can only be achieved when a person willingly submits to the love of God. Similarly, Chloe, in _Many Dimensions_ does not attempt to impose her will upon the Stone, but submits her will to the larger will of that Stone. Upon submission to the Stone, Chloe gains much more than she could have by insisting upon her own will, for the characters who attempt to subvert the power of the Stone to their own will fail wholly to benefit from the Stone's power.

The goal of entering the City becomes Williams' central focus in all of his works. He does not focus on the perfection of the afterlife or the hope for a better future, but on the process which must occur if we are to become parts of the grace of the City. Even Lester and Evelyn, who

the reader first meets after they have died in an airplane crash, learn that death does not offer better options. There is simply Love or not love, wholeness or despair. They find that what they had in their mortal life is all to be found in life out of the body. Evelyn turns into self and is therefore unable to discover co-inherence (Williams' notion of the life-offering interdependence of all people of the "City" and of all people upon God). She futilely grasps for something that will comfort her, but she finds only nothingness, for she fails to discover the mystery of co-inherence.

Lester, however, learns of the paradoxical nature of love. She has lived for her own concerns and is now haunted by memories of the way she treated Betty, a past acquaintance from school days. Having been preoccupied with herself, Lester recalls how she ignored Betty and allowed Evelyn to torment her. Feeling compelled to seek Betty's absolution, Lester goes to meet Betty and finds her to be forgiving. And Betty's compassion becomes a healing force in Lester; Betty has provided Lester with a joy that Lester, in her self-consumed mindset could never find. At this point, Lester learns that one discovers joy only in seeking it for other people and not as an end for oneself. Happiness, or more accurately, fulfillment, results from caring for others. And paradoxically, one best finds his or her individual will and voice when he or she submits to the

humble acts of love. As Lester and Betty discovered their selves more fully once they had submitted to one another in love and allowed themselves to co-inhere, Williams maintains that we too can find joy through mutual submission to each other.

Throughout his fiction and in his theological writings, Williams ironically uses the word "City." The word "city" comes from the Latin word "civitas" meaning citizenship. To have citizenship--to be a member of city--is to have rights and to be accountable in respecting the rights of fellow citizens. A city is a place where people with many interests can function cohesively. A city, then, is a place where justice provides cohesion among its members, where the larger unit protects the rights of the individual. The city means justice, and in the city, "the fulfilling of the law is love" (198); the city's concept of love is respect. One loves another by providing justice.

Williams, however, does not seek coherence. Coherence provides for individuality and co-existence; for example, when Evelyn and Lester enter into the same body made by Simon, they become *cohered* to each other, not *co-inhered*. At that time they are more distant than they have ever been from one another. On the other hand, co-inherence, the principle of the City, provides Grace. In the act of co-inherence, one is capable of doing more than justice and more than politely brushing shoulders as we do in a city.

In the City, with co-inherence, we are able to give more than justice and rights would require us to give. In the City, one does not just pay taxes and obey laws for the good of the whole; instead one's whole life becomes part of the organic whole. In the City, "Love is the fulfilling of the law," not "the fulfilling of the law is love" (198), for the laws of the City are transcended by God's love.

But co-inherence does not happen simply because we want it to, says Williams. In the City, we are able to tap into the strength of Christ. Though the principles of justice would have provided that Christ did not bear the hardships of any but himself, he chose to substitute himself for humanity as an act of grace, not justice. And it is not, says Williams, our right to receive grace and strength that we ourselves do not possess. In turn, when we bear the affliction of another, Christ's substitution provides strength in our giving.

In All Hallows' Eve, Williams concretizes the act of grace in Lester's substitution for Betty. When Simon tries to "undo" Betty, Lester acts as a substitute for her, and we find that Lester "was incapable of any action except the unformulated putting herself at Betty's disposal" (158). But in her loving support of Betty, Lester receives a mystical support that resembles a cross:

> Of one other thing she was conscious. She had been standing and now she was no longer standing.

> She was leaning back on something, some frame which from her buttocks to her head supported her; indeed she could have believed, but she was not sure, that her arms, flung out on each side held a part of the frame, as along a beam of wood. (159)

With the help of the cross-like support, Lester is able to withstand Simon's chants:

> Between standing and lying, she held and was held. If it gave. . . she would fall into the small steady chant. Then she would be undone. She pressed herself against that sole support. So those greater than she had come--saints, martyrs, confessors. (159).

Co-inherence is, then, a mystical union with all the members of the City: the saints, martyrs, confessors, self, and Christ himself.

Interestingly, Williams' concept of the City, contains the elements of what Kermode and Becker say must be in a workable fiction: the basic and seemingly contradictory needs to tuck in and stick out. Myth attempts to mediate the two through paradox as Williams has done in his fiction. By joining in with the plan of God, the City, one's personal identity and worth are enhanced. The submission to the City that would seem to be giving up personal identity thus actually offers personal significance. One can, then, in one act of submission, tuck in and stick out.

But to discuss Williams' fiction in terms of human need is not to disregard his philosophy as trivial or illusory. On the contrary, if what he posits is true, then the solution offered by a loving God, as portrayed by Williams, will correspond to the ultimate needs of humanity. In addition, Williams provides a multi-faceted fiction that does not negate varieties of experience, but legitimizes a variety of voices and approaches to understanding reality. One is able, then, to accept Williams' fiction without ignoring the complexity of experience, for he does not ask us to neatly package reality into our own or others' preconceived categories, but to accept its many dimensions. Thus, in my world which is filled with thousands of voices, I do not have to deny the legitimacy of each or categorize them all neatly into my own preconceived categories, for Williams' fiction is one in which we can achieve and validate many approaches to reality.

Moreover, Williams does not appear to use his characters simply to reach the conclusions that he has already formulated in order to inform or persuade his readers. Instead, Williams depicts through his characters the complexity of the truth search and the subjectivity of each conclusion which differs from the next. And as we have learned from Rosenblatt, the individual interpretation of a text (religious or non-religious) will be based upon a network of subjective meanings based upon individual make-up

and experience. Each person who searches--even for the same thing as another--will have a different dialogue with reality.

Although Williams accepts the validity of each individual's dialogue with reality, he does not ultimately embrace relativism, his fiction being grounded in his faith in an ontological being/God. While pledging allegiance to an absolute theoretical construct, however, Williams demands a dynamic interaction between this theoretical construct and his existential experience, each shaping, he believes, his interpretation of the other. In other words, Williams agrees with Kermode that our fictional "as if" must be in dialogue with the "Is." Such a philosophy allows him to be much more honest to the existential experience of people; he is not apt to categorize experience as either good or evil, but represents reality as being multi-dimensional and evasive of one dimensional categories.

His fiction, then, does not prescribe the concepts of ultimate reality in which we are asked to believe despite our experience, nor are we asked to deny our experience in order to accept his fiction. According to Williams we can look directly in the face of experience and not fear the discrepancies between the theoretical construct and our own experience. Williams says, "Look at your own experience and you will see this reality of which I write." He *shows* us what he believes rather than dogmatically forcing it upon

us. His fiction makes sense *because of* our experience, not *in spite of* it.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In chapter 1, I began this study of myth in literature by discussing myth's relevance to our own lives. Our study of individual texts or lofty comparisons between literary works often become enjoyable and interesting ends in themselves. The field of literary theory centers on the issues of the importance of such literary study to human life, each school of criticism espousing its own answers to questions, such as "What is literature?" "How does it shape our view of reality?" "How does our world view affect the meaning of a text?" and "What substantial value might we find in the study of literature?"

Having now answered a few of these central theoretical questions for myself, I believe that the study of mythic literature directs us to central issues of the human psyche, recurrent "themes of the imagination" which reveal not only our pains and joys, but our wishes and fears.

Each of the mythic scholars in chapter 1 discusses this connection between the human psyche and myth. Becker speaks of our need to transcend our limitations by achieving personal greatness and distinction in our world; this he calls "sticking out." On the other hand, says Becker, we

feel a need to be a part of something more than ourselves; this he calls "tucking in." Though the needs to "tuck in and stick out" appear to be antithetical, several of the myth scholars suggest that myth mediates this tension. Eliade, for instance, asserts that myth "satisfies the secret longings of modern man, who. . .knows he is a fallen limited creature," while addressing the hope of being "an exceptional person" or a "Hero" (185).

Similarly, Kermode notes that we adopt "fictions," or story-lines which help us assimilate our disorganized experience and allow us to fit in with the world around us while simultaneously "sticking out" in the "middest" point in the plot of reality. Kermode suggests, however, that the structure of the fiction must be believable to us; it must not be "too good to be true;" it must do justice to our "experience of the chaos," to chronos, and to limitation.

There exists, then, a tension between fictional form (the "as if") and reality (the "Is"). Accordingly, the task of the contemporary mythopoeic author is to offer a fiction in a believable package which meets the demands of contemporary skepticism. Frye dubs this recreated myth "displaced myth," and asserts that a modern writer must stray from the idealism of pure myth of ancient mythology. The result, says Frye, is a displaced myth which wears a new surface structure, new characters, and innovative

situations, but which also mimics the mediating function of pure myth.

The mythology of the past, usually created in a context of a single, primitive culture, frequently represents a monolithic vision of reality embraced by its culture. The displaced myth of today, however, must respond to a multi-cultural and often confused blending of civilizations. Unlike primitive peoples of the past, in our melting pot of civilizations, we now hear simultaneously the voices of many religions and philosophies. Because these voices often clash, we have learned to listen more critically to them, resulting in an elevated level of clerical skepticism; we have learned to consume vast amounts of information, analyze it, and often reject its truth content or validity.

According to mythic scholarship, however, this elevated level of skepticism does not negate the need for myth in civilization. Campbell writes that, on the contrary, a culture's loss of myth is its destruction. This is one issue on which most mythic scholars agree: that we *need myth, that it must grow with our skepticism, that we cannot negate ubiquitous human needs and do without myth.* Similarly, Kermode suggests that our fictions must thrive in skepticism; we must experience "disconfirmation followed by concordance." Mythopoeic authors, then, are those who offer fictions in the face of growing skepticism and apparent

chaos. Accordingly, a study of mythopoeic authors is the study of displaced myth in today's world.

Both C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams strive to be mythopoeic authors and aspire to represent the fiction of Christianity--remembering that Kermode and I do not use the word "fiction" pejoratively--in a manner meaningful to contemporary culture; each author attempts to depict the paradoxical mediating forces of the Christian Deity in his works.

Lewis's Till We Have Faces, for instance, attempts to retell the myth of Cupid and Psyche by incorporating Lewis's belief in Christian theism. Till We have Faces is Lewis's best example of a mythic work, for in its attempts to provide a fiction, it depicts an intricate and believable reality which does not offend our critical integrity. Further, we find through the protagonist of this novel, Orual, a dynamic and often painfully confused dialogue with the "Is." Orual's experience of reality does not suggest a simple, monolithic approach to reality, for she hears and synthesizes many voices. We find Lewis's mediation, then, effective, for Till We Have Faces fulfills the first hurdle of mythopoeic literature: to empathize with our own human situation.

Likewise, we find in the novels of Charles Williams convincing characters and mediation of conflicts. Williams accepts the validity of each individual's dialogue with

reality. But though he represents in his fiction a world, like ours, which is filled with a cacophony of images and logics, he proceeds to construct a hopeful fiction. And even more so than Lewis, his fiction does not prescribe an ultimate reality in which we are asked to believe despite our experience. According to Williams we can confront the discrepancies between his fiction and our experience.

Though the effect of these two authors' fictions differs, both espouse similar philosophies. Both Lewis and Williams posit the existence of a transcendental signified which is not contingent upon human experience. Both, however, differ in how they represent the relation of humans to that objective Reality. Lewis, in the _Chronicles_ and the Space Trilogy, for example, depicts an overt relation between subjective experience and transcendent Reality by using authoritarian characters to divulge an ultimate divine Will, Aslan or Oyarsa, for instance. But this is not necessarily how we experience Reality. Williams, on the other hand, never suggests that Reality is dictated to us by a transcendent being. Instead, he portrays the dynamic process through which his characters gradually discover knowledge of divinity.

More than any other of Lewis's works, _Till We Have Faces_ illustrates Williams' method of demonstrating that discovering Reality is a progressive and dynamic process, not a single revelation or epiphany. Lewis, however, does

not portray as believably as Williams this fluid process. Throughout Part I of Till We Have Faces, Orual consistently presents her spite-ridden case against the gods, but after we have heard Orual's seemingly final comment on the gods, we are jolted by Lewis's abrupt narrative strategy which reveals Orual's final resolve. In Part 2, we suddenly find an all-new Orual, one who embraces the gods and admits her depravity. She then narrates her own recent past to inform the reader of how her transformation occurred. In this work, Lewis's strategy fails to demand the readers' involvement in the process of Orual's transformation throughout the tale.

Apparently, Lewis has forgotten that the craft of the novel is the attempt to cloak the hand of the author in the lives of the characters and the events of the story. We, of course, know that the author is in control of the fiction and desires to teach us something, but the subtlety of fiction must allow us to assent conditionally to the intentional world of the novel. Like our own lives, the lives of the characters must appear to be in process and products of the individual will which occurs in the eternal present of the novel. If we sense throughout the work that the author appears to be too much in control and too eager to teach us, we will not yield to the fiction, and "the willful suspension of disbelief" will be abandoned. Literary fiction, then, must lie to us, for the unmistakable

structure and intention of the novel is, in our experience, rare, if not non-existent.

We therefore realize that the god-like creator/author of fiction is merely another limited voice, one of billions. And in our world, few claim to hear God's voice nearly so distinctly as we can hear the voice of an author in the fictional reality of the novel. The writer of fiction, then, must not be overtly present and manipulative in his or her writing. While the author may have something to teach us--or perhaps something that we sense to be true but are unable to voice--the author must *show* us his or her fiction so that we can simulate our real-life discoveries in which no one neatly assimilates all of the pieces for us. That is the whole notion of presentational discourse: that we are shown. We are given something more (and maybe more convincing) than we are in rational discourse.

As we have noted in the Chronicles and the Space Trilogy, Lewis's voice, however, is at times too overt to achieve our "willful assent" to his fiction. As Kermode maintains, there must exist some dissonance between fiction and reality, but in these early works Lewis provides too much dissonance between his fiction and reality. In his world the creator/author is too much in control, and the characters are too much informed of the nature of Reality.

Williams, on the other hand, does not provide so much dissonance from reality that we must draw back in disbelief,

nor does he produce a wish-fulfillment fantasy that affords an unbelievable, ultimate utopia. On the contrary, he grounds his fiction in reality by confronting actual problems that do not vanish even after death. He thus focusses our attention on the resolution of real problems rather than a magical escape from them. For Williams, death is not a time for final judgment or ultimate escape, but a continuation of the struggles of the human soul without the body.

Lester and Evelyn, for instance, have died before the beginning of <u>All Hallows' Eve</u>. Unlike some of Lewis's after-life wish fulfillment episodes in the <u>Chronicles</u>, Williams suggests that what it takes to make us happy we possess in this present life. He believes that the love we are capable of attaining now is the same route to happiness that we will have at anytime--afterlife included. Accordingly, Williams emphasizes that we cannot wait for our lives to suddenly become whole and enjoyable at some time in the future.

In this way, Williams achieves a fundamental function of myth: the affirmation of our life. As we have noted, a mythic hero embarks upon a mythic journey, not to remain in the magical world, but to return from it to find life acceptable. After the hero's mythic experience, his or her life, which was once mundane and unacceptable, now becomes

fulfilling. Campbell describes this experience of finding joy in what was once mundane:

> If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are. . .you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you. . . . (<u>The Power of Myth</u> 91)

Ted Rosenthal, a poet who wrote of his terminal illness before his death in 1970, bears a similar message. In <u>How Could I Not Be Among You</u> he writes:

> I don't think people are afraid of death. What they are afraid of is the incompleteness of their life. I think what society does is strip you of your self-confidence from the moment you are born; strip you of the sense that what you are is all you're ever going to be. And so you tell yourself lie after lie after lie, and as you grow older you begin to feel that whatever life is going to mean to you, it's going to mean it in the future, depending on what you are grabbing for, what your ambition is--to get to the other shore, to be enlightened, or whatever it is. And it isn't until you discover that you're going to die that you realize that whatever it is you have, you've already got. Right there. (45-46)

Rosenthal tells us that upon confronting death, he learned that the ambitions that his world prescribed for him led him nowhere. Like Campbell, Rosenthal realizes that one cannot look continually to the future for fulfillment. Our culture, says Rosenthal, is one that looks for wholeness in the future tense; once we have achieved enough, once we have learned enough, once we have gained enough, then our lives will be something more than incomplete. We can believe this future wholeness as long as we forget that we will die. And perhaps, considering that we will run out of time before we have achieved our ambitions, we hope for an extension of our wishes; we look forward to a heaven with its streets of gold, crowns with jewels, and rewards unfathomable. But to focus on those rewards that we only wish we could have in the present is to miss the point of the myth of the Biblical heaven.

Rosenthal, accordingly, continues in his book of poetry and prose to tell of his new found fulfillment in his present life that occurred because of his illness; he learned to love, and he discovered that love could be the center of his reality. Instead of demanding for reality to change or staggering to complete his life with another accomplishment, he asserts that he had asked the wrong things of life, and that one's demands of reality must change in order to find contentment. When Rosenthal became ill he became less "self pre-occupied;" and being less

burdened with the completion of his own ambitions, he then found himself more able to love. He tells of being "acutely sensitive to everyone else's pain." Once he was freed to love, he writes that for the first time he "felt full and rich inside" and "had no sense of anxiety, no sense of boredom, no sense of impatience, no sense of time" (48).

Similarly to Rosenthal and Campbell, Williams depicts for us this fundamental theme of myth. Williams does not focus on what may be a better life in the future, but asks us to look to the present for resolution; it is in the shadows of our present life that we find deity, and in the relationships with people that we find God. Williams' resolution in his fiction, then, occurs in much the same way as Rosenthal's, for one does not find wholeness by waiting out the inconveniences of this life, but by discovering a union with Reality to which we are often blind.

This affirmation of our present reality, I believe, is the most fundamental function of myth. Drawing upon my understanding of several mythic scholars and my readings of Lewis and Williams, I find that the term "mythic" does not refer to the absence of truth in a tale, but to the presence of truth. Myth is able, then, to affirm our lives by honestly depicting our experiences. Whereas the fairy tale represents a fantastic account of wish-fulfillment thus denying mortality, pain, and loss, myth utilizes a fantastic

or supernatural setting in order to illustrate the collective and central truths of humanity.

It is in just such truthfulness that myth finds its power, for the resolve of myth does not force us to deny or resist our pains and limitations. Accordingly, the first task of myth is to empathize with our true situation, with our loss, our joy, our mortality, our toil, our experience of chaos, our fear, and our anger. We find this empathy in the tears of Christ, the toil of Sisyphus, in Williams' depiction of our limited understanding, or even in the soft words of the father to his daughter, "I know."

Once we have seen our own lives depicted empathetically in myth, we are able to join in with myth in voicing the communal call of humanity; our problems, then, are not ours alone but ubiquitously human. Myth, then, functions like the call and response model of the Negro Blues; the individual voice cries out, and the communal voice answers in harmony. And myth, like the Blues, does not deny pain, but celebrates it as part of life, hence the bitterness of pain is transformed into the bittersweet sharing of hardship.

Myth, however, does more than empathize. Through mythic mediation, we are able to find resolution for our pain. As Levi-Strauss explains, mythic mediation is that process in myth through which seemingly opposed forces paradoxically become part of a single, interdependent

sphere. The mythic figure of Christ, for example, represents humility and weakness, but He, at the same time is God incarnated. For Christ, then, death on the cross becomes life, humility becomes one with nobility, and mortality becomes one with the infinite. And likewise in Williams' fiction, polar forces unite through mythical paradox; in the City, self-denial becomes healing, submission means freedom, and justice becomes grace.

Accordingly, as mythic mediation occurs, we find that we are able to embrace our whole variety of experience. Mythic mediation achieves, then, what I have called the fundamental function of myth: the affirmation of our present reality. Just as Camus's Sisyphus is able to turn back to his stone, we are able to accept our struggle with all of its joy and pain; myth tells us that our lives are enough, for "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart."

Works Cited

Becker, Ernest. The Denial of Death. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

Borges, Jorges Luis. Labyrinths. New York: New Directions, 1962.

Campbell, Joseph. The Flight of the Wild Gander. Chicago: Gateway, 1951.

---. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949.

---. Myths to Live By. New York: Bantam, 1973.

---. The Power of Myth. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Denham, Robert D. Northrop Frye and Critical Method. University Park and London: Pennsylvania UP, 1978.

Eliade, Mircea. Myth and Reality. trans. Wilard R. Trask. Harper and Row: New York, 1963.

Frye, Northrop. The Educated Imagination. Bloomingtion: Indiana UP, 1964.

---. Fables of Identity. New York: Harcourt, 1963.

Jung, Carl. "Approaching the Unconscious." Man and His Symbols. Ed. Carl Jung. New York: Laurel, 1964. 1-94.

---. "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," and "Psychology and Literature." 1931 and 1950. The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature. 2nd ed. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971. Vol. 15 of The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. 65-108.

---. "The Transcendent Function" and "On the Nature of the Psyche." 1958 and 1954. The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche. 2nd ed. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960. Vol. 8 of The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. 67-91, 159-236.

Kermode, Frank. The Sense of an Ending. London: Oxford UP, 1966.

Leach, Edmund. Claude Levi-Strauss. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1970.

Lewis, Clive Staples. The Last Battle. New York: Macmillan, 1956.

---. The Magician's Nephew. New York: Macmillan, 1955.

---. Out of the Silent Planet. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

---. Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold. New York: Harcourt, 1957.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ. 1889 New York: Penguin 1968.

Rosenthal, Ted. How Could I Not Be Among You?. New York: Persea, 1973.

Shakespeare, William. King Lear. William Shakespeare: The Complete Works. Ed. Alfred Harbage. New York: Penguin, 1969.

Stillman, Peter R. Introduction to Myth. Rochelle Park: Hayden, 1977.

Stevens, Wallace. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens. New York: Random House, 1982.

Williams, Charles. All Hallows' Eve. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948.

---. Many Dimensions. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931.

---. The Place of the Lion. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933.