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Narrative Patterns of the Cross

The ethical beliefs, opinions, and prejudices of novelists . . .
have a discernible and vital shape within those novels.
—Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*

People think that stories are shaped by people.
In fact, it's the other way around.
—Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*

O pardon, since a crookèd figure may
Attest in little place a million,
And let us, ciphers to this great account,
On your imaginary forces work.
—William Shakespeare, Prologue, in *King Henry V*

Introduction

Theaters of War, the Throughlines of Life, and the Shaping of Stories

In 1916, C.S. Lewis was seventeen years old and studying in Great Bookham England to enter a university course he might never have a chance to pursue. In the phantasmagoric geographies of war, the "vasty fields of France" lay in the way between Lewis's tutorials in Surrey and his degree in Oxford, just seventy miles away. The princes of Europe had once again assumed the port of Mars, patron god of war, and were spreading famine, sword, and fire across the stage of the world. The mighty minds and monarchs of Earth sought the brightest heaven of invention to feed the technological machinery of battle. The war machine never slacks in its thirst for the blood of men. In a global media age, all the world beheld the swelling scenes of the Great War: the air in Agincourt, the Ypres Salient, the Battle of the Somme, the

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terror in the trenches, and the swollen bodies of men and horses that filled No Man's Land.

Meanwhile, in the Saxon village of Great Bookham, Lewis chose a much different muse of firethan that of the military geniuses who owned his body by law and were writing the prologue of his future. Perhaps the pen could be mightier than the sword. With various kinds of success, Lewis immersed himself in the literary arts in order to keep the Great War on its own continent, far away from his writing desk.

During this period, Lewis wrote dutiful letters nearly every week to his father. His epistolary delight, though, was his correspondence with his best friend back in Belfast, Arthur, whom he addresses as "My dear Galahad" in gentle jocularity. In May 1916, he writes to Arthur about the humble beauty of his surroundings: "the sunny fields full of buttercups and nice clean cows, the great century old shady trees, and the quaint steeples and tiled roofs of the villages peeping up in their little valleys." Lewis describes the books he is reading—*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ("absolutely top-hole") and *Rob Roy* ("I am now revelling in it")—and mentions the authors they have been reading together: the Brontës, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and Lewis's page-born spiritual director, George MacDonald.[1] Indeed, this letter to Arthur comes just two months after he had encountered *Phantastes* at a Leatherhead station bookstall:

> I have had a great literary experience this week. I have discovered yet another author to add to our circle—our very own set: never since I first read [William Morris's] "The well at the world's end" have I enjoyed a book so much—and indeed I think my new "find" is quite as good as Malory or Morris himself. The book, to get to the point, is George Macdonald's "Faerie Romance," *Phantastes*, which I picked up by hazard in a rather tired Everyman copy. . . . At any rate, whatever the book you are reading now, you simply MUST get this at once.

In the Great Bookham letters to Arthur, Lewis is developing his skills as a literary critic. With *Phantastes*, though, he felt it was hopeless to restrain his reading experience by words. Instead, if Arthur could just follow "the hero Anodos along that little stream to the faery wood," he would find his way.[2]

Two months later, after discussing their books and the lovely countryside of Surrey, Lewis shares the first chapter of the new romance he is writing, "The Quest of Bleheris." There is a peculiar contrast between Lewis's literary

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imagination at his desk in Great Bookham and the daily news. While all of Britain is watching the great theaters of war, Lewis spends his summer reading across the ages and writing about the restless Bleheris, who so evocatively vows that "my deeds shall be the song I make."[3] Sir Bleheris leaves his lordly life and pricks forth to win his manhood in the North, striking a solitary figure against the backdrop of the old tales that have formed his entire understanding of courage, honor, and love.

A year after Lewis had rolled up the scroll of Bleheris's tale unfinished, modern warfare invaded his chivalric and classical imagination and took possession of his body. In 1917, he crossed the English Channel to enter the stage of WWI in France, following the path of many Englishmen before him. In the Prologue to *Henry V*, which I have been echoing in this chapter introduction, Shakespeare invites his audience to let their "imaginary forces work" to visualize this same English crossing to war:

> Suppose within the girdle of these walls
> Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
> Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
> The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder. ("Prologue," *Henry V*, lines 19–22)

Using the imagination required by the stage, Shakespeare's audience navigates the English Channel on dry land like Moses and the children of Israel. However, it is another ancient tale that occurs to Lewis when he retreads Prince Harry's pace across that narrow ocean. Lewis had spent months working through Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the original Greek with his tutor in Great Bookham. On his nineteenth birthday, he is there in the camp, in France, experiencing for himself

> the frights, the cold, the smell of H.E. [high explosives], the horribly smashed men still moving like half-crushed beetles, the sitting or standing corpses, the landscape of sheer earth without a blade of grass, the boots worn day and night till they seemed to grow to your feet.

As bullets fly and boys die, all those lines of Greek come home vividly to Lewis: "This is War. This is what Homer wrote about."[4] It seems that the front pages of Europe's newspapers were closer to the tales of Lewis's literary imagination than he thought.

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Bleheris had not survived his own adventure of old tales, but Lewis survived France. In ways that I doubt he ever saw, the Great War influenced Lewis. However, whenhe shapes his life story for readers decades later, he wants us to see his martial service not as the prologue to the tale of his life but merely as a chapter. While in a war hospital with blighty wounds, Lewis defied the destiny of the war machine by drawing his poems into a collection for publication. As a minor war poet, he writes of "Long leagues on either hand the trenches spread" and "The jaws of a sacked village, stark and grim."[5] *Spirits in Bondage* seethes with desperate rage and near-despairing frustration, evident from the first poem within the cycle, "Satan Speaks."

What I find most intriguing, though, is his "Prologue." Shakespeare's chorus in the "Prologue" of *Henry V* invites the audience to co-create the mythic scaffolding that makes England what it is. By contrast, Lewis evokes all the atmosphere and memory of myth and legend by inviting readers to see through the eyes of unnamed heroes singing a sailor's song:

> As of old Phoenician men, to the Tin Isles sailing
> Straight against the sunset and the edges of the earth,
> Chaunted loud above the storm and the strange sea's wailing,
> Legends of their people and the land that gave them birth. (Lewis, "Prologue," lines 1–4)

The Phoenicians of old, lords of the Mediterranean, searched for a legend and found the islands of Britain. To their gods and muses, they sing the tales of pride and glory and discovery. Every man leaning on oars or reading the stars forgets his "burden in the measure of a song." I would like to know to what degree singing with "the heroes of old song,"[6] as Lewis captures his world of imagination in "Bleheris," was about forgetting hardship, loss, and other burdens. Is the temptation to escape unique to the modern world? I am convinced that for Lewis, in any case, literature has always been immersive rather than escapist. As a teenager writing poetry and romance, he uses the old tales of adventure to shape his own story of discovery. In this way, he is one of the sailors in his "Prologue." Lewis wrote to find out—to know the story of the world around him, the tale he was telling, and the narrative of his own mind.

In the case of his long narrative poem, *Dymer*, published in 1926, Lewis explains that it "arrived, complete, in my mind somewhere about my seventeenth year. To the best of my knowledge I did not consciously or voluntarily

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invent it, nor was it, in the plain sense of that word, a dream."[7] In the period of "Bleheris" and preparations for war and school, the entire plot of *Dymer* appeared at once. The formal poetry of that tale took years to perfect, but it is intriguing to note that while Lewis the Poet knows where *Dymer* the Story is going, the semi-autobiographical Dymer the Protagonist has no idea. We will explore the narrative shape of *Dymer* later in this chapter, but briefly, Dymer's adventure is a flight, a story that just goes on and on, always away from something left behind.

We do not know for sure why Lewis declared "Bleheris" "dead" in the autumn of 1916, but my sense is that Lewis simply did not know where the tale was going. If sometimes clumsy and precocious, Bleheris's desire to give meaning to his life in the fading twilight of Arthurian customs evokes questions about courage, honor, and love. Reading his story in the Weston Library at the Bodleian, I came to like Sir Bleheris. His adventures are atmospheric and entertaining. When Lewis moves past self-deprecating satire and overly conscious prose, there is something evocative of myth beyond the crude symbolism.

But there is no sense that the story is going anywhere. In the seventeenth chapter, Bleheris has reached a great thriving kingdom in the North, where pagan temples and Christian churches are an everyday feature of the arboreal bazaar. Enthralled by cosmopolitan wonder, a provincial Bleheris forgets his quest for the Striver—and, indeed, forgets that he is gaining his manhood to be worthy of Lady Alice. He bedecks himself in finery and sits at a rich table with pale, beautiful male slaves in waiting. Suddenly, a feminine cry of joy cuts through his nervousness. Lady Ynette, the king's daughter, enters the court. She is joyful and blithe, with a long slender body that is supple like a wildcat's:

> Her hair, being dark and plentiful, was dressed low upon her forehead, and she was clad in a single straight robe of a russet colour, with a girdle of green about her waist. She was not a beautiful woman, yet, as the tale tells, none that saw her ever wished her to be other than she was, whether it were her great, dark eyes, or her swift movements or her loud, fearless laughter that made her seem fair.[8]

Bemused by the energy of her presence, "Bleheris found himself bowing and kissing her hand, which was somewhat too strong for beauty, and a little brown with the sun"—nothing like his Lady Alice's lovely white hand. Still,

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Bleheris is caught—maybe even enchanted—by this lithe princess of the north with man-like strength and open curiosity. The business of the court begins over bread, beer, and broth, so Sir Bleheris and Lady Ynette turn to speak to one another. Lewis promises that "here I shall set down for you some of what those two spake between," but there is no more. After 19,000 words,[9] the manuscript ends at a place of many crossings. Indeed, the story seems further from revealing a plot than when it began, and we must remember that in these tales of old, both murderers and suicides are buried at the crossroads.

Still, in his vocation as a poet, Lewis continues to be shaped by the great stories of the past as he grows as a shaper of words and worlds. It is a tumultuous decade between "Bleheris" and *Dymer* (1916 to 1926): Lewis fights in the war, is wounded, publishes his poetry, goes up to Oxford, takes up house with a comrade's family, evolves his philosophy of the world in the company of admirable friends, and designs his academic pathway. However, in both stories—"Bleheris" and *Dymer*—the lines are flat, even if the poetry sometimes hits skillful notes of wonder and pathos. At this point in his life, having shed the "mythology" of his Christian home and culture and filled his mind with world-class learning, Lewis has not yet discovered the shape of his own thought. Indeed, his thought is always ever in formation. He is bright, productive, and increasing in skill and knowledge. In reading *Phantastes*, he experienced an imaginative baptism in the year he wrote (and buried) "Bleheris" and discovered *Dymer*. As *Dymer* goes to print in 1926, Lewis is still some years before he experiences the whole-life death and resurrection of his mind, will, and literary art. He has not yet surrendered to MacDonald's doctrine of good death or discovered the mytho-historical pattern of the cross. When the literary public gives a polite, appreciative pass to *Dymer*, Lewis still has no clear vision of where his own story will lead. Naturally, he will only understand the throughline of his life when he sees the emerging "pattern" as he looks back along the pages of his own history.[10]

We cannot miss this observation. Easter weekend roots Lewis's conversion experience and all of his thinking since. His spiritual imagination is expressed in the "recognizable narrative pattern" in his writing, to use Michael Gorman's term. Gorman analyzes St. Paul's own story and "the story of the cross," attending to Paul's "experience of re-presenting in living form the word of the cross."[11] Once attuned to this cruciform story, Gorman can discern the shape of Paul's spiritual theology. On the flip side of moral reality, Screwtape offers his own anti-spiritual theology in *The Screwtape Letters*. He

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presses his protégé Wormwood to ignore the low-hanging fruit of temptation and understand the "general diabolical framework" of spiritual life, as Lewis describes it in a letter.[12] Once we have the "general spiritual framework" of Lewis's cruciform spirituality, we can see the Logic of Cruciformity working out in his entire body of work.

Thus, in Act III, we will explore recognizable narrative patterns in C.S. Lewis, focusing on cruciform images as they surface in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Instinctively aware of narrative patterning, Lewis uses essays like "On Stories" to theorize narrative structure, the mythic, and the shape of story. Consequently, we begin this chapter with a brief consideration of Lewis as an imagistic mythmaker, highlighting the integration of theory and practice in his work. Applying tools from Northrop Frye's archetypal and mythopoeic criticism, supplemented by structural analyses from Lewis critics and J.R.R. Tolkien's theories of fantasy, this chapter examines the U-shaped narrative of the death and resurrection story in Christ's self-sacrifice and our cross-patterned, Christ-guided response. This chapter's central concern is narrative cruciform patterning as Lewis imprints the shape of the Paschal Mystery onto his stories, what he calls "the great story on which the plot turns."[13]

If I understand him correctly, I use "shape" as Sheldon Sacks does in *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* for the phenomenon of how novelists shape their novels:

> The ethical beliefs, opinions, and prejudices of novelists . . . have a discernible and vital shape within those novels. An awareness of that shape has important implications for literary criticism, for literary history, and for the many humanistic pursuits that depend upon a relationship between the two.[14]

As Sacks takes his entire monograph to define "shape," I will use two of my own illustrations to capture the essence of the idea. First, the shape of belief in a novel is like looking down at a grassy field from a hilltop and being able to see the skeleton of an ancient village in the archaeological remains beneath the turf. Second, it is like throwing a storyboard quilt over a chaotic collection of children's toys on the playroom floor. A discernible shape of the child's fictional world of play remains, even though the quilt's story is what we see most clearly. While gazing at the shadows of the past in the grassy field, we may be tempted to overlook its later agricultural history; while examining

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the quilt, we can forget the story it tells and wonder about the toys hidden beneath. And yet, is it not the case that the child's fictional, subterranean world shapes the story we see in the quilt just as the lost village shapes our vision of the field?

While *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* helps us explore the oft-forgotten contours of stories, Sacks is like the rider who begins to fall off the right side of the horse and then, with a sudden, violent overcorrection, falls off the left side. While he grants that the interior worlds and models of novelists have a shape within their novels, he is surely in error when he says that those beliefs "do not shape their novels." Besides being a false binary—the relationship between authors and their fiction is surely reciprocal—can one truly maintain that an author's worldview does not shape their fiction? I argue in this book that any sufficiently integrated author shapes their fiction just as their fiction takes a discernible shape. Perhaps Sacks understands this reciprocal, integrated reality, even though he seems to reject it. In conversation with Coleridge, Sacks captures the heart of this analysis: "it is not what a great writer has shown us he believes that matters, it is what he *is* and how his work reflects his being that counts."[15] Sacks intimates a fundamental principle of this book: The whole form of a story has meaning; the structure is not accidental but an outworking of the author's worldview and spiritual imagination.

Another rider in danger of tossing himself off the other side of the horse is Terry Pratchett, the creator of Discworld. "People think that stories are shaped by people," he writes, while asserting the living importance of stories. "In fact, it's the other way around." Stories have a life of their own, "great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time" that "have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time." The existence of these living tales etches grooves into the slopes of the cosmos and "overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history." This is what Pratchett calls "the theory of narrative causality and it means that a story, once started, takes a shape."[16] While Pratchett, like Sacks, overcorrects in claiming authors don't shape stories, his imagination of narrative causality provides the rationale for this study, for Lewis's stories are among that elf-woven, myth-laden shaping force in the world.

As one example of this cosmic shaping, this chapter uses the "dive" as a guiding image in Lewis's poetry, stories, teaching, and autobiographical materials; Chapter 8 follows by looking at U-shaped paradigms such as the fairy tale and other patterns of descent and ascent. Spiritually speaking, this

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narrative pattern is "where the secret of secrets lies hid"[17] in Lewis's work. We end Act III with Lewis's "Grand Miracle" discussion from the last volume of his apologetics trilogy, *Miracles*.

Images and Mythmaking

Children have a remarkable capacity for meeting a story with delight and wonder, even when they do not understand all the words and images. Is it impatience, self-doubt, or diminishing scopes for the imagination that makes adults far more likely to lose confidence in a tale and set the book down? Or is it that when you grow up, your heart dies? Those of us who make our trade in words and stories, pen and ink—writers, literary critics, teachers, scholars, storytellers—envy children for their insatiable readerly appetite. When they were preteens, my son and his cousins, each of them what Tolkien calls readers with "keen appetites" but different tastes,[18] sent me a video of a song they wrote. It was about "Uncle B" who reads so slowly, but that's okay because reading is all he does anyway. It was an on-the-point example of observational art from a trio of precocious cultural critics.

Quite apart from a book-loving child's ability to read hungrily—and often with a foodie's palate for quite distinct tastes—there is an ineffable sort of magic that happens when an adult reads to a child. When a teacher sits on a stool in front of a classroom, or an aunt or uncle sets down with one of their niblings in a reading chair, or a parent snuggles in with a little one for a bedtime story, eager children listen with trust in the adult reader. While the childling may not know a particular word, they are sure that the adult knows that word and will hold the story together for them. There may be questions and interruptions and bepuzzlements, but the whole experience is what the tale becomes in the telling. As a teacher, uncle, and father, I would not trade those reading experiences for a chance to run my finger over the ancient runes carved into the Stone Table in Narnia, or to wind Susan's horn, or to ride on Fledge, father of the winged horses—things I have wanted to do since childhood.

One of the easiest ways for an adult to destroy that readerly moment of trust is to explain what's "really" going on. Reading, for children, is a phatic function. They are always testing the boundaries of their world, desiring to know that there are walls to the secret garden but curious about what lies through the hedges. Authoritatively answering questions like "Did this

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really happen?" or "Is this real?" or "What does this mean?" closes off entire doorways of wonder and discovery for children. At a workshop I once led, I overheard this declaration: "No honey, Narnia is not real. It's just a story." Besides the fact that I radically disagree with this knowing adult—is there any such thing as *just* a story? Can they really know that Narnia is not real?—this faux-realist reductivism is the opposite of what Lewis is asking us to do in Narnia: we are to follow Lucy through the wardrobe door, see what she sees, and then learn to see things in our own way but with Lucy-like eyes.

How many lives of literary possibility have been lost by well-meaning adults who have barred the paths to lands of wonder, disenchanted the portkeys of imagination, or had safety inspectors close up the hobbit holes of hope and wonder? Is it any surprise the "nymphs are departed" from our waters?[19] Even as a self-declared teenage atheist, Lewis never trivializes the numinous in poetry. Indeed, he grieves the exile of our imagination:

> The faerie people from our woods are gone,
> No Dryads have I found in all our trees.
> No Triton blows his horn about our seas
> And Arthur sleeps far hence in Avalon.
>
> The ancient songs they wither as the grass
> And waste as doth a garment waxen old. ("Victory," lines 5–10)[20]

True, there are ways to wither ancient songs other than closing off any corner of the imagination still open to the fantastic. We need go no further than our local school's curriculum. A soul-thinning societal vision of education directs students' childlike wonder toward a purpose: imaginative learning becomes the means to a socioeconomic end. And, ultimately, these learning spaces are held together with glue and tape by loving and hopeful but weary and under-resourced teachers.

But it is easy to blame "the system." Closer to home, at life-enriching dinner tables and in soul-winning Sunday Schools, how many well-meaning adults have locked the wardrobe door behind them by explaining that Aslan's Stone Table sacrifice is really "just" the story of the cross? Time and again, I hear testimonies of adults seeking liberation from the religious or anti-religious reductivism of their childhood. At a crucial moment in the midst of the sacred art of talking about stories, someone explained to them that the Stone Table scene is "just" this or "really" that, reducing all of the myth, fantasy, and

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history to a few words on a page or a few acres in Palestine. So many readers hope that Narnia might live in them again as adults free from materialistic reductivism or copy-and-paste Christian moralism.

In describing the Stone Table as "cruciform," or cross-shaped, I am not reducing the tale to an allegory with plug-and-play identity markers for the characters and events. Neither is it simply a symbol—any more than a wedding ring is just a symbol for the contract of marriage. The Stone Table scene at the climactic tipping point of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is its own story. When Aslan lays his own life down, he is certainly a *figura Christi*, an image of Christ. As we saw in Chapter 2, though, each of us is a *figura Christi* because "in reality every real Christian is really called upon in some measure to enact Christ."[21] Lewis invites intriguing questions about the breaking of the Stone Table: what is the deeper magic that is woven into the fabric of Narnia? How does the image of "death working backwards" deepen our understanding of the Christ event in our world? What is the *imitatio Leonis* pattern in Narnia? Whatever lines of inquiry might come about, the story must *be* the story. The characters must authentically live and breathe and have their being in an authentic fictional world, or else the story will never have real symbolic value any more than a stick-figure sketch can put on flesh. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis was not providing a Sunday School lesson plan for a future civilization where flannelgraph has gone out of style. He was telling a story. The cruciform shape of the Stone Table is about the saving of Edmund and the breaking of Jadis's tyranny of ice and death. Without losing the living tale in religious or moralistic lessons, in this experiment of rereading Lewis, we are interested in how the Stone Table sacrifice also patterns what a true Narnian hero is.

We saw in Lewis's "bubbling up" description of writing that images are central to his imaginative process. Likewise, his theology takes narrative form through the images he chooses. Once the images take the form of a story, Lewis communicates beliefs and praxis through and within visual storytelling. He does theology "by inviting us to indwell these images, to find our own resolution there, and so finally to dwell in God."[22] After all, Christians are called to enact Christ—to let Christ indwell our lives. It is useful, then, to trace the roots of Lewis's imaginative process to images in his world, exploring his "characteristically deft use of apt analogy."[23]

The juvenilia that a young Lewis produced with his brother Warren, later edited by Walter Hooper as *Boxen*, demonstrates the instinctive nature of his visual artfulness. Except when his doodles occasionally find their way

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into his letters to children,[24] or when supplying a specific detail in his writing (like a map of Narnia), there are very few sketches in Lewis's extant papers. Yet, mental pictures continued to inspire him throughout his life. When he reflects on his fiction writing, Lewis confesses that he typically began not with a moral or even a storyline, but with "pictures in my head." For Narnia, it was a faun and a snowy wood; for *Perelandra*, he saw floating islands.[25] In *That Hideous Strength*, the remarkably complete prose mapping of Edgestow seems to be inspired by his visits to other colleges and his days walking the hills of Malvern.[26] And there is little doubt that the landscapes Lewis loved inform his world-building.[27]

As a sensual reader and writer, Lewis describes how his childhood experience of literature was so vivid that it nearly brought him to the "frontiers of hallucination." Arthur Rackham's fantastical illustrations were "very music made visible," plunging the young Lewis "a few fathoms deeper into . . . delight."[28] This delight was beyond words, as mystical experiences typically are. But mystics still try to speak of the ineffable. Lewis coined the phrase "Northernness" to give readers his sense of longing and to describe the role arboreal myths played in his concept of Joy or *Sehnsucht*.[29] That longing is always imagistic for Lewis, "a vision of huge, clear spaces . . . in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity."[30] Lewis uses other images in his works to capture this sense of longing: the "unheard-of lands beyond, away to the North" in "The Quest of Bleheris";[31] the Hesperidean dream of the western Island in *The Pilgrim's Regress*; "the cupshaped land of Abhalljin, beyond the seas of Lur in Perelandra";[32] the eastern Mountains in *The Great Divorce*; Reepicheep's utter East, which is the end of the world in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, "Where the sky and water meet";[33] and the "further up and further in"[34] image of heaven in *The Last Battle*. These places are each visually rich and imaginatively tactile, appearing as notes of joy infused through Lewis's literary history, poetry, and fiction.

With theological and artistic care, Lewis constructs these numinous images in order to make "their impact, their beauty, and their relevance easier to see *and to feel*."[35] Scholars agree about the ways Lewis integrates reason and imagination as word and image in his writing. The "key literary element in both his fiction and nonfiction" is that imagination becomes a pathway for reason, so that readers can grasp multiple meanings in the text that take them imaginatively beyond reason.[36] Thus, to explore the meaning of Lewis's spiritually infused images in his fiction,[37] it is important to step

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back and sketch out this visual and mythic nature of his work. To do this, we will consider the recurrent union of image and story, reason and imagination in the cruciform narrative patterning of his fiction.

The Shape of Story

Lewis's fiction is rich in color, light, landscape, and texture.[38] A singular exception is Screwtape's hell, which feels like a demonic Department of Motor Vehicles office: dim, stale, and dominated by never-ending, musicless noise. I can imagine Screwtape's office painted that antagonistically forgettable pale beige color preferred in institutions with low ceilings and fluorescent lighting. The lights hum and flicker irregularly. The paint, stained with decades of dust, nicotine, and bad breath, deepens to chemical brown near the ceilings. There is always a loud talker two cubicles over—as if cubicles themselves were not sufficient evidence for demonic influence in everyday life. HR insists on serving stale company coffee during eon-long motivational seminars informed by the newest marketable approaches from the psychology of the individual. Screwtape's successful Temptation Strategy is entirely about muting the colors of life so as to dull the sharp, bright, dynamic activity of the soul. No doubt hell's interior decorators are inspired by Screwtape's design for spiritual decay.

Whether muted or bright, these touches are part of what Lewis calls "atmosphere"—the narrative layering of a story that gives it its unique texture.[39] It is also Lewis's goal for his fictional worlds to reflect "spiritual reality" as Dante's *Comedy* has done.[40] Lewis is interested as a critic and author in the relationship between the imagistic atmosphere and the reader's experience of the text world. If we are sensitive to Lewis's use of space, movement, and sensuality while attempting to discern the shape of the narrative action and emotional plotlines of his work, we can see intriguing patterns that confirm the central narrative arc of Lewis's cruciform spiritual imagination. In his study of the story patterns in St. Paul's narrative spirituality, Gorman observes the *form* of the cross and its role in the *formation* of believers. Thus, observing the architecture of one's spiritual theology of the cross is an essential element of examining its narrativity. Literary theorist Northrop Frye's narratological tools provide a helpful literary guide to discern the recognizable narrative patterns in Lewis's storytelling.

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From his archetypal study of narrative in *The Great Code: The Bible as Literature* (1981), Frye brings together his experience as a literary critic with his background as an ordained minister. Frye observes a U-shaped pattern in biblical stories, historic accounts, legends, and myths that shows the intimate link between Lewis's storytelling, his understanding of fiction, and central themes in his theological writing. Beyond this literary kinship, Lewis scholars have occasionally used Frye's analytical tools,[41] and sometimes place Lewis and Frye together in their metacritical discussions.[42] Frye is, like the Oxford Inklings, interested in mythopoeic literature as it goes beyond genre-specific categories of writing; indeed, he includes the work of C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams in his theory of symbols.[43] They share a biblical background and a literary interest in narratology, making Frye a strong conversation partner.

Frye expands on the Greek notion of the narrative shape of tragedy and comedy, to observe that the story arc of the Christian Bible is roughly U-shaped—from the height of Creation, through the Fall and disaster in Genesis, to redemption and recovery in Christ and the return to paradise in Revelation. This U-shaped descent and ascent cycle of the whole story repeats throughout Scripture: in the downward spiral of Judges and the Davidic dynasty, in the story of Job and the prodigal son, and, ultimately, in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Moreover, the narrative framework has a prophetic element, so that "the U-shaped progression of original prosperity, descent to humiliation, and return . . . is a part of its emphasis on the shape of history and the specific collision with temporal movement that its revelation is assumed to make." There is a "repeating *mythos* of . . . apostasy and restoration"—and I would add "exile and return" to Frye's list—as told in the "falls and rises of the Biblical history." These depths and heights are metaphorically interrelated within the Christian Bible to produce what Frye calls a "divine comedy," where spiritual reality is mirrored in history. This comedy of the Christian Bible has for its "hero" the Messiah, centered upon the U-shaped mytho-historical drama of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.[44]

In considering the overall scope of the Narniad from the earliest book according to internal chronological order—the cosmogenic *Magician's Nephew*—to the apocalyptic fulfillment of the series in *The Last Battle*, Charles Huttar describes a "linear" pattern of creation, fall, redemption, and eschatology that approximates Frye's U-shaped comedic narrative. Narnia forms "a sort of Bible," making up "a loose collection of varied

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material structured to highlight the climactic events of world history, beginning, middle and end."[45] Edith Humphrey uses similar language, also approximating Frye's pattern as she considers the "shape" of Narnia as a "'v' shape of a restoration (down, and then up)," the narrative pattern of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.[46] Scholars note these U-shaped patterns because Lewis was most interested in theological perspectives that might be "a sort of echo or rhyme or corollary to the Incarnation,"[47] which is also one of the critical U-shaped comedic stories that Frye mentions.

As we will see, Lewis employs certain images to capture the U-shaped comedic narrative of the Gospel story, like a weightlifter raising barbells or a diver going deep for a buried object.[48] Among the passages that Lewis uses to structure his own thought about the incarnation and the believer's imitation of Christ's self-giving, Paul's poetry in Philippians 2:5–11 provides the clearest picture of a U-shaped mythos.[49] This early church text begins by describing the divine nature of Christ Jesus, the absolutely greatest heights of imaginative possibility for the first-century Jewish context of the Jesus movement. Christ chooses to set aside this greatness to make himself as nothing. Then, we see the descending steps of Christ's self-emptying in the language of the poem about Christ:

> 6 Who, being in the form of God,
> did not consider being equal to God
> as something to grasp after;
> 7 instead, he emptied himself,
> embracing the form of a slave,
> emerging in the likeness of humankind:
> and being discovered in human design,
> 8 he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross.

Every stage takes us further down: letting go of divine self-attribution, Christ pours himself out, falling into the pattern of slavehood and descending into childhood, he makes himself lowly and submits to death—not merely the consequence of Adam's fall, our common destiny to descend into the earth when our mortal design is finished—but the doom of a disobedient slave, the deep shame of the cross, an ignominious death.

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Ignominy is the death of one's name, a humiliation most of us cannot appreciate in our own cultures. However, this descent by degrees is followed by a sudden ascent to glory. It is not just the restoration of a name; the name of the man of no reputation is suddenly on everyone's lips. Christ's self-emptying is the great descent of tragedy, but the hinge of history turns to new life:

> 9 Therefore, God lifted him up to the greatest heights
> and bestowed upon him the name
> that is higher than any name,
> 10 so that in the name of Jesus,
> every knee may bend—
> those in heaven and upon the earth
> and in the deadlands below—
> 11 and every tongue shall confess
> "Jesus Christ is Lord!"
> to the glory of God, the Father.

In this dramatic exaltation, tragedy turns to comedy. Likewise, in the pattern of Paul's letters and the principle of spiritual theology, doctrine turns to doxology and ethical life in the community of God's children. Indeed, the context of this entire U-shaped Christ hymn is the ethical guidance of Philippians 2:1–4, leading to this exhortation: "Engender a Christ Jesus-like mindset among one another" (Phil 2:5). The Christ hymn is thus a prime model of an *Imitatio Christi* spiritual imagination in early Christianity.[50] For the U-shaped structure of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension is, in Lewis's words, "the great story on which the plot turns,"[51] a divine comedy, the grand narrative of self-death and resurrection patterned by the Divine for our redemption, liberty, and flourishing.

This chapter aims to demonstrate the intricacy with which Lewis works this divine comedy through his writings. Frye's narrative analysis registers the synchronicity of form and content in the U-shaped biblical comedy, a narrative arc that matches its redemptive arc. So, too, looking at the narrative shape of Lewis's fiction shows a synchronicity of form and content. I am arguing that the shape of Lewis's spiritual theology *is* the shape of his thought, which appears consistently throughout his diverse-yet-unified œuvre. To discern narrative patterning in Lewis's spiritual imagination using Frye's U-shaped archetypal typology, we will explore the image of the "dive" in this chapter,[52] followed by other comedic forms in Chapter 7.

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The Dive

We ended Act II on the edge of a cliff, where Orual of *Till We Have Faces* finally comes to the point of surrender. Indeed, in terms of the Logic of Cruciformity—which is the psychological storyline of Orual—the novel ends with a cliffhanger. Rather than a full sense of Divine Possibility, the transformed life, *Till We Have Faces* ends midsentence: "I might. . . ."[53] The sudden ending of Lewis's last novel is far more effective than his first attempt, "The Quest of Bleheris." When I read "I might" as Orual's last words, I interpret it as a statement of recovery and hope. Indeed, Lewis's Logic of Cruciformity invites us to imagine Divine Possibility, a new life, when Orual has died before she dies. Christ's death-and-resurrection drama enacts the Divine Principle, the living character of a God in perpetual, loving self-giving. Our lives, in turn, enact the death and resurrection of Christ in the Paschal Mystery, the Divine Pattern of cruciform spiritual life, which leads to the divine transformation of new life. I believe the hope is there in Orual's ending, but we must admit that her tale goes beyond us.

To the extent that her life is "the enactment of a myth,"[54] Orual's struggle is a paradigm of the spiritual life. Let us go to another clifftop, traveling from Lewis's last published character-driven long-form narrative to his first one. We saw earlier that Lewis completed *Dymer* in the decade following his encounter with *Phantastes* and his "Bleheris" season. Critical responses to *Dymer* are quite mixed, ranging from obscure failure to his "most important poem."[55] Indeed, both may be true. While it is a work that many forget, it is undoubtedly essential for understanding Lewis's philosophical, artistic, and spiritual journey from 1916 to 1926, from "Bleheris" to *Dymer*.

The story of *Dymer* begins in a utopian community that uses eugenic social control and doctrines of self-discipline to anesthetize curiosity and wonder. It was the kind of social formation that Lewis loathed, where the "man-moulders of the new age will be armed with the powers of an omnicompetent state and an irresistible scientific technique" (what we would call technology).[56] Dymer was shaped by a technocratic rule of implied consent, "Refining, chipping, moulding and adorning"[57] a monochromatic pattern for soul destruction, death by a thousand spreadsheets. Screwtape would have been pleased with the design for nurturing Dymer.

Blessedly, the oligarchs of precision are unable to dull all the colors of creation.[58] Dymer conforms to his conditioning for nineteen years. Then one day, he looks out his classroom window and is suddenly stirred by the

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natural world. Dymer laughs aloud—a dusty, cough-like sound that disrupts the lecture. With an awakening imagination creaking like long-shackled limbs, Dymer rises from his pedagogically designed desk. He laughs again and then casually murders his teacher. Then he flees naked into the wilderness, leaving behind the bloody revolution he began. Stumbling in the dark, Dymer falls into the arms of a mysterious woman who beds him for the night. Far from a flight to freedom, he awakes from his one-night stand to discover that he has impregnated a monster. He flees once more into the unknown.

After many disturbing adventures, Dymer eventually finds himself lying on a hilltop, high up among the clouds, dying of hunger. Even in this state of disarray and desperation, Dymer fails to find humility. Though all his steps have been folly and fumbling, he dares to weigh the universe by his own wisdom. As he has recently awoken to the soul-devouring engine that kept his community safe in tyranny, Dymer considers the "silly earth" and the "business of perpetual death and birth" as mechanistic, a kind of "meaningless precision."[59] In a moment that flips the perspective of the prologue to Isaiah, Dymer feels the universe accusing him in the starlight. Despite committing murder, Dymer holds tight to his position as the freethinking rebel without a cause. He proclaims his own innocence to the heavens while his empty stomach grumbles at the world's unjust treatment. Dymer then falls asleep on the dewy bluff.

This crisis point in *Dymer* resonates with Lewis's own biography,[60] echoing his complaint against an unjust world that we see as early as *Spirits in Bondage* (1919).[61] In "Satan Speaks," there are no confederates for the mortal, who is betrayed by God, beauty, nature, sex, love, technology, myth, and reason. The one myth that prevails is Darwin's, for in the story of evolution, the jaw of every beast is naturally caked with blood. And in that grand narrative, all things move toward a mythic version of the heat death of the universe—a reflection of how Sköll finally devours Sol in the Norse story, thus instigating Ragnarök.

Between the publication of *Spirits in Bondage* in 1919 and *Dymer* in 1926, Lewis had moved from being a soldier in WWI to working as a freshman Oxford don. Still, the later poem has a similar existential tension, where the mythic eschatological tinge is exchanged for societal dystopia. On the ridge of great height, fleeing monstrosities of his own making, Dymer's complaints keep him awake and dew-drenched in the early morning cold. When "the furrowed fog rolled down ahead," Dymer continues his mountaintop

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pilgrimage of narcissistic agony, reflecting on the futility of it all. Suddenly, his footing on the promontory gives way:

> he tripped,
> Stumbled and clutched—then panic, and no hope
> To stop himself, once lost upon that slope.
>
> And faster, ever faster, and his eye
> Caught tree-tops far below. The nightmare feeling
> Had gripped him. He was screaming: and the sky
> Seemed hanging upside down. Then struggling, reeling,
> With effort beyond thought he hung half kneeling,
> Halted one saving moment. With wild will
> He clawed into the hillside and lay still. (*Dymer*, canto V, lines 152–62)[62]

Hanging onto the edge of the cliff, Dymer's feet dangle over the incalculable void below. There seems to be no way of salvation, but his resolve returns: "By God, I will not die." And then he adds somewhat weakly, "Not yet." Slowly he heaves himself to a safe purchase on the ridge, "saved and spent," but feeling "the big, round world beneath his breast, / The mother planet proven at his need." Dymer then casts off the "shame of glad surrender."[63]

We cannot tell whether Dymer makes a vow to God or prays, whether he challenges the heavens or curses God in his refusal to die. Whatever the case, and a later Lewis is pleased to allow for ambiguity in interpretation,[64] Dymer surrenders to the care of the earth he had just condemned as meaningless. This complex relationship between death and life is congruent with the themes of the poem.[65] At this moment, Dymer is caught between the surrender to death that his nihilism warrants and holding on for dear life to the precipice for reasons he cannot explain.

It is on the cliff's edge, moments before a dive or a drop, where we see the crux of C.S. Lewis's own spiritual crisis as well.[66] With all of his protagonist's instincts for self-preservation, though, as a convert, Lewis is the anti-Dymer. To demonstrate the importance of these escarpment scenes—and remembering that Lewis's "doctrine of death" is rooted in conversion—we turn to two crucial moments in Lewis's conversion five years after *Dymer*: the summer of 1930 and the autumn of 1931.

In a July 8, 1930, letter to his friend, Arthur Greeves, Lewis wrote: "I learned to dive wh[ich] is a great change in my life & has important (religious)

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connections. . . . They are still v[ery] ungraceful dives but I do get in head first."[67] The sense of a beginning and a tangible connection to immortality are spiritual notes in the letter that suggest the tenor of this time in Lewis's life.[68] While Lewis does not explain further in the extant letters, there is manuscript evidence of the metaphorical importance of learning to dive. The pinnacle of Lewis's theistic conversion narrative, "Early Prose Joy" (c. 1930–31), makes a connection to Lewis's lesson just as he confesses a belief in God:

> The same year and the same month I learned an art which I had been trying to learn since boyhood. I learned how to dive. I am still not a good diver, but I do get into the water head first. Nothing is simpler than this art. You do not need to do anything, you need only to stop doing something—to abstain from all attempt at self-preservation—to obey the command which Saint Augustine heard in [a] different context, Securus te projice.[69]

In this context, we might translate the Latin phrase *Securus te projice* as "throw yourself down with ease," or more colloquially, "relax, stop protecting yourself, just let go." It is an intertextual hyperlink from Augustine's *Confessions*, captured quite nicely in this translation:

> Why standest thou in thyself, and so standest not? Cast thyself upon Him, fear not He will not withdraw Himself that thou shouldest fall; cast thyself fearlessly upon him, He will receive, and will heal thee.[70]

As Lewis observes, a dive is both a doing and a not-doing, an action and a letting go. Given the spiritual death-and-resurrection cycles of *Phantastes*, it is not surprising that George MacDonald uses a dive to visualize his Pauline theology of self-death. In *The Golden Key*, Tangle wants to find her way to the country where shadows fall, so she must visit the Old Man of the Fire. Tangle's guide, the Old Man of the Earth, takes her to where they can hear water running inside the cave walls. He raises a large stone, revealing a great abyss, and says: "You must throw yourself in. There is no other way." Tangle studies his face for what feels like a year but may have been a moment, and then plunges freely into the unknown.[71]

Lewis brings both Augustine and MacDonald into the story of Jill Pole's first precipitous moments in a world beyond her imagination. Jill and Eustace escape schoolyard bullies by crossing a magical threshold into Narnia. Full of bad feelings and anxious self-doubt, Jill causes Eustace to tumble off the great

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mountain of Aslan's country, so far from the ground that the clouds are miles below them. As Eustace plummets toward the earth, Aslan comes to the very edge of the cliff to rescue him. The great lion, though, is completely unknown to Jill, and she is afraid. When Eustace is safe, Aslan sets himself down before Jill, majestic in repose like the lions at the New York Public Library or the Vancouver Art Gallery, or in London on Oxford Street or at Trafalgar Square.

Like Tangle, Jill finds time stretching out as a desperate thirst grows inside of her. Like Tangle, Jill hears the sound of running water, and she is nearly frantic with thirst. Aslan invites her to drink, but she is terrified of the great beast.

> "Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.
> "I make no promise," said the Lion.
> Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.
> "*Do* you eat girls?" she said.
> "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. . . .
> "I daren't come and drink," said Jill.
> "Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.
> "Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."
> "There is no other stream," said the Lion.[72]

Securus te projice: there is no self-preservation here. Jill's life is forfeit whatever she chooses. In the end, she dares the lion and drinks from the stream. When she has quenched her thirst, Aslan charges Jill with a quest to rescue a lost prince of Narnia and leads her back again to the precipice. Alarming as her return to the cliffside must have been, Jill has already recklessly and intentionally "thrown herself down," so to speak, in choosing to drink. After a brief tutorial in the arts of adventuring well, Aslan carries her off the mountain on his breath.[73]

While Jill's dive off the precipice is metaphorical, the cliffside scene is a striking retelling of Tangle's tale. Each story visualizes MacDonald's Pauline doctrine of good death that Lewis draws into a cruciform spirituality of self-surrender. There is a striking contrast between self-protecting Dymer and self-giving Tangle and Jill: Dymer stands solo, a rebel to the end, casting away reason to grasp the last tendrils of life and meaning. When he loses his

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footing and feels the crisis of death, he saves himself (and curses God?); however, he refuses to fully cast himself down, walking away to face the destiny he has carved out by his deeds. Dymer's instinct to cling to the cliff's edge, refusing to surrender, is not unlike Orual's. She clings to a lifelong grudge and sets out to make her complaint of injustice against the gods. And yet, as they leave the cliffside to face the short remaining space of their mortal lives, their stories end quite differently.

The difference in the tales of Dymer and Orual is the difference between Lewis in 1926 and Lewis in 1931. His first published conversion story, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, written in 1932, has the most striking parallel with these dive images.[74] *The Pilgrim's Regress* is neither a typical modern-era novel nor a paint-by-numbers allegory about Christian life, but a retelling of Lewis's conversion story through his "allegorical imagination."[75] After many days of traveling toward the goal of an Island in the west, escaping some temptations while falling into other traps, John finds himself on the edge of a great canyon. Like Dymer before him and Orual after, he is standing on a cliff's edge in the cold dark, hanging between life and death. John then hears a voice, that of the Landlord he has been trying to escape in his quest for the Island:

> "What am I to do?" said John. . . .
> "Jump, or be thrown. Shut your eyes or have them bandaged by force. Give in or struggle."
> "I would sooner do the first, if I could."
> "Then I am your servant and no more your master. The cure of death is dying. He who lays down his liberty in that act receives it back."[76]

Though the conversion narratives of *The Pilgrim's Regress* and *Surprised by Joy* are quite different in genre and voice, John's subsequent confession to Mother Kirk is similar to Lewis's later description of surrender: "I have come to give myself up."[77] Pilgrim John winces as he waves the white flag, a withering convert handing himself over to the authorities after a Dymer-like headlong flight toward freedom. Two decades later, Lewis retells this story in non-allegorical prose: "I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."[78] Without hope, John asks what he must do, and his fellow traveler, Vertue, answers with a smile: "It is only necessary . . . to abandon all efforts at self-preservation." *Securus te projice*. Speaking more truth than he

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knows, John realizes that he is at the moment of his death. The final act of submission—the dying that is the cure of death—is a head-first plunge into a dark pool. Despite temptations for John to abandon this madness of the deadly plunge, he throws himself into the dive. "And how John managed it or what he felt I did not know," the narrator explains, but he "rubbed his hands, shut his eyes, despaired, and let himself go."[79]

The echo of Lewis's 1930 lesson in diving is clear in the text: "It was not a good dive, but, at least, he reached the water head first."[80] Indeed, the amateur dancer turned diving coach Owen Barfield may be the human model for Lewis's cruciform image of the diver in *Miracles*:

> [The Diver,] first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover.[81]

It is important to note that the referent here has changed even though Lewis is using the same word image. Up to this moment, the dive—imaged as the entire movement of release, descent, and then reascent—has been a metaphor for spiritual life, capturing a theology of self-death and resurrection to new life that transcribes Lewis's Logic of Cruciformity into narrative form. Though the *Miracles* passage is about the incarnation, we see in Lewis's cruciform spirituality that the two are united in the imitation motif as they are in the great U-shaped descent and ascent of Christ in Philippians 2. As imitation is threaded into that Pauline Christ-hymn, so Lewis invites readers to live out the U-shaped pattern in their spiritual lives. The two realities of the believer's spiritual pattern and the Grand Miracle of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection are united in Lewis—consolidated in the U-shaped metaphor of self-death and new life as pictured in the dive. The dive is a story image of the "whole, huge pattern"[82] of life.

The cliff/dive images in his letters, in "Early Prose Joy," and in the Grand Miracle parallel with *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *The Silver Chair*, and *Till We Have Faces* in specific and intriguing ways. The pilgrim John, Jill Pole, and Queen Orual each find themselves trembling on a cliff's edge, faced with the desperate choice between an ill-timed death and the will of the divine. And

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in each scene, the divine voice speaks, sharpening their moment of decision to a fine point. Orual, like John and Jill, can fly no longer. "Die before you die," the god commands Orual,[83] just as Pilgrim John is told that "the cure of Death is dying," and Jill is told that she must risk death to receive life.

What brings them to the precipice of decisions is particular to each story, but still alike in this crucial way: John, Jill, and Orual have each been fleeing from the divine voice *and* themselves. It is time to surrender. In John's case, "resistance is gone,"[84] which is parallel to Lewis's later memoir, where he finds himself unable to resist "the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet."[85] Jill does the hardest thing of her life because it is better to be eaten by the lion than suffer from thirst. Intriguingly, for Orual to surrender, she must walk away from the cliff's edge. Resolving to throw herself off the cliff is the wrong kind of self-death, akin to Lewis's temptation to ignore the philosophical evidence of theism. If Orual throws herself bound into the rushing river, she is escaping the truth about herself: the character's desperate choice parallels her author's temptation to intellectual suicide. In the search for truth, both Orual and John must surrender to the voice in the dark and move toward their respective paths of self-death, while Jill must risk her life in the light of Aslan's country and trust the voice that offers her no assurance. The principle for each character is the same: they must die before they die—a dive for John, kneeling by the water for Jill, and a descent into dreamlands of truth for Orual, where she experiences the sort of "dying many deaths"[86] that John experiences in his own story.

Considering the entire U-shaped pattern of descent and ascent in the image of the dive, both the image of self-death as well as the hope of resurrection to new life are essential. In the confessional cliffhanger that closes *Till We Have Faces*, there is only a little of Orual's resurrected life pictured in the story, though she leaves a powerful legacy. For Jill, this is the beginning of her adventure—the first step toward the U-shaped descent into Narnia and reascent to Aslan's Mountain. Like Sir Shrek in another tale, Jill and her heroic team had not gotten around to slaying the great serpent before rescuing the enthralled child of the king and queen. Fortunately, in freeing Prince Rilian, he can help Jill and her comrades in the task of dragon slaying.[87]

In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the ascent in the dive, the resurrection of new life, is also Lewis's "regress"—his return to the road to slay the cultural dragons that are before him. As he grows in faith, Lewis will slay some dragons with his apologetics and controversial writings. Eventually, he will prefer to sneak past these dragons and transform the imagination of culture at its mythic

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roots.[88] The pattern of the dive in these richly intertextual stories reveals the all-encompassing, integrating narrative shape of Lewis's spiritual imagination. Over and over again, in the deeper mythic elements in his work, Lewis elegantly captures the living story of Easter weekend in the U-shaped word picture of the dive—as he does in other images of surrender and new life. These images are woven into Lewis's normative spirituality as they echo Paul's cruciform narrative spiritual theology of Philippians 2:5–11.

Conclusion: The Full Narrative Shape of Life

Returning to where this section began, we recognize that Dymer is simply incapable of a self-death that could lead to resurrection because he is unable to surrender himself completely. Dymer's story is linear, even though the poem itself is a sort of chiastic parallelism—and if we vertically cut the Greek χ (*chi*, the first letter of chiasm), we notice the mirrored U-shaped pattern on its side. Still, there is a progression in his spiritual development. In *Spirits in Bondage*, Lewis equates nature with Satan,[89] and the lyric cycle is a rejection of surrender to the world as Lewis experiences it. In 1919, Lewis refused to give in to reality as he perceived it. By the time of *Dymer* in 1926, we see that surrender to nature is possible: Dymer feels gratefulness for "the big, round world beneath his breast, / The mother planet proven at his need."[90] Perhaps this surrender means that Dymer is willing to come to terms with reality. However, Dymer cannot yet surrender to death—either to slide off the "perilous cliff"[91] or to make the intentional head-first dive that is both an action and a non-action. When Lewis is finally able to surrender to God in 1930 and 1931, the full narrative shape of his life develops, which is the U-shaped comedy of death and resurrection portrayed in his fiction and nonfiction. And, in that moment, Lewis is finally able to dive.[92]

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