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Amanda M. Niedbala  
Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

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### Abstract

A look at the way C.S. Lewis used and transcended Greek myth, particularly *The Odyssey*, in *The Silver Chair*.

### Additional Keywords

Homer. *The Odyssey*—Influence on C.S. Lewis; Lewis, C.S.—Knowledge—Greek mythology; Lewis, C.S. *The Silver Chair*

## From Hades to Heaven: Greek Mythological Influences in C. S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*

Amanda M. Niedbala

In his *Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis creates a world that teaches children about Christianity outside of a normal religious setting. His mythical stories steeped in Christian ideals present a fresh, magical world that breaks through normal childhood inhibitions concerning Jesus and church. Says Lewis,

But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons?  
(*Sometimes Fairy Stories* 47)

In building this “imaginary world” Lewis draws from many sources, including the Christian Bible, events from his own life, and the mythologies of many ancient civilizations. While critics have energetically explored the role of Christianity in *The Chronicles*, investigations into the presence of Norse, Greek, British, and other cultures’ legends and myths in these novels are surprisingly few.<sup>1</sup> However, if *The Chronicles* are, in a way, their own mythology that ultimately points towards Christianity, perhaps these other influences that make up Narnia come together to serve the same purpose—that is, if *The Chronicles* include all of these pagan elements, are these elements not also a part of this ultimate lesson in Christianity? An excerpt from Lewis’s autobiography *Surprised by Joy* recounts Lewis’s own feelings towards the role of paganism in Christianity:

In my mind [...] the perplexing multiplicity of “religions” began to sort itself out. The real clue had been put into my hand by that hard-boiled Atheist when he said, “Rum thing, all that about the Dying God. Seems to have really happened once”; by him and by Barfield’s encouragement of a more respectful, if not more delighted, attitude to

Pagan myth. The question was no longer to find the one simply true religion among a thousand religions simply false. It was rather, "Where had religion reached its true maturity? Where, if anywhere, have the hints of all Paganism been fulfilled?" [...] The God whom I had at last acknowledged was one, and was righteous. Paganism had been only the childhood of religion, or only a prophetic dream. Where was the thing full grown? or where was the awakening? (*Surprised by Joy* 235)

For Lewis, paganism anticipates Christianity, a Christianity he sees as the fulfillment and "awakening" of these pagan hints. Indeed, *The Chronicles* themselves began as an image of a pagan figure. Lewis writes, "*The Lion [the Witch and the Wardrobe]* all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. The picture had been in my mind since I was about 16. Then one day when I was about 40, I said to myself: 'Let's try to make a story about it'" (*It All Began* 53). Before Narnia came to life with all of its Christian ideals, Narnia was Greek.

All of these Greek and pagan figures become as much a part of Narnia as any others, and they all contribute to the Christian ideals that are at its core. They reside comfortably in this Christian realm because they are symbols, physical expressions of some larger concept that is intrinsic to humanity. Writes Lewis in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, "But giants, dragons, paradises, gods, and the like are themselves the expression of certain basic elements in man's spiritual experience. In that sense they are more like words—the words of a language which speaks the else unspeakable—than they are like the people and places in a novel" (*Preface* 57-58). As Joseph Campbell writes of the function of the gods of mythology in the hero's quest,

The gods as icons are not ends in themselves. Their entertaining myths transport the mind and spirit, not *up* to, but *past* them, into the yonder void. [...] This is the orthodox teaching of the ancient Tantras: "All of these visualized deities are but symbols representing the various things that occur on the Path" [...] And the same metatheological insight seems to be what is suggested in Dante's final verses, where the illuminated voyager at last is able to lift his courageous eyes beyond the beatific vision of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to the one Eternal Light. (Campbell 181)

Campbell concludes that the hero's adventure is marked by figures and obstacles that lead the "voyager" through a quest that encompasses more than its physical reality. While in the end these icons no longer matter, their presence illuminates the "Path" for the quester—that is, their support and their antagonism provide a physical aspect to a rather spiritual journey, without which the hero might not be "able to lift his courageous eyes [...] to the one Eternal Light."

Of all of Lewis's *Chronicles*, one in particular seems to lend itself to the exploration of the role of mythology in the journey towards Christianity. In *The Silver Chair*, Lewis has created two rather unlikely main characters for a volume that culminates with a resurrection through selfless blood sacrifice. Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole are the only explicitly non-Christian humans to visit Narnia, for when addressed as "Son of Adam and Daughter of Eve," they "couldn't answer" (*Silver Chair* [SC] 42)—they do not recognize the biblical names. Yet despite this initial exclusion from the Narnian-Christian faith that is the life force of Narnia, by the end of *The Silver Chair* Jill and Eustace participate in the resurrection of King Caspian atop Aslan's Mountain, an experience reminiscent of Jesus' mourning for and resurrection of Lazarus (Lindskoog 170). How does Lewis guide these two non-Christian characters through a journey that ultimately ends with their initiation into Christianity?

The answer surfaces in an exploration of the "various things that occur on the Path." Jill and Eustace's journey is marked by hints of Greek myth that are woven into the nature of the quest and the obstacles and figures they meet; the ways they react to and learn from these elements bring them closer to a Christian faith in Aslan. The first half of their quest, from the human world to Narnia and into Underland, abounds with Greek images—it is very much an Odyssean journey. Yet in Underland the Greek symbols and details begin to turn Christian and the travelers choose Aslan over temptation (provided by a figure who encapsulates at first a Greek and then a biblical temptation), securing their victory in the Narnian-Christian faith. After this victory they return to a world of Narnians who celebrate their deeds and Aslan leads the children once again up to his mountain which at this time is symbolic of a Christian heaven. This symmetrical framework, flanked by first a Greek and then a Christian experience on Aslan's Mountain, and

pivoting upon the metamorphoses of tropes in Underland, allows Lewis to draw his heroes (and his readers) *farther* and *further* into a land from which they emerge as believers in his unique Narnian-Christian faith. Since many critics have discussed at length the Christianity present in Lewis's *Chronicles*,<sup>2</sup> this paper will refrain from reiterating their well-made points and instead explore the ways in which the Greek aspects of Jill and Eustace's journey lead the children to an ultimately Christian end.

Before the final rejoicing in Christianity on Aslan's Mountain, Lewis must open the land of Narnia to his heroes. He does so in a scene infused with the Greek image of laurel leaves.

Just before Jill puts to Eustace the question that leads him to tell her about the existence of Narnia, "The drops dripped off the laurel leaves" (SC 6). Laurel leaves are an unmistakably Greek image, and Lewis uses them twice more in this scene. Jill and Eustace invoke Aslan by raising their arms and chanting, facing east and "up into the laurels" (SC 10), and when they hear the bullies approaching, "Jill and Eustace gave one glance at each other, dived under the laurels, and began scrambling up the steep, earthy slope of the shrubbery at a speed which gave them great credit" (SC 10). This total immersion into the laurels, much like a religious procession or celebration in ancient Greece, leads them to a door that opens into Aslan's country, a "very high mountain" (SC 13), that by virtue of the laurel imagery may be linked to Mount Olympus, home of the Greek Pantheon.

Aslan's mountain serves as both the alpha and omega of Jill and Eustace's adventure outside of their world. In a sense, it is like Eliade's "Sacred Mountain" (Eliade 12) of which he speaks in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. The Sacred Mountain is a spiritual center towards which the road is difficult, including

[...] danger-ridden voyages of the heroic expeditions in search of the Golden Fleece, the Golden Apples, the Herb of Life; wandering in labyrinths; difficulties of the seeker for the road to the self, to the "center" of his being, and so on. The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and

illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective. (Eliade 18)

Eliade picks up on the same thread as Campbell; to get to this “Sacred Mountain” one must go through “ephemeral and illusory” perils—“various things that occur on the Path”—in order to attain that final eternity. This mountain trope in *The Silver Chair* operates in a two-fold manner: first, as a Mt. Olympus from which the god, Aslan, assigns an Odyssean quest to the adventurers, and later as a Christian heaven (Ford 156) towards which the travelers journey to witness a Christian resurrection. In order to make the transition to the Christian Aslan’s Mountain, Jill and Eustace must embark upon a journey that will lead them from their profane, non-religious state to one that is sacred and eternal.

Aslan presents the quest to Jill, instructing her that she and Eustace must find the lost son of King Caspian:

[N]ow hear your task. Far from here in the land of Narnia there lives an aged King who is sad because he has no prince of his blood to be king after him. He has no heir because his only son was stolen from him many years ago and no one in Narnia knows where that prince went or whether he is still alive. But he is. I lay on you this command, that you seek this lost Prince until either you have found him and brought him to his father’s house, or else die in the attempt, or else gone back to your own world. (SC 25)

The impetus of the journey is to restore the relationship of a father to a son, to bring one back to the other and unite them in the “father’s house”; the overall emphasis on the paternal bond can be linked to Christianity in the form of the Holy Trinity and the lineage of Christ, and the journey itself also involves a type of resurrection since they bring Rilian back from Underland. Yet the physical nature of the journey, the portion that at this point is most real to Jill and Eustace, hearkens back to a pagan tale. The separation of a kingly father and son and a god-inspired search to bring one back to the other parallel the events at the beginning of Homer’s *Odyssey*, when Athena intervenes to reunite Odysseus and his son Telemakhos. It is important to note here that Jill and Eustace’s quest is to bring a son back to a father, the opposite of the

Odyssean quest to bring a father back to a son. This difference hints at the way this pagan quest functions in Jill and Eustace's path towards Christianity, for the resurrection of a son who is thought to be dead links more strongly to Christ than Odysseus. Yet the Odyssean quest format is the way in which Jill and Eustace must arrive at this final Christianity. Indeed, Jill and Eustace are at a point where they can only comprehend religion in a pagan manner; they think they were the ones who decided to enter Narnia, attempting to do so by chanting Aslan's name (much like the invocations to the gods present in ancient Greek literature). Yet once they are on Aslan's Mountain, Aslan tells Jill, "You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you" (SC 24-25). Jill continues to refer to Aslan as "Sir" (SC 25); she does not yet know him "by another name [...] the very reason why [children] were brought to Narnia" (*Voyage of the Dawn Treader* [VDT] 247), and so needs to learn through her Odyssean quest into Narnia.

After the assigning of the task more Odyssean qualities emerge. Aslan gives four signs that Jill and Eustace must follow in order to be successful:

First; as soon as the Boy Eustace sets foot in Narnia, he will meet an old and dear friend. He must greet that friend at once; if he does, you will both have good help. Second; you must journey out of Narnia to the north till you come to the ruined city of the ancient giants. Third; you shall find a writing on a stone in that ruined city, and you must do what the writing tells you. Fourth; you will know the lost Prince (if you find him) by this, that he will be the first person you have met in your travels who will ask you to do something in my name, in the name of Aslan. (SC 25)

By laying out these signs, Aslan acts an oracle, intimating to Jill what will happen and warning her of the best course of action. In addition, as is true of many prophecies in Greek mythology, Aslan warns that "the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look" (SC 27). In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters this same kind of beneficent advice from the prophetess Kirke:

[...] home you may not go  
unless you take a strange way round and come  
to the cold homes of Death and pale Persephone.



You shall hear prophecy from the rapt shade  
of blind Teiresias of Thebes, forever  
charged with reason even among the dead...  
only set up your mast and haul your canvas  
to the fresh blowing North; sit down and steer,  
and hold that wind, even to the bourne of Ocean,  
Persephone's deserted strand and grove [...]  
until you know the presence of Teiresias.  
He will come soon, great captain; be it he  
who gives you course and distance for your sailing  
homeward across the cold fish-breeding sea. (10.543-597)

Many elements similar to Aslan's signs are mentioned here: Odysseus must speak to Teiresias for help, just as Eustace must greet his old friend. He must set his sails to the North; Jill and Eustace must travel North. Odysseus must follow the words of Teiresias in order to gain passage home; the children must follow the words written on the stone in order to complete their task. Significantly, the one sign Aslan adds to these Odyssean ones is that the children must respond faithfully to his name—thus, a response to the fourth and last sign requires the Christian ideal of faith.

Upon Jill's arrival in Narnia, more Greek and Odyssean aspects of the journey appear. The first inhabitants of Narnia that she sees are "fauns, satyrs, centaurs" (SC 35), three creatures out of Greek myth. However, the first animal who speaks to her and Eustace and who ultimately lends them valuable direction for their journey is an owl, the sacred bird of Athena, identified with wisdom (Athena being the Greek goddess of wisdom) and the soul of Athena herself. It is quite significant that Lewis's words should evoke the idea of Athena in his world of talking animals, for "with one exception Homer has no god in the form of animals: Athene, however, sometimes transforms herself into a bird and it is by this very transformation that the aged Nestor recognizes her" (Nilsson 27). Since she, "owl-eyed Athene" (Hesiod 61), is the prominent divine impetus in *The Odyssey*, the initial appearance and helpful, informative role of Glimfeather complement the quest for the reuniting of a father and a son well. A further investigation into Athena's nature reveals another level of this connection.

To associate the owl with wisdom only and view it as a stand-in symbol for Athena is too simple an assessment. Writes Christine Downing in *The Goddess*,

The owl is a bird of prey (and thus equivalent to Zeus's eagle) and a night bird—associated with death and darkness—but, like all birds, associated with winged flight and also with spirit. The owl thus seems to suggest that bringing of soul back into the upper air, which comes up again and again in connection with Athene. (Downing 124)

This bringing of a soul back into the “upper air” implies a resurrection of the spirit, an aspect that is present in three ways in *The Silver Chair*: first, Jill and Eustace's quest centers around rescuing Rilian from under the earth and bringing him back into the “upper air” of Narnia; second, they themselves must emerge from Underland into Narnia (which marks both the conclusion of the Greek tropes and a rebirth for Jill and Eustace out of the death-like Underland into the Christian world of Narnia); and third, the children participate in the resurrection of King Caspian on Aslan's Mountain. In this way, Athena's role complements the (Greek) physical quest, the spiritual renewal, and the confirmation into Christianity that concludes Jill and Eustace's adventure.

Glimfeather introduces Jill and Eustace to Trumpkin, and the feast that follows accentuates the presence of Greek myth further. Without fully knowing their identity (Eustace does not tell Trumpkin that he has been there before, or that he is a personal friend of King Caspian X) or the reason for which they have come to Narnia, the Lord Regent welcomes the two children into the castle and makes sure they are treated with the greatest service and respect: “You shall tell me your business in full council to-morrow morning. Master Glimfeather, see that bedchambers and suitable clothes and all else is provided for these guests in the most honourable fashion. [...] See that they're properly washed” (SC 43). Trumpkin's immediate attention to the comfort of his guests mirrors that of the great kings whom Telemakhos and Odysseus visit on their respective journeys. Telemakhos and his crew call first on Nestor, who receives the strangers with great hospitality, “calling out invitations to the feast” (3.40) and having his youngest daughter bathe the noble prince in the morning. Menelaus's reception also mirrors this guest-host relationship: “Bring / these men to be our guests!” (4.38-39).

Odysseus finds similar treatment at the house of Alkinoos in Phaiakia, along with entertainment provided by a minstrel named Demodokos,

[...] that man of song  
whom the Muse cherished; by her gift he knew  
the good of life, and evil—  
for she who lent him sweetness made him blind. (8.67-70)

He sings of the past heroes of Greece and Troy, of Odysseus and Achilleus and Agamemnon. So at the feast at Cair Paravel,

[...] a blind poet came forward and struck up the grand old tale of Prince Cor and Aravis and the horse Bree, which is called *The Horse and His Boy* and tells of an adventure that happened in Narnia and Calormen and the lands between, in the Golden Age when Peter was High King [...]. (SC 47)

Homer, the great poet of *The Odyssey*, was blind and sang about the Golden Age of Greece; the presence of the blind poet in *The Silver Chair* is, like the laurels, overwhelmingly Greek.

At the children's midnight meeting with Glimfeather, Jill and Eustace learn of Rilian's disappearance, the circumstances of which strengthen the parallels to *The Odyssey*. Rilian embarks upon a quest of vengeance against the green serpent that has slain his mother, the queen, a woman of unsurpassed beauty: "And when they looked at her they thought they had never before known what beauty meant" (VDT 199). After one of his daily journeys into the forest, Rilian does not come back. He is in the hold of a witch who is also "most beautiful" (SC 59), and who the children later find out is keeping him against his will through enchantment. Odysseus' voyage to Troy that brings him far from home for many years is a journey to avenge the taking of Queen Helen, also a woman of famed beauty. And at the opening of *The Odyssey*, he has not been able to come home because the nymph Kalypso keeps him on her island despite his "desire [...] / merely to see the hearthsmoke leaping upward / from his own island" (1.78-80). Both Rilian and Odysseus are on quests of vengeance for the taking of a beautiful woman, and neither can return home to reclaim his royal status since each is in the power of an enchantress.

The children and Puddleglum's journey into Ettinsmoor contains events similar to Odysseus' own struggles during his voyage after the War of Troy. One of the first islands upon which Odysseus lands is that of the Kyklops Polyphemus, a cannibal; the giant devours dozens of Odysseus' men whom he traps in his cave, the entrance of which is blocked by an enormous boulder too large for any of the human men to move. In order to escape, they rely on the wits of Odysseus, who offers the giant strong drink to dull his senses and then blinds Polyphemus while the Kyklops lies in drunken sleep. The next morning he hides his men under the bellies of the blind giant's sheep so that they might pass out of the cave safely in the morning daylight (9.113-516).

Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum find themselves in a similar situation at Harfang. Reads an entry from the giants' cookbook: "MAN. This elegant little biped has long been valued as a delicacy. It forms a traditional part of the Autumn Feast, and is served between the fish and the joint" (SC 131). But escape is no small feat, given their size: "they all looked at the door and saw that none of them could reach the handle, and that almost certainly no one could turn it if they did" (SC 121). This door is as threatening to their situation as the boulder at the mouth of Polyphemus's cave, and their flight to freedom must also depend on wit. Like Odysseus, they decide to make their escape during the day, and realize that, just as Odysseus makes Polyphemus drunk, they "must put them [the giants] off their guard" (SC 122) in order to carry out their trickery.

At Harfang the children and Puddleglum are involved in still another episode that mirrors one of Odysseus' own. During one of their meals at the castle, they realize that they have "been eating a *Talking stag*" (SC 128), one of the animals chosen by Aslan to have the power of speech and so forbidden to be slain and eaten:

[...] Puddleglum, who was Narnian born, was sick and faint, and felt as you would feel if you found you had eaten a baby.

"We've brought the anger of Aslan on us," he said. "That's what comes of not attending to the Signs." (SC 129)

Odysseus and his men, too, eat an animal sacred to a god. Although warned by Tiresias and Kirke not to land on the island of Helios for fear that they might eat his sacred cattle and anger the sun god, the crew of

the great ship begs to land there at least for rest. Hunger takes over and the men slaughter the sacred kine, thus bringing on the anger of the gods: "Restitution or penalty they shall pay — / and pay in full" (12.489-490). A major difference between these two episodes must be noted here. Odysseus rightly fears the anger of Helios, who provokes Zeus to "thrown down one white-hot bolt, and make / splinters of their ship in the winedark sea" (12.495-496). Yet while Puddleglum fears Aslan's anger, a specific punishment never occurs. The contrite feelings of the three travelers seem to take the place of any retribution. Continues Puddleglum, "'If it was allowed, it would be the best thing we could do, to take these knives and drive them into our own hearts.' And gradually even Jill came to see it from this point of view" (SC 129). Already Lewis is weeding out the harsher aspects of the Greek pantheon in order to create a path to the Christian God of love and salvation.

Both of these episodes contain the idea of prophecy; Puddleglum mentions "the signs," and Odysseus is forewarned by two figures gifted with foresight. Indeed, as discussed above, prophesizing plays an important role in each of these works, for not only does each include the telling of signs to ensure success, but also the missing or disobeying of signs to provoke troubles.

Just as Odysseus and his men do not practice the "denial" and "restraint" (11.119) for which Teiresias calls and land on Helios' island, so do Jill and Eustace forsake self-mastery for temptation, demonstrated by their failure to perform the first three signs. Eustace does not greet Caspian (sign one) because of Jill's "showing off" (SC 24) on the side of the cliff that sends him into Narnia too early to hear his directions. They pass the ruined city of the giants (sign two) without noticing it in their eagerness to get to Harfang. Only the next morning do they realize that the rocky terrain over which they had traversed the night before was, in fact, this city, and they see with horror and dismay the words "UNDER ME" (sign three) written across the stones. The children's selfish lack of restraint still hinders their embrace of the selflessness of Lewis's Christianity.

Through his appearance to her in a dream, Aslan reveals the third sign to Jill so that the three travelers can begin their immediate task of rescuing Prince Rilian from Underland. The manner in which Aslan comes to Jill in the dream is worth noting—he uses the form of a giant

wooden horse in Jill's room: "the great wooden horse [...] came of its own will, rolling on its wheels across the carpet, and stood at her head. And now it was no longer a horse, but a lion as big as the horse. And then it was not a toy lion, but a real lion, The Real Lion [...]" (SC 116). A wooden horse is easily associated with the horse of Troy, that great scheme of Odysseus to infiltrate the city's walls. That Aslan metamorphoses from a figure reminiscent of Greek myth to his majestic Narnian lion form mirrors the Greek to Christian design of Jill and Eustace's quest. Once he appears in his true form, he sets Jill on the right path—towards Underland, the midpoint of the children's journey towards Christianity, and the turning point in the characteristics of the quest from Greek to Christian.

Initially, Underland seems to have many Greek attributes; this "Deep Realm" (SC 140), as it is called, is at times referred to as "Underworld" (SC 150), suggestive of the Greek Hades, and there is a river in Underland that induces forgetfulness, much like the river Lethe of Hades, "which the souls of the dead taste, that they may forget everything said and done when alive" (Bulfinch 707). The Warden transports the travelers across this river just as Charon brings the souls of the dead across the river Styx, and during the trip the children "began to feel as if [they] had always lived on that ship, in that darkness, and to wonder whether sun and blue skies and wind and birds had not been only a dream" (SC 148).

In addition, the Queen of Underland seems to share many characteristics similar to the enchantress figures Odysseus meets during his journey. Kalypso, the nymph mentioned above, keeps Odysseus on her island despite his desire to return home, "[...] coaxing him / with her beguiling talk, to turn his mind / from Ithaka" (1.76-78). The Green Witch, too, practices this "beguiling talk"; the first time she speaks she "crie[s] out in a voice as sweet as the sweetest bird's song, trilling her R's delightfully" (SC 88), and she laughs with "the richest, most musical laugh you can imagine" (88). In this quality she is also akin to the classic Greek temptresses, the sirens, also a threat to Odysseus' return.

The characteristics of the Green Witch also allude to Kirke, another antagonist to Odysseus' return home. She too shares the power of enchantment through voice and song: "Low she sang / in her beguiling voice" (10.242-243). The Green Witch carries out her

enchantment through “drugs of evil” (10.232), “a handful of a green powder” that “did not blaze much, but a very sweet and drowsy smell came from it” (SC 173). And so, like Kirke with her “vile pinch, / to make them lose desire or thought of our dear father land” (10.260-261), the Green Witch tries to convince the prince that “there is no land called Narnia” (SC 174). One interesting detail of the episode on Kirke’s island is that she seats Odysseus in a “chair [...] silver-studded, intricately carved, made with a low footrest” (10.353-355) that reminds one of Rilian’s seat from the Green Witch, “a curious silver chair” (SC 162), from which the novel receives its name, and that, like most things in Kirke’s house, is “enchanted” (SC 164). Peter J. Schakel points out that Lewis himself saw Kirke as the predecessor of his Green Witch: “Lewis wrote, ‘the witch [...] is of course Circe [...] the same Archetype we find in so many fairy tales’” (Schakel 9). Indeed, the “dozens of strange animals lying on the turf, either dead or asleep” (SC 144) in Underland mirror Kirke’s “wolves and mountain lions” that “lay there, mild / in her soft spell.”

All of these Greek links to the Green Witch and Underland are complemented by the Odyssean quest; Hades is a stop along the way for Odysseus too. But between these two tales there is one vital difference. For the wandering King of Ithaka, Hades is only a stop, albeit a harrowing one, where he sees some old companions and speaks to Tiresias to get more information about his journey home. But for the heroes of *The Silver Chair*, the Underworld marks the decisive point in their adventure, and it is in this Dark Realm that the Greek tropes begin to fade and the Christian ones emerge.

The first clue that Lewis has brought his travelers to the point that they can actually participate in the Narnian Christianity is their response to the fourth sign. Instead of being distracted by the temptations set forth by the Green Witch that caused them to miss the previous signs at Harfang (much in the manner of Odysseus), Jill and Eustace have learned their lesson well enough to realize that Aslan’s command is their chief concern. When the crazed Prince Rilian beseeches them to untie him in the name of Aslan, Puddleglum dispels their confusion with a speech that strikes at the heart of the Christian ideal of blind faith:

"[...] You see, Aslan didn't tell Pole what would happen. He only told her what to do. That fellow will be the death of us once he's up, I shouldn't wonder. But that doesn't let us off following the Sign."

They all stood looking at one another with bright eyes. It was a sickening moment. "All right!" said Jill suddenly. "Let's get it over. Good-bye, everyone . . . !" (SC 167)

The travelers choose "faith and trust" (Glover 165) in Aslan over their own physical well-being; to him they have utmost loyalty. Once they free the prince the spell under which he has been captive for so long breaks and he utters the name of Narnia, which he had first denied when he was still under the "bedevilments" (SC 168) (with an emphasis on "devil," discussed below) of the Green Witch. The temptation and confusion to which the travelers were susceptible throughout their Odyssean journey to Underland are waning; a realized trust in Aslan and a conscious will to obey his command are replacing them. Yet this new faith that is so liberating and joyful is about to come to a test, for within moments of Rilian's release and embrace of his friends in Aslan, the Green Witch is at the door.

The Green Witch, in her womanly form, certainly conjures up the many Greek temptress figures. But she has another identity, the serpent, akin to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, to evil, to Satan. This is not to say that her Temptress and Tempter characteristics are not related; on the contrary, her Greek attributes weave nicely into her Devilish ones. All of the seductive, deceptive, luring qualities of the temptress figures transfer to her serpentine identity, as Sir James Frazer notes of the serpent in both Hebrew scripture and in other cultures' stories of evil: he is "cunning" (Frazer 15) and "more subtle than any beast of the field" (Frazer 19). But the Greek temptress figures to which the Green Witch is related all lack one important characteristic that the serpentine figure of evil possesses in full: none of them are decidedly evil. Once Kirke's charms fail to trap Odysseus, she helps him by warning him of the sirens. Kalypso treats Odysseus as a god while he is on her island and she lets him go at Hermes' message from Athene—she acts more like a spoiled, scolded child than a bitter force of evil. And the sirens, while luring men to their deaths with song, have a power limited to their voices.



In *The Silver Chair*, the Green Witch outdoes all of these femmes fatale with her devilish characteristics. She does attempt to win her victims away from Aslan and into her power by the enchantment of sweet smells and “silvery laughs” (SC 178), but these are sensory temptations that supplement her true modus operandi: beguiling her victims’ reason to undermine their faith. She deceives Rilian by giving him a rather logical explanation for tying him to a chair every night, saying that he goes into a fit of enchantment from which she must save him—the exact opposite of the truth. Yet in his enchanted state, Rilian believes her. She convinces Jill and Rilian and Puddleglum and Eustace that neither the sun nor Aslan really exists by replacing the truth with her own soft-spoken logic:

You have seen lamps and so you imagined a bigger and better lamp and called it the *sun*. You’ve seen cats and now you want a bigger and better cat and it’s called a *lion*. Well, ‘tis a pretty make-believe, though, to say truth, it would suit you all better if you were younger. And look how you can put nothing into your make-believe without copying it from the real world, this world of mine which is the only world. (SC 180)

Lewis himself attributes such methods to the forces of evil in his *Screwtape Letters*, as noted by Kathryn Lindskoog in her discussion of *The Silver Chair*:

The trick of lulling the victim’s reasoning powers to sleep is advocated by Screwtape in his letters to Wormwood. “By the very act of arguing,” says Screwtape, “you awake the patient’s reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?” The business of the tempter is to fix the victim’s attention upon the stream of immediate sense experiences. “Teach him to call it ‘real life’ and don’t let him ask what he means by ‘real.’” The devils fear to let humans think about the realities they can’t touch and see. The goal of Satan is befuddlement. (Lindskoog 60-61)<sup>3</sup>

That the Green Witch is attempting to turn the travelers away from the command of Aslan to bring Rilian to the upper world recalls the snake in the book of Genesis who persuades Eve to disobey God’s command and eat of the Tree of Knowledge. Indeed, the Green Witch is

even more closely connected to this biblical treachery through her kinship to Jadis, the White Witch who tempts Digory to disobey Aslan and eat the fruit in the garden in the creation story of Narnia, *The Magician's Nephew*.

Lewis's heroes do not succumb to the Green Witch's "bedevilment" as Eve and Adam do to Satan's, however. Instead, Jill and Eustace, along with Puddleglum and Rilian, display a loyalty to Aslan that marks their worthiness of a Christian welcome to his Mountain. As the Witch begins to work her magic, the four companions fight hard against her persuasions, naming Narnia and Aslan over and over again to keep from succumbing to her charm. Her enchantment is intense, however; she subdues them all to the point that she seems to have convinced them that there is no such thing as the sun or Narnia. But something inside Jill shakes her from the spell:

For the last few minutes Jill had been feeling that there was something she must remember at all costs. And now she did. But it was dreadfully hard to say it. She felt as if huge weights were laid on her lips. At last, with an effort that seemed to take all the good out of her, she said:

"There's Aslan." (SC 179)

Even though the witch has explained away all of Narnia, Aslan alone remains real to Jill, and by the speaking of his name Jill secures the triumph of faith over devilish enchantment and temptation. For though the Witch attempts to reduce Aslan to a large cat, Puddleglum, alert since Jill mentions Aslan, stomps out the Witch's fire and breaks her spell, sending the smell of "burnt Marsh-wiggle, which is not at all an enchanting smell" (SC 181) into the room. At this point the Queen of Underland's transformation into her true form commences, the serpent form in which she perishes. When Puddleglum takes action she uses a "loud, terrible voice, utterly different from all the sweet tones she had been using" (181), indicating that her temptress form was just a disguise, a way by which to bring about her evil plot to seize the rule of Narnia, a land loyal to Aslan. Puddleglum's speech represents the true victory of Jill and Eustace's quest over the serpentine temptation of the Witch: "I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia" (SC 182). To

choruses of "Good old Puddleglum" (182), Jill and Eustace join in Puddleglum's faith in the goodness of Aslan.

Once the travelers have killed the serpent all evil disappears from *The Silver Chair*. The physical quest of restoring Rilian to his father almost complete, Jill and Eustace are ready for their spiritual renewal, their rebirth or resurrection from a Hades-esque Underland to a Christian Narnia. Just before the children set out to find a way back into the "upper air" of Narnia, "Scrubbs shook hands with Jill [and] he said, 'So long, Jill. Sorry I've been a funk and so ratty. I hope you get safe home,' and Jill said, 'So long, Eustace. And I'm sorry I've been such a pig.' And this was the first time they had ever used Christian names, because one didn't do it at school" (SC 191). This small exchange marks the first time in the narrative that Lewis explicitly labels an action Christian on the part of Jill and Eustace, and from then they are not puzzled by the appellations "Son of Adam" or "Daughter of Eve," but respond to them naturally. Aslan's quest has brought them further into a Christian life.

When Jill emerges from Underland into Narnia, the first figures she sees are those from Greek myth (fauns, dryads, centaurs), yet at this point their presence is not conspicuously Greek to her but fully Narnian. When Jill spotted them after her initial entrance into Narnia, she "could give a name to these, because she had seen pictures of them" (SC 35), most likely because she had seen them in her schoolbooks and knew they were mythological creatures. As she emerges from Underland she sees these "little Fauns, and Dryads" once again, but this time they trigger a far different response. By their presence Jill knows that the travelers "had not only got out into the upper world at last, but had come out in the heart of Narnia" (SC 217). Lewis has made these Greek figures as Narnian as Aslan himself; indeed, the next morning it is the Faun Orruns who first calls Jill "Daughter of Eve" and tells her "perhaps you'd better wake the Son of Adam" (SC 229).

The children's journey to Cair Paravel on the backs of Centaurs encapsulates the role of these Greek tropes in Jill and Eustace's journey into Narnian Christianity. Lewis lets his readers know that this ride is sacred by the words of Orruns: "'[...] two centaurs have very kindly offered to let you ride on their backs down to Cair Paravel.' He added in a lower voice, 'Of course, you realize it is a most special and unheard-of

honor to be allowed to ride a Centaur. I don't know that I ever heard of anyone doing it before'" (SC 230). These "solemn, majestic people, full of ancient wisdom which they learn from the stars" (SC 232), in both Greek mythology (Bulfinch 114) and in *The Chronicles (Last Battle [LB], The Horse and His Boy [HHB])*, have the gift of prophecy. Thus, the "hints of Paganism," the "prophetic dream" of which Lewis writes in *Surprised by Joy* that "are fulfilled" in Christianity may be symbolized in the carrying of the children by Centaur from the end of their Greek quest to Cair Paravel, at which point Aslan invites the children to share in a resurrection atop his mountain. Along the way these Greek-Narnian Centaurs explain "the nine names of Aslan with their meanings" (SC 233).

At Cair Paravel, the children witness the reuniting of Rilian and his father (the physical goal of their quest) and the death of Caspian (the figure resurrected upon Aslan's Mountain). At this point two important things happen: first, the music turns from celebration to "a tune to break your heart," the same description Lucy gives to the music wafting from Aslan's country in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (VDT 243)*, and second, Jill and Eustace "slipped off their Centaurs (who took no notice of them)" (SC 236). These two events demonstrate that Jill and Eustace are finished with their Greek quest and are ready for their Christian experience upon the "Sacred Mountain." Indeed, Lewis makes this even more clear when Aslan appears to the children just after they have dismounted the Greek figures:

"I have come," said a deep voice behind them. They turned and saw the Lion himself, so bright and real and strong that everything else began at once to look pale and shadowy compared with him. And in less time than it takes to breathe Jill forgot about the dead King of Narnia and remembered only how she had made Eustace fall over the cliff, and how she had helped to muff nearly all the signs, and about all the snappings and quarrellings. And she wanted to say "I'm sorry" but she could not speak. Then the Lion drew them toward him with his eyes, and bent down and touched their pale faces with his tongue, and said:

"Think of that no more. I will not always be scolding. You have done the work for which I sent you into Narnia." (SC 236)

Jill's repentance makes evident the change in her disposition. At the start of her journey Jill avoids mention of her mistakes because of embarrassment; at the Parliament of Owls she "kept quiet" at the mention of the first sign which the children miss because of her "showing off" (SC 24) on the cliff, "hop[ing] Scrubb would be sporting enough not to tell all the owls why this hadn't happened" (SC 56). At Harfang, Jill attempts to defend the three travelers from their missing of the words "UNDER ME": "could it have come there since last night? Could he—Aslan—have put it there in the night?" (SC 119), though she admits, "I've spoiled everything ever since you brought me here" (SC 120). At the sight of Aslan and upon completion of their quest, however, she feels truly penitent; she has journeyed from the sacred to the profane.

Aslan's forgiveness of the two children marks his acceptance of Jill and Eustace into his world, for once he touches their foreheads with his tongue,

[...] he opened his mouth and blew. But this time they had no sense of flying through the air: instead, it seemed that they remained still, and the wild breath of Aslan blew away the ship and the dead King and the castle and the snow and the winter sky. For all these things floated off into the air like wreathes of smoke, and suddenly [...] they were once more on the Mountain of Aslan. (SC 236-237)

The figures in Narnia "float [...] off into the air like wreathes of smoke," for they are simply "the various things that occur on the Path" that no longer matter once the hero is ready to go beyond them. Significantly, Aslan does not blow the children back *to* the mountain *from* their quest in the way that he sends them to Narnia; rather, he blows the quest *away from them*, and they find themselves already on his Mountain. They do not need to travel anymore, for through their task they have entered the realm of Aslan, the realm of Christianity.

At this point the Mountain takes on its Christian identity for the travelers through Aslan's resurrection of King Caspian X. Indeed, not only do the two children witness the event, but they actually participate in its sanctity. For when Aslan leads them over to the stream, the same stream with which Jill quenches her thirst with just one drink before her quest (foreshadowing her ultimate fulfillment in faith in Aslan) they see "on the golden gravel of the bed of the stream [...] King Caspian, dead,

with the water flowing over him like liquid glass. [...] And all three stood and wept" (SC 237). This is the first time in the entire volume that Eustace and Jill do not "cry" or "blub," but actually weep. In addition, they weep alongside Aslan with his

[...] great Lion-tears, each tear more precious than the Earth would be if it was a single solid diamond. And Jill noticed that Eustace looked neither like a child crying, nor like a boy crying and wanting to hide it, but like a grown-up crying. At least, that's the closest she could get to it; but really, as she said, people don't seem to have any particular ages on that mountain. (SC 237-38)

Aslan includes these children in a very sacred emotion; their weeping is not embarrassing or generated by self-pity, but a pure kind of weeping that is steeped in love. This act is not of the profane immaturity with which the two began their quest, but of the sacred spirituality for which the quest has prepared them.

The resurrection of Caspian serves to consecrate the inclusion of the children in Christianity. Aslan does not perform this act by himself, for while it is by the shedding of his blood that Caspian is reborn, Aslan asks Eustace to help him spill it:

"Son of Adam," said Aslan, "go into that thicket and pluck the thorn that you will find there, and bring it to me."

Eustace obeyed. The thorn was a foot long and sharp as a rapier.

"Drive it into my paw, Son of Adam," said Aslan, holding up his right fore-paw and spreading out the great pad towards Eustace.

"Must I?" said Eustace.

"Yes," said Aslan.

Then Eustace set his teeth and drove the thorn into the Lion's pad. And there came out a great drop of blood, redder than all redness that you have ever seen or imagined. And it splashed into the stream over the dead body of the King. [...] And the dead King began to be changed. (SC 238)

Aslan, like Christ, sheds his blood to renew one whom he loves, and he does not just allow the children to watch the sacred mystery, but he invites them to be a part of it. They are included in the Christian-Narnian faith; guided by tropes from Greek myth they have journeyed to

Eliade's "Sacred Mountain" where "yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective" (Eliade 18).

Jill and Eustace's quest has led them to the Christian "awakening" of which Lewis writes in *Surprised by Joy* that follows a pagan "prophetic dream." The quest portion of their journey towards faith is Aslan's way of drawing Jill and Eustace closer to the selfless ideals of Christianity. The Greek-ness of their quest does not deter them from their Path but is the manner in which they achieve their goal. Indeed, this pagan means to achieve a Christian end is observed by Aslan himself in *The Last Battle*. The Calormene Emeth, a worshipper of the god Tash (whose appearance and the attitude of his followers set him up as the pagan god in Narnia), describes his experience with Aslan:

[...] the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me.

(LB 188)

Aslan recognizes this selfless blind faith as a true understanding of Christianity, even if it is to pagan deities. He transforms service to them into service to him.

The last sign that Aslan commands Jill and Eustace to follow on this quest focuses on blind faith; they must respond when someone asks them to do something in his name. Significantly, the preceding sign is that they follow the directions written on a stone in the giant city, directions that are explained away by "the enchanted prince [...] that the writing is only a fragment of a much longer statement about some ancient giant king" (Gibson 186). Yet these words, though written long ago for another purpose, are exactly what Aslan intends for them to follow—as Gibson writes, "Aslan's plans may include a new meaning for old words" (186). These ancient figures and tropes can guide Jill and Eustace towards their Christian end because these figures express "certain basic elements in a man's spiritual experience [...] they are more like [...] the words of a language which speaks the else unspeakable." Roger Lancelyn Green writes in his work *C. S. Lewis*, "what matters is the

use made of these hints, ideas and inspirations [...] the old universal pieces, now arranged in a new pattern" (Green 34). This new pattern set forth in *The Silver Chair* ultimately leads to Christianity. By the excitement and magic of its tale, it does, indeed, steal past those watchful dragons.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Worth noting are Nancy-Lou Patterson's essay "'Halfe Like a Serpent': The Green Witch in *The Silver Chair*" and Paul F. Ford's entries such as "Mythology," "Centaur," "Bacchus," "Fenris Ulf," etc. in his encyclopedic *Companion to Narnia*. Many other works also mention non-Christian influences, but without in-depth analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Discussions of the Christianity present in Lewis's *Chronicles* abound. See particularly the many esteemed works of Walter Hooper concerning C. S. Lewis, the works of Kathryn Lindskoog concerning *The Chronicles* and Aslan, and Lewis's own words compiled by Dorsett and Mead in *C. S. Lewis: Letters to Children*. Also of value is Paul F. Ford's *Companion to Narnia*, because of its encyclopedia-like entries such as "Credal Elements" and its inclusion of wide-ranging sources and suggestions for further reading.

<sup>3</sup> See John D. Cox's essay "Epistemological Release in *The Silver Chair*" in Peter J. Schakel's *The Longing for a Form* for a discussion of other sources for the Green Witch, including Spenser's Prosperpina, as well as an analysis of the function of true knowledge in *The Silver Chair*.

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