



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 23
Number 2

Article 5

4-15-2001

"Where Sky and Water Meet": Christian Iconography in C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

Salwa Khoddam
Oklahoma City University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Khoddam, Salwa (2001) "Where Sky and Water Meet": Christian Iconography in C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 23: No. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol23/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



"Where Sky and Water Meet": Christian Iconography in C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

Abstract

Examines a set of images from Christian iconography that underlie the structure of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*: light, the sun, the ship, the garden, particular characters, and the pageant which incorporates all of them. The author also describes two of what she calls "false icons": the sea and natural appetites.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Symbolism; Lewis, C.S. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

“Where Sky and Water Meet”: Christian Iconography in C. S. Lewis’s *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

Salwa Khoddam

I. Introduction

THE two structural principles at the basis of *The Chronicles of Narnia* are, to use Claude Saussure’s terms, the diachronic and synchronic. These create a two-in-one narrative: 1) a major linear frame narrative of rescue, adventure, quest, or fulfillment of a prophecy enacted by Narnian Kings and Queens, and 2) a non-linear series of tableaux beyond space and time, composed of images that I will later define as iconic. This “God-intoxicated imagery” intersects with the linear narrative to create a union between earth and heaven or, in Narnian terms, Narnia and Aslan’s Country (Smith 163). These tableaux gloss the main line of action to “narrate” for the readers the story of the Christian soul’s regeneration from the powers of evil. As the Narnian Kings and Queens accompanied by talking beasts (friendly fauns, birds, beavers, lions, dragons, wolves, and satyrs) move across the Narnian landscape, Aslan appears in haunting and evocative tableaux out of time and space to protect his followers, draw them to him, or fulfill primeval prophecies, whatever the plot requires.

II. Background on Christian Iconography

The sense in which I use the term “icon” in this paper approaches St. John of Damascus’s fourth type of image: the objects and creatures that suggest the Divine by analogy (Barasch 232). Under such a general classification all the universe to the Christian imagination is imbued with holiness because it participates in the Incarnation. Thus objects, places, humans, and animals acquire iconic roles. Aslan, and liberated souls through Aslan, take on that role in Narnia. As John Doeblen points out, icons are at the point where all words meet in a single moment of action (16). This single moment is, as I indicated earlier, the intersection of the synchronic and diachronic elements of the story.

In his study of icons, Leonard Stanton defines the icon as God’s “penetrating energies” into created time and space (16). Stanton goes on to state that the icon is

presented in “a complex spatial, perspectival, epistemological relationship to what lies beyond its palpable, sensible portion” (20). Objects thus are distorted, space and perspective inverted in order to pull the readers (or, in the case of visual arts, the viewers) into the center. However, in literary texts, “icon” takes on a literary shape, a fictional image created by words that engage the writer’s and reader’s imagination. The meaning of the icon exists at the half-way point in the dialogic imagination of icon and icon viewer (or in literary texts icon reader), and always within a liturgical context, such as the pilgrimage in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* or the fulfilling of the prophecy at Cair Paravel in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. These iconic images, natural or man-made, always point to the mystery of the Incarnation. At the heart of the Narnia stories, the “inverse perspective” that Stanton mentions breaks the laws of time, space, and reason to produce seeming paradoxes and riddles that engage the readers. For example, the stories are set in an ambiguous Narnian time, with talking animals and British children who travel to Narnia through a painting, a wardrobe door, or some such absurd way to become Kings and Queens of Narnia. Most important, the hero of these stories is a Golden Lion who inspires *mysterium tremendum*, forever treading in a halo of light in the darkest of nights—the greatest Talking Beast of all. And he always has a good story to tell.

Lewis himself had a few things to say about iconography. He defines iconography as traditional images filled with ancient wisdom and used in “divine compositions” (*Spenser’s Images of Life* 11). He states that iconography is at the basis of Neo-Platonic art since the artist models his work after an image in his mind, created from prolonged reflection on sacred iconography (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* 319). He also refers to iconography as scenes and characters in a story that provide its readers with explanations of their experience (*An Experiment in Criticism* 3). It is thus an accompaniment of life, rather than a criticism of it (*Spenser’s* 11).

III. Christian Iconography in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

Since this paper is my first foray into uncharted grounds, I have confined my study of Lewis’s Christian iconography to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which offers a rich representation of Lewis’s iconic universe. I will show how the iconic imagery accompanies the daily activities of the characters on their mission to find and rescue the seven missing lords in order to illuminate and transform the

characters' souls. Basing my classification of iconic imagery on Lewis's own in *Spenser's Images of Life*, I have divided the imagery into 1) True Icons: images of apocalyptic forms of life, love, and natural appetites; and 2) False Icons: icons of demonic forms of life, love, and natural appetites.¹

The latter group, the false icons, are foils to the true icons. They are necessary for setting up the background of the tableaux which will be completed by the true icons. For good to manifest its power, evil must prevail for a while. Aslan is not visible in all tableaux, only when he is about to bring regeneration into the Narnian universe. Each group—the true icons and the foils—include natural objects, human or Narnian characters, and man-made objects. At the end of the story, the true icons are shown on a synchronic tableaux which I will term “pageant.” In *Spenser's Images*, Lewis defines pageants as “processions of symbolical figures in symbolical costume, often in symbolical surroundings” (3). I have reduced these groups from Lewis's original seven in *Spenser's Images* to two because the conflicts in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as in all the Chronicles of Narnia, are much simpler than those in Spenser's epic. Often the two groups of imagery are intertwined in one scene which requires the analysis of both simultaneously.

A. The True Icons: Images of Apocalyptic Forms of Life, Love, and Natural Appetites

1. Light

Like the foils for the true icons, light and darkness are also necessary to construct the tableaux. We will find that Lewis uses light in two ways: 1) as a traditional symbol of the spirit always present in his iconic presentations of Aslan and his good forces; and 2) as a tool for drama and suspense. Like a spotlight on the stage, the moon or the sun follow the moving good and evil forces, isolating them for the reader to savor and reflect upon, and in the case of the evil forces, for Aslan to see and destroy.

The contest of light (as good) and dark (as evil) endows the landscape of Narnia with Christian meaning and mystery; Lewis follows a long tradition that views light as a symbol of the spirit (Cirlot 187-88) and, in the case of Christianity, an image of Christ or God. His non-fictional writings reflect the significance that he attaches to this symbol which becomes a part of his Christian iconography. In *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, he states that light is a natural symbol of God, for “God is, or is like, light [. . .] for every devotional, philosophical, and theological purpose imaginable within a Christian, or indeed, a monotheistic frame of reference” (71). In *Miracles*, he describes God as light that illuminates nature

from beyond (124). In *The Four Loves*, he compares light to the ultimate reality that remains a mystery while giving meaning to everything else: “We cannot see light, though by light we can see things” (175). As for Christ, Lewis describes Him as “always [. . .] streaming forth from the Father, like light from a lamp or heat from a fire, or thoughts from a mind” (*Mere Christianity* 151). In *The Great Divorce*, the regenerate spirits who choose to stay in Heaven are light-bearers (Lewis refers to them as “bright spirits” [119]). And in the landscape of East of Narnia Aslan clearly is the “light-bearer.”

Aslan makes his first appearance in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* to the suffering Eustace, who has been transformed into a dragon, an image of his greed. Eustace describes the scene in the following haunting passage:

I looked up and saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly towards me. And one queer thing was that there was no moon last night, but there was a moonlight where the lion was. So it came nearer and nearer. I was terribly afraid of it. You may think that, being a dragon, I could have knocked any lion out easily enough. But it wasn’t that kind of fear. I wasn’t afraid of it eating me, I was just afraid of *it*—if you can understand. (113)

Aslan’s purpose is to lead Eustace to a garden, on top of a green mountain, in order to transform him back to a human. Inspired by the Lion, whom he thought was just an ordinary lion—although suspiciously surrounded with light and possessing awe-inspiring majesty and the gift of speech—Eustace follows him obediently. He had never seen Aslan before. Aslan’s iconic role is obvious in Eustace’s acceptance and recognition of him as his savior. This openness to Aslan is Eustace’s first step towards regeneration as will be discussed later.

If in Lewis’s landscape light is associated with Aslan as a Christ figure, a transformative force, then the darkness which engulfs the ship later in the plot signifies Satan’s dominance. This contest of light and dark ending in the defeat of the latter is described dramatically in the Dark Island in a stark monochromatic scene. Aslan appears to rid the ship of darkness as soon as Lucy prays for his aid. Appearing as a speck of light at first, then a beam of light, then a cross, an aeroplane, and an albatross, Aslan floods the ship—but not the surrounding water—with light. As an albatross (a Coleridgean symbol of a Christian soul), Aslan guides Drinian, who “steered after it not doubting that it offered good guidance” (201). But the iconic image speaks literally and imaginatively only to Lucy, for she is the only one to hear Aslan’s words of comfort: ““Courage, dear heart”” (201).

Analogously, God's grace in our world is not offered equally but by degrees. This transformation of Aslan from abstract to concrete, from inanimate to animate in Lucy's imagination (and the witnessing reader's) suggests the Incarnation. The focus of this image is on Aslan as a transforming and transformative force.

There is one scene in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* which is a clear analogue to Christ's Transfiguration. Again, light is the operating force in this iconic scene. In the penultimate chapter, after the children taste the sweet water, light increases: "They could see more light than they had ever seen before. And the deck and the sail and their own faces and bodies became brighter and brighter and every rope shone" (249-250). Aslan's light shines more intensely on the children as they approach the destination of their pilgrimage. This scene parallels St. Paul's description of the transformation of Jesus's followers when the light of the Gospel should shine on their faces (2 Cor. 4, 6). As the British children approach Aslan, his glory shines on them because they are entering into his country.

2. Sun

Lewis also draws on ancient classical and Christian iconography to establish the iconic role of the Sun—a companion of Aslan. In ancient cultures, the sun represented generally the source of life and light (Cirlot 319). Alistair Fowler writes that "in Pythagorean and Orphic thought Sol was associated with the monad because both were key images of deity" (77). According to Plato, the sun is the symbol of the ultimate good to which all creatures must turn (*Republic* 5.1. 507-08). Christian typology links solar imagery in the New Testament to Christ: "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (Rev. 1.16), and "I saw an angel standing in the sun" (Rev. 19.17). These passages identify Christ as "the Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4.1-2). One of the famous representations of this motif in the visual arts is Albrecht Dürer's engraving entitled "Sol iustitiae" which is inspired by the above passage from Malachi. The engraving links the triad: Christ, sun, and lion (Panofsky 262). A medieval tradition also underlies Lewis's linking of Aslan with the sun: the lion was a sun deity, his mane shone like the sun, and the astrological sign of the sun was Leo (Smith 68). Edmund Spenser bases his character Una on Revelation 14.1: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun." He writes in Book 1 of *The Fairie Queene*:

Her angels face
As the great eye of heaven shyned bright

And made a sunshine in the shadie place;
Did never mortall eye beheld such heavenly grace. (1.1.3.6-9)

In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis defines a “blessed spirit” as “a body ever more completely uncovered to the meridian blaze of the spiritual sun” (151). He also declares, “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see every thing else” (*The Weight of Glory* 92). Based on this early tradition, Aslan is a sun god shedding light on the benighted world of Narnia.

3. Ship

Christian tradition translates the ship into a symbol of the church which can be threatened by sin. According to Berkeley, the ship symbolism occurs in patristic literature from about AD 200 (135). Also, in patristic thought the church as a ship sailed East to paradise (91), much as the “Dawn Treader” does. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* the characters sail on their mission in various means of navigation that include the ship, the boat, and Reepicheep’s coracle. The scenes involving these diverse means of sailing can be interpreted by way of the Christian tradition as other diverse means of attaining grace: the church, the intimate fellowship of the Christian community, and individual actions, respectively. Although the church is essential to draw men to Christ, grace can be offered through extraordinary means which affirm God’s freedom. For God can reveal himself to men who are “individually good.”² Such is the case of Reepicheep, who will be discussed later. The Narnian ship, the boat, and the coracle become iconic images as they point to the Christian salvation, thus enriching the plot element of the rescue mission.

4. Garden³

The garden in Narnia with its green mountains, trees, fruits, and a well also functions as a Christian icon in the region. A. Bartlett Giamatti’s well-known study of these gardens is of help in this interpretation. He states that these traditional gardens—with their green vistas, water, shade, fragrance, gentle winds, and in some accounts their location on a mountain top where trees touch the sky—appeared later in apocalyptic and rabbinical commentaries and “anticipate gardens and paradises of medieval literature which culminated in the earthly paradise of the *Divine Comedy*” (50). Lewis dealt with these literary images in his work *The Allegory of Love* where he describes Claudian’s garden as “the land of longing, the Earthly Paradise, the garden east of the sun and west of the moon” (75-76). He also discusses

in Platonic-Christian terms the Good Shepherd's pasture of the *Roman de la Rose* as the true garden, an obvious celestial paradise. Giamatti describes the latter "as a green meadow, with the Lamb leading the flock amid the joys of eternal springtime and daylight in a glistening, flowery landscape" (64). Some of these icons, as I will show later, are used by Lewis to describe Aslan's Country at the end of the voyage, and some appear earlier in the story in Eustace's experience with Aslan, which has already been discussed. As Eustace narrates: "So at last we [Aslan and Eustace] came to the top of a mountain I'd never seen before and on the top of this mountain there was a garden—trees and fruit and everything. In the middle of it there was a well" (*Voyage* 114). This place is of great significance to Eustace because he is immersed in that well by Aslan to regain his human shape. With careful ministrations, the process of Eustace's regeneration, described through baptismal imagery, is completed: the undressing, the peeling off of Eustace's dragon skin, the throwing of Eustace into the water, and Aslan's dressing him in new clothes. As a result, in regaining his humanity through interaction with Aslan, Eustace loses his sloth and his hostility to others—even to Reepicheep. He is accepted into the community of the other travelers as a committed member. The iconic image of Aslan as a persistent Christ figure who enters a human life and transforms a willing soul into proper shape is obvious here. So is the image of the garden as the Garden of Eden. According to Lewis, Christ also works on many who do not know him. In one of his letters, Lewis writes, "I think that every prayer which is sincerely made even to a false god [. . .] is accepted by the true God and that Christ saves many who do not think they know Him" (*The Letters of C. S. Lewis* 247). Eustace will forever remember the garden as a place of purification and regeneration through Aslan's love. However, he does not remember the specific location of this garden nor the means of his getting there. It does not conform to laws of space and time; its role is to function as an iconic image that points to Aslan's Country (the Christian Paradise in our world), a state of being in Aslan. This icon does not appear again until the final tableau in the story, where it is linked to other icons in sublime pageant.

5. Characters

Icons can also be human or animal figures similar to the Arthurian figure in *Spenser's Images of Life*. True icons in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* are Christ-like, focused on their own salvation and that of others.

a. Reepicheep

He is a mouse transformed into a member of King Caspian’s retinue and considered “a good knight,” one of the bravest and hardiest in battle as shown when he challenged the cowardly Eustace to a mortal combat and when he attempted to save the “Dawn Treader” from the sea serpent. This latter event places him in line with Christian heroes who triumphed over Satan (false icon): St. George and the Archangel Michael. But he is also at one with Aslan. Reepicheep’s knowledge of Aslan springs from his “heart’s desire,” aroused by a Dryad’s lullaby that he heard in his cradle:

Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There in the Utter East. (*Voyage* 22)

Always focused on the right direction, i.e. the East, Reepicheep spends his time at the prow of the ship, gazing in that direction. He embodies Lewis’s concept of Joy as “a desire turned not to itself but to its object” (*Surprised* 220). By becoming one with Aslan, Reepicheep has already secured his own salvation independently. Such people have already attained the exemplary state of sainthood. One can read an analogy between the church and the different means of navigation. Like the British children, Reepicheep is a traveler on the ship (the church) and later one of the small select group that embarks on a boat (the Christian community) after the ship is grounded. But unlike the children, he is in no need of regeneration. Nor, as narrated in the final chapters, does he have to, like the children, wade through baptismal waters or partake of the fish (icon of the Eucharist) in order to get a glimpse of Aslan’s Country; Reepicheep does not eat the fish because it carries no iconic meaning for him: Aslan did not die for him and all Narnia as he did for Edmund primarily and for all the children and their world. Reepicheep sails up and over the wave directly into Aslan’s Country, his everlasting home, in his little coracle, an icon of individual salvation. He is all goodness, as “a mirror is filled with light” (*Mere Christianity* 130), but unconscious of this goodness because people like him are “too busy looking at the source from which it comes” (131).

b. Ramandu

He is also an apocalyptic image of life. In the Island of Ramandu, when Caspian, the three children, and Reepicheep take their seats at the “perilous table” laden with unconsumed food and a stone knife, an old man and a young girl (a Jungian/

Druidic/Biblical prophet and virgin) appear from a cave in the mountains. They sing with arms outstretched to the East, ushering in the sun.

The iconic images in this scene are brought to function together as they are enhanced by the beam of light that comes from the East. Table, food, and stone knife point to two parallel stories: Aslan's sacrifice and Christ's crucifixion. (We later learn that the table is the same table on which Aslan was slain by the White Witch earlier in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the stone knife, the same murderous weapon.) The crimson table with food serves as an iconic image of Aslan's sacrifice for Edmund and Christ's passion and resurrection for humanity, the color red a reminder of the blood shed by both. The turning of Ramandu and his daughter to the east to pray comes from the long classical and Judeo-Christian tradition which associates the East with sacredness. The early Roman Christian churches oriented their altars to the east because, according to the tradition of the church fathers, the holy city is in the East (Berkeley 94). Since the sun is also an iconic image of Christ, "early Christians during private and liturgical prayer seem to have faced, Tertullian indicates in his *Apology*, the rising sun" (103). What further enriches this tableau is that the gold and silver cups recall the heavenly banquet of Revelation. The central character, Ramandu, actually a "retired" star, is allegedly getting younger due to consuming a fire-berry fetched daily by a bird from the valleys of the sun (analogous to the live coals in Isaiah 6.6-7). He thus suggests the transformative theme in the story: regeneration through basic openness and obedience to Aslan. His prophecy repeats the theme and, intersecting with the plot events, adds a sacred meaning to the rescue mission.

6. Icons that Come to Life

The last sub-group of true icons in this first category in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is clearly related to the Incarnation. They are the painted icons which literally come alive. The first is the painting in Aunt Alberta's back bedroom of a Narnian ship which, to Lucy, looks as if it were really moving. Moments later, the ship actually starts to move, and the children are swept into the waters and onto the "Dawn Treader." The transformation of the painting from inanimate to animate makes possible the plot, of course, and the pilgrimage that leads to the children's regeneration. The theme of dynamic transformation and quickening of souls and natural objects is set in this very first scene of the story. The second event involves Lucy only. While she is reading from the Magician's Book, she is distracted by a spell that would beautify her. But when she intends to utter the spell,

there in the middle of the writing, where she felt quite sure that there had been no picture before, she found the great face of a Lion, of the Lion, Aslan himself, staring into hers. It was painted such a bright gold that it seemed to be coming toward her out of the page [. . .] He was growling and you could see his teeth” (165).

Aslan comes alive in this graphic image of a medieval illumination to warn Lucy of her vanity, and she turns the page in a hurry. What is also significant about this scene is its use of the traditional convention, built upon the scriptures, of associating the sacred with gold. In Revelation 21.18, for example, the New Jerusalem is described as “pure gold.” In this tableau Lewis uses Aslan as a Christological medieval icon. In discussing scriptural imagery of Heaven, Lewis writes that gold is used “to suggest the timelessness of heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it” (*Mere Christianity* 121).

Aslan becomes physically visible to Lucy again, ostensibly because she has uttered the spell to make things visible: “What stood in the doorway was Aslan himself, the Lion, the highest of all High Kings. And he was solid and real and warm, and he let her kiss him and bury herself in his shining mane” (*Voyage* 169). Again, this tableau associates Aslan with light (his “shining mane”). He is also a real live lion, solid and warm. The simple yet powerful tableau suggests Lewis’s belief that Christ, like Aslan, is real in his humanity and close to our desires and thoughts. Through right conduct we can make visible the Christ in us as Lucy shows. Also, like Christ, Aslan is on an active crusade to redeem those who are open to him. The dark room of the magician and of Lucy’s heart are illuminated by the icon of Aslan, and Lucy is purged of the sins of vanity and the coveting of forbidden knowledge. This static tableau that materializes in a dark, secret room far away from the din and bustle of action outside the magician’s castle suggests the Christian mystery at the center of the story. Aslan, like Christ in the human world, has been/is present the whole time without being visible. The frame narrative recedes and is forgotten as the mystery of Aslan becomes known to Lucy (and the readers) in this poignant tableau.

The last example from this group of icons that actually come to life involves also Aslan. After Caspian retires to his cabin in a temper because he is not allowed to go along with Reepicheep and the British children further eastwards to the World’s End, he witnesses a miracle. As he later reports to the sailors, “Aslan has spoken to me. No—I don’t mean he was actually here. He wouldn’t fit into the cabin, for one thing. But that gold lion’s head on the wall came to life and spoke to me. It was terrible—his eyes” (262). Aslan appears to purge Caspian of his sin of

pride. After this experience, Caspian accepts that his obligations as a King and a future husband to Ramandu's daughter must take priority over his private desires, so he sails home.

7. The Pageant (Last Scene)

The last tableau of apocalyptic forms is like a pageant, incorporating all the motifs which have appeared in previous tableaux. It, however, is the most sublime. All laws of space and time are broken:

They [the three children and Reepicheep] saw a wonder ahead. It was as if a wall stood up between them and the sky, a greenish-gray, trembling, shimmering wall. Then up came the sun, and at its first rising they saw it through the wall and it turned into wonderful rainbow colors. Then they knew that the wall was really a long, tall wave—a wave endlessly fixed in one place as you may often see at the edge of a waterfall. (263-64)

The shimmering high wave that seems to be a boundary between the Narnian world and Aslan's is actually surmountable. Reepicheep, in his little coracle, will later glide up one side of it and down the other into Aslan's Country. Even the huge sun is not an obstacle to their vision. Beyond it the four travelers can see the high green mountains of Aslan's Country beyond the borders of the world. As the sun rises, the sight of the mountains disappears, again suggesting that light (Christ) is the source of all meaning in the universe. The travelers have reached a point where laws of time and space do not exist. This dynamic scene integrates all natural icons of the Narnian landscape (light, green mountains, trees, and water) with Aslan to suggest that Narnia and Aslan's Country are actually linked, and Aslan is the Bridge Builder. The tableau invites the readers to conceive of Earth and Heaven as also more closely linked than they appear to be, that our loci of our experience are in a real sense spiritually meaningful. Lewis himself states in *Miracles* that the physical and spiritual are actually one: "That archaic sort of thinking will become simply the correct sort when Nature and Spirit are fully harmonized—when Spirit rides Nature so perfectly that the two together make rather a *Centaur* than a mounted knight" (164).

A short time later, the children wade into the calm water (a final stage of regeneration) to get to a flat open-spaced green meadow where, sure enough, sky and water meet:

But as they went on they got the strangest impression that here at last the sky did really come down and join the earth—a blue wall, very bright, but real and solid: more like glass than anything else. And soon they were quite sure of it. It was very near now.

But between them and the foot of the sky there was something so white on the green grass that even with their eagles’ eyes they could hardly look at it. They came on and saw that it was a Lamb. (267-68)

Later, as they eat the fish offered by the Lamb, the Lamb transforms into Aslan. Two iconic images of Christ are unified here: “Then all in one moment there was a rending of the blue wall (like a curtain being torn) and a terrible white light from beyond the sky” (270).

The iconography in these last two scenes, the richest yet in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, pulls together all the preceding icons in a glorious finale. The lamb and the white light (magnified so that it is all that the children see for one moment) are icons of Christ and his resurrection. The green meadow is one of the motifs of the garden as an icon of Paradise. The image of glass is right out of the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal” and “the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass” (Rev. 4.6 and 21.18, respectively). In an interesting remark, Aldous Huxley points out that glass was valued in the Middle Ages specifically for its vision-inducing features. This belief led to the installation of stained-glass windows in cathedrals (108-09). Also, “the Welsh had a blessed land called Yrisvitrin, the Isle of Glass” (101). All the natural icons in the East of Narnia are integrated in this collage with Aslan.

B. The False Icons: Images of Demonic Forms of Life, Love, and Natural Appetites

Without evil good cannot assert itself. God allows evil so that through spiritual struggles one can learn to love freely. Aslan intervenes in such trying situations to hasten this regeneration. Thus, other elements in this drama of transformation are revealed to be foils or false images of Christian iconography.

1. Sea

The name “Dawn Treader” opens up a whole field of Judeo-Christian associations regarding the waters of the sea as the home of the Leviathan or Sea-Serpent (Berkeley 114-30). The word “Treader” suggests the act of “treading on” in the sense of “stepping over” as a means of showing power and control (as in God’s curse that the offspring of Eve shall “bruise” the serpent’s head [Gen. 3.15]); and the name “Dawn Treader” suggests that the ship will traverse and control the dark,

chaotic, and (presumably) demonic waters of the sea as the ship travels to the dawn, an action that is reminiscent of the Hebrews' crossing of the Red Sea and the River Jordan in the Old Testament and Christ's walking on the sea and calming the sea storms in the New Testament. This interpretation is in line with Lewis's typological thinking. Edmund, one of the privileged travelers allowed into Aslan's Country, is aware of the demonic aspect of the sea. He tells Lucy, "In the Sea, the deeper you go, the darker and colder it gets, and it is down there, in the dark and cold, that dangerous things live—the squid and the Sea-Serpent and the Kraken" (241). Indeed, the travelers have already been confronted by a Sea-Serpent between Burnt Island and Deathwater Island, and they have overcome it with Reepicheep's help. However, as the travelers continue to approach Aslan's Country, the sea is tamed: it becomes "waveless," its waters "sweet" (247) as "drinkable light" (248). Aslan, like Christ, is victorious over demonic and chaotic forces.

2. Natural Appetite

There are many forms of demonic distortion of natural appetite: greed, materialism, sloth, anger, pride. Eustace's transformation into a dragon was caused by his worship of materialism and technology. Also his snobbishness and his greed blind him to the beauty around him and to the purpose of the voyage. His derogatory remarks are ubiquitous in the early part of the journey: the boat is "ghastly" and "blasted," his food is "frightful," his cabin is a "dungeon," and the whole voyage is "idiotic." He is so obnoxious that none of the slave buyers would have him for free. He is also slothful and slips away to "find a cool, airy place up in the mountains" and "have a good long sleep" (81). The Lion must work aggressively to crack open this veneer of skepticism and sloth in order to transform him into a regenerate being. We have seen how Aslan achieves this goal. In another tableau, which depicts Edmund and Caspian fighting in Deathwater Island over ownership of a pool that transforms anything into gold, Aslan appears:

Across the gray hillside above them—gray, for the heather was not yet in bloom—without noise, and without looking at them [Edmund and Caspian], and shining as if he were in bright sunlight though the sun had in fact gone in, passed with slow pace the hugest lion that human eyes have ever seen. (136-37)

Stunned by Aslan's appearance, Edmund and Caspian forget the cause of their quarrel and scramble to the ship, purified of their greed. Captain Drinian would say later, "Their Majesties all seemed a bit bewitched when they came aboard"

(138). Aslan, shining brightly in the darkness, directs them back to the right destination—the East—and Deathwater Island becomes a landscape of regeneration, not death, as Aslan’s icon illuminates it and the characters. The image of the three sleeping knights in Ramandu’s Island also suggests sloth, waste, or death. They come under an enchanted spell because of sloth and anger which causes divisiveness regarding whether or not to proceed forward to the East. In anger one of the lords caught up the Knife of Stone which lay on the table (which was not right for him to do, for it was the same knife that the White Witch had used to sacrifice Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*); so they all fell sleep, never to wake up until Ramandu’s oracle is fulfilled.

IV. Conclusion

This analysis of Lewis’s Christian iconography in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* has revealed four interesting points. First, the Narnia stories exert enormous pressure on their readers to think analogously, to read them with Christian iconographic conventions in mind. In Lewis’s fiction, objects, places, and characters are translated by his Christian imagination into iconic images that accompany the frame narrative to create for his characters and readers not just an adventure story, but “a story for the refreshment of the spirit” (*Voyage* 167). Once the process of refreshment is experienced, it must be re-experienced again. In this manner, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and stories of its type are like “forgotten” narratives that have to be reread, reheard, retold. However, the brilliant icons stay in the mind as remembrances from a land visited long ago, which has no boundaries nor directions. Like Lucy, who has all but forgotten the story from the Magician’s Book and remembers it only as a “good” story (in fact “the loveliest she has ever read” with “pictures that were read” about “a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill” [*Voyage* 167-68]), the readers carry in their memories from this story pictures that are “real,” icons of the Christian faith. For what happens in the story’s tableaux is of more significance than what happens linearly. Aslan transforms the Narnian landscape with extraordinary visual effects that suspend it out of time and place and link it to him, and, by analogy, link humanity with divinity, matter and spirit in our world. He sanctifies each scene he appears in. These scenes of the Great Lion are “real” in a sense that renders the frame narrative primarily a fictional vehicle.

This point leads to the second point of the conclusion which is that, because *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is primarily a story of regeneration, the true icons are more predominant than the false ones. As the pilgrimage continues, evil, in the

form of the Sea-Serpent and the misdirected appetites of Eustace, Edmund, Lucy, and Caspian is transformed into good increasingly until the sublime pageant of salvation is reached at the end.

Third, in his Narnia stories, Lewis uses iconography as a means for his Christian apologetics. He creates his own iconography based upon traditional pagan and Judeo-Christian iconography, culled from his vast reading of ancient, medieval, and renaissance texts. As I have explained, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is structured upon scenes and characters that are dramatically opposed as true/false, good/evil. It also includes a pageant-like scene. Lewis's iconic imagery in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* emphasizes the transformative power of Christianity, a key theme in his works, and something he experienced in his own conversion to Christianity. This transformation can occur only in answer to human longing. Indeed, the iconic imagery surrounding the figure and landscape of Aslan convey in no other way his significant Christ-like role in relationship to others as creator, teacher, and judge. Aslan continually makes it known that he is behind every effort of those who believe in him and want to know him. This relationship is at the center of Lewis's theology: human desire is entwined with grace. Lewis's major themes regarding the false vs. the true, and the good vs. evil in human relationships radiate in his narratives from this iconic imagery.

Fourth, focusing on these icons in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is consistent with Lewis's own aesthetics. Lewis firmly believed that the picture is a symbol truer than any philosophic theorem. His literary technique is based on describing a scene or a picture. He "realized that the quality of a vision could be hampered by too much action" (Daniel 23). In fact, when asked to explain how he came to write *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, he wrote, "All my seven Narnian books, and my three science-fiction books, began with seeing pictures in my head" (*On Stories* 53). While *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* began, as Lewis writes, with a picture of a faun, an umbrella, and a snowy wood, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, I would venture to say, may have begun with an image of a mouse haunted by a dryad's lullaby about a place in the East "Where Sky and Water Meet."

Notes

¹ McClatchey's article cited in the bibliography has been helpful to me in grouping the categories of iconic imagery.

²This belief is stated or implied in many of Lewis's works, specifically in *God in the Dock* (262), *The Weight of Glory* (13-14), and *Mere Christianity* (62).

- ³ For more information on the garden image see Patrick Callahan’s article, “The Two Gardens in C. S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*,” in Thomas Claerson, *SF: The Other Side of Realism: Essays on Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 147-56.

Works Cited

- Barasch, Moshe. *Icon: Studies on the History of an Idea*. New York: NY Press, 1978.
- Berkeley, David S. *Inwrought with Figures Dim: A Reading of Milton’s Lycidas*. The Hague: Mouton, 1974.
- Callahan, Patrick. “The Two Gardens in C. S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*.” *SF: The Other Side of Realism: Essays on Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Thomas Claerson. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1971. 147-56.
- Cirlot, J. E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. 2nd ed. Trans. Jack Sage. New York: Philosophical Library, 1962.
- Daniel, Jerry L. “The Taste of the Pineapple: A Basis for Literary Criticism.” *The Taste of the Pineapple: Essays on C. S. Lewis*. Ed. Bruce L. Edwards. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1988. 9-27.
- Doebler, John. *Shakespeare’s Speaking Pictures: Studies in Iconic Imagery*. Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 1974.
- Fowler, Alstair. *Spenser and the Numbers of Time*. New York: Barnes, 1964.
- Giamatti, A. Bartlett. *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966.
- The Holy Bible. (KJV)
- Huxley, Aldous. *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*. New York: Harper, 1954.
- Lewis, C. S. *Allegory of Love*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936.
- . *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1954.
- . *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt, 1960.
- . *The Great Divorce*. New York: Collier Macmillan, 1946.
- . *Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Ed. W. H. Lewis. New York: Harcourt, 1966.
- . *Mere Christianity*. New York: Collier, 1952.
- . *Miracles*. London: Fount, 1974.
- . “On Stories” and *Other Essays on Literature*. Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Harcourt, 1982.
- . *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- . *Spenser’s Images of Life*. Ed. Alstair Fowler. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967.
- . *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Ed. Walter Hooper. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.
- . *Surprised by Joy*. New York: Harcourt, 1956.
- . *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1993.
- . *The Weight of Glory*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.

- McClatchey, Joe. "The Affair of Jane's Dreams: Reading *That Hideous Strength* as Iconographic Art." *The Taste of the Pineapple: Essays on C. S. Lewis*. Ed. Bruce L. Edwards. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1988. 166-93.
- Panofsky, Erwin. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Garden City: Doubleday-Anchor, 1955.
- Plato. *The Republic*. 1945. Trans. Francis M. Cornford. New York: Oxford UP, 1967.
- Smith, Robert Huston. *Patches of Godlight: The Patterns of Thought in C. S. Lewis*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1981.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Fairie Queene*. 1977. Ed. A. C. Hamilton. New York: Longman, 1980.
- Stanton, Leonard J. *The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination: Iconic Vision in Works by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy, and Others*. New York: Lang, 1995.