

The Architectural Parables of C.S. Lewis:
The World Between Tangible and Transcendent

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Beloved and renowned writer, C.S. Lewis, sees the world beyond its material construction and that its meaning is rooted in its spiritual significance. Beyond the curtain of physicality lies divine reality that transcends our world, yet is constantly invading it. The experiences of beauty, sublime awe, and the delights of the imagination within our corporeal realm awaken within us inconsolable longing that points to the reality that we were made for another world. For Lewis, stories and myths were the most powerful vehicles of transport to the other world, namely that of the spirit, illuminating transcendent reality in a language we can understand. The context of our sensual setting provides tangible expressions to the intangible realm, and provides a framework for understanding what is beyond our comprehension. As Lewis ventures into creating his own stories within imaginary other worlds, he opens up a portal for us to become pilgrims in the story, to experience the spiritual dimension in a concrete way. Architecture, through its mythical form, can become revelatory, unveiling concealed truths that lurk behind the visible. Such artforms are able to awaken a powerful desire to move beyond the shadows and towards the substance of absolute reality in which we can encounter the Other.

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DEDICATION

*To all who lay awake in the night
wondering and searching,
chasing after shadows*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Author's Declaration</i>	ii.
<i>Abstract</i>	iii.
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	v.
<i>Dedication</i>	vii.
<i>List of Figures</i>	xi.
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xv.
Preface	1
Commencement: Introduction	3
Chapter 1: Clive Inconsolable	13
Chapter 2: Chronicles	23
Chapter 3: Cosmos	39
Chapter 4: Christ	53
Chapter 5: Constructing Liminality	65
Conclusion: Commissioning	87
Consummation: Chasing Shadows	97
<i>Letter of Copyright Permission</i>	127
<i>Bibliography</i>	129

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:
Anonymous, “And his ships went sailing, sailing” illustration from *The Saga of King Olaf*. 1899
The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30228123>
Page 16

Figure 2:
Camille Flammarion, *L’Atmosphere: Météorologie Populaire*, 1888
Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=318054>
Page 19

Figure 3:
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1290–1300
Public Domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438754>
Page 25

Figure 4: J.A. Fridrich after J.M. Füssli, *Cosmological Plan of Copernicus’ astronomical vision surrounded by systems of Ptolemy and Tycho Brahe*, 1732
Public Domain, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/bxb6umba>
Page 34

Figure 5:
J. M. W. Turner, *The Slave Ship*, 1840
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2816953>
Page 43

Figure 6:
William Blake, *Jacob’s Dream*, 1805
The William Blake Archive, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1869973>
Page 46

Figure 7:
Gentile da Fabriano, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1423
Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2373201>
Page 55

Figure 8:
Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601-2
dezoomify-rs<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/der-ungl%C3%A4ubige-thomas-michelangelo-merisi-named-caravaggio/OAEjjQkNdRL9sg>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=120649550>
Page 63

Figure 9:
Matthäus Roriczer, *Plan and elevation of a pinnacle*, Buchlein von der Fialen Gerechtigkeit, 1486,
arranged by the author. Photo: Guido Pressler Verlag,
Bork, R., 2014. *Dynamic Unfolding and the Conventions of Procedure: Geometric Proportioning Strategies in Gothic Architectural Design*. *Architectural Histories*, 2(1), p.Art. 14. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.bq>
Page 69

Figure 10:
Saint-Denis Basilica, completed 13th century
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/user:P.poschadel>
Author of photo: Pierre Poschadel
Page 73

Figure 11:
Mi Youren, *Cloudy Mountains*, before 1200
Public Domain, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40007>
Page 76

Figure 12:
Pauline Baynes, Illustration from *Prince Caspian*, 1951
Illustrations by Pauline Baynes © copyright 1950-56 CS Lewis Pte Ltd.
Used with permission.
<https://www.terriwindling.com/.a/6a00e54fcf73858834026be41cfa90200d-pi>
Page 81

Figure 13:
Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818
<https://www.tiqets.com/ja/hamburg-attractions-c64886/tickets-for-hamburger-kunsthalle-skip-the-line-p976728/>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=127245432>
Page 82

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1:
Scene 1
Page 98

Illustration 2:
Scene 2
Page 99

Illustration 3:
Scene 3
Page 100-1

Illustration 4:
Scene 4
Page 102

Illustration 5:
Scene 5
Page 103

Illustration 6:
Scene 6
Page 104-5

Illustration 7:
Scene 7
Page 106

Illustration 8:
Scene 8
Page 107

Illustration 9:
Scene 9
Page 108-9

Illustration 10:
Scene 10
Page 110

Illustration 11:
Scene 11
Page 111

Illustration 12:
Scene 12
Page 112-3

Illustration 13:
Scene 13
Page 114

Illustration 14:
Scene 14
Page 115

Illustration 15:
Scene 15
Page 116-7

Illustration 16:
Scene 16
Page 118-9

Illustration 17:
Scene 17
Page 120-1

Illustration 18:
Scene 18
Page 122-3

Illustration 19:
Scene 19
Page 124-5

PREFACE

The first thing I get asked when I tell people that my Masters of Architecture thesis is about C.S. Lewis is “what does *he* have to do with architecture?” That is a very expected, common, and understandable question. What *does* C.S. Lewis have to do with architecture? For those who are unfamiliar with C.S. Lewis, he was a writer, lay theologian, Christian apologist, and professor at Oxford University and Cambridge University. He was a brilliant mind, a Medieval enthusiast, and a lover of stories. Architect was not anywhere in his job description. The link between C.S. Lewis and architecture is not clear to most people, and it certainly wasn’t clear to me at first. Rather, it came into natural fruition when I thought about what really intrigued me about architectural discourse.

I was walking outside with a friend on a cold, snowy afternoon, months before beginning my thesis. She majored in film studies, and our keen interest in movies, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R Tolkien always gave us much to talk about. We discussed my plans for my thesis, in which I confessed I hadn’t quite figured out by then. Hours of conversation that day included my particular interest in architecture in films because I found it did something within me at a deep level. The theater experience heightened my appreciation of architecture, not only because of the dark room, vivid images, and surround sound, but primarily because of the story. The senses were fully engaged, and so was my heart. As we struggled forward together on our walk, trying to make connections, the way opened up before me.

Ever since I was a kid, it was movies and books that were the first real awakenings of my imagination, and my real consideration of beauty (after nature). Whenever I would go to the movie theatre, I was drawn into another world, wishing I could somehow be part of it. The whole experience made me ache in places of my heart I couldn’t quite put my finger on. I remember picking up *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the 6th grade, not having any clue what it was about, and not being able to put it down. My sister was the reader of the family: I *hated* reading. But this was the first book I actually enjoyed, and through them I found something that arose within me, a familiar feeling, that had been difficult to put into words as a child. It was C.S. Lewis himself, through his other books, who helped me articulate what I was experiencing: *longing*. It was a happy sadness, or a sad happiness, I couldn’t quite decipher. This was the overwhelming power of story that I had experienced in fairytales and films.

There is much more to say about Lewis and there will be plenty of opportunity in this thesis to do so. What is important now to emphasize is C.S. Lewis’ profound influence on *me*. Through him I discovered how a whole world could be created to usher me into a reality I didn’t know existed. It was through them that the inconsolable longing was awakened. They became portals for me to not just look at or watch, but enter in through the door that was created. Not only was that taking place in my young life, but also a heightened journey of faith. Like Lewis, I hadn’t ever made the connection between the longing I was experiencing and God. But the more I read Lewis, the more the veil was being removed, and I began to see everything in a whole new light.

COMMENCEMENT

Introduction

Introduction

The tangible world in which we interact everyday can be considered merely material by some, but to C.S. Lewis, it is seen as a portal to another, transcendent world. To C.S. Lewis, there are glimpses of something far beyond his reach that is encountered in and through the context of our immediate, physical surroundings. Our experience of the tangible world speaks to us a profound story, and our longing in response to the physical world has the ability to awaken us to it. Imagination, wonder, and beauty, the experiences that awaken in us inexpressible longings, are necessary to give meaning to what our physical bodies tangibly perceive. Without them, our minds would not be able to comprehend the possibility of anything else beyond the curtain of physicality. Lewis embraces the imagination as the vehicle for meaning along with reason as the vehicle for truth to give a greater vision of what our world may truly be, and that the transcendent reality beyond our senses is speaking to us, in a language we can understand.

For Lewis, it was stories and mythologies that awakened within him these longings most powerfully. Throughout his fiction and non-fiction writings, C.S. Lewis' works are riddled with the concept of longing and how that is experienced through tangible means meant to reveal a spiritual, transcendent reality. The physical, tangible world provides us the embodied framework for the imagination to provide an illumination, not merely an escape, of reality. The function of art is meant to present what the narrow perspectives of pragmatism and cold hard facts cannot provide, and the reconciliation of imagination and reason is necessary to gain the fullest meaning of our reality. These stories and experiences within the tangible framework of our sensual reality leave a transcendental index, hinting at the source of the imprints and echoes we experience in our everyday lives.

This love of story led Lewis to write his own fantasy novels that venture into a dimension of "other worldliness", in which Lewis refers to the realm of the spirit. His skill in literature produced stories that invite the reader not simply to read the story, but to live it. The reader thus becomes a pilgrim in the story, discovering and unveiling great truths as it unfolds, where the narrative becomes a whole field of vision. Architecture can be used as a powerful tool in literature and storytelling to frame, build, and embody a narrative and invite us to fully enter into its experiential qualities. Like stories, architecture can become a place of revelation of deeper truths hidden beneath the sensual surface.

The aim of this thesis will be to explore C.S. Lewis' thought in his fiction and non-fiction writing to see the world through his eyes. My hope is that through the writings of Lewis, my thesis will become an exploration of how physical and transcendent realities meet and interact, and how architecture can be used as a portal to tell a story that can awaken such longings. The desired result will culminate into a hybrid thesis that explores the role of beauty and longing in architecture and the translation of written language into architectural language, in which the world of Lewis is imagined in the form of architectural parables.

Methodology

The writings of C.S. Lewis opened up a whole new way of me seeing the world. By first stepping into his world of *Narnia* as a child, I came to experience the power of story. A whole world was created that ushered me and Lewis into a reality I didn't know existed. It was through them that the inconsolable longing was awakened. They became portals for me to not just look at, but enter in through the door that was created. In order to write a thesis through the lens of C.S. Lewis, I need to get to know him thoroughly. Understanding Lewis as a whole, how he views the world and reality will help give the appropriate context and groundwork for understanding his other works. The first place is to begin with his worldview and philosophy. Considering he moved from atheism to theism and then to Christianity shows a steep shift of worldview throughout his childhood to adult years. His autobiography *Surprised by Joy* pens this journey while focusing on Joy, the inconsolable longing which he credits as the most significant part of his journey. I start with looking at what Lewis has to say about the nature of longing and its purpose, and ultimately how it led to a change of worldview and philosophical outlook. Understanding this is fundamental considering it played one of the most significant roles in his life, journey to faith, and understanding of reality. Other essays written by Lewis reveal his philosophical foundation and other significant influences, such as Plato, in the development of his insight of reality.

Next was to steep myself first into Lewis' imagination and writing. Having already read a number of his books of fiction, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Cosmic Trilogy*, I have already been able to see common themes and threads that are interwoven and progressed throughout his books. As I continue to study Lewis' work, I provide an analysis of Lewis as a writer. He has a number of essays which he dedicates to his philosophy of stories and storytelling, specifically in the genres of fantasy, fairytales, and science fiction. To help accomplish a fuller picture of his writing philosophy, I look to the Inklings, a group of Lewis' friends who consistently discussed literature and faith, to provide helpful aid. J.R.R. Tolkien in particular proves extremely influential in Lewis' journey towards faith and the development of his writing. A study in his *Lord of the Rings* series, as well as his essay "On Fairy-Stories" are extremely useful in providing context to fantasy literature, its function, and making connections with Lewis' trains of thought. George MacDonald, whose *Phantasies* "baptized" Lewis' imagination before ever coming to faith, also bears a strong imprint on Lewis, and his *The Fantastic Imagination* provides a wonderful portrait of literary beauty, truth, and Fancy.

A larger philosophical question enters into my mix of inquiries: what is beauty? Within that stems another question of truth. For the sake of this thesis, I will consider how spiritual truth is revealed in and through beauty and connecting it with Lewis' understanding of longing, as well as storytelling. The sublime also comes into question and how awe, wonder, and astonishment are mingled with beauty, truth, and longing. This ultimately leads to Rudolf Otto's seminal work

of *The Idea of the Holy*, connecting beauty, truth, and longing with the spiritual, transcendent source of the Other world. This fundamentally relates to Lewis who, in *The Problem of Pain*, refers to Otto's numinous Other in the introduction when remarking on religious belief and revelation. This also connects with Lewis' faith in his later years, in which a study into the Christian narrative from creation to the incarnation deems warranted. Through this lens, I discuss the Christian belief of revelation through Nature, the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, and ultimately the person of Jesus.

Considering he became a scholar and professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature, the work of Medieval literature, art, and architecture is necessary to provide greater comprehension of Lewis' work. The Medieval period is where he spent most of his intellectual time and efforts, which informed much of his view of the world as well as his writing. The worldview and philosophy that dominated the Middle Ages naturally find their way into Lewis' imagination. Medieval literature, art, and architecture is charged with symbolism, and understanding its role in the Middle Ages provides a significant window into the mind of C.S. Lewis. Analyzing the prevalent themes, symbols, allusions, and narratives that were used in their literature and art provide helpful context in understanding Lewis' work. Within the Medieval context comes a specific focus on the Gothic and its architecture, particularly the emergence of the Gothic cathedral. Its architecture is a synthesis of its philosophical underpinnings in regards to spiritual truth's display within the physical realm, the connection of beauty and truth, and the desire to act as a liminal portal to experience God's presence.

Finally, I conduct research through drawing. The thesis is meant to culminate into a graphic novel in which a story is laid out visibly. Part of the initial challenge is understanding that words and pictures function differently, and each carry their own artistic expressions and language. By seeking to understand their distinct characteristics, I learn to take what my research has provided abstractly to create a concrete experience through visible form. The intention is not to act as an adaptation of one of Lewis' books into images; though I had considered this direction, I found I was led to take a different approach. Rather than attempting to translate text to images in a more literal sense (which is a thesis on its own), I wanted to create my own story in a similar spirit as Lewis (and Tolkien) by immersing myself in their work. The result is *my own* story, deeply personal, in which Lewis has been profoundly influential. In a way, I myself test out how one connects the spiritual realm to the physical realm, not only by trying to explain through words, but demonstrate through a graphic narrative. The artistic renderings of the Romantic sublime, Rudolf Otto's descriptions of artistic sublime, and Jean-Luc Nancy's essay on "The Sublime Offering" all provide a useful framework for determining an artistic vision for my drawings. Pauline Bayne's illustrations for *The Chronicles of Narnia* as well as *The Lord of the Rings* provide inspiration of whimsical drawings that follow Medieval style for rendering fantasy and fairytales that can strike the heart, evoke mystery, and deliver meaning.

Onwards and Upwards

I begin the first chapter, *Clive Inconsolable*, with a brief biography of the life of C.S. Lewis, focusing on his childhood upbringing into his career as a professor and writer in his adulthood. I look at the effect of the loss of his mother at a young age, his abandonment of religious belief, and how his education in his teenage years under his English tutor led to a transformative interest in literature. As England is met with WWI, Lewis is thrust to its center during his time at Oxford, which solidified his atheism. However, upon returning to Oxford, he forms a strong bond with a few fellow students, among them the famous J.R.R. Tolkien and Owen Barfield, who were extremely influential in his writing, but also his journey of faith.

Not everything about Lewis, his life and philosophy, is spelled out in this opening chapter. Rather, it focuses on one particular point, which was to Lewis, the central force of his whole life's trajectory: longing. His autobiography *Surprised by Joy* focuses primarily on the role of Joy, which Lewis defines as an "inconsolable longing", and how that led him to a vague belief in God, and then ultimately to the Christian God. Lewis describes how the longing that was awakened within, especially through imaginative literature, was a necessary experience to point him to a reality beyond what materialism could offer. Longing suggested that there was an object of desire, a transcendent substance, that communicates through the medium of the tangible world, to reveal they were only ever shadows of the real thing.

The second chapter, *Chronicles*, lays out the significance of stories in Lewis' life which captured his imaginative impulse and pierced his heart to arouse most powerfully the inconsolable longing within him. Stories, poems, and myths, particularly those of fantasy and fairytales, became portals in which he was transported to other worlds. As he journeys towards belief in God, Lewis recognizes that in stories' ability to transport you to another world, it is ultimately the spiritual dimension in which they take you. He ventures to conclude that stories have the power to provide spiritual illumination of invisible reality in the vehicle of imagination.

His friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien had a profound impact on his understanding of storytelling. Tolkien's seminal essay "On Fairy-Stories" provides fundamental groundwork in understanding the function of fantasy and fairytales, and how the highest form of imaginative creation, that of "sub-creation", is a participation with the Creator in the act of invention. Through the making of other worlds, one is able to paint a portrait of truth about our world, and what lies beyond. These stories through "the Perilous realm" provide a new way of seeing, and a greater clarity of seeing in the way we were originally intended. By casting someone into a fantastical fiction, one must fully immerse themselves in the unique mode and operations of that imaginary world, providing regained sight to see the real world with greater vibrancy and wonder. Fantastic and mythopoeic forms of storytelling move the human heart at a deep level, and reveal the transcendent reality we long for, which lies beyond the curtain of

physicality.

The final section of the chapter looks at how Lewis, and Tolkien, created the stories surrounding their other fantastic worlds. Since they were both Medievalists in regards to their education, writing, and teaching, as well as Christians, their stories are heavily toned in Medieval Christian philosophy. The belief in a wise and omnipotent Creator made entry into the divine realm a necessary element in their writing, accomplished through the introduction of the supernatural. This can be seen in a storyline that interweaves complex events and prophetic tales leading to a revelation of divine providence. Another way is to invoke the numinous feeling of the Other, in which the creation of a landscape and place stretches beyond the limits of the imagination, and in doing so, indicates a transcendent presence. Medieval mode of thought is also expressed in the literary hiddenness of Lewis and Tolkien's writing. The cosmological concept of the "music of the spheres" reveals a divine understanding of the universe in which the presence of the transcendent God is always present, yet veiled in sensual forms that we can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. By creating a world and writing a story that is surging with symbolism, the spiritual core is absorbed within its suggestive nature. This connects finally to the difference of Contemplation and Enjoyment, in which one must move away from abstract analysis towards full entrance into that world, and through the employment of the story, one is able to concretely experience the knowledge of the divine through personal interaction and engagement of the spirit.

Chapter Three, *Cosmos*, begins with the beginning. The beginning of the universe, that is. The biblical account of Genesis reveals the all-powerful God of all speaking matter and time into existence. All things as we know it was created and crafted by a Divine Personality which then communicates through their tangible characteristics and intangible character of their Creator. Creation is not lifeless, but rather surging with God's presence who made the natural world as his original sanctuary. As the Divine Architect, he constructed the cosmos as shelter to his creatures, and as a glorious display of his provision. Nature bears images of God, communicating, through their physicality, revelation of he who is spirit. Humanity, enamored by the glorious and majestic grandeur of the natural world, creates poetic lyric and vivid paintings in an attempt to capture what one feels standing in the midst of overwhelming great and terrible beauty.

Unimaginable magnificence and incomprehensible magnitude strikes one to the soul and evokes the feeling of a transcendent power. The experience of the sublime has often lent itself to the recognition of the ineffable Other. C.S. Lewis joins with Rudolf Otto in describing this sublime, numinous feeling as an awakening or revelation of the Other to the human consciousness. Nature and sublime beauty are the thin veil in which the wholly Other clothes himself, and at the same time, manifests himself. They act as the visible cloak giving form to the invisible Spirit. Lewis, along with the other Inklings, write with exuberant natural vision as a glimpse to God's nature and to invoke his presence within their writing. Lewis gives warning, however, not to mistake the shadow, which is Nature, for the substance, which is God. Nature exists to act as a reflective mirror

of God's divinity and suggest in our earthly language the presence of he who is beyond all physical dimension. This transforms Nature into a potent symbol in which she proclaims and bears witness to the excellences of he who made her. Nature then becomes revelatory, not only of who the Other is, but also of who we are in comparison: small, unworthy, and afraid. As the numinous Other approaches, we feel ourselves tremble, and we innately sense our severance from him.

The fourth chapter, *Christ*, expounds the great approach of the Other from the spiritual dimension to our earthly dimension: the Incarnation. This metaphysical mystery of God, who is transcendent spirit, touching down with a physical body into our earth space, is what Lewis calls "the grand miracle." God takes on flesh and bone, and he who is invisible becomes visible. The great unveiling approach of the numinous Other comes, not simply to appear before mankind, but to reconcile mankind. Lewis remarks that God came to bring a real effectual change in his relations with humanity – that is, to sever us from our severance with him. The world, fallen out of peaceful fellowship with their Maker, has been exiled from the fullness of his presence because of its cosmic rebellion. We went on chasing shadows to replace the Substance and have brought wrath and death upon ourselves. But the Other came, in Lewis' imagination, as a diver, stripping himself of all his clothing to enter into the cold, dark water. He descends into the utter depths to take hold of humanity and Nature and bring it up with him again in newness of life. This story of redemption is one that has been heralded in creation, Nature itself, ever since the fall: a seed must fall to the ground and die before it breaks forth in the spring in multiplied life. It is the central chapter of humanity's history that brings the whole manuscript to completion.

In the person of Christ is revelation of truth. And yet, truth was not revealed in the way we would have expected or hoped. Jesus comes, not merely giving a set of instructions to follow or listing out a doctrinal catechism, but rather forces us to reckon with his whole personhood. In his elusive manner of speaking, he invites each person not to learn facts, but to encounter him as Truth. No longer can we try to gain knowledge with only the mind, for Christ is showing us that the whole self is demanded for genuine, transforming, personal revelation. Furthermore, he reveals himself to be the substance in which the tabernacle and temple were only a shadow. He claims that his own *body* is the true temple. The architectural tabernacle and temple as the sanctuary of God's living presence, and in which Israel would make atoning sacrifices for their sins, served as a copy and foreshadowing of the substance, which is Jesus. He is the fulfillment of the architectural shadow.

Furthermore, Lewis identifies the Incarnation as "myth became fact". The story of the dying god has been seen throughout history in various myths, those of which were some of Lewis' favourite stories, but the narrative given in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures is utterly unique. Though they resemble in a sense, they do not read as the mythical legends of old. The Incarnation utters a shocking, history-altering declaration: this really happened. Imagination and

fact have met in the person of Christ who is the summation of all fictional stories. Tolkien proclaims that the Christian story is the ultimate fairy-tale, and it is true. The ancient desire of man's heart to partake in the realm of the Other world has been given the thrilling hope that perhaps there is a way there. Jesus proclaims that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The final chapter, *Constructing Liminality*, brings together all the elements from the previous chapter in a profoundly architectural context. Joy, Lewis' inconsolable longing, was throughout his life suggesting the existence of something, or someone, Other, that dwells in the spiritual dimension. Stories were the powerful vehicle that opened up the door to interact with the invisible, intangible, spiritual reality. The longing that was awakened through them was a moment of the ineffable Other bearing on his consciousness, and opening up the eyes of his heart to see something else his intellect alone was unable to attend to. These mythical journeys became to Lewis spiritual awakenings, in which he recognized the divine reality of the shadows bearing witness to the substance. They transformed into liminal spaces, bridging the physical and spiritual worlds where he could then mingle with the transcendent Other, the very Source of Joy. There he experienced an "apocalypse", an unveiling of heavenly reality in earthly space and time.

To delve into my perspective of liminality as I springboard off of Lewis, I explore the Gothic cathedral, as real space in real time, in which the Middle Ages sought to open up a portal from its earthly architecture to heavenly reality. Otto von Simson's *The Gothic Cathedral* lays out two distinct design features of the Gothic: proportion and light. They were used fundamentally from a philosophic and metaphysical reason that overflowed into aesthetics and form. Drawing heavily on Augustine and Plato, the Gothic sees truth and beauty as inseparable, in which the proportion of perfect ratios imitate harmony found within the cosmos, as ultimately within the heavenly realm. The cathedral displays itself as a model of the heavens, in which the vision of the Temple and Celestial City become significant precedents in its design and structure. Where the Romanesque had high, heavy walls, the Gothic is given a transparent structure invaded by windows to illuminate every inch of the interior. Light, the greatest natural manifestation of God, becomes the active force of physical illumination to reflect, and evoke, spiritual illumination. Rudolf Otto recognizes the Gothic cathedral as the emblem of sublime, numinous artistic expression in the West in its composition of flickering lights amidst the darkness and silence of void. Lastly, Ridsen explores how the Gothic cathedral lends itself to the structure of a fairytale as he compares it to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* narrative structure.

In my exploration of liminal space, I then venture into the regions of the imagination, diving into the physical and architectural landscapes that are described in stories to bring about revelation. The entrance into a story allows for full immersion into another world to experience divine truth and reality in a concrete way through the imagination opposed to abstractly through the intellect. These fantastic worlds are identified by their descriptive physical environments that form images in the mind's eye of the place, landscape, and culture which give

it its air of "otherness". I first look at the Lothlorien of Middle-earth in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, focusing on the books rather than Peter Jackson's rendering in the films. Their unique presence in the books are central to the tone of the book, giving their enchanted and numinous feel. We walk with the fellowship as they cross over into Lorien to witness the profound moment of their unveiling. I then shift to Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, primarily focusing on the role of the portal in the series, in the writing and illustrations by Pauline Baynes. As the story itself is a portal, the reader enters to experience our world with many portals into Narnia. The portal or doorway is a significant architectural motif that facilitates moments of discovery in the story, and for us as the reader. With a focus on a particular section of the final book of the series, *The Last Battle*, I walk through how the subsequent scenes become a liminal, revelatory space in time in which spiritual insight is received.

I conclude (almost) with a *Commission*. This conclusion ends with a call (or benediction if you will) in light of all that has been discovered. C.S. Lewis offers us a way to see the world in the here and now through the lens of Ultimate reality. The tangible world in which we reside is filled with shadows being cast from that Other world to lead us to the apocalypse of the Substance. Nature was created by God to shadow his character; stories were created by mankind to shadow the world as we experience. Longing pierces straight to the soul to awaken our spiritual senses to a reality beyond what is available merely to the senses. But it was through the shadows, and our experience of them, that longing came. And through longing, an unveiling. The commission is to continue making shadows, fashioning windows to see through, designing portals to walk through, and inventing worlds to experience. We are called to join in with our Creator in the act of creating, or sub-creating, works of art that invoke the reality that is beyond its individual parts. These creations are able to open before us a portal to act as a liminal bridge from this world to the Other world, and perhaps feel our way to the Other.

Finally, the exclamation mark of the thesis is the graphic novel: *Chasing Shadows*. This serves as a synthesis of the research and written work of my thesis, but also as a *consummation*. The idea of Contemplation and Enjoyment has proved fundamental in Lewis' work and a common thread that knits together his view of reality. The writing portion has acted as a mode of Contemplation – a rigorous analysis of Lewis' writing and philosophy. There have been moments in which my reading and writing ruptures into Enjoyment, but I see this graphic novel as a movement from Contemplation to Enjoyment. Here, I step fully into that beam of light to operate in the spirit of Lewis by sub-creating my own world, and telling my own story. In this, I take up the challenge that I presented in my commissioning to create works of art that become portals to other worlds. And so, I attempt in the final moments of my thesis, to draw you into my world, and fully immerse yourselves within the beam of light of the story.

CHAPTER 1

Clive Inconsolable

Clive Staples Lewis

Many may know C.S. Lewis as the author of the beloved children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Some may know him as the atheist turned Christian apologist and lay theologian. Oxford University knew him as a student, Fellow, and Tutor in English Literature, and Cambridge University knew him as the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature until his retirement. C.S. Lewis is known by most as a writer, professor, and arguably one of the most intellectual and influential thinkers of the 20th century.¹ It is no doubt that Lewis reached a vast audience within the Western world, and continues to hold strong relevance and interest even in today's age. So now we ask: who is C.S. Lewis?

Born in Belfast, Ireland in 1898, Clive Staples Lewis, who often went by "Jack", grew up with his parents and younger brother until the death of his mother from cancer when he was 9 years of age.² This undoubtedly had a significant impact on the shape of his early life. Lewis writes that with his mother's death "all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life."³ His father was distant and demanding which led to a somewhat strained relationship with him. As a young teen, Lewis went to study in England under tutor William T. Kirkpatrick, who Lewis refers to as "the Great Knock", where he had the grand awakening of his imaginative mind. Though never religious himself, Lewis properly abandoned Christianity and any notion of there being a God and embraced atheism and materialism at age 15. Lewis reasons that "had God designed the world, it would not be a world so frail and faulty as we see." During this time, he exchanged religion for literature and developed an interest in mythology and the occult. In 1916, Lewis received a scholarship to study at Oxford for English Literature where he then enlisted in the British Army for World War I. On his 19th birthday, he was sent to the front lines in France in World War II where he himself was injured and one of his close friends was killed. A later letter from Lewis reveals that the horrors of war and the death of his mother and close friend were his greatest reasons for his pessimism and atheism.⁴

After returning to Oxford to complete his studies, C.S. Lewis was appointed English Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.⁵ In his time at Oxford, Lewis befriended fellow Inklings Owen Barfield and J.R.R. Tolkien who both became significant figures in Lewis' literary pursuits and journey to faith. It was in these proceeding years that had a profound effect on Lewis. Many conversations, discussions, and arguments ensued between the friends over a number of years, with Barfield and Tolkien both being Christians, that were significant in turning Lewis from materialism and atheism to theism, and then ultimately to Christianity.⁶

1 HarperCollins Publishers, "About C.S. Lewis - Official Site"

2 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 20.

3 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1-23.

4 Marie A. Conn, *C.S. Lewis and Human Suffering: Light among the Shadows*, 21.

5 HarperCollins Publishers, "About C.S. Lewis"

6 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 243, 264

Longing

In his memoir and autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis goes to great lengths to pen his journey of faith from childhood into his adult years, ultimately culminating from his turn from atheism to theism, and then from theism to Christianity. Longing, or "Joy" as Lewis puts it, is the central theme in which his story revolves. One of the most significant themes in Lewis' writings is in regards to longing. Throughout his fiction and non-fiction writings, his works are riddled with the concept of longing and how that is experienced through tangible means meant to reveal a spiritual, transcendent reality. The first reflection of Joy began in his early childhood when his brother gave him a toy garden on a summer's day in Ireland:

...there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries...It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me...It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit-tin filled with moss, nor even for my own past...and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.⁷

The second came when reading *Squirrel Nutkin*, an illustrated children's book by Beatrix Potter:

...as before, the experience was one of intense desire. And one went back to the book, not to gratify the desire...but to reawake it. And in this experience also there was the same surprise and the same sense of incalculable importance. It was something quite different from ordinary life and even from ordinary pleasure; something, as they would now say, 'in another dimension'.⁸

Poetry gave way to the third glimpse, through Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*:

...there came a moment when I idly turned the pages of the book and found the unrhymed translation of Tegner's *Drapa*...I knew nothing about Balder, but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of the northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described...and then...found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I

7 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 17.

8 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 18.

Figure 1:
Anonymous,
"And his
ships went
sailing, sailing"
illustration from
*The Saga of King
Olaf*, 1899



"And his ships went sailing, sailing." Page 247.

were back in it.⁹

Lewis continues to describe that the common denominator in each of these three experiences was "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction"¹⁰ in which he calls Joy. This is not to be mistaken for happiness or pleasure, but oddly enough feels more like a kind of unhappiness or grief. Further along in the book, Lewis defines Joy more clearly as an "inconsolable longing"¹¹ which must have a pang or stab. Lewis goes so far as to recommend his readers to continue no further if they have read these experiences and cannot relate. In this statement, he is revealing something quite significant: it cannot be truly understood if it has not been personally experienced.

Each experience of longing in the wake of imagination's power provided a sense of incalculable importance, as if he were thrust from ordinary life into another world. However, his reason seemed to be disrupting his rapturous enjoyment of the imagination. In his poem "Reason", Lewis seeks to reconcile reason with imagination and desire:

9 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 19.

10 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 19.

11 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 86.

Set on the soul's acropolis the reason stands
A virgin, arm'd, commercing with celestial light,
And he who sins against her has defiled his own
Virginity: no cleansing makes his garment white;
So clear is reason. But how dark, imagining,
Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
Is loaded and her pains are long, and her delight.
Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains
Demeter, nor rebel against her mother-right.
Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
Who make in me a concord of the depth and height?
Who make imagination's dim exploring touch
Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
Then could I truly say, and not deceive,
Then wholly say, that I BELIEVE.¹²

Lewis articulates his inner war, where we see him grappling with Reason, personified as Athena, and Imagination, as Demeter. Truth must be accepted, but what does he make of his mythologies that cause his soul to soar? Who will reconcile reason and imagination without extinguishing the other? It was later in life that Lewis was able to understand reason as the vehicle for truth and imagination as that for meaning. He would later see that the stories he adored were not simply enjoyment, but an employment of longing and revelation of profound truth. At that point, Lewis will come to embrace the imagination along with his reason to give a greater vision of what our world may truly be, and that the transcendent reality beyond our sight is speaking to us.

In the last few chapters of the book, Lewis in his adult years is approaching a significant moment in his personal story. His longing has been awakened, his soul has been pricked from multiple angles, and he is seeking to find what exactly is the substance of the longing.

I saw that all my waitings and watchings for Joy, all my vain hopes to find some mental content on which I could, so to speak, lay my finger and say, 'This is it,' had been a futile attempt to contemplate the enjoyed...I knew now that they were merely the mental track left by the passage of Joy - not the wave but the wave's imprint on the sand.¹³

This is the point in which his understanding shifts and Lewis begins to see that there is something beyond the longing, and that the experiences of Joy were only to point to the real thing. Joy is not the end in itself, but is meant to suggest or allude to something else. The object and form of the desire is revealed in

12 C. S. Lewis, "Reason"

13 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 268.

the desire. Lewis is by no means dismissing the things and experiences that do provide Joy, but rather believes that the physical world, and our experiences in it, are necessary to give us a sense of what the real thing can be. Lewis continues this insight in *Mere Christianity*:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage.¹⁴

The physical world wakes us up from our slumber and forces us to reckon with the reality that what we can observe with our bodies isn't enough to satisfy all our desires. Transcendent desires cannot be filled by tangible means, but rather aroused by them. In a way, this reality proves that there is something quite beyond our immediate reach that is meant to satisfy the desire; where there is a desire, there exists a fulfillment of it. Has not food, water, sex, laughter, proven such a conclusion? It is through the tangible world that the transcendent world communicates with us in our familiar language. If indeed the real thing is transcendent, how else can we learn what it is unless a portal is opened up in our world as we know it in a way that we can see, touch, and hear?

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis describes that it was nature that, though it did not teach him about glory, gave glory a meaning for him. It is in his interaction with the physical world that gave him the experiential knowledge of what glory is; without nature, he would not have been able to even begin to understand what glory could be.¹⁵ The physical world has a place in sparking our imagination, and through that imagination and wonder, we are able to form a shell of understanding in a way that reason has not yet arrived at, or has been able to explain. Lewis makes it clear that nature isn't the glory itself, but rather it bids us come and look to then redirect us elsewhere where we can truly be taught. The heart is awakened in these moments, but the mind must catch up. The shell must be filled up with truth sooner or later to gain its fullest meaning.

Nature not only has taught us about glory, but also about beauty. In his sermon "The Weight of Glory", Lewis suggests that it is not glory or beauty itself that we are seeking, but they are the portal to see through them to the real thing.

14 Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*

15 Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*, 25.

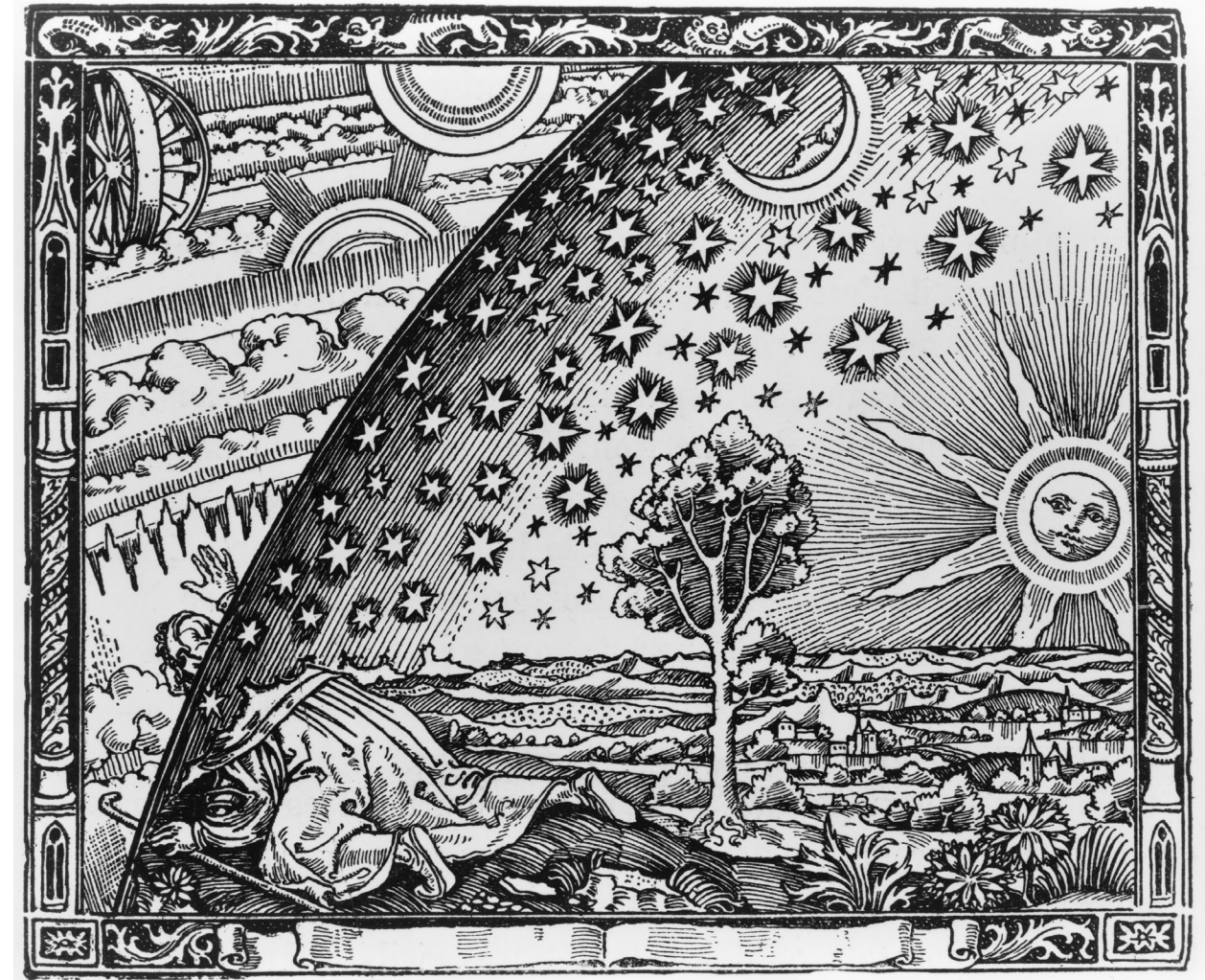


Figure 2:
Camille
Flammarion,
*L'Atmosphère:
Météorologie
Populaire*, 1888

We not only want to witness it, but to embody it, be consumed by it, participate in it, and one day become it.

But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beauty, grace, and power of which Nature is the image. That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that "beauty born of murmuring sound" will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet... At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity

of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.¹⁶

Our experience of beauty, which often feels almost impossible to describe and define, is a powerful moment that pierces the soul. Academic words are not enough to give it even a fraction of its meaning. Poets and storytellers, so compelled by the Joy awakened in its presence, attempt to give words to something indescribable; they go to symbols, metaphors, personifications, and images. They try to grasp at the hem of a reality far too wonderful and mysterious to be merely reduced to quantitative or qualitative observations which do not suffice. One only really begins to understand it when they are in its midst. There are moments in the presence of beauty that Joy speaks to us whispers we never heard and know little of their origin. Lewis elaborates in his sermon:

In speaking of this desire for our own faroff country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter... The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing.¹⁷

Imagination, wonder, and beauty, the experiences that awaken in us inexpressible longings, are necessary to give meaning to what our physical bodies tangibly perceive. Without them, our minds would not be able to comprehend the possibility of anything else beyond the curtain of physicality. Poems and songs, memories of blissful play as a child, the sweet talk of two people in love, walks through the English gardens leading the way towards suburban villas — all of

16 Lewis, C.S. "The Weight of Glory", in *The Weight of Glory*, 43.

17 Lewis, "The Weight of Glory", 31.

these experiences of beauty and delight that made our hearts soar are trying to tell us something. C.S. Lewis sees that our reality within the context of this sensual world is constantly alluding and suggesting something beyond itself. Materialism may seem at times a convincing route to take, but Lewis knows that its vision is too small and narrow to see the full picture of reality. In fact, the greatest protection for Lewis from falling back into Materialism was Joy. "Inexorably Joy proclaimed, 'You want — I myself am your want of — something other, outside, not you nor any state of you.'¹⁸" The longing we experience is not something inner, but outer. It is not even for the longing itself; that is not its end. We long for *something*. Out there. Other. The desire is for its object since that longing only comes when we are completely and utterly transfixed, entranced, by what we are beholding. Joy is only the by-product of our experience of the immensely boundless value of the object. And the object certainly wasn't the mere letters that made the words of mythologies he adored, nor was it the molecular compounds that gave brick its structure to form a delightful cottage or sublimely beautiful cathedral. Lewis was slowly learning that this object is more external, objective, and other, than he ever dared think.

18 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 270

CHAPTER 2

Chronicles

Mythical Portals to Other Worlds

For Lewis, it was stories and mythologies that captured his imagination and awakened within him inexpressible longings most powerfully. There were certain stories for Lewis that transported him to these other worlds. However, it was not any fantasy or science fiction book that would do that for him. In one of his essays on literature titled *Of Other Worlds*, he argues that any good story, especially those of fantasy or fairytales, need to bring you to another world:

No merely physical strangeness or merely spatial distance will realise the idea of otherness which is what we are always trying to grasp in a story about voyaging through space: you must go into another dimension. To construct plausible and moving 'other worlds' you must draw on the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit... If some fatal progress of applied science ever enabled us in fact to reach the Moon, that real journey will not at all satisfy the impulse which we now seek to gratify by writing such stories. The real Moon, if you could reach it and survive, would in a deep and deadly sense be just like anywhere else.¹

Simply taking us to outer space would not do, for we would find that the Moon after all was just a big rock in a dreadful void. Lewis continues his argument by claiming that no one would find anything marvelous or strange about the Moon unless they were the sort of person to find it in their own backyard. No, the only true other world would be the realm of the spirit. Stories that bring us into this spiritual dimension are able to be, not merely an escape from reality, but an illumination of an invisible reality.

The religious iconography of the Medieval past shares a similar sentiment. They acted as a portal from this world into another world, that being the spiritual realm. We are not meant to merely look at them, but see through them. There is a kind of dialogue and interaction between the physical means and spiritual realities that is experienced in iconography. The goal was for the viewer to grasp at invisible realities that exist beyond the curtain of physicality. They provided an outlet for illumination and revelation of things unseen.² C.S. Lewis draws on Plato's Allegory of the Cave and his Allegory of the Divided Line to explain our reality. We live in a world of shadows, imprints, and images.³ The "real thing", the higher forms, are the true substance of the shadows we witness with our senses. One must make their way out of the cave, move beyond the world of shadows, to

1 C. S. Lewis, "On Stories", 17-18.

2 Adolphe N. Didron, *Christian Iconography, or, the History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*.

3 Plato, *The Republic*

discover true reality. We gain knowledge through our material world suggesting that there is something more than just what we are perceiving with our bodies. Stories are a powerful example of an artform that provides a window from this world to the realm of the "other".



Figure 3:
Duccio di
Buoninsegna,
*Madonna and
Child*, ca.
1290–1300

Function of Fantasy

J.R.R. Tolkien, who was a close friend and literary companion to Lewis for many years, spent years of his life writing stories of enchanted worlds with their own races, creatures, landscapes, languages, and histories. The imaginative literature he produced continues to transport readers to other worlds, most notably Middle-earth, that is brimming with curious life and fantastic vitality.⁴ As Tolkien delves into the creation of such worlds, he refines his own philosophy of fantasy and the Fairy Story in his seminal essay "On Fairy-Stories" which helps us in our understanding in the function of fantasy, and its significance for today.

Sub-creation

The world of the Faerie is one that contains many incredible things, such as elves, giants, trolls, witches, and dragons, as well as the earth, sky, sun, and moon. It contains all sorts of things that would be in such a world, such as trees and rocks, and even mortal men, but transformed under enchantment. It is "the

4 Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 146-9

Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country.⁵” Through the mind of imagination to conceive of magic to invent, such a mode of fantasy has created a new form. This level of imagination displays “the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.⁶” Now we venture into the realm of sub-creation, the achievement of a Secondary World with its own unique quality of wonder and strangeness, which is an essential characteristic of the fairy-story and to ignite “visions of fantasy⁷”.

“Fantasy” becomes a compelling word for Tolkien to use as it combines the notions of “unreality” or unlikeness to the Primary World (in which we currently dwell) with all of its peculiar strangeness and freedom from what we observe as fact in the our world. Achieving a sub-creative art is an extremely difficult endeavor, and according to Tolkien, the reason it is seldom attempted. In this view, Tolkien considers Fantasy as a higher and purer form of art, that when executed well, is art in its most powerful and compelling expression, particularly within storymaking and narrative.⁸ Similarly, C.S. Lewis notes in his essay “On Stories” that we are trying to “grasp at a state and find only a succession of events in which the state is never quite embodied.⁹” Producing such works of art that have the tremendous power of providing a picture of the truth in a story is akin to creating a net that would catch an elusive bird. However, Lewis believes it can sometimes be done in stories, and that though difficult, is worth every effort. This mythical and fantastical artform is the kind able to “give us experiences we have never had thus, instead of ‘commenting on life’, can add to it.¹⁰”

Tolkien wrote a poem to Lewis, who prior to his conversion to Christianity, claimed that “myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though ‘breathed through silver.’¹¹ He addresses him, as Philomythus to Misomythus, and pens of his belief in the significance of stories, and how it is humanity’s innate desire to create such tales.

The heart of Man is not compound lies,
but draws his wisdom from the only Wise
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,

...

Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind¹²

5 J.R.R Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” in *The Monsters and the Critics: And Other Essays*, 114

6 Tolkien, 138

7 Tolkien, 122

8 Tolkien, 140

9 Lewis, “On Stories”, 30

10 Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” 60

11 Tolkien, 143

12 Tolkien, “Mythopeia”, 144

We make because we ourselves were made “in the image and likeness of a Maker.¹³” Man fulfills his calling as Sub-creator in the act of making as we emulate our Creator and transform into beings of “refracted Light, through whom is splintered from a single White.” In fact, we live reasonably by partaking in a creative work because the arts and tales we conceive and embrace proceed from a reality of divine wisdom. The fantastic mode does not diminish or insult Reason, but rather requires it.¹⁴ The clearer the reason, the better the fantasy will be. This is a significant point to creating a believable Secondary World that cultivates its own inner consistency, and essential to good fantasy. Its goodness is rooted in truth, not lies, recognizing fact but not enslaved to it, and is able to communicate a profound understanding of how the world works.

Fantasy is far more than a mere means of modern escape, but rather an activity that flows naturally and springs up from a profound human aspiration and creative desire. This is the deep human yearning for Fantasy, and as Lewis notes, “does something to us at a deep level.¹⁵” The beauty and longing it provokes is pointing to the desire to share in its enrichment, and for us to become partners and partakers in the delightful act of creating. Just as the Creator rejoiced in making, so we can join in this joy in our own making, and come closer to the intended purpose of our lives as we approach the mind of Divine Wisdom through the imagination.

Recovery

Fantasy has the potential to provide new vision, above the smog of appropriation or clouded judgements from the Primary World. This newly created world helps us see things “as we are (or were) meant to see them”¹⁶ and regains a clear sight of things, free from familiarity, triteness, and possession. It opens up a fresh page to see a reality apart from the opinions and beliefs we tightly hold, and challenges the way we currently see things. C.S. Lewis writes, “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?¹⁷” By employing the mode of fantastical fiction, one is able to articulate an essence of thought that is freed from its common day affiliations, and portray it in original power and evocation in its offering of whole new classes of experiences. It is a call to leave behind the unchallenged notions of life and see everything through the lens of a storyteller who is revealing a world you have never experienced.

The art of story-making, especially in the fantastic mode, is able to infuse

13 Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories”, 145

14 Tolkien, 144

15 Lewis, “On Science Fiction”, 114

16 Tolkien, 146

17 Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories Say Best What’s to be Said” 5

the everyday things in the Primary world with greater vibrancy, by offering a new lens of seeing. In the making of something new, and even strange in comparison to what our daily reality perceives, we are invited to enter into a new world and see everything through the rules, operations, and consistencies within that inner Secondary World. Tolkien describes how a fantastic world is crafted with all the materials and elements found in the Primary World, endlessly combined in the act of making to discover that “Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory.”¹⁸ What may have seemed plain or commonplace to us is seen all the more gloriously in the giving of a new perspective. In fantasy, its metaphorical quality is able to deepen or modify our perception of the meaning of reality in the Primary world. In Lewis’ experience of Joy when encountering such stories, he once resented coming back into his own primary world which seemed to him a desolate desert in comparison. But then, at the point when his imagination was “baptized” reading George MacDonald’s *Phantastes*, he began to see the bright beauty coming out of the stories to rest upon the real world, and transform his sight of them.¹⁹ In fact, through the story within a Secondary world, our world becomes a bit more magical. In his essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”, Lewis notes that “He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.”²⁰ Fantasy allows the reader to recover what might have been lost, or darkened, in the drudgery of everyday life. Tolkien elaborates further that fairy-stories often deal with simple, even mundane, fundamental things, but when Fantasy has come upon them, they are made “all the more luminous by their setting.”²¹ Through the power of Fantasy, common things like wood, rocks, trees, houses, and bread are made vibrant, and their wonder is rediscovered as if for the first time.

Consolation

Fairy-stories are “the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires.”²² Tolkien explains that there is an innate longing to be reconciled to the world, nature, and creatures that we have felt ever since the fall of humanity. There also exists the desire to escape from the ugliness of our present time and self-made miseries of life; and perhaps we want to escape from the travesties that our world experiences, such as poverty, sorrow, and injustice. There is another kind of escape we long for, not only an escape “from” but an escape “to.” We sense that things are not as they are, or should be. There exists within us a form of separation and severance, with the weight of guilt lying heavily upon our inward selves. When we consider that creatures are akin to “other realms” in which we can sense a broken relationship

18 Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories”, 147
 19 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 222
 20 C. S. Lewis, “On Three Ways,” 45
 21 Tolkien, 147
 22 Tolkien, 153

and hostility, and are ever now looking “from the outside at a distance.”²³ Finally, there exists “the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape”, that from Death itself.²⁴ The fairy-story provides a wide range of expressions of what Tolkien refers to as “the genuine escapist” or “fugitive spirit.”²⁵

To Tolkien, the most important aspect of fairy-stories is “the consolation of the Happy Ending.” He argues that every complete fairy-story must include the Eucatastrophe and elaborates that “The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function.” It is the “good catastrophe”, where the story takes a “sudden joyous turn.” It is not escapist nor fugitive, but rather “a sudden and miraculous grace” that was not expected to come, nor depended on to recur again. The Eucatastrophe is not blind nor dismissive of tragedy, sorrow, or failure, but sees this as an essential element to build the “joy of deliverance.” This moment of final defeat provides a “fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” Tolkien argues that this is the mark of a good and complete fairy-story, regardless of how fantastic and unimaginable the events are, and that “turn” can provide anyone with “a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart.”²⁶ This “turn” accomplishes a moment of light through the cold darkness of all that has happened, which becomes cherished in its contrast.

Longing

According to Lewis, these genres of fantasy, fairytales, and the mythopoeic serve a unique purpose with its defining characteristic being longing.²⁷ This connects to Rudolf Otto’s *Idea of the Holy*, referencing something so ‘other’ that almost seems unreachable or untouchable.²⁸ Fantasy possesses that ‘otherness’ which awakens longing and brings us into the presence of transcendence. Lewis and Tolkien’s theology of fantasy describes how stories, particularly the genres of fantasy and the mythopoeic, are able to communicate something deeply moving in a way that can best be said in this type of imaginative storytelling. As Lewis puts it, there are some fairy stories that say best what there is to be said. These stories and experiences within the tangible framework of our sensual reality leave a transcendental index, hinting at the source of the imprints and echoes we experience in our everyday lives. So then engaging with a story is no longer a neutral act, but a moment of transfiguration.

C.S. Lewis goes further to say that these sorts of stories do not only have the capacity of profoundly commenting on life and reality, but adding to it. Here he articulates this point:

But in the next type...the marvellous is in the grain of the whole

23 Tolkien, 152
 24 Tolkien, 153
 25 Tolkien, 153-4
 26 Tolkien, 154
 27 Colin Duriez, “The Theology of Fantasy in Lewis and Tolkien”
 28 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*

work. We are, throughout, in another world. What makes that world valuable is not, of course, mere multiplication of the marvellous either for comic relief...or for mere astonishment...but its quality, its flavour. If good novels are comments on life, good stories of this sort (which are very much rarer) are actual additions to life; they give, like certain rare dreams, sensations we never had before, and enlarge our conception of the range of possible experience.²⁹

The mode of fantasy and the mythical, and its ability “to generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences”, to eliminate whatever may seem irrelevant, can offer to its audience “whole classes of experience”.³⁰ Its power is to transport you to another world, another category of being and imagination, where what once seemed impossible or unimaginable comes springing to life in colorful abundance. The ‘other’ has drawn near. Though Lewis believes no one has been adequately able to explain “the keen lasting, and solemn pleasure which such stories can give”, it is evident that the mythopoeic and fantastical mode of imagination “does something to us at a deep level.”³¹

Revelation

Every artist, or sub-creator, on their quest to create a successful Secondary World also hopes, in some way, to be saying something true, not just about their fantasy world, but our world also. There is a desire that the created “inner consistency of reality” also flows from and partakes in our Reality. Tolkien states that “the peculiar quality of “joy” in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth.” This quality is not meant to merely console current sorrows we face in this world, but is actually “a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, “Is it true?”” The artist side of the artist may be content with the answer being yes only in the world they created, but the eucatastrophe provides “a brief vision that the answer may be greater”, as if a “gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world.” This is where we enter the crux of what Lewis and Tolkien believed, not only about stories, but about our world and Reality.³²

Stories are epistemological; they are not a mere descent into entertainment or escapism, though they can often provide moments of safe retreat and relief from the gloom of everyday life. The stories we engage with impart knowledge to us, not in a factual form, but in its artful form. Though C.S. Lewis considered himself a man of reason and logic, he understands that the function of art is unlike the function of science. The material sciences can only tell us what things are made of, but not what they are. Science observes material attributes

29 C. S. Lewis, “On Science Fiction”, 111.

30 Lewis, “On Stories”, 60.

31 Lewis, “On Science Fiction”, 113-14.

32 Tolkien, 155-6

and properties, what things look like, smell like, sound like. Science can even provide insight into a substance’s function or use. But science has its limit. What something means is more than the summation of what it is made of; its meaning in relation to the Substance, its divine reality is what gives it its true meaning beyond its material properties. Lewis gives us a portrait of this on *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, when Eustace remarks that stars in his world are made of flaming gas. Ramandu responds, “Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of,”³³ revealing that there is greater reality to the physical, tangible nature of things. Lewis articulates that one of the functions of art is “to present what the narrow and desperately practical perspectives of real life exclude³⁴.” Where these narrow paths end, the arts are able to provide revelation into the real essence of things beyond their material properties. Stories can provide a portal to deeper, profound, and even transcendent truth. Fantasy becomes a form of sub-creation, which becomes a microcosm or miniature of the real world.

The joy that is experienced in the eucatastrophe is one that gives us the hint of primary reality and truth. The joyous moment looks to the future, or to the past, to see something real and true, that will in fact one day be beheld, not only in the imagination, but in reality. Fantasy is now elevated to the level of creation and enrichment. We are now shown the purpose of the faculties we possess, and that they can, are, and will be redeemed. The stories and worlds we create may, in fact, come true, or be made new. In such tales, we will find that the kaleidoscope of joy that is presented to us at the end of all things, is made of an abundance of tears, sorrows, struggles, and heartache. The eucatastrophe resounds a deep, ancient truth, that all things indeed will be restored, redeemed, and remade.³⁵

Creation of Fantastic Myths

Lewis and Tolkien were Medievalists in regards to their education and both shared a common belief and creative philosophy in their writing. Each of them “possessed an ideology which was Christian in philosophy, Medieval in form, and Mythopoeic in nature.”³⁶ Their work is devised to express the created order of things as we experience it, set in a uniquely sub-created Secondary World, which reflects, as Lewis writes, a “pattern or arrangement of activities which our nature cries out for.”³⁷ Stephen Yandell notes that they believed that the world was created and ordered by a Divine Creator, who then made humankind to reflect the divine order in their calling as sub-creator. The act of creation, literature being their preferred artistic sub-creation, involves uniquely combining separate parts to produce a whole work of harmony and unity.

There were six significant analogies that dominated Medieval thought:

33 C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 522

34 Lewis, “On Stories”, 15.

35 Tolkien, 155-6

36 Stephen Yandell, ““A Pattern Which Our Nature,” 375

37 Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 133-4

God as composer, choreographer, author, painter, player, guide. Following the Medieval mode of thought, along with their Christian worldview, the Inklings' work reflected this central core understanding of the relationship between creature and Creator. The Creator maintained a comprehensive view of the whole, whereas the creature in the midst of creation only has limited perspective. The image of Divine Dance articulates that life seems chaotic to the one in its midst, but the divine one oversees all and "understands how each measured step of the complicated pattern interacts with every other step."³⁸ In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and Sam often discuss this feeling of being part of a divine order, exclaiming "I feel as if I were inside a song,"³⁹ alluding to this Medieval notion of a Divine Dance, in which the Great Composer is conducting all movements. The artist, excellent in their craft, has the ability to reflect the very real experience that humans have in the Primary World in the natural rhythm of their storytelling in a way that brings an ordered and harmonic assembly of chaos and tension within a Secondary World. Lewis notes that we take elements of the primary world and rearrange them to creatively combine a harmonic whole.⁴⁰ The diversity of parts is skillfully brought together to create something new and unified, an art that is a "reflective microcosm of the ordering of the world."⁴¹

Otherness: The Supernatural and the Numinous

Which leads us back to the necessity, according to Lewis, of transport into the spiritual dimension. Good stories, in Lewis' view, "often introduce the marvellous or supernatural."⁴² This makes the fantastical or mythical mode of writing so attractive to C.S. Lewis, as it provides the opportunity to venture into the spiritual realm. One way to do this is through the category of stories that employ the fulfillment of prophecies. These kinds of narratives "produce a feeling of awe, coupled with a certain sort of bewilderment such as one often feels in looking at a complex pattern of lines that pass over and under one another."⁴³ They awaken within us a sense of divine providence, an omnipotent hand working out the strange course of events in such a way that brings about the great, and sometimes unlikely, achievements to some benevolent purpose. Lewis hails Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as exemplary. His story displays a deeply spiritual center with a complex intertwining of events that was devised according to an interlace narrative structure whose anti-linear pattern reveals his belief in "the workings of Providence."⁴⁴ Life seems chaotic and senseless at times in the perspective of the creature, but with the knowledge that all things are held together and being worked out in the sublime keeping of a divine, omniscient,

38 Yandell, 376

39 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 455

40 C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 371

41 Johansson, *Music and Ministry*, 95

42 Lewis, "On Stories", 18.

43 Lewis, "On Stories", 22.

44 Shippey, *Another Road*, 251-2.

benevolent Creator. It provides the reality of a spiritual realm interacting with our world, and its numinous thread gives the story its feeling of transport to another, enchanted world.

When writing his essay *On Science Fiction*, Lewis finds himself more inclined to employ supernatural methods, referencing his *Ransom Trilogy* in which he "took a hero once to Mars in a spaceship, but when I knew better I had angels convey him to Venus."⁴⁵ Nor does he see the need to imagine these strange worlds tied strictly to scientific probabilities, but it is rather their "wonder, or beauty, or suggestiveness that matter."⁴⁶ In Tolkien's *Lord*, Tolkien claimed that evoking the numinous and transcendent was a vital purpose in his fantasy literature, as he expresses in "On Fairy-Stories" that it is "to open a door on other Time."⁴⁷ Middle-earth is surging with spiritual feeling in its landscape and creatures, giving us a numinous experience of otherness. The imagination is given to its fullness, stretched to its limit, when given the freedom from purely scientific or logical constraints to employ the power of myth. These kinds of stories, according to Lewis in "On Science Fiction", are no different than fantastic or mythopoeic literature in which the impossible, or incredibly improbably, imaginatively have the same status as the impossible.⁴⁸

Literary Hiddenness

Another Medieval influence can be seen when considering the Ptolemaic cosmological model of the universe. Lewis knew well the Medieval cosmology which acknowledged seven planets with the earth at the centre of all the celestial bodies. This model of the universe, introduced by ancient Greeks (most notably Aristotle), puts Earth at the center, with sun, moon, stars, and other planets revolving around it, and was the widespread belief until the 16th century. C.S. Lewis knew its one serious defect: it wasn't true. However, Lewis does not believe that scientific fact is necessarily the immutable, universal truth that it is perceived as today. The glory of science is to progress as new facts are discovered to be true, therefore 'factual truth' is a provisional human construct. This is why, Lewis would argue, the wise man does not only think in the category of truth, but also of beauty. Lewis believed this cosmology was a beautiful thing and was convinced it had permanent value as spiritual symbols.⁴⁹

Lewis wrote a cosmic trilogy, the first book called *Out of the Silent Planet*, voyaging readers through a planetary fiction, but as expressed before, carries us profoundly into a spiritual dimension. Silence can be understood by Lewis through the lens of this Medieval model of the cosmos, in which space is not a dead, black, cold void, but rather a vast, lighted concavity. The planets were silent and sounding at the same time, their music not heard on earth because it was

45 Lewis, "On Science Fiction", 108.

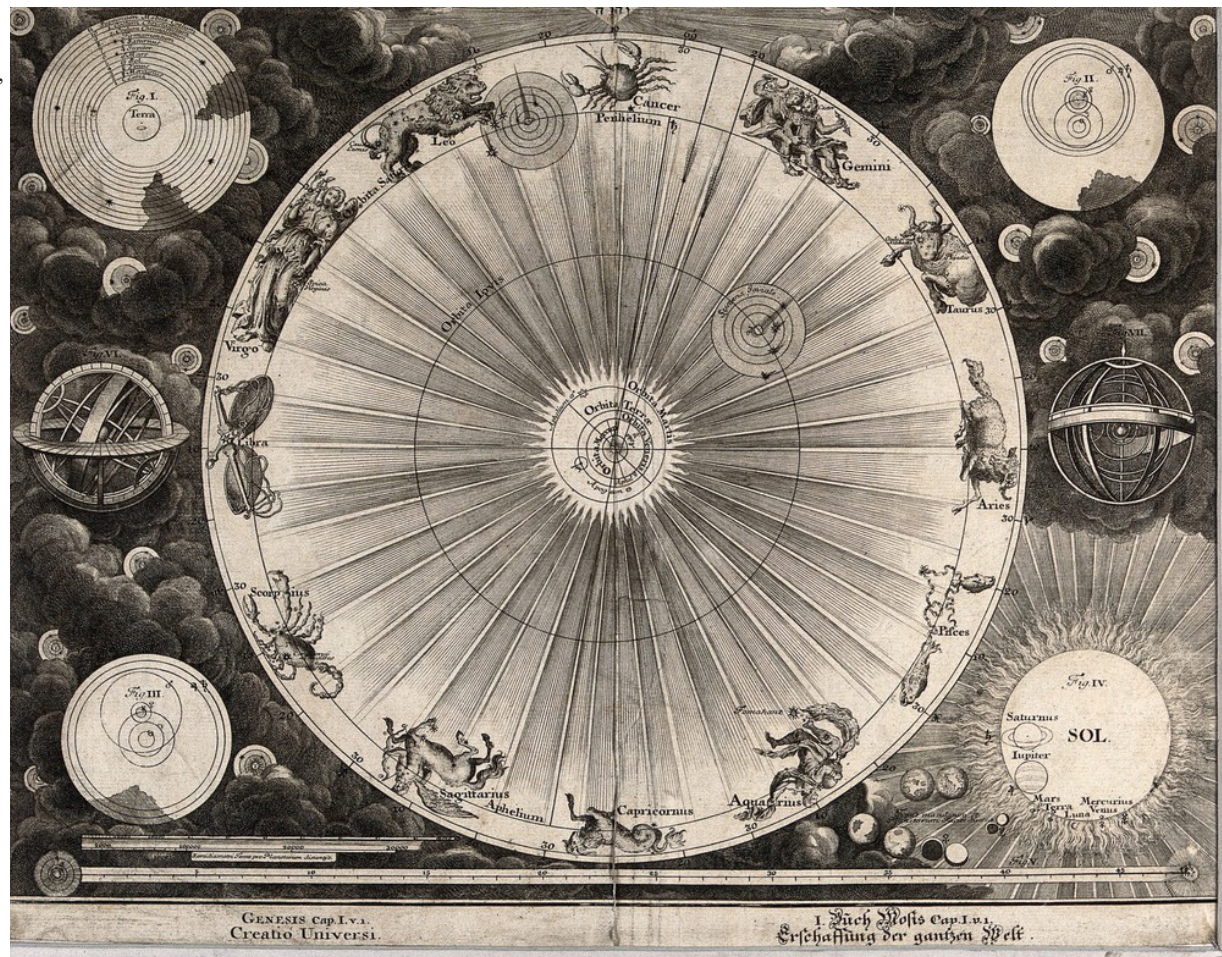
46 Lewis, 108.

47 Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", 129.

48 Lewis, "On Science Fiction", 109.

49 Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*

Figure 4:
J.A. Fridrich
after J.M. Füssli,
*Cosmological
Plan of
Copernicus’
astronomical
vision
surrounded
by systems of
Ptolemy and
Tycho Brahe,
1732*



always heard. There exists a perpetual singing of the spheres: “the music of the spheres”. Lewis draws on Dante, who was a significant influence in his writing, referencing *The Divine Comedy* and the movement of the planets: God as the unmoved mover, the love of the spheres by their Maker, which is what moves the sun, planets, and stars.⁵⁰

C.S. Lewis was very interested in this kind of silence, and wrote in a way that is best expressed through literary hiddenness, or quiet fullness, in which the inner meaning is to be carefully hidden. The neo-Platonic mode of thought deemed that “all great truths should be veiled” and should be “treated mythically.” Medieval allegories often portrayed God, but almost always incognito.⁵¹ The stories and poems we write and tell should be secretly evoking powerful associations, and should not merely state but suggest, believing that silence could make certain things audible. Lewis does not want you to just read a story, but live the story.

This cosmological theme and idea of quiet fullness in his writings displays

50 Ward, 21-24.

51 C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 356.

in part the significance of Medieval thought on Lewis’ writings and worldview. *Planet Narnia*, written by C.S. Lewis scholar Michael Ward, makes a case that *The Chronicles of Narnia* is written upon this underlying cosmology as well, in which each of the seven books is based on the symbolic “personality” of each of the seven planets that were identified in the Middle Ages.⁵² The cosmological model, making an appearance in many places of Lewis’ writing, reveals an essence that Lewis considered extremely valuable in understanding the world. It draws again upon this idea of silence, a perpetual singing throughout the stories that encapsulates us, but draws no attention to itself.

Lord also exemplifies this kind of silence, particularly in its seeming lack of God, religion, or religious rituals.⁵³ Yet Tolkien’s conception of Middle-earth with all its creatures, beings, and powers are an expression of a profound spiritual core rooted in his Christian worldview. Tolkien himself notes that *Lord* is “a fundamentally religious and Catholic work” where “the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.”⁵⁴ In a letter, Tolkien responds to a reader who perceived in *Lord* a “sort of faith” that “seems everywhere present but without a visible source”, in which he then says “You would [not] perceive it in these terms unless it was with you also.”⁵⁵ This kind of spiritual receptivity is able to recognize the presence of the numinous “other”,⁵⁶ and say with Frodo “You can see and feel it everywhere.”⁵⁷

Contemplation to Enjoyment

This idea can be furthered in Lewis’ understanding of Contemplation and Enjoyment, as expressed in Lewis’ essay *Meditation in a Toolshed*. He is first introduced to this distinction by philosopher Samuel Alexander, particularly in his book on metaphysics called *Space, Time, and Deity*. Lewis describes the duality of Contemplation and Enjoyment by a metaphor of looking at a beam of light compared to looking along a beam of light. Contemplation is like looking at a beam of light from a distance, analyzing and speculating it from afar. Enjoyment, however, is entering into the path of the light’s beam, and seeing everything from the perspective within. No longer is a single path lit, but the whole mode of seeing is illuminated by that beam.⁵⁸ In story writing, there needs to be a kind of hiddenness so that the story becomes the whole field of vision, a kind of silence that takes on a quiet fullness. Like light, it is not just something you can see, but something you see by.⁵⁹

This is a significant element to Lewis in the writing of a good story. The

52 Ward, “Planets” in *Planet Narnia*, 23-41

53 Rickie & Barnett, “Filming the Numinous,” 270.

54 Tolkien, Letters, 172.

55 Tolkien, 413

56 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, xvi

57 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 351

58 C.S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed”

59 Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 18-19

full immersion and entering into a discreet world, in which one is taken outside of themselves, and their whole being is captivated and enraptured by its beauty. There is a sense of bringing us out of a state of Contemplation into Enjoyment, away from analysis and examination, and towards appreciation and ecstasy. Lewis notes that the surest way of spoiling your pleasure of something is to look away from that very thing. That is because pleasure is in the active enjoyment of the object, just as longing is the active desire of the object. The moment you begin analyzing your satisfaction, it ceases.

Human intellect is incurably abstract... Yet the only realities we experience are concrete... The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think. You cannot *study* pleasure in the moment of nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyze the nature of humor while roaring with laughter.⁶⁰

We must thrust ourselves fully into the heart of the story until it takes over our senses and consciousness. It conceals in order to reveal. Its concealment forces us out of the abstract, into the concrete, through Enjoyment. The imagination leads us right out of the self to experience a whole world operating within itself. And there, you are enraptured, taken up, caught up, in the glory of that other world. It is not an abstract meaning that we are after. If that were the case, we were involving ourselves with a mere allegory, not a true myth. It is not simply a matter of knowing, but of tasting. Indeed it is one thing for someone to tell you about a book they read, and it is another thing entirely to read it for yourself. The difference is that of knowing something abstractly and concretely. "In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to the experiencing as a concrete what we can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction... It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely."⁶¹

So then, what is characteristic of the myth that gives us over into Enjoyment? Such stories, in their veiling of its inner meaning, propels the innate pilgrim within us to go on a journey of discovery, not by mere mental Contemplation, but through the immersive adventure of Enjoyment.

60 C.S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact", 40

61 Lewis, "Myth Became Fact", 40-1

CHAPTER 3

Cosmos

Creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Light was separated from the darkness. Boundaries were fixed for the oceans away from the skies above. Mountains, hills, and grass emerged from the deep blue and dried. Vegetation sprouted from the dry land to yield seed and fruit. Stars were called by name and placed in their rightful position to rule the seasons and heavens. Birds and animals grew their limbs and voices according to their kind. Man breathed his first breath from the dust, bearing the image of his Maker. God beheld the works of his hand and saw that it was good.¹

God spoke, and all was made. All things erupted in jubilation at the coming forth of their being from that single voice. The universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.² He made all raw materials, all elements, all matter that cannot be created nor destroyed by man. The cosmos he made and fashioned their beauties with precision and craftsmanship. Life in every way was granted by the word of power by the Creator.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.³

One cannot help but recall the founding of Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew*, when the mysterious, majestic, shaggy Lion begins to sing.⁴ His song fills the darkness to its breaking point until thousands of stars burst forth into emission to join the tune with glorious harmony. Its beauty overwhelmed the formless land until they gave way to distant mountains and sloping hills. Trees and grass reached towards the sky as if being woken from the sleepy ground. All the land swelled in exultation at the vitality of the song sung by Vitality himself. He summoned each landscape, animal, and starry host to their orchestral position to commence the symphony of exuberant life. The thrilling range of notes was the

1 Genesis 1

2 Hebrews 11:3

3 Psalm 33:6-9

4 C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 58-70

sound of the praise and the Praised reveling in the splendor of the first moments of the birth of a new world, in delightful unison with its parent.

The doctrine of creation was not initially adored by Lewis. He was indifferent in his childhood, and particularly put off by it in his teens. He was a materialist after all. Everything that was made was to him mere molecular matter without any flicker of life surging through them. All was dead, or rather, unliveable. There was no hand that crafted the rugged mountains, no artist that painted the canvas of nebulae. However, that all began to change as he became more convinced of the existence of a supernatural personality upholding the universe and everything in it. The validity of God's presence in the cosmos was shining through the materialist mist of his purely rationalist mind. The beauty of the flowers, trees, mountains, and even that little tin garden he loved from his childhood, must be linked to an Imaginative mind, as much as the stories he loved were connected to an author. Reason and Imagination have collided in Lewis to bring him to such an understanding. The material world was speaking to him, in soft whispers, and at times, paralyzing shouts, that there really is more behind what his senses perceive.⁵

Nature is God's original sanctuary. The Divine Architect has pleased Himself to construct trees as pillars branching into an ornamentation of leaves, the everlasting sky as its ceiling. Creation acts as the temple of God's presence in which his spirit filled and settled amongst all he had made. His work cannot help but bear witness to their Designer:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.⁶

Lewis considered Psalm 19 to be the chief of the Psalms. He is so enthralled by the beauties and precision of the natural world surrounding him that were day by day telling him of the God he would one day come to believe. The cosmos actively resounds the splendor of the God who designed it, proclaiming day and night of his glory. Nowhere in the earth, and no one on the earth, has not heard the declaration from planets soaring above, to the depths of the seas below. They profess knowledge of their Creator in their beauty and intricacy and announce the character of him who is not seen. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made⁷”.

5 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*

6 Psalm 19:1-4

7 Romans 1:20

Just as humanity bears that glorious Image of the Other, created and formed by His very own breath and dust, so Nature bears “His own character of *emeth [truth]*”⁸. She brews with groans too deep for words. All creation bears the imprint of the Inventor of space and time, and all dimensions undiscovered by mankind. Nature overflows from her entity the declaration of her Maker, singing of the glorious beauty that belongs to God. What we witness are traces of glory from the Glorious one. Creation then is revelatory, emitting knowledge that is unseeable through the things that are seen. What is invisible can be known through general revelation in Nature.

The Sublime

It is Nature that first provoked the lyrics of poetry and the sweeps of paint of what we now consider the “sublime”. For centuries, artists have tried to capture feelings of terror, awe, and infinity, experiences that can be characterized by the sublime.⁹ These works of art typically displayed the immense beauty and grandeur of the natural world around them, namely the creative work of a divine hand. Mountains stretching to the skies, seas running past the endless horizon, stars poking through the vast black curtain above, even the destruction of Nature’s wrath in the wake of natural disaster. What was one to do in the wake of incalculable demonstration? Words attempted to describe the terror and awe, images strove to capture such marvels to elicit such sublime feeling. Edmund Burke wrote, “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully is astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.”¹⁰ According to Burke, anything that excites the ideas of pain, danger, and whatever is terrible, that is the source of the sublime: that which will facilitate the strongest emotion our minds are capable of. Immanuel Kant proposed the feeling of the sublime in the face of Nature’s magnitude and vastness, the failure of one’s imagination to comprehend it, and the shaking of the soul in its proximity.¹¹

It is the feeling of overwhelming greatness lurking in your midst, seizing your whole being, evoking a sense of an unimaginable force that lives beyond us. This is not the mediation of a mere beauty that brings pleasure, but rather a beauty so ravishing, that it departs from enjoyment into the sublime. The beauty of Nature skidding into the sublime is the beautiful beyond itself, overflowing beyond the limit of the Imagination. The sublime transforms and transfigures the beautiful, carrying it off into infinity. It is the experience of the gesture of the infinite, the gesture by which all finite form gets carried away into absence of form.¹² Each physical and material element of that large, rugged rock is

8 C.S. Lewis, “Nature” in *Reflections on the Psalms*, 97

9 Tate. “Sublime”

10 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

11 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*

12 Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Sublime Offering” in *On The Sublime: Presence in Question*



Figure 5:
J. M. W. Turner,
The Slave Ship,
1840

transformed, in a moment, as something beyond the sum of its parts. Such occasions give way to the suspension of the Imagination over the great chasm of unimaginable magnitude and magnificence. And in such a wake, as Kant would say, “That is sublime, in comparison with which all the rest is small.”¹³

Writers and philosophers have attempted to theorize the sublime as early as the first century, as they sought to explain the experience rooted in humans’ relationship to Nature, the world, and whatever may lie beyond. The experience of the sublime is relational, and we feel ourselves in the sublime – we feel small in comparison to something much larger than ourselves. In the wake of tremendous displays of greatness, power, and majesty comes the overwhelming of the soul into a silent shudder. The sublime often evokes a sense of unimaginable greatness beyond us which is often associated with the numinous and transcendent. There is an unshakable feeling that you are in the presence of, as Bolieau writes, “a marvel, which seizes one, strikes one, and makes one feel.”¹⁴ It is the standing before the misty mountain to then find you have stumbled upon Alpha and Omega.

13 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*

14 Quoted in Jean-Luc Nancy’s, “The Sublime Offering”

The Idea of the Holy

It is the keen awareness that you are in the presence of, not just something mighty, but Almighty. Greatness itself is before you, holding all power and vigor. Man's machines are feeble toys in comparison; our intellect is dumbfounded. Lewis saw this expressed in a multitude of writers across time¹⁵:

'Under it my genius is rebuked'.
Shakespeare

Galahad 'began to tremble right hard when the deadly flesh began to behold the spiritual things.' (Wordsworth, *Prelude*, Xvii, xxii)

'awful (*horrendum*) with woods and sanctity (*religione*) of elder days'.
(Virgil, *Aen.* Vii, 172)

the sea and mountains shaking beneath the 'dread eye of their Master'.
(Fragm. 464)

This experience is so universally ingrained within the human experience that Lewis thinks it "...probable that numinous awe is as old as humanity itself."¹⁶ It came into existence, widespread, and does not disappear with the increase of knowledge or evolution of civilization. The feeling is difficult to describe. It is not so much mere fear of death or danger, but a special, peculiar sort of fear, which may very well excite Dread. It is the movement when "the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous."¹⁷

...the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking - a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visit at and of prostration before it... This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it is the *Numinous*.¹⁸

That ineffable Other inspires the eruption of thrilling awe and dread, whose presence is an inexpressible mystery, and who stands apart and above all other creatures. The ancient Israelites, the prophets of old, penned their trembling and awe in the presence of YHWH. He is the Maker of mountains that quake before him and smoke at his touch, clothed in majesty. King David keenly felt his smallness in his beholding of the grand universe:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

- 15 C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 7-8.
16 Lewis, 8.
17 Lewis, 6.
18 Lewis, 6.

what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?¹⁹

When his eyes gazed at the wonders of the universe, he was stirred inwardly with a sense of his smallness. They attribute all Nature as the handiwork of that transcendent Being; supreme, infinite, *holy*.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!²⁰

The numinous Other revealed Himself in the temple that day before the prophet Isaiah. *Holy* thrice was the seraphim's descriptive portrait. The visions of enraptured glory in the presence of he who is beyond Reason and Imagination made the foundations shake and brought Isaiah to ghastly proclaim "Woe is me! For I am lost".²¹ Fear of that terrible Beauty seized him, and no other response was possible. This is the creature-feeling that Otto describes, the overwhelming "self-abasement into nothingness" standing before an absolute power, "supreme above all creatures".²² The spontaneous moment that the ineffable and inexpressible Other bears on your consciousness, it awakens a response within that can only be understood when directly and personally experienced.

So it was with Jacob, son of Issac, son of Abraham. He came to a certain place to rest the night, when suddenly he dreamt of a ladder stretching between heaven and earth with the Lord's angels descending and ascending.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."²³

The place he nonchalantly chose to rest was illuminated in a moment to reveal that God was in that awesome, dreadful place. His vision was filled with inexplicable majesty as he lay, just moments prior unaware, in the house of God Himself. YHWH revealed Himself in Jacob's dream by showing him that he was in the midst of a spiritual realm, actively yet quietly invading, the physical realm. It is a deeply intimate experience that is had at the undeniable approach of the Other. There is a shuddering of the soul, an inward trembling that transforms into what Otto calls "mystical awe" before the ineffable object.²⁴

There is no logical deduction that explains this sublime, numinous feeling when moving beyond physical fear into awe and dread unless we consider the existence of that Numinous Other. Lewis writes in his introduction to *The*

- 19 Psalm 8:3-4
20 Isaiah 6:3
21 Isaiah 6:5
22 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10
23 Genesis 28:16-17
24 Otto, 17

Figure 6:
William Blake,
Jacob's Dream
1805



Problem of Pain:

...we must insist that dread and awe are in a different dimension from fear. They are in the nature of an interpretation man gives to the universe, or an impression he gets from it; and just as no enumeration of the physical qualities of a beautiful object could ever include its beauty, or I've the faintest hint of what we mean by beauty to a creature without aesthetic experience, so no factual description of any human environment could include the uncanny and the Numinous or even hint at them. There seem, in fact, to be only two views we can hold about awe. Either it is a mere twist in the human mind, corresponding to nothing objective and serving no biological function, yet showing no tendency to disappear from that mind at its fullest development in poet, philosopher, or saint: or else it is a direct experience of the really supernatural, to which the name Revelation might properly be given.²⁵

25 Lewis, 9-10

If this feeling of the Numinous is thus revelation, then Lewis and Otto claim in unison that it is through the seed of Abraham's faith. Though this is present in every major religion's core, "it was the Jews who fully and unambiguously identified the awful Presence haunting black mountain-tops and thunderclouds with 'the *righteous* Lord' who 'Loveth righteousness'."²⁶

This experience through revelation is "the point at which 'the numinous' in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness."²⁷ It is an experience that cannot necessarily be taught, but "can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."²⁸ God uses his character-revealing, personality-witnessing, and truth-bearing creation to stir the spirit through the sublime and awaken us to his presence in the Numinous feeling. The invisible God, veiling himself with robes of awful brilliance, conceals himself in order to be found. He bears on our consciousness through soul-gripping manifestations that inspire trembling and worship

Nature's Symbolic Purpose

Lewis, as well as Tolkien, write of a hyper-nature²⁹ in which the natural world becomes revelatory, as in the spirit of the Scriptures that describe God revealing himself through the created world. This clear emphasis on nature in the sublime can be an expression of the presence of the numinous upon being enraptured by the tangible world at hand. It reflects the belief of Nature as the sanctuary of the divine. This feeling of the presence of the divine in a vividly sublime portrait of Nature provides glimpses and impressions of the wholly Other reaching down and touching our faded and fallen realm of space. There maintains a recurring pattern of the connection to Nature and one's spiritual epiphany, and one of the reasons the Inklings are so intent on painting fantastic literary visions of Nature's enchanting beauty and majestic grandeur. The natural, physical world then becomes a portal to the invisible, to the holy, to the Other.

However, Lewis notes that one ought to take caution. He claims it would be an utter falsehood and mistake to deduce from Nature that it is she herself who is the Divine deity. Chaos in the cosmos entered when mankind discarded the Creator himself for the creation. The eyes of their hearts shifted away from believing the glory they were seeking was in God, but rather in the things he's made. This is why God gave the command to have no other gods but him, and not to worship any image. Lewis writes that the Israelites worshipped the God of creation distinct from his creation. God was Maker and Ruler; Nature was made and ruled. This was a defining characteristic of the people of Israel compared to the surrounding nations and tribes. God was not Nature, and Nature was not God — they were separate entities, the artist and the work of the artist distinct in their essence. The constant idolatry of regarding Nature more than it ought to be, a

26 Lewis, 13

27 Otto, 7

28 Otto, 7

29 Joseph Ricke and Catherine Barnett, "Filming the Numinous" In *Picturing Tolkien*, 271

distortion of its true purpose, and thus, a misdirection of understanding. For even the earth and its creatures tremble before their Maker, and experience sublime feeling with us.³⁰

Yet, "...the same doctrine which empties Nature of her divinity also makes her an index, a symbol, a manifestation, of the Divine.³¹" The purpose of Nature remained. It was not to be worshipped or treated as divine, but meant to teach about the truly Divine One. The character of the Creator is reflected and revealed through his handiwork. When rightly understood and seen in their proper place, the objects that have been made become "magnificent symbols of Divinity".³² The earth surges with the numinous presence of the Other and ruptures with the voice of God. He is the one pouring the water of the rivers running down the mountains, blowing the winds carrying the wings of the eagles, the clouds as the dust of His feet. The elements are His servants, obeying His beckoning.

But of course the doctrine of Creation leaves Nature full of manifestations which show the presence of God, and created energies which serve Him. The light is His garment, the thing we partially see Him through (104:2), the thunder can be His voice (29:3-5). He dwells in the dark thundercloud (18:11), the eruption of a volcano comes in answer to His touch (104:32). The world is full of His emissaries and executors. He makes winds His messengers and flames His servants (104:4), rides upon cherubim (18:10), commands the army of angels.³³

Nature is his clothing, his design, his architecture, his messenger. By his voice and the works of his fingers, they do his bidding. His work is displayed throughout the world as his gallery.

By taking the god's voice away — or envisaging the god as an angel, a servant of that Other — you go further. The thunder becomes not less divine but more. By emptying Nature of divinity — or, let us say, of divinities — you may fill her with Deity, for she is now the bearer of messages. There is a sense in which Nature-worship silences her — as if a child or a savage were so impressed with the postman's uniform that he omitted to take in the letters.³⁴

Nature was the first storyteller, proclaiming the ultimate, supreme character of the Creator, and creation his first form of language to communicate. They provide images of the invisible God in order to communicate to us, a sensual species,

30 C.S. Lewis, "Nature", 91-4.

31 Lewis, 94-5

32 Lewis, 95

33 Lewis, 95

34 Lewis, "Nature", 97

to feel our way to knowledge of the Other. Lewis writes, "The principle is there in Nature because it was first there in God Himself³⁵" articulating that Nature is because God is. Creation follows God as a shadow follows its object, and its character is such because the character of the Object is such. So Nature bears God's fingerprints, his outline, his shadow, his scent, his echo, his taste. These symbols loom powerfully over us, his presence pervading our lives at every turn, though incognito through so thin a veil. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning so beautifully writes, "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God: But only he who sees takes off his shoes; the rest sit round and pluck blackberries."³⁶

But there are many who do not see. The same Scriptures that tell us the heavens declare the glory of God also tell us that humanity has become blind.³⁷ The earth is filled with his glory, but our knowledge of him is lacking. The sublime feeling and Numinous presence, through the overwhelmingly and majestic power of Nature, is not only a revelation of the Other, but a revelation of ourselves: who we are, or more precisely, who we are in relation to the Other. Lewis reveals his introspection of himself in the wake of God's relentless approach towards him:

All my acts, desires, and thoughts were to be brought into harmony with universal Spirit. For the first time I examined myself with a serious practical purpose. And there found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.³⁸

He joins in the ranks with Isaiah and David when he realizes what he really is in light of the holy Other. The Other's presence exposes what we are, and what we are not. We stand afraid, fully naked and exposed, before the presence of the approaching Other. Innately we feel ourselves shamefully condemned, unworthy to stand in its midst without being utterly and rightly consumed by righteous wrath. Why else would such an approach bring abasement and fear?

Furthermore, we walk throughout the world to see alongside beauty, destruction, and within Nature, death. The cosmic battle of good and evil ensues, which we read in myths only because we know it all too well in our own experience. It is not difficult to admit that things are not as they ought to be. On everything there is cast a shadow that we cannot escape. We sense that severance from that holy Other, whose very presence makes us acknowledge we are utterly lost. We long to "be united with the beauty we see... mingle with the splendors we see", but we cannot.³⁹ How will we escape from this curse? How will we reach the Other without being swallowed up by his terrible wrath?

35 C.S. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle", 58

36 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh", 86

37 2 Corinthians 4:4

38 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 276

39 C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 43

Now we must move further, and come nearer to the heart of myth and revelation, as the Numinous Other makes a history-altering approach towards us. We must now ponder a great mystery and moment of unveiling: the *Incarnation*.

CHAPTER 4

Christ

Incarnation

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory” - John 1:1-3, 14

The Grand Miracle

The *Incarnation*. That great and profound mystery which Lewis calls the “grand miracle” of the history of the universe.¹ The transcendent, Numinous Other, Maker of all matter, upholder of all Time, shaper of all Space descended into Matter, Time, and Space. The imaginative mind and personality that spoke the universe into being took on form. Word took on a body. Language took on appearance. Revelation took on substance. Invisible took on visible. Spirit took on solidity. Ineffable took on intimate. Transcendence took on transience. The two worlds that once seemed divided and distinct have fused into a single essence. The Other has made himself known and seen. Revelation itself was revealed at a distinct moment in history, for eyes to see, ears to hear, hands to touch. A man, average and mundane in appearance, came walking around town and saying the most astounding things. His claims, if true, would change everything as we know it. What he spoke was lunacy to the common man, impossibility to the intellectual academic, blasphemy to the religious leader, and a eucatastrophic miracle to the humble believer.

The cosmos were already speaking of him, proclaiming his nature, heralding his character. Nature came as the town crier, the psalmists and prophets the scribes,

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.²

God Himself, who is spirit and thus invisible in the human realm “was manifested in the flesh”.³ Jesus is “the image of the invisible God”.⁴ It is to Lewis the grand miracle because, as all miracles, it disrupts the “normal stability of Nature”.⁵ It is, naturally, impossible and ludicrous. Yet, that is the nature of miracles. They are *super-natural*. “Extra-natural reality has...invaded and disturbed the sensuous

1 C.S. Lewis, “The Grand Miracle”, 55
2 Hebrews 1:2-3
3 1 Timothy 3:16
4 Colossians 1:15
5 C.S. Lewis, “Miracles”, 3



Figure 7:
Gentile da
Fabriano,
Adoration of the
Magi, 1423

content of space and time which makes our “natural” world”⁶ and has declared that God, who is outside of Nature, is indeed “her sovereign.”⁷ The King of Nature steps into Nature as the ultimate metaphysical marvel. Not as another legend, but as a historical event.

There was a man born among these Jews who claimed to be, or to be the son of, or to be ‘one with’, the Something which is at once the awful haunter of nature and the giver of the moral law. The claim is so shocking - a paradox, and even a horror, which we may easily be lulled into taking it too lightly - that only two views are possible. Either he was a raving lunatic of an unusually abominable type, or else He was, as is, precisely what He said. There is no middle way. If the records make the first hypothesis unacceptable, you must submit to the second. And if you do that, all else that is claimed by Christians becomes credible - that this Man, having been killed, was yet alive, and that His death, in some manner incomprehensible to human thought, has effected a real change in our relations to the ‘awful’ and ‘righteous’ Lord, and a change in our favour.⁸

6 Lewis, 3
7 Lewis, 8
8 C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 13-4

The Other who made all things, and transcends all things, who is spirit and thus invisible, entered into the sensible world. Revelation of revelations, that Great Theophany, all within fully God and fully Man. He is Divine Descendant. This heavenly arithmetic is unsearchable and indiscernible to the natural mind. We cannot intellectualize all great profound mysteries. Not because they are unreasonable, and therefore false, but because we are unreasonable to think it is false if *we* cannot reason it. Some mysteries are too great and beautiful to be intellectually understood, as if a two dimensional shadow trying to discern its three dimensional object.

Reconciliation

Now begs the question: why did He come? As Lewis noted, if the Incarnation really did happen, it was not only for a mere appearance, but for a reconciliation.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together...

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.⁹

The real effectual change that Lewis claims took place with the Incarnation is the reconciliation *to* the Other. And if He came to reconcile, and to make peace, that means there really was dissension. Through Adam and Eve's discarding of God's rule and offering of life with him, the world fell into darkness, despair, and death. We simply followed suit, partaking in the destruction by our continued rebellion to his cosmic rule. To stand before the holy Other reveals a total abasement, a shameful acknowledgment of our hostility towards him. To look upon him in all his glory would be to die, and to stand in the wake of his passing would be obliteration. The terror and dread that was kindled in the presence of the numinous Other was exposing that truly "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."¹⁰

But God did not leave us in such a state. Ever since the fall of man in the garden, that dreaded day was filled with a promise. The curse that brought chaos, catastrophe, violence, and death would be reversed. In the fullness of time, generations past, God sent forth His Son, the seed of woman, to redeem Man and Creation. Redemption was coming, wrapped up in swaddling cloth, born from a young virgin Jewish girl with nothing to her name but a forgotten lineage, in a dirty, smelly barn amidst cows and goats. She bore a son, as the angel who visited

9 Colossians 1:15-19

10 Isaiah 6:5

proclaimed, would be called Immanuel, *God with us*.¹¹

Lewis tells us to picture a diver, stripping himself of every piece of clothing or equipment, until totally naked, to enter into the vast, tumultuous sea. He sinks deeper and deeper until he is in the utter depths of darkness to retrieve something lost in the muddy bottom. Down, down, down he goes until he grasps the thing he went down to get, and then up, up, up again through the enclosure of water, holding in his hands that thing. It is human nature itself, along with all Nature, brought up again from death into life. The Incarnation is the great story of descent and ascent. Death, then resurrection. Creation redeemed. Miracle of miracles.¹²

...the Christian story is precisely one grand miracle, the Christian assertion being that what is beyond all space and time, which is uncreated, eternal, came into Nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing Nature up with him.¹³

This is the story that the cosmos has been foreshadowing ever since that great fall. Its descent into decay and death during every cosmic winter, then up again in multiplied life when the spring comes with flowers blooming echoes this reality. Nature itself is telling the story of Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected. All of Nature was serving as a shadow of God and his intentions unfolding in the human story. Just as every natural event in the world includes in it the full diversity of the character of the natural world within that particular moment in space, every great miracle in Nature exhibits the summation of the Incarnation.¹⁴ To Lewis, the Incarnation is the missing, central chapter of the whole manuscript of life that illuminates its whole meaning, and the Resurrection in which the whole plot turns from descent into ascent.¹⁵

The Person of Christ

The Revelation

Nature acted as a powerful symbol to communicate the attributes of God's entity. Through it we learned by general revelation that there really exists a Being that transcends our sensual reality. Our experience of the sublime in Nature, and our sensation of the holy Other's presence, showed us the grandeur and power of that Being. The prophets who scribed the Scriptures bore witness about YHWH by divine inspiration. And now we have the Incarnation – divine revelation in bodily form, manifested before our very eyes. This revelation came to us not in the way

11 Matthew 1:23

12 Lewis, "The Grand Miracle", 57

13 Lewis, 55

14 Lewis, "Miracles" and "The Grand Miracle"

15 Lewis, "The Grand Miracle", 62

we would have expected, for we think we would have desired “an unrefracted light giving us ultimate truth in a systematic form — something we could have tabulated and memorized and relied on like the multiplication table.¹⁶” What we find in the person of Christ is not a simple-to-follow teacher, but an elusive one. His way was the way of parables and he rarely provided a straight answer to a question. “He will not be, in the way we want, ‘pinned down’. The attempt is...like trying to bottle a sunbeam.¹⁷” Through his elusive, parabolic teaching, Jesus was showing people that revelation was far more than mere knowledge and an abstract set of ideas or philosophies. His way demanded a response from a person’s whole being. It was not about “learning a subject but of steeping ourselves in a Personality, acquiring a new outlook and temper, breathing a new atmosphere, suffering Him, in His own way, to rebuild in us the defaced image of Himself.¹⁸” Lewis is convinced that “No net less wide than a man’s whole heart, nor less fine of mesh than love, will hold the sacred Fish.¹⁹” He echoes God’s beckoning to the Israelite exiles in Babylon, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”²⁰

And this is the extraordinary claim of Christ. *He* is the truth.²¹ Truth isn’t the impersonal cold, hard facts. Truth is a Person. Truth is the sublime, numinous Other who bears on our consciousness, and beckons us to lay every defense at the door. *He* is the light of the world. Whatever he is, that is truth. To know truth is to have encountered the person of Christ. And to know Christ is to have encountered the invisible, transcendent God.²² Truth lives in the concrete. If we are “finally to know the bodiless, timeless, transcendent Ground of the whole universe” we will not know him as “a mere philosophical abstraction but as the Lord who, despite this transcendence, is ‘not far from any one of us’, as an utterly concrete Being.”²³ Truth is real, and alive. Truth breathes and eats and creates and acts and dances. Truth is profound revelation personified. Truth from the Other World has come in the flesh.

In Christ we are shown that revelation is a divine encounter with a Person. It involves the transformation of a whole life in operation, living in an illuminated state, in communion with the Other.²⁴ It is a total surrender of heart, mind, body, and soul. It is a renewed dwelling with the “darting illumination” himself.²⁵ A whole being encapsulated and caught up in the glorious light beam of intimate Enjoyment. Revelation proved personal, echoing the story that had always been told in creation, and later, in the tabernacle and temple.

16 C.S. Lewis, “Scripture” in *Reflections on the Psalms*, 131

17 Lewis, 132

18 Lewis, 132-3

19 Lewis, 139

20 Jeremiah 29:13

21 John 14:6

22 John 14:9

23 C.S. Lewis, “Nature”, 102

24 Lewis, “Scripture”, 133

25 Lewis, 139

The Substance

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”²⁶. The Greek word for “Dwelt among us” is *tabernacle*.²⁷ In other words, we can say that the Word who became flesh, Jesus, *tabernacled* amongst us. The tabernacle (“tent of meeting”) and temple were all pointing to the reality of Christ. The presence of God that is promised in the image of the tabernacle, where God and man would dwell in peaceful and harmonic relationship, finds its fulfilled reality in Christ. The tabernacle, where atoning sacrifices were made, was the shadow of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. He is the tabernacle where God dwells bodily. He is the sacrificial Lamb that makes peace by His blood. He is the mediator between man and God. He is the temple that unites man and God as one and in one place. He is the fusion of heaven and earth. He is the door, the ultimate, effective portal, by which we can enter into the other world of the spirit. His body is the temple. We meet with YHWH, the holy Other, in the presence of Christ.

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.²⁸

Just as the tabernacle and temple were the sanctuary, or dwelling place, for God’s tangible presence amidst the people of Israel, the Jews, so Christ comes to proclaim that he Himself, the Incarnate God, is the Temple. He is the dwelling place of God: *God with us*. In Jesus, Immanuel, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. The place that summoned people to come and enter in God’s presence came, not as another building, but as a Person. The Person of Christ, God in the flesh, the *Incarnation*. The tabernacle and temple were a temporary, transient means to the fulfilling, effectual work of reconciliation. It was progressive revelation at work. God in the cosmos, God in the scriptures, God in the tent, God in the flesh. Nearer and clearer was his approach. When Jesus came, he alluded to his body as the temple. The building was the shadow of his body. Can you imagine the cosmic paradox of Christ standing in the temple? Temple in temple. Dwelling in dwelling. Revelation in revelation. Substance in shadow. Creator in creation.

26 John 1:14

27 Tim Mackie and Lindsay Ponder, “Exodus: What’s So Special About the Tabernacle?”

28 John 2:18-22

Not only were the cosmos revelatory, but also the tabernacle, then the temple. The tabernacle and temple were temporary teachers that signified the dwelling of God, the place of presence. They served their purpose as a shadow, to teach of the nature of the substance. How else can we know of heavenly things, particularly in their invisible nature, if there is no shadow in our world?

They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.²⁹

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.³⁰

These are the shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.³¹

The shadows and copies of the heavenly things foreshadow and prophecy God's intention as the author of the human story. As Tim Mackie articulates, "God dwells with humans first in Eden, then in the tabernacle and temple, and then finally in the presence of Jesus, who announces he is the greater temple."³² The shadow anticipated the substance and prophesied about the better and truer thing. The story reaches its culmination when the Substance enters into Lewis' Shadowlands. The temple that would administer peace, fellowship, and reconciliation between God and man is fulfilled in the person of Christ and the body of his flesh. He is the Lamb of God whose death served as the truer and better atoning sacrifice.³³ It is the great metaphysical mystery.

Myth Became Fact

Prior to Lewis' conversion, not long after reading Chesterson's *Everlasting Man*, the toughest atheist he'd ever known sat across from him by the fire and remarked that the Gospels have surprisingly good evidence for its historicity. "'Rum thing,' he went on. 'All that stuff of Frazer's about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it had really happened once.'"³⁴ This remark shattered Lewis' atheist view and unyielding desire for there not to be a God, let alone the God of Christianity. However, he reckoned that if that Absolute, which Lewis was beginning to recognize as 'Spirit' were to make himself known, if Shakespeare

29 Hebrews 8:5

30 Hebrews 9:23-4

31 Colossians 2:17

32 Tim Mackie, "Exodus: What's So Special About the Tabernacle?"

33 John 1:29

34 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 273

were ever to make himself known to Hamlet, he'd have to write himself into the play.³⁵ We go around looking for God as if looking for Shakespeare as a character in one of his plays. Shakespeare was always present at every moment and every part as the author, yet invisible, and unknowable, unless Shakespeare were to take measures to enter in himself.³⁶

Lewis' conversion to theism was "dejected and reluctant".³⁷ This was not yet an embrace of Christianity, for the God he admitted to was non-human, and he had not yet grappled with the Incarnation. However, with each step he "was now approaching the source from which those arrows of Joy had been shot at me ever since childhood."³⁸ Or rather more accurately, the source was approaching Lewis. Never had he the slightest notion that God and Joy were connected until he realized that the heart of reality wasn't so much a place, as it was a Person. God was intimately closing in on Lewis, despite his best efforts to ward him off. His experience in literary criticism could not support that the Gospels were another myth, like the ones of the Pagans. The story does strangely resemble the myths of the dying gods, yet is utterly unique to itself. There was nothing in all of literature that was like this. Myths and histories resembled it, but there was nothing simply like it.³⁹ And there was no person like the one depicted as Christ. He was real and recognizable,

yet also numinous, lit by a light from beyond the world, a god. But if a god — we are no longer polytheists — then not a god, but God. Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not 'a religion', nor 'a philosophy'. It is the summing up and actuality of them all.⁴⁰

Each step he took in his journey to discover what lay behind Joy was an impending approach nearer "towards the more concrete, the more imminent, the more compulsive."⁴¹ The Incarnation has shown itself to be the final, most conclusive step, which brought intimately God closer to him. His belief in Jesus as the Son of God was like that of a man after a long sleep realizing he is now awake while lying motionless in his bed.⁴² Lewis finally realized and admitted that, in the spectacular moment of the Incarnation, Myth became Fact.

When considering the Christian story from creation to incarnation, we are invited "...to re-live, while we read, the whole Jewish experience of God's gradual and graded self-revelation, to feel the very contentions between the Word and the human material through which it works. For here again, it is our

35 Lewis, 272, 277

36 C.S. Lewis, "The Seeing Eye" in *Christian Reflections*

37 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 279

38 Lewis, 281

39 Lewis, 288

40 Lewis, 289

41 Lewis, 289

42 Lewis, 290

total response that has to be elicited.”⁴³ In Tolkien’s eyes, the whole Christian story is the ultimate fairy story. Like a fairytale, we are fully immersed into the mythical journey, entering in with our whole imagination. The Incarnation is the eucatastrophe of human history, and the Resurrection the eucatastrophe of the Incarnation. All of its peculiar literary marvels and mythical “self-contained significance” embrace the essence of the fairy story, and fulfill the deep ancient yearning of the heart of myth. The Christian narrative “is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe.” Not only that, but it is in the Gospels that “Legend and History have met and fused.”⁴⁴ It is the supreme story where myth is made real. In the revelation of Christ, fulfillment of Christ, and atonement of Christ, we find recovery and consolation. We are brought up out of the hopeless destiny into death in a miraculous grace of his resurrection and seemingly unlikely defeat over death itself. In Christ we become the fugitive provided a way of escape from the shackles of cosmic corruption and destruction. A poor carpenter’s son fulfills the countless prophecies of old by being sentenced to death, yet through his sacrifice, when all hope seems lost, he is raised up to reign as King over all kingdoms, revealing a great providential plan that had been in place throughout the ages. “There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits.”⁴⁵

In the person of Jesus, spirit and flesh have merged together in one body. The world of spirit and of material, heaven and earth, have been reconciled together.⁴⁶ Two worlds have collided in a way that hasn’t been seen since that dreaded severance in the garden, a turning point in the story of humanity. We were on a decline, descending into the depths of chaos. The Incarnation and Resurrection has changed the trajectory. Upwards we go, in the very hands of God, into redemption, to be united in the glorious concord of the course of Joy and beauty that we have longed for our whole lives.

43 Lewis, “Scripture”, 133
44 Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories”, 155-6
45 Tolkien, 156
46 Tim Mackie, “Heaven and Earth”



Figure 8:
Caravaggio,
*The Incredulity
of Saint Thomas*,
1601-2

CHAPTER 5

Constructing Liminality

The Moment of Unveiling

Joy, the inconsolable longing that Lewis experienced throughout his life, were powerful moments that seemed to take him out of this world into another. As Lewis journeys through his life from materialist atheism into theism, and then ultimately to Christianity, he recognizes the deeply ingrained connection between Joy and God.¹ He wandered away from the belief that reality is simply what you can perceive with the physical senses and anchored himself to the notion that a spiritual world exists. Not only that, but the other world, the dimension of the spirit, is constantly invading our world of senses and appearances. The two worlds are not so far from each other, but continually interacting and overlapping. Those moments of Joy, the feeling of the sublime, the bearing of the numinous presence, can be considered the opening of the door of the portal into that Other world.

As we explored Lewis' life towards Christian faith, we saw a significant discovery: that it wasn't a place that Joy was coming from, but from a Person.² If that is the case, Lewis provides us with a whole new meaning and perspective of liminality: it is the point of meeting with the source of Joy. Spiritual awakening is the moment the Other bears upon our consciousness, when we recognize suddenly that there is a Presence looming over us, we are in a liminal space in time. This rips apart the divide between secular and sacred in its traditional sense. It is not dependent on a particular building or city in which one meets with the Other; heaven can penetrate earth wherever and however it pleases. The bright shadow that Lewis alludes to has settled upon where we are and what we are, and the Other has made itself known. Perhaps I can say, liminality is an apocalypse.

The biblical word "apocalypse" does not refer to the popular understanding of the end of the world. *Apocalypse* in Greek (apokalypsis) means "to uncover" or "reveal".³ It is a moment of divine revelation, when you finally see the true nature of something. The veil is pulled back, and what was once hidden in the shadows bursts forth into the light of day. Apocalypse provides a "heavenly perspective on earthly circumstances"⁴ and a transformation of vision. This follows Tolkien's thought on the purpose of fantasy and storytelling – to provide new vision, or to see things the way we were meant to see them.⁵ The apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians of his prayers that they would receive "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened".⁶ We saw this in Jacob's dream and Isaiah's vision in which they were in a moment transported to the throneroom of God. Those spiritual epiphanies revealed a divine reality they could not see prior. The space in which they stood transformed as it opened up a portal into the spiritual realm which was always there, concealed. Invisible, transcendent reality was

1 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 281

2 Lewis, 282

3 Tim Mackie, "How to Read the Bible: Apocalyptic Literature", 3

4 Mackie, 3

5 Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", 146

6 Ephesians 1:17-8

unveiled.

This kind of revelation is not a neutral, unfeeling moment. It is one that grips your whole being, thrusting you into the heart of the divine. As Isaiah and Jacob stood in the presence of YHWH, it caused a dual downward and upward movement. Otto articulated it as a mysterious greatness that is both daunting and attractive.⁷ Psalm 2:11 puts it, "serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." They were shaken to the core, moved deeply inward, for this kind of revelation is not one simply of intellect - it is the sort that strikes your innermost being. The spatial or artistic expressions by which we seek to provide liminal experience cannot effectively "teach". As Otto puts it, the numinous can only be "induced, incited, and aroused."⁸ Through suggestion, rather than representation, we can call from mind to mind, in hopes that the spirit can awaken it.

For the sake of argument, I will turn my attention to two places: that of real estates and unreal estates. That is, liminality in real space and time, and liminality in imaginary space and time. The Gothic Cathedral will act as a case study in real estate. The fantastical landscapes of Tolkien's Middle-earth and Lewis' Narnia will provide the setting for the case studies of unreal estates.

Real Estates

The Middle Ages lived continually interacting with the supernatural realm, always in its presence at every turn of human life. To the medieval mind, the physical world had no reality except as a symbolic image, and stood as the "objectively valid definition of reality."⁹ Understanding symbols was necessary to comprehend the world as it is and gain a perception of invisible reality in the object and its meaning beyond it. Beauty was perceived as "splendor veritatis", the radiance of truth. Symbols were prevalent everywhere in the Medieval world, revealing that the physical world is infused with metaphysical meaning. The medieval mind focused on the symbolic essence of things, and at every turn, saw invisible reality reflected in the visible world. Thus, the image was not considered as illusionary, but as apocalyptic – revelatory.¹⁰

In Max Dvorak's *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, Karl Maria Swoboda defines "the basic problem of Gothic art as the relationship between transcendental ideas and the finite world."¹¹ Otto von Simson provides a detailed articulation in *The Gothic Cathedral* of the Medieval philosophy and worldview that conceived its architecture and art. The Gothic age was ultimately an age of vision, in which the supernatural manifested itself to the senses. Religious life of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were motivated by the "desire to behold sacred reality with bodily eyes."¹² Architecture became a mode to express and experience

7 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 65

8 Otto, 62

9 Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, xvi

10 Simson, xvii

11 Swoboda, *Idealism and Naturalism*, xxvii

12 Simson, xvii

reality.”²³ The harmonies of audible and visible creations imitate and reflect the ultimate eternal harmony of the redeemed new world. As the icon sought to participate in the true reality of what it was attempting to represent, so consonances and proportions expressed musically and visually are participating in the sacred reality that transcends beyond them. Meditation upon such harmonies that are caught up in the divine concord can stir the soul upward to experience true ultimate reality, the living God in which all creation lives and breathes and has their being. Its architecture, in the language of geometric forms, imparts ineffable insights that transcend the world of appearances.²⁴ In *Retractions*, Augustine reaffirms the belief that the principle of the number is powerful in guiding one’s intellect from perception of images to invisible reality and truth of God.²⁵

The School of Chartres saw a synthesis of Platonic and Christian ideas which then attempted to translate theology into geometry, leading to aesthetics as its natural consequence. They held the belief that mathematics was the link between God and the world, and the tool to discover secrets about the Creator through creation. Harmony established in the cosmos is represented in musical composition, but also architecture. God is the Divine Architect, taking his created chaotic matter as his building material and transforming it into his adorned cosmic temple, the ordered universe. When we consider the beauty of perfect proportions found in compositions of music and architecture, we must recognize the knitting together of existing elements of which God created the cosmos. In this, the perfection of proportion is seen to be the foundation of stability and beauty of God’s cosmic palace. Through the human act of composing and harmonizing, and by submitting to geometry, the medieval architect believed himself to be walking in the footsteps of the Divine Architect and Master Builder.²⁶

Vision of Heaven

There exists a deeply symbolic relationship between the cosmos, the Celestial City, and the sanctuary.²⁷ Musical harmony was not primarily a physical principle, but a metaphysical one. The music of the spheres, an ancient concept, can refer to the eternal worship and praise that is rendered to God amongst the angels and saints in the heavenly dwelling. Abelard transposes this musical image architecturally by relating Celestial Jerusalem to Solomon’s Temple. The Biblical descriptions of the Temple, as well as Heavenly Jerusalem, and Ezekiel’s vision, rest on building measurements which he connects to the divine harmony present in the celestial spheres. The dimensions given in these descriptors yield the proportions of perfect musical consonances. Solomon’s Temple, considered a “mystical image of heaven” was also used, as many medieval documents

23 Simson, 24
 24 Simson, 24-5
 25 Augustine, *Refractions*
 26 Simson, 26-32
 27 Simson, 37

have testified, as a prototype for the Christian sanctuary.²⁸ The proportions and dimensions for the Temple were divinely inspired, given by God himself, in which Renaissance architect Philibert Delmorme declares God “the great architect of the Universe” in his instructive design of Noah’s arc, Moses’ tabernacle, and Solomon’s Temple.²⁹

The Gothic cathedral is more than an image or symbol of the cosmos but can be considered a “model” of the universe. More so,

...the cathedral was the intimation of ineffable truth. The Medieval cosmos was theologically transparent. Creation appeared as the first of God’s self-revelation, the Incarnation of the Word as the second. Between these two theophanies medieval man perceived innumerable mystical correspondences, and only he who understood these correspondences understood the ultimate meaning and structure of the cosmos.³⁰

Adam’s fall in the garden has cosmological consequences, disrupting and obscuring the theological order of the cosmos, severing the peaceful fellowship and union that all creation had with God. However, that right order is still maintained and manifested in the harmonic relationship and dance of the heavenly spheres. Where one sees the stars, the medievalist will recognize the celestial home of the host of heaven. In designing a sanctuary according to the laws of harmonious proportion, an architect is imitating the order of the visible world while at the same time conveying an intimation of the harmony that will be fully realized in the redeemed world to come.³¹

The Medieval era, moving from Romanesque to Gothic, was indicative of a Platonic influence in its cosmological understanding, and enraptured with a musical, symphonic experience. The Romanesque preoccupation with the mere illusion or image of truth was insufficient. Now, the Gothic was intimately concerned with infusing the foundations of design with the laws that upheld the universe. The symphony of ineffable unison was the foundation of the biblical descriptions of New Jerusalem. They became architects inclined to learn directly from their Master architect to embody the essence of ultimate reality and portray metaphysical truth through law and reason. This was to become a liminal space, not a mere display for the eyes, but a fully all-consuming experience of ineffable truth. It was a call to truly bring heaven down to earth and declare the Gospel of Christ as the heavens declare the glory of God.³²

The metaphysical experience of music was also carried in St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s philosophy of art, portraying Augustine’s influence in his understanding of the redemptive mystery of Christ’s reconciling work as

28 Simson, 38
 29 Simson, 38
 30 Simson, 35-6
 31 Simson, 36-9
 32 Simson, 38-9

harmony.³³ The mystical musical experience served them this meaning:

It was not that the enjoyment of musical consonances subsequently led Augustine to interpret these as symbols of theological truth. On the contrary, the consonances were for him echoes of such truth, and the enjoyment that the senses derive from musical harmony (and its visual equivalent, proportion) is our intuitive response to the ultimate reality that may defy human reason but to which our entire nature is mysteriously attuned.³⁴

To say that the medieval attitude towards music was that of deep appreciation and admiration would be an understatement. It was embraced as a means to convey divine secrets that correspond to the symphonic perfection of the heavens. Simson says this of The Abbot of Clairvaux:

What he demands of ecclesiastical music is that it “radiate” truth; that it “sound” the great Christian virtues. Music he thinks should please the ear in order to move the heart; it should, by striking a golden mean between the frivolous and the harsh, wholesomely affect man’s entire nature.³⁵

Light

Where the Romanesque features high, heavy, dark walls with windows piercing the building, the Gothic increases its windows to make its structure transparent walls.

As Gothic verticalism seems to reverse the movement of gravity, so, by a similar aesthetic paradox, the stained-glass window seemingly denies the impenetrable nature of matter, receiving its visual existence from an energy that transcends it. Light, which is ordinarily concealed by matter, appears as the active principle; and matter is aesthetically real only insofar as it partakes of, and is defined by, the luminous quality of light.³⁶

Gothic architecture can be considered as transparent and diaphanous. No interior space was untouched by light, nor allowed to remain dark. Windows are enlarged, the width becomes narrower, and exterior walls are pierced by continual rows of windows. The structure transforms from solid framing into light tracery, in which everything is illuminated and infused with its transcendental quality.

33 Augustine, *De Trinitate*
34 Simson, 40
35 Simson, 41
36 Simson, 4

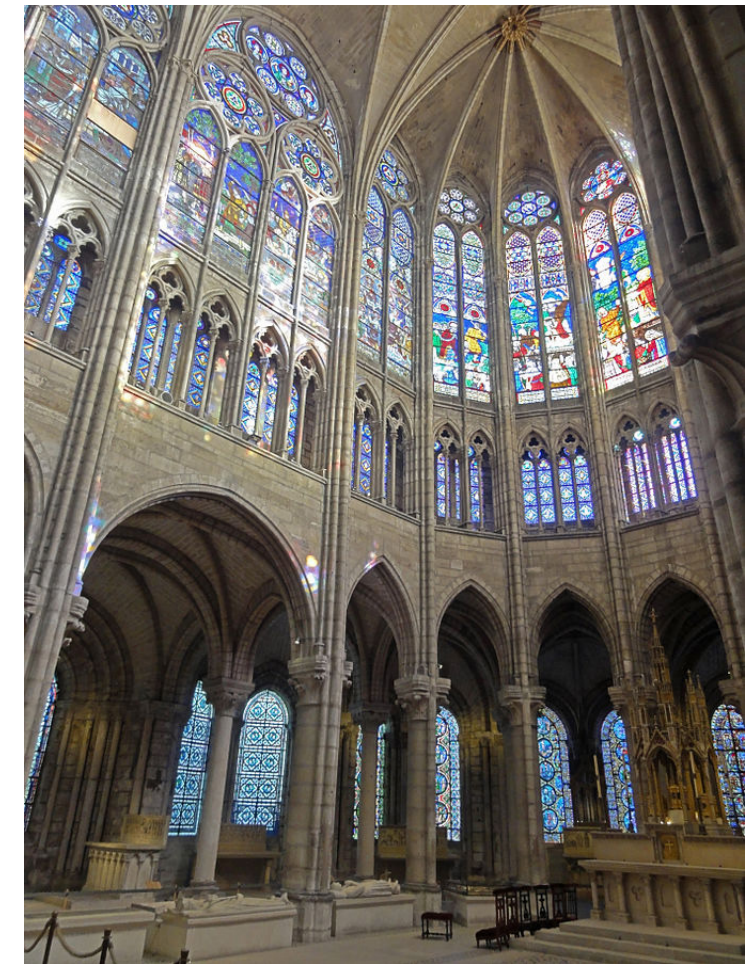


Figure 10:
Saint-Denis
Basilica,
completed 13th
century

Ultimately they appear as a shallow, transparent shell surrounding nave and choir, while the windows, if seen from the inside, cease to be distinct. They seem to merge, vertically and horizontally, into a continuous sphere of light, a luminous foil behind all tactile forms of the architectural system.³⁷

Luminosity, for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was “the essence of all visual beauty”.³⁸ Stars, precious stones, gold, glittering objects, polished surfaces - all were praised for their beauty because of their luminescence. Literature and philosophy were spoken about for their aesthetic delight in terms of light, as if clear or lucid. Stained-glass windows replaced opaque walls to reflect this preoccupation with light. This medieval direction that flowed into the development of Gothic architecture originates not fundamentally in their sensuous impressions but from a philosophical one. All of this was a welling up of worldview overflowing into aesthetics.³⁹

The medieval man considered beauty as “the radiance of truth, the

37 Simson, 4
38 Simson, 50
39 Simson, 50-1

splendor of ontological perfection, and the quality of things which reflects their origin in God.”⁴⁰ Light, as well as proportion, were displays of the fingerprints of the Creator, and insight into his divine perfection as established in the cosmos. The Platonic influence in the Middle Ages deemed light as the most revelatory of natural phenomena, seeing that it is the closest to immateriality, and thus closest to pure form. Light can be considered as “the mediator between bodiless and bodily substances, a spiritual body, an embodied spirit”.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is the fundamental creative principle underlying all life and all things. It is active in the heavenly realms, as well as the earthly realms. Light is necessary for the growth of all organic material and permeates all worldly substances. Everything we encounter testifies to the existence of and dependence on light. An object’s value is determined by its participation with light. In our delight of luminosity, as it interacts with our world, we intuitively come to decipher its philosophical significance and transcendental quality.⁴²

This ancient, philosophical, and even mythical, idea of light originates in Plato’s *Republic*, in which sunlight is compared to the good as the cause of knowledge and being. Plato extends his argument to say that light makes things visible and is the underlying force of growth and nourishment.⁴³ The Neoplatonists took this metaphor and infused it with epistemological meaning – light is the illuminating agent in the material universe of transcendental reality and truth. Augustine follows this mode of thought into Christian philosophy, light being the fundamental metaphysical principle, in which illumination is the Divine, enlightening the human heart and mind. He takes it further, driving it right into the heart of the theology of Christ as the light of the world found in John’s gospel.⁴⁴ He is the Divine Word made flesh, the incarnated revelation, the light that shines forth into the darkness.⁴⁵ By him and through him all things were made,⁴⁶ and just as everything would vanish into nothingness without light, so all of existence hinges on the Divine Light.

Creation is an act of divine illumination, God revealing himself in and through Nature. The created universe exists and is seen and known, in and through light, and all created beings and things bear witness to “the Divine Light and thereby enable the human intellect to perceive it.”⁴⁷ Of all the manifestations of himself that God made, light is the greatest and most direct theophany. Light, similarly to musical harmony, fulfills that deep, innate longing for that ultimate concord, to experience the reconciliation of body, mind, and soul, the multiple together in one unified essence. As corporeal light burst into the Gothic cathedral through its transparent walls to illuminate the inner sanctuary, so the mystical

40 Simson, 51
 41 Simson, 51
 42 Simson, 51-2
 43 Plato, *The Republic*, Book Six
 44 Simson, 52-3
 45 John 1
 46 Colossians 1
 47 Simson, 53

reality of the transcendent God descending into the world of flesh, down again into death by crucifixion, and raised up again in newness of life to unify all who would believe to Himself, is made all the more palpable to our physical senses. Light reveals a metaphysical marriage of physical and spiritual, ultimately joining together in the person of Divine Light.⁴⁸

Sublime/Numinous Feeling

Otto’s description of artistic expressions of the sublime and the numinous reach its most effective peak in the Gothic. Great art allows those in its midst to be “confronted with the numinous itself, with all its impelling motive power, transcending reason, expressed in sweeping lines and rhythm.”⁴⁹ Otto describes that this is traditionally done in the sublime, when something suggests an overwhelming power and beauty that causes the shuddering or exasperation of the soul. In the West, according to Otto, this is most successfully shown in the Gothic. He deciphers that the two most direct methods of representing the numinous, particularly in Western art, is through darkness and silence.

The darkness must be such as is enhanced and made all the more perceptible by contrast with some last vestige of brightness, which it is, as it were, on the point of extinguishing; hence the “mystical” effect begins with semi-darkness. Its impression is rendered complete if the factor of the “sublime” comes to unite with and supplement it. The semi-darkness that glimmers in vaulted halls, or beneath the branches of a lofty forest glade, strangely quickened and stirred by the mysterious play of half-lights, has always spoken eloquently to the soul, and the builders of temples, mosques, and churches have made full use of it.⁵⁰

The flickering lights amidst the darkness affords the mystery of the ineffable Other. Silence, then, is the innately spontaneous reaction to the feeling of the numinous presence. The prophet Habakkuk records, “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”⁵¹ Even in music, the closest utterance to holiness is in the fading away into quiet tune, silence, and stillness. Darkness and silence mark an emptiness, a void, which, in their negation, does away with form, with “here” and “there”, to actualize the wholly Other.⁵² The solemn dying away into quiet stillness, the faint strokes of glimmering light, the pause, and the holding of breath, all render a revelatory composition of awe-struck fear and wonder in the sudden presence of the numinous. It provides a tangible vision that strikes the soul with awe, and pierces the heart with longing. Not

48 Simson, 55-58
 49 Rudolf Otto, 67
 50 Otto, 70
 51 Habakkuk 2:20
 52 Otto, 71-2

Figure 11:
Mi Youren,
*Cloudy
Mountains*,
before 1200



only displaying the positive, but also displaying the negative (or in its failure to display) can open one's spiritual eyes to what is seen and what is unseen. In the absence of form, all form gets carried off into the sublime, on the border of the maximum of the imagination⁵³, beyond the tangible world, into the transcendent realm of the spirit. In the rapturous longing in the wake of beauty and grandeur, standing before overwhelming form, but also the absence of form, can transform into a liminal space, a portal to the other world, and provide our souls with a transcendent vision of divine reality. What is beyond merely what the eyes can see, is awakened within the content and composition of sensual form framing what is beyond form. In the form that can be comprehended and grasped holds the offering of something that cannot be comprehended and grasped – or at least in this realm. As George MacDonald would say, “the greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended.”⁵⁴ Such outlines and silhouettes indicate the presence of the incomprehensible something lurking behind the concealing veil.

Architectural Fairytale

E.L. Ridsen remarks in his essay “Tolkien’s Resistance to Linearity: Narrating The Lord of the Rings” of Tolkien’s narrative structure in *Lord* and its semblance to a Gothic cathedral, providing a fascinating mythical perspective to the cathedral as an experience of a fairytale. As you enter the cathedral, you enter into a “separate, discrete world”⁵⁵, as if entering the story of a book. The plan of the building is in the form of a Latin cross to indicate its purpose, and the sanctuary is like a fairy story in its offering of recovery, escape, and consolation, or judgment and death if the protagonist fails in their journey. Ridsen states that the “Gothic cathedral unfolds not merely a single experience but a huge and

53 Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”

54 George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination”, 31

55 E.L. Ridsen, “Tolkien’s Resistance to Linearity: Narrating The Lord of the Rings” 80

varied world”⁵⁶ as if episodes of a story. This can be seen as you enter through an elaborate and highly ornamented portal opening up to a lobby or narthex and progress through the long passage of the nave set beneath the towering arches. Approaching the transept, the arms of the cross-cutting through the nave, one will see the hemispherical dome above where the nave and transept meet or sometimes above the apse or choir. The altar, enclosed by the ambulatory at the end, displays the sacraments and remembrance of sacrifice. The cathedral has a multitude of episodes: multiple aisles to approach the altar; galleries and stained-glass windows depicting biblical, historical, or natural scenes to illuminate a story; and smaller chapels along the outside of aisles designed for individual prayer and meditation. Just as each path leads to the altar, the moment of the epiphany of the Eucharist, symbolizing Christ’s death which Tolkien considers to be the eucatastrophe of human history,⁵⁷ conveying the many paths of the characters leading ultimately to the eucatastrophic end. The flickering lights, its movement and struggle between light and dark, comes to the end to realize the ultimate significance of the whole story.⁵⁸

Unreal Estates

The unexplored estates of the universe, particularly those of the human imagination, venture upon the realms of the incomprehensible, and ride the winds blowing from the Other world. Fairy stories and myths construct worlds with their own inner consistencies of histories, legends, cultures, languages, creatures, landscapes, and laws. Entering into a story allows one to fully immerse themselves in the place, time, and tone of the other world being formed. Unreal estates, fantastic worlds that exist in myth and imagination, lend themselves as thresholds and liminal spaces into the other worlds. George MacDonald writes, “A fairytale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away.”⁵⁹ It is through their imaginative beauty, suggestiveness, mystery, and poetic language that one is fully immersed in the world that a story opens up. The myth beckons you through the narrow door into a world wholly other, unique, and separate. One must step outside of the abstract, and in a sense outside of themselves, to enter concretely into this new world. As we’ve read from Lewis prior, “it is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely.”⁶⁰ True revelation, genuine apocalypse, is experienced in the concrete.

The worlds of fantasy require their physical environments to experience the myth as a story in the most concrete sense. Fantasy does not exist apart from its architecture and landscape to indicate that we are no longer in our world. The

56 Ridsen, 80

57 J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories”, 155

58 Ridsen, 79-81

59 MacDonald, 30

60 C.S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact”, 41

“otherness” of other worlds is often illuminated, and revealed, in their setting. The physical, visible setting, with whatever strange creatures that reside, exposes the moment of transport from this world to the next. As Tolkien puts it, the fairytale is most characterized by “the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country.”⁶¹ That moment that signals to us we are in another realm can be awakened by its mystical landscape, its “unreal” estate, its air of otherness.

Lothlorien of Middle-Earth

For many readers of *Lord*, it is “a kind of liminal experience, taking readers, by literary enchantment, to the threshold of a place, a feeling, a way of being, which might be termed “transcendent” or...”numinous.”⁶² In Middle-earth, Tolkien is constructing plausible and moving ‘other worlds’ that draw you into the only real other world, that of the spirit. *Lord* also follows Lewis’ inclination in introducing the marvelous and supernatural. Tolkien and Lewis both understood that simply taking you to a strange place is not enough to evoke the power of fantasy, but must usher its reader into another spiritual dimension, a mingling with transcendence. They consider the “holy” as the divine meeting the natural, and how earthly creatures experience such “otherness” on earth. Such moments occur within the world we reside when, as Rudolf Otto says, the ineffable “other” makes itself known or its presence felt.⁶³

For Tolkien, this means of transport to another world, the truly other dimension of the spirit, was through the numinous experiences of Middle-earth. Though the numinous and sublime is often in reference to supernatural beings or the divine realm, it does not necessitate overt mythologies or religious activities. Tolkien’s Middle-earth is a “religion-less” world, a pre-Christian conception of a secondary world influenced by his interpretation of the Anglo-Saxons.⁶⁴ However, despite the absence of religion and associated rituals, such as prayer or worship, the story is heavily toned in the mythic, majestic, and sublime. We sense the story is being played out in a world and landscape that feels haunted and mysterious, serging with divine powers of both good and evil.⁶⁵

As we move through the story, we come upon Lothlorien. They are not simply strange Elves, but correspond to the most enchanted and beautiful section of the book filled with historical narrative, poetry, and songs. Lothlorien signifies that this tale is only part of a much larger, richer story and Tolkien considers them extremely significant and profound, essential to the book’s mystical tone. As the idea of Lothlorien was developed over many years, Tolkien began to invest in the Golden Woods which would suggest beings and things far higher and greater than the plot at hand.⁶⁶ Tolkien’s narration of Frodo and the Fellowship to the realm

61 Tolkien, 114
 62 Ricke & Barnett, “Filing the Numinous”, 266
 63 Otto, xvi
 64 Ricke & Barnett, 270
 65 Ricke & Barnett, 270
 66 Ricke & Barnett, 267

of Lothlorien is a “crossing over” into a kind of liminal space and “threshold into another way of being and seeing.”⁶⁷ Tolkien attempts to capture the “air of timeless enchantment”⁶⁸ through its other-worldliness and other-timeliness, as if entering a different dimension:

As soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling came upon him, and it deepened as he walked into the Naith. It seemed to him that he stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell, there was memory of ancient things; in Lorien, the ancient things still lived on in the waking world.⁶⁹

His rich description describes “an extraordinary state of consciousness” that seems to cross into a “different order of existence.”⁷⁰ This powerful scene is filled with indescribable and profound mystery and meaning. This description may be a reference, or paying of homage, to C.S. Lewis who, in his introduction to *The Problem of Pain*, discusses the numinous and comments on Virgil’s reference to the palace of Latinus “awful (horrendum) with woods and sanctity (religione) of Elder Days.”⁷¹ This is evident in the description of the numinous or sublime through the borrowing of language, and helps to provide useful context to the feeling of mystery and otherness of the Lothlorien.⁷²

Lothlorien infuses the entire work of *Lord* and Middle-earth with this powerful presence and suggestion of the numinous all around. A profound moment in the novel that displayed the feeling of the numinous was the entrance and moment of unveiling of Lothlorien as Frodo’s blindfold is taken off. The passage into Lothlorien perhaps has provided the sense of the “other-worldliness” of the place, and the moment of uncovering leaves Frodo in astonishment at the presence of the ineffable.⁷³ Frodo “caught his breath”⁷⁴ as his eyes beheld for the first time a place he had never seen that existed beyond what he had ever known or experienced. Where Rivendell provides a glimpse of the Elvish world that Tolkien is creating, Lothlorien is its profoundly awful, reverent, and vivid culmination.

It stands as the inscrutable but wonderful reminder and remainder of a heightened life, a life both more divinized and yet somehow, ironically, more “natural” than that experienced by the other folk in and on Middle-earth. It is a taste of the other, a trace of the glory of

67 Ricke & Barnett, 267
 68 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 308
 69 Tolkien, 304
 70 Ricke & Barnett, 268
 71 Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 7
 72 Ricke & Barnett, 269
 73 Ricke & Barnett, 270-1
 74 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 341

the One, a place apparently still untouched by the ravages if not the temptations of Time.⁷⁵

Frodo's experience shows him "lost in wonder" as if "he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world."⁷⁶ He is experiencing Lothlorien as if a world without stain, a natural world in its fullest vibrancy, delight, and beauty, as if the world first formed by its Creator before evil had come to distort our senses and lessen our vision. Through its sublime beauty and mystical feeling, the physical world becomes a portal of the invisible, of the holy, of the Other.

Tolkien's Lothlorien vision of a glorious landscape draws on the idea of the sublime, in its awe-inspiring reverence in the presence of an overwhelmingly great and beautiful power. The narrative goes into great detail to describe the sub-created world of Middle-earth, with its natural setting being of high importance in the story. Plants, trees, woods, mountains, and other natural phenomena play a significant role in Tolkien's *Lord*, reflecting Tolkien's "deeply theological" and "sacramental" view of nature.⁷⁷ Therefore, since the numinous presence can be felt powerfully in the presence of the works of art (nature) by the Divine Artist, Tolkien's Middle-earth is profoundly "natural" and suggests the ancient reality of a kind of humanity that has not severed its relations with God and creation. The construction of ruins was also significant as they signal the existence of Tolkien's "vanished worlds"⁷⁸ with their own embodied memories and histories. This allows for the transport to another world, where the evocation of "the Elder Days" is felt tangibly through the witness of the ruins of past ancient civilizations. The whole mysterious setting of Middle-earth, in its landscape, architecture, and ruins, provide an ethereal quality and antiquitous feeling, transporting you to another, enchanted world. We are drawn into its spiritual center, making the reading of *Lord* a sublime, liminal experience, opening up a window into "otherworldliness" and "othertimeliness."

Narnian Portals

Lewis claimed that a good story that keeps you coming back to it is not the mere presence of suspense, but the *quality* of uncovering. He identifies the true test of a good story by asking whether someone would read the story again. "the re-reader is looking not for actual surprises (which can only come once) but for a certain surprisingness...It is the *quality* of unexpectedness, not the *fact* that delights us. It is even better the second time."⁷⁹ He compares the reader's taste for stories to that of tasting wine; we can only truly "savour the real beauties" when our ravenous thirst of curiosity has been satisfied,⁸⁰ and then given to the delights

75 Rickie & Barnett, 271

76 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 341

77 Rickie & Barnett, 272

78 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 341

79 C. S. Lewis, "On Stories", 25-6

80 C.S. Lewis, "On Stories", 26

Figure 12:
Pauline Baynes,
Illustration from
Prince Caspian,
1951



of discovery and progression through the world of the story. The movement from concealing to revealing is what gives the story its engaging quality.

As we journey through a story, there are successive moments of revelation. Architectural elements often frame significant moments in the story, and help facilitate progressive discovery. The portal is a recurring architectural motif in Lewis' writing, especially in the Narnia series. In order to enter the land of Narnia, one must be brought through a portal, each book containing its own: magic rings, a wardrobe, a painting, a train station, etc. Though each varied, they all envisaged a fundamental architectural element of the portal to symbolize the entrance into another world, into another way of seeing, into another way of living. In a way, the story itself is a portal, as the reader is invited to journey with the characters from 20th-century England in the mysterious land of Narnia. The interaction with the portal object or location opened up a way to the other world which came suddenly and spontaneously, often without warning. The change of setting signifies the place and time, signalling whether you are home or elsewhere, and facilitating the movement from one world to the next. The portal is a threshold in its liminal embodiment of the transition from "here" to "there", distinguishing two spaces and framing it as a significant point of transport.

Figure 13:
Caspar David
Friedrich,
*Wanderer Above
the Sea of Fog*,
1818



Lewis commissioned Pauline Baynes to create illustrations for each of the seven Narnia books.⁸¹ Her drawings, elegant and stylized according to Medieval mode, as well as lively and decorative, help lead the story in a tone of whimsy.⁸² Simple as they are, her illustrations are engaging and evoke the power of suggestion. She plays off of stylistic form and flatness of image, as if typical of many Medieval works of art, and graphically builds moments of the world by compressing selected elements into a single illustration that invokes questions of its meaning and symbolism.⁸³ But apart from the presence of form in a clear absence of form. Baynes' doorways are particularly mysterious and engaging, drawing the reader and viewer deeper into the story. Her portals frame a dark void (or sometimes a lightened void) that the characters look into. Suspense is not created by facial expression, since we do not see the children's faces, but rather the composition of the architecturally framed void in relation to the characters. More specifically, we see their backs. *Rückenfigur*, the German word literally translated "back-figure" is a compositional device employed in the visual

81 Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper: *C. S. Lewis: a Biography*, 302 - 310

82 Nancy-Lou Patterson, "An Appreciation of Pauline and Baynes", 3

83 Patterson, 4

arts which directs "the viewer's gaze towards their metaphysical dimension."⁸⁴ Questions also arise not only from the presence of particular forms, but also from the absence of form altogether. Otto's darkness and silence are powerfully at work in these drawings as the characters look into the void. However, the reader does not know what is beyond, though we sense the characters see something. What we witness in moving through the story, engaging with the drawings, is the apocalypse of the characters as things are revealed to *them*. The void, in its darkness and silence, invites us to enter with them.

The architecture plays as significant of a role as the characters, concealing and revealing, bringing excitement or dread. What is beyond the doorway indicates something hidden by the exterior, to be revealed from the inside. This evokes a sense of mystery and intrigue, provoking within us the desire to see what they see and uncover what they have uncovered. The story's essence is carried out in and through its architecture and landscape, delivering meaning to the story. They work together to bring the story to life. The whole world of the story – the physical environment with the succession of events – brings things to light. Architecture here can act as a threshold. There is brick like in our world, there are doors like ours, stairs like ours – but the story is what brings us into another dimension. The fantasy world acts as a bridge to our world, producing a liminal experience, showing us that maybe there is more to our world than what we can see. And so, we cannot help but with beating hearts, press on to the next page for that moment of unveiling. The illustrations are graphically appealing, and work alongside the literary narrative to drive home its significance and feeling.

One of the most moving apocalyptic moments in the series is in one of the last chapters of the final book of the series, *The Last Battle*. Standing before Tirian, a Calormene, was a rough, wooden door and its framing, with no walls or roof, appearing as if it had grown from the ground. As he walked around it to examine this marvel, he was bewildered, wondering if that was really the door he had just walked through moments prior by the Stable entrance.

"But did I not come in out of the wood into the Stable?
Whereas this seems to be a door leading from nowhere to
nowhere."

"It looks like that if you walk round it," said Peter. "But put
your eye to that place where there is a crack between two of the
planks and look through."

Tirian looked round again and could hardly believe
his eyes. There was the blue sky overhead, and grassy country
spreading as far as he could see in every direction, and his new
friends all round him laughing.

"It seems, then," said Tirian, smiling himself, "that the stable seen
from within and the stable seen from without are two different
places."

"Yes," said the Lord Digory. "Its inside is bigger than its outside."

84 Murray, *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era*, 338

“Yes,” said Queen Lucy. “In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.”⁸⁵

Tirian’s response to Queen Lucy was to ask about their whole adventure. As the chapter concludes, the following chapter shows the characters watching, alongside Aslan, Narnia’s fate take place through the opening of the Doorway. What takes place resembles a biblical, fantastic prophetic vision being fulfilled in the present of the story. Aslan summons from his country all the stars, who instantly fall from the sky and rush towards him as, in shocking display, bright people. All Narnians walk towards him, and those in their hatred of him move to the left of the Doorway and vanish, and those in their love of him enter through the Doorway to join Aslan and the characters in Aslan’s country. They watch as the Sun grows twenty sizes larger and bright red, the Moon joining, until the Time-giant crushes them in his hands and all Narnian light and warmth cease. Once these events take place, all those who have entered into Aslan’s country receive the continual cry, “Further up and further in!” They are being summoned to enter further, and deeper, into the world in which greater unveiling is yet to come.

As they progress further into the land, there is greater uncovering of the true nature of things. Everything is more bright and beautiful, sweeter and vibrant. Their whole field of vision is transforming before them, leading to this revelation:

“The Eagle is right,” said the Lord Digory. “Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and will always be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan’s real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream.”

His voice stirred everyone like a trumpet as he spoke these words...he added under his breath, “It’s all in Plato, all in Plato, bless me...”⁸⁶

They continue moving onward into the very heart of the land until they reached the wall of the garden in which they could see Narnia spread out below them. As Lucy turned inward to look at the garden, she remarks with Tumnus:

“I see,” she said at last, thoughtfully. “I see now. This garden is like the Stable. It is far bigger inside than it was outside.”

“Of course, Daughter of Eve,” said the Faun. “The further

85 C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 744

86 Lewis, 759

up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the outside.”

Lucy looked hard at the garden and saw that it was not really a garden at all, but a whole world, with its own rivers and woods and sea and mountains. But they were not strange: she knew them all.

“I see,” she said. “This is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below, just as *it* was more beautiful than the Narnia outside the Stable door! I see...world within world, Narnia within Narnia...”

“Yes,” said Mr Tumnus, “like an onion: except that as you go in and in, each circle is larger than the last.”⁸⁷

As Lucy journeys forward, she is progressively enlightened. The more she seeks, the more she finds. With each newfound perspective and revelation, she says what is before her in an utterly new light. She is discovering all she’s ever known from afar, but now as closely as her own body. Everything she knew in the shadows was now being seen as she stands directly in the beam of light. All that was vague is revealed before her in detailed view as she sinks herself deeper and deeper into the center of the other world. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully”.⁸⁸

87 Lewis, 765

88 1 Corinthians 13:12

CONCLUSION

Commissioning

Purpose of Shadows

Awaken the Inconsolable Longing for the Substance

Plato said we live in a world of appearances. C.S. Lewis followed suit and said we live in a world of shadows. All that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch is not Ultimate reality, but the shadow of Ultimate reality. In the shadow is the *indication* of Ultimate reality beyond our world, casting its silhouette in our sensual context. The shadows are beautiful, grand, and glorious; and yet overwhelmingly out of our reach. Our daily existence is filled with images that pierce us to the core of our being and awaken in us desires too strong to be properly put into words; and so the poet was born. In songs and poems, one attempts to articulate the exasperating and anguishing inability to possess the thing that provoked such ecstasies. In a moment, we are taken up to regions of glorious splendor, majestic grandeur, sublime beauty. We are thrust from ordinary life into another dimension and filled with agonizing desire and inconsolable longing. As quickly and suddenly that it comes upon us, it disappears. The shadows and images constantly invading our lives are always evading us. That is the thing with shadows: one cannot grasp them.

All created things are “theophonies,” manifestations of God. How is this possible when God is transcendental to His creation? Are His creatures not too imperfect to be images of Him? The Pseudo-Areopagite answered this question by pointing to the fragility of our intellect, which is incapable of perceiving God face to face. Therefore, God interposes images between Him and us. Holy Writ as well as nature as such “screens”; they present us with images of God, designed to be imperfect, distorted, even contradictory. This imperfection and mutual contradiction, is to kindle in us the desire to ascend from a world of mere shadows and images to the contemplation of the Divine Light itself. Thus it is, paradoxically enough, by evading us that God becomes gradually manifest; He conceals Himself before us in order to be revealed.¹

Lewis tells us plainly, as we read before: “The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing.”² That is the purpose of shadows: to awaken the longing for the Substance. The shadows were never meant to satisfy, simply because it can’t. They were made, however, to reveal the Object of desire.

1 Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 53

2 C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”, 31.

Provide Images of the Substance

Nature, the original shadow crafted by the Substance, proclaims day and night of God’s ineffable glory. The extravagant beauty of the soaring mountains whose pointed ends are hidden amongst the mist of clouds, the cathedral of stars above, to the dark, mysterious oceans below; the intangible character of the invisible Other is ever before us. Its sublime eminence exults its Maker and trembles with us in the passing of that holy presence. God himself casts his brilliant shadow in Nature, his handiwork providing insight to the existence and personality of the Divine Architect and Artist. As Lewis articulated in *The Four Loves*, it was Nature that gave him a vision of glory. Without it, what would the word glory mean to him if not his experience of “ominous ravines and unapproachable crags”³? It is the same with human loves which “can be glorious images of Divine love” in their likeness.⁴ The form of the Substance, its outline and silhouette, is revealed in its shadow. The shadows are revelatory because they follow the Substance everywhere it goes, and in doing so, bear witness about the Substance.

We can see this in the countless passages of the Hebrew Scriptures that are consistently providing natural and architectural metaphors: “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge”⁵; The name of the LORD is a strong tower⁶; For the LORD is a sun⁷; “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire”⁸. As Lewis considers Nature, and other experiences that evoke Joy, he sees their incredible power as symbols to provide images of the Creator, and provide context for understanding his nature. All we see and experience, all the images that bombard us – through the cosmos, through stories, through things made, seen, and heard, all are shadows of the Ultimate. Everything is an appearance of the Absolute. All has its “root in the Absolute, which is utter reality.”⁹

It is through such appearances and images that the Substance has chosen to reveal himself. The images and shadows act as signposts declaring, “It is not I. I am only a reminder. Look! Look! What do I remind you of?”¹⁰ What he writes in “The Weight of Glory” cannot be understated: “These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire” but states explicitly “they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country

3 C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 26

4 Lewis, 11

5 2 Samuel 22:2-3

6 Proverbs 18:10

7 Psalm 84:11

8 Deuteronomy 4:24

9 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 270

10 Lewis, 268

we have never yet visited.”¹¹ When we mistake the images and shadows for the Substance, we deny their purpose and “they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers.”¹² We will always remain empty handed in our attempt at grasping shadows mistaking them for the real thing; but if we engage with them as intended, they can brighten up the path that leads towards Ultimate reality. And in their disappointment and devastation, still mark the presence of the Great Iconoclast who shatters them.¹³ When sorrow hits, we can be sure that “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”¹⁴ In his mercy, he will ensure the illusions show themselves a mere shadow in consistently eluding us – their intention was not an end in themselves, but to point you *to* something else, the *real* thing.

Point you to the Substance

Shadows for Lewis are ontological proof of a concrete reality. In our physical realm, only an object can cast a shadow. If we experience shadows in our world of things we cannot hold or grasp, or be satisfied by, we can conclude that it is an object from another realm casting the shadow into our earthly realm. A whole divine reality is casting heart-gripping, soul-awakening, shadows that elude us at every turn. It is a reality that does not live solely in the abstract, but is profoundly concrete. Within the shadow is a concealed divine truth hidden in its centre, the core of its essence. The power of the sacred is radiating from its centre, inviting us with centrifugal force.¹⁵ And what will we find at the centre? “Where Maleldil is, there is the centre...He is the centre.”¹⁶ The eternal Origin, the elusive Source, the life-giving Energy, the supernatural Personality, the numinous Other, the concrete Substance, the Ultimate Reality. All things were created by him, through him, and for him. He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”¹⁷ He is all in all.¹⁸ At the centre is a Person. *He* is the centre.

And that numinous Other is calling us to join him in the centre. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.”¹⁹ The day will come when the former things pass away, when the shadows fade away, and the Substance takes over every realm and dimension known and unknown to man. His presence will fill up every physical and imaginary space, every real and unreal estate, and every

11 C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”, 31

12 Lewis, 31

13 C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 55

14 C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 91

15 Emilie M. Townes, “Constructing the Immaterial in Spaces Large and Small”, in *Constructing the Ineffable*, 79

16 C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 336

17 Revelation 22:13

18 1 Corinthians 15:28

19 Revelation 21:3

creature, rock, leaf, dwarf, wizard, and elf. Divine reality will burst forth with full potency and vibrancy into every corner and crevice of heaven, earth, and perilous realm of fairy story and myth. The veil will be pulled back in full, and the true nature of things will be revealed for all eyes to see. But until that day, we live and breathe and have our being in the Shadowlands. And here we must go on about our daily business; cleaning, cooking, learning, laughing, weeping, sleeping, writing, drawing, designing, composing, making, building, feeling, desiring, longing, seeing, believing, beholding, transforming.

Language of Shadows

The Pattern of Nature

At the heart of Medieval thought and epistemology is the idea of the analogy. The degree by which something resembles God, or illuminates the reality of God in it, so it is considered a greater image or manifestation of God. It is a shadow that more truly and closely provides us an understanding of the Substance. According to Gilson, in referencing St. Bonaventure, it is considered the only valid epistemological method contrived in the Medieval mind.²⁰ We understand something inasmuch as we perceive God in it. It is in this semblance that a shadow can reveal more honestly and give truthful testimony to the reality of the Substance. God has veiled himself with creation, and clothed himself with Nature. One way of learning about the nature of the Author is to read his work, the Artist to consider their artistry, and the Substance is to study the shadow. As the cosmos reveals patterns in its physical nature, we come to recognize a Divine Order. The intricate working together of Nature, in the grandest and smallest of objects, displays the workings of intelligent reason, too detailed and beautiful to convince Lewis in his later years that there wasn’t Divine Intelligence behind it all. The Medieval mind recognizes this as the basis of God’s intelligent design and providential ordering, in which he acts as a Divine Author writing his tale.

As the world is creatively and intelligently ordered, it shows the Creator as one who brings about harmonic unity. Through this mode of thought the Gothic cathedral was conceived. Proportion and light were considered physical demonstrations of God’s transcendent nature in which he revealed in his created order. Within their tangible expression is the hint of its divine source, leading one beyond the experience at hand. When we sub-create according to the knowledge of how the world works and is ordered, we join in the heavenly concord of truth and beauty, reason and imagination. This reflects Lewis’ thought in *An Experiment in Criticism*, “Looking back on the performance, we shall feel that we have been led through a pattern or arrangement of activities which our nature cries out for.”²¹ The Inklings believed bad art was not carefully constructed and produced cacophony, echoing Lewis’ remark in *The Screwtape Letters*, “We will make the whole universe a noise in the end”²². However, if an artist combines the elements

20 Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 100

21 C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 133-4

22 C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 114

of their craft carefully in a unique way, they will not only create something harmonious, but also something more than the mere collection of the original parts. Their imaginative invention will reflect the beauty of the cosmos that is a tangible expression of its Divine Source.

George MacDonald, in “The Fantastic Imagination”, writes on the deeply entwined connection between beauty and truth:

Law is the soil in which alone beauty will grow; beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed; and you may, if you will, call Imagination the tailor that cuts her garments to fit her, and Fancy his journeyman that puts the pieces together, or perhaps at most embroiders her button-holes. Obeying laws, the maker works like his creator; not obeying law, he is such a fool as heaps a pile of stones and calls it a church.²³

Without truth, beauty would not exist, and beauty accompanies truth where it goes. Reason, law, and order was found in the created universe is foundational to harmony, and in harmony, vitality. Sub-creation allows one to ascend beyond the drudgery of everyday life to experience enriched divine reality.

Allusion to the Other

The majestic displays of Nature, objects of such imposing size and monumentality strike the soul with solemn shock, bringing you innately into a state of reverence. Its magnitude is so incredible that it gestures a limitless infinity which confounds the human mind. Otto remarks that a marvel is “Whatever has loomed upon the world of his ordinary concerns as something terrifying and baffling to the intellect; whatever...has set him astare in wonder and astonishment”²⁴. In a moment, one’s being is confronted with the ineffable wholly Other who is an incomprehensible mystery. The sublime and the idea of the holy are inseparably connected in Otto’s mind as a “hidden kinship”, believing that the sublime almost naturally invokes the numinous. Since the ineffable Other is *wholly* other, belonging to another world outside of space, time, and matter, it is not a question of representation, but rather of *allusion*.

What is seen frames itself around what is not seen. The composition of the sensual and tangible creates a portal to the unseen realm. Art and architecture, in the selection of its various elements, composes itself around what is void, empty, and unseen. In this sense, it becomes a window, not a wall. Its form outlines the absence of form to provide a silhouette. And so, the visible, tangible world, composed as a frame, can transform into a window to the invisible, transcendent world. The Medieval mind sensed God’s presence at every turn, yet invisible and incognito. The power of silence can make things more audible, and through suggestion, things more apparent. God conceals himself behind the material

23 George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination”, 28

24 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 66

veil in order to reveal his immaterial nature. The form anticipates the Substance and “rouses the something deeper than the understanding – the power that underlines”²⁵.

The flickering lights of the Gothic cathedral, the beautiful poetic lyric, and the fantastic myth are also occasions for experiencing the numinous approach of the Other. In our transport to other worlds through the beauty and mystery awakened in the imagination, we are caught up in a realm that transcends its sensual vehicle. We catch our breath and feel ourselves longing “for something else that we can hardly put into words.”²⁶ Lewis discovered in his love of myth and poetry that it wasn’t a place he yearned for, but rather, a Person. We are actually longing for the Other that makes other worlds “other”; it is the presence of the Other that we are after. We build altars, construct images, imagine strange worlds, in order to get to that place, to be caught up in the presence of otherness. But the *place* was ever only a *portal* to the *presence*. The shadow leaves a transcendental index, a trace of glory, an imprint in the sand to mark the presence of the Other. At the centre of Ultimate reality is a Person.

Mythical Form

The regions of other worlds can provide a setting for the other world of the spirit to touch down on us, and receive sublime contact through myth. In fact, Lewis states “...it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern...It is what Corineus calls myth, that abides..It is the myth that gives life.”²⁷ Even the physical, sensual material is heralding a divine story. Nature burst forth singing the praises of her Maker, foreshadowing the story of death and resurrection. The tabernacle and temple were shadows and copies that prepared the way for the coming Redeemer, anticipating the atoning work of Christ in which the Incarnation reveals Jesus as the true Temple in which God’s presence dwells bodily. This sublime mystery was the fulfillment of prophetic shadows in which God, the Author of human history, was providing to reveal his divine intentions for earth’s consummation into Ultimate reality.

Then comes the church building, another shadow of a substantial reality. The Scriptures reveal the church to be the Body of Christ, and this time, referencing those who would believe in Jesus. The believing person then becomes a bodily temple for God’s spirit to dwell in peaceful fellowship. The early years of Christianity often had believers meeting in ordinary houses or secretly in caves. When the church building burst forth, it came as another shadow-building that revealed a divine reality. Architecture became a vessel of theological proclamation, in which the composition of material preached the good news through its physical manifestation. Through it is brought forth the sacred memory of the stories found in the Scriptures, and created “a window to what transcends

25 MacDonald, 31

26 C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”, 43

27 C.S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact”, 39-40

that reality.”²⁸ The moment you take away the sacred myth, you’ve removed the vital organ that gave life to the structure. Its vitality is found precisely in the story that it carries.²⁹

It is the myth that is experienced in and through these architectural forms. The story brings divine contact to the physical realm, in which God then speaks through the shadows. Through the vehicle of the imagination, one is able to interact with these realities in a concrete way, by fully immersing themselves in the story and in its divine reality. It becomes the back-door to the heart through its beauty and poetic form. The myth causes us to transcend its sensual context to encounter the divine realities it attempts to communicate.

Commissioning Shadows

While we still live in the world of appearances, in the Shadowlands, we are called to continue creating images and shadows that can become portals to the divine world. Stories, Nature, and architecture are shadows overlapping shadows, mingling with one another, and providing a rich context for the Substance to reveal himself. The shadows testify, proclaim, and bear witness about the Substance. Sublime art is able to present a beauty at the border of the imagination which produces an exasperation of the soul and awakens the inconsolable longing within us. There is a kind of beauty that throws you beyond itself, through the sublime, into the realm of divine infinity. The call is to continue making sublime shadows and imprints that point to the Substance, that awaken the longing, and do not satisfy us, but elude us. By eluding us, the Other makes himself known.

We are commissioned to join the Creator in the task of creation. By making and inventing, according to the laws and patterns revealed in the cosmos, we are able to present the world a vision of beauty and truth that joins with the heavenly symphony. Through it, we provide a mirror of what we can already witness in creation, rearranging and combining to create something new that ascends the summation of its parts. Fantastic sub-creation transports us to imaginative other worlds, and in doing so, creates images and icons that propel us into the spiritual dimension. They provide the opportunity to open the door to “Other Time” and mingle with the transcendent Other who manifests himself in a multitude of images. They show us that we are in fact in the Shadowlands and there lies a distant land beyond what we can perceive with our senses. It is the land we truly long for.

We are commissioned to make stories that shadow the great cosmic tale of exile and exodus, that bears witness to a coming redemption, and gives us the glimpse that perhaps that divine harmonic concord we have longed for all our lives does exist, and we can be part of it. These stories draw others in and

28 Karsten Harries, “Untimely Meditations on the Need for Sacred Architecture” in *Constructing the Ineffable*, 59

29 Mioslav Volf, “Architecture, Memory, and the Sacred”, in *Constructing the Ineffable*, 60-3

encapsulate them in the field of vision of the story. They awaken the sleeping pilgrim and set them on a journey to the other world through its fairytale, moving from Contemplation into Enjoyment. Their concrete experience of the story clears the way for divine encounter with the Other who is reaching through the sensual experience of poetic delights. They transform into icons, forming the liminal portal to enter into the spiritual dimension. This kind of art not only provokes our longing, thirst, and inquiry, but reveals that there exists a satisfaction to those desires, that there is an end to joy, a Substance to be grasped. It reveals a path beyond the Shadowlands, out of the cave, into Ultimate reality. As Lewis writes, “the shadows have indicated (at least to my heart) something more about the light.”³⁰

30 C.S. Lewis, “Scripture”, 133

CONSUMMATION

Chasing Shadows



Illustration 1.1:
Scene 1

There once was a girl named Iris. One day, she came across something very strange. She was looking at a flower on the ground and picked it up. Immediately, she found herself surrounded by darkness, except for a door. This door wasn't like any door she'd seen before. It seemed as if the flower she was holding just moments ago grew and expanded a hundred times its size. Light poured from its opening. Suddenly, a voice called out, though Iris did not understand the muttering. "Hello? Who is that?" Iris asked.

"You cannot know unless you come in," the voice said.


So, Iris did the only other thing she could think to do – she plunged herself headfirst through the portal. As she entered through the opening, she was met with the sweet smell of grass and flowers and mountains and water. It was a familiar beauty. But an unfamiliar face appeared – perhaps the one who possessed that mysterious voice?

"Friends call me Jack," said the man. "And your name?"

"Iris," she responded.

"Iris," said Jack. "Pleasure to meet you. Is this your first time in these parts?"

"I believe so, though we have grass and flowers too. But the grass is taller and the sun and moon much larger here," Iris responded.



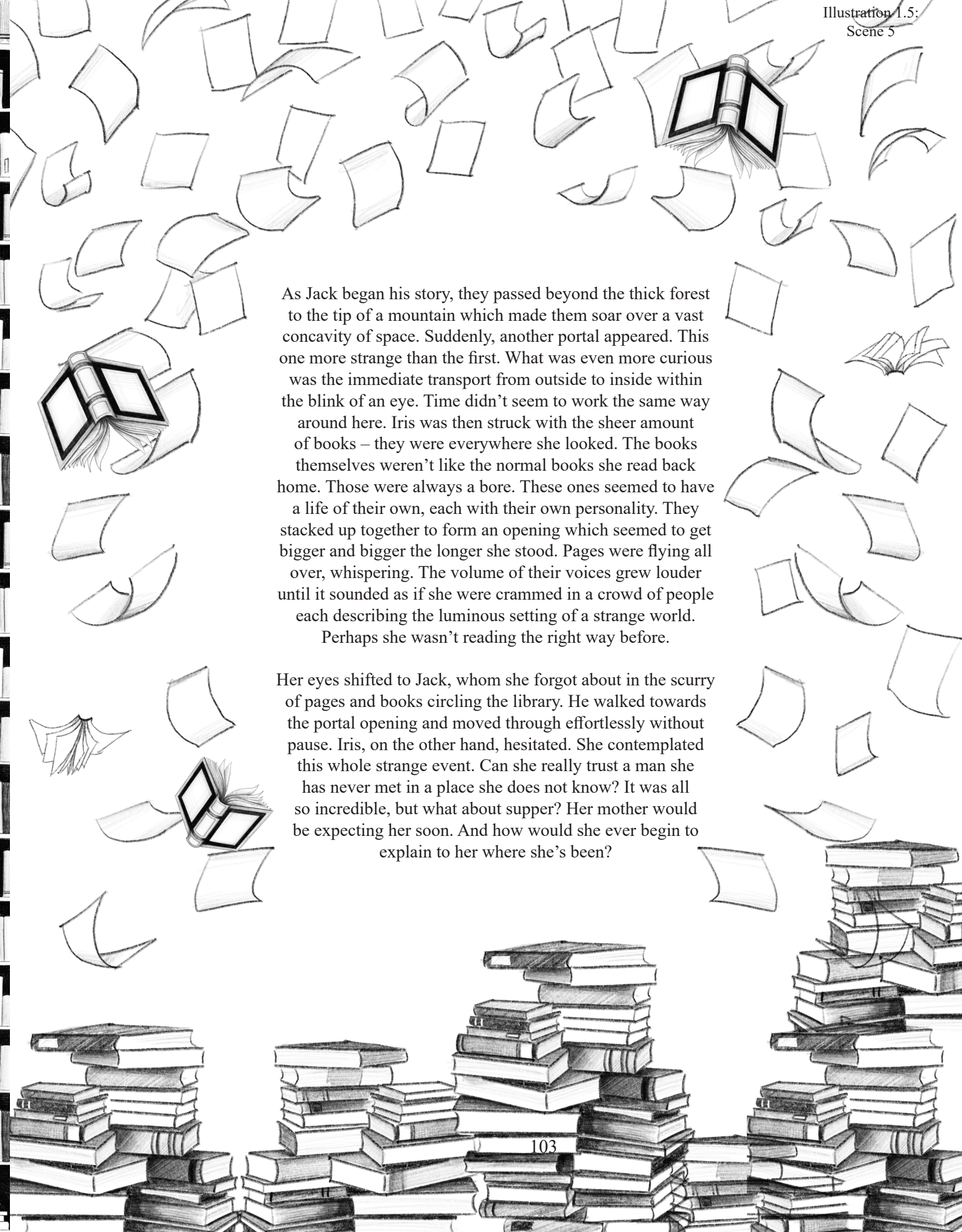
Where are we?" Iris asked.

"You'd hardly believe it if I told you."

"Please tell me," Iris pleaded.



Illustration 1.4:
Scene 4



As Jack began his story, they passed beyond the thick forest to the tip of a mountain which made them soar over a vast concavity of space. Suddenly, another portal appeared. This one more strange than the first. What was even more curious was the immediate transport from outside to inside within the blink of an eye. Time didn't seem to work the same way around here. Iris was then struck with the sheer amount of books – they were everywhere she looked. The books themselves weren't like the normal books she read back home. Those were always a bore. These ones seemed to have a life of their own, each with their own personality. They stacked up together to form an opening which seemed to get bigger and bigger the longer she stood. Pages were flying all over, whispering. The volume of their voices grew louder until it sounded as if she were crammed in a crowd of people each describing the luminous setting of a strange world. Perhaps she wasn't reading the right way before.

Her eyes shifted to Jack, whom she forgot about in the scurry of pages and books circling the library. He walked towards the portal opening and moved through effortlessly without pause. Iris, on the other hand, hesitated. She contemplated this whole strange event. Can she really trust a man she has never met in a place she does not know? It was all so incredible, but what about supper? Her mother would be expecting her soon. And how would she ever begin to explain to her where she's been?

Before she could resist, Iris found herself lifted up by a book through the portal.



Illustration 1.6:
Scene 6



Illustration 1.7:
Scene 7



Iris was enamored by the spectacle. With each progression of events, she was further away from home. The winds blew through her hair as she soared beyond the mountain peaks and clouds. She was almost afraid, her insides seizing in blissful awe.

While taking in the utterly beautiful sight, she was being led closer to the majestic city swimming in the sky. As she landed, with feet to solid ground, Iris caught something moving in the corner of her eye. As she turned, she caught a fleeting glimpse of a golden tail, which disappeared amongst the greenery. Jack didn't notice and continued to lead the way towards the center of the city, passing by elves and nymphs and centaurs and hobbits, until they approached an elaborate facade of what looked like a cathedral. Iris was enthralled by the ornament and sculpture, and they seemed so lifelike, as if ready to pounce in a moment's notice. The portal looked like the mouth of a hungry animal, ready to devour her. She shivered inwardly at the thought of being eaten by a lion. But instead of shrinking back in terror, she felt great courage. She wanted to go and see what was inside.

Iris followed close behind Jack as they passed beyond the portal and inched towards the nave. Light flooded from every side, even below. It seemed she walked inside to be taken outside again, into a large expanse of glass, stone, and cloud. Iris twirled to fix her eyes on every detail of the structure which seemed to merge heaven and earth. She steadied her feet to move forwards only to be met with the silhouette of a gigantic dragon hovering behind the transparent walls. Her mouth opened slowly as the thought of being eaten by a dragon rather than a lion crossed her mind. But her lips curled upward to form a slight smile. Something about the way it flew behind the altar made her think he wasn't a scary dragon, but was just as much delighted as her to be in such a place.

Illustration 1.8:
Scene 8



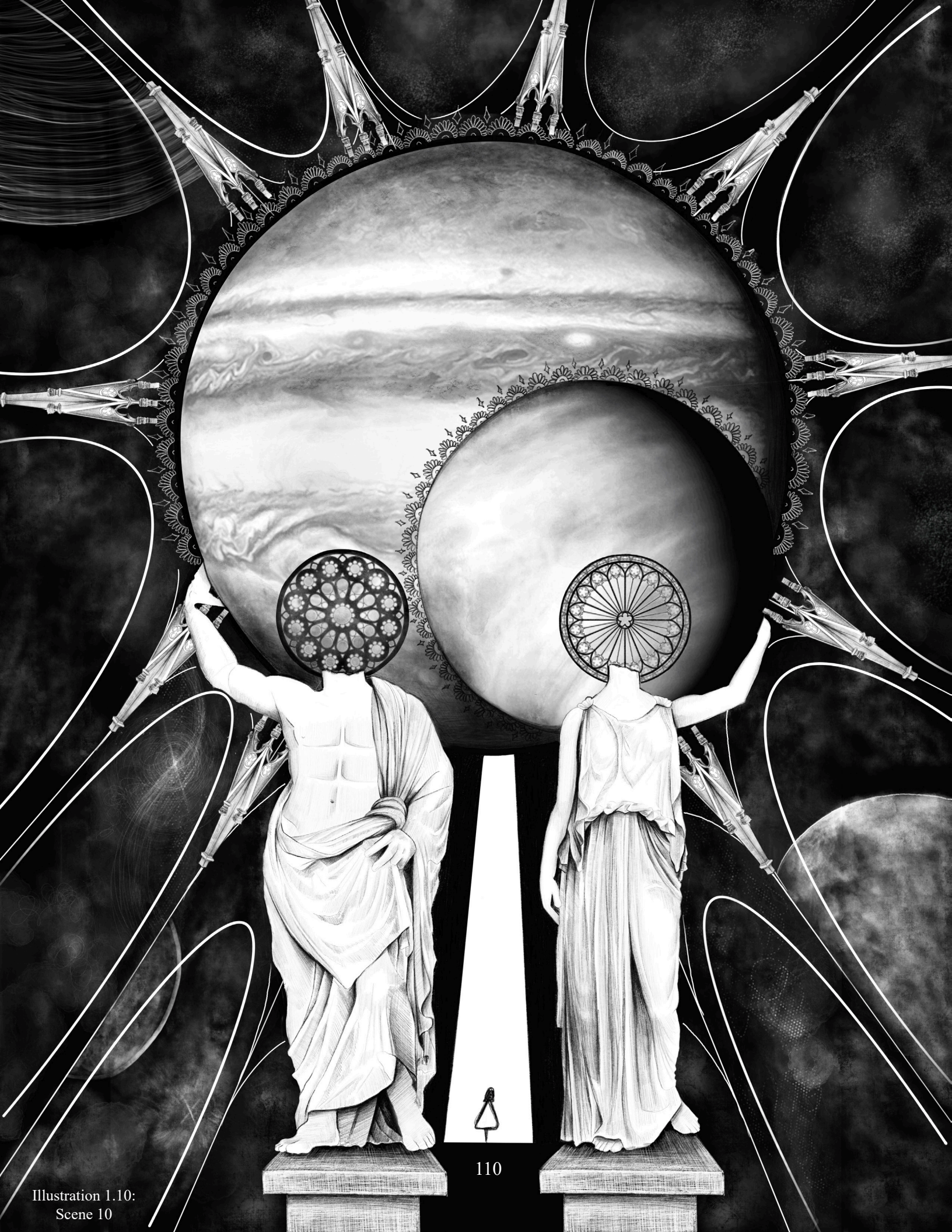
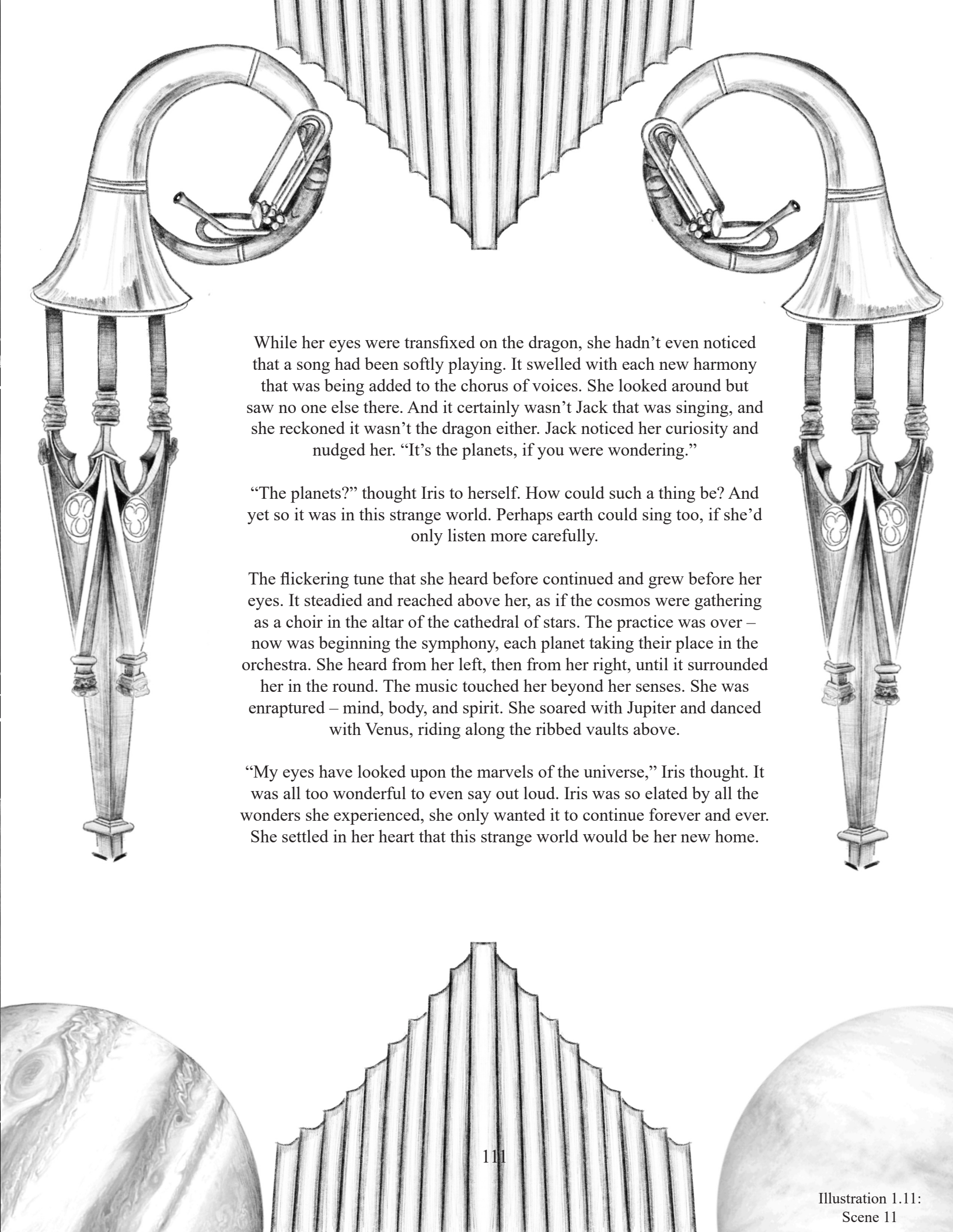


Illustration 1.10:
Scene 10

110



While her eyes were transfixed on the dragon, she hadn't even noticed that a song had been softly playing. It swelled with each new harmony that was being added to the chorus of voices. She looked around but saw no one else there. And it certainly wasn't Jack that was singing, and she reckoned it wasn't the dragon either. Jack noticed her curiosity and nudged her. "It's the planets, if you were wondering."

"The planets?" thought Iris to herself. How could such a thing be? And yet so it was in this strange world. Perhaps earth could sing too, if she'd only listen more carefully.

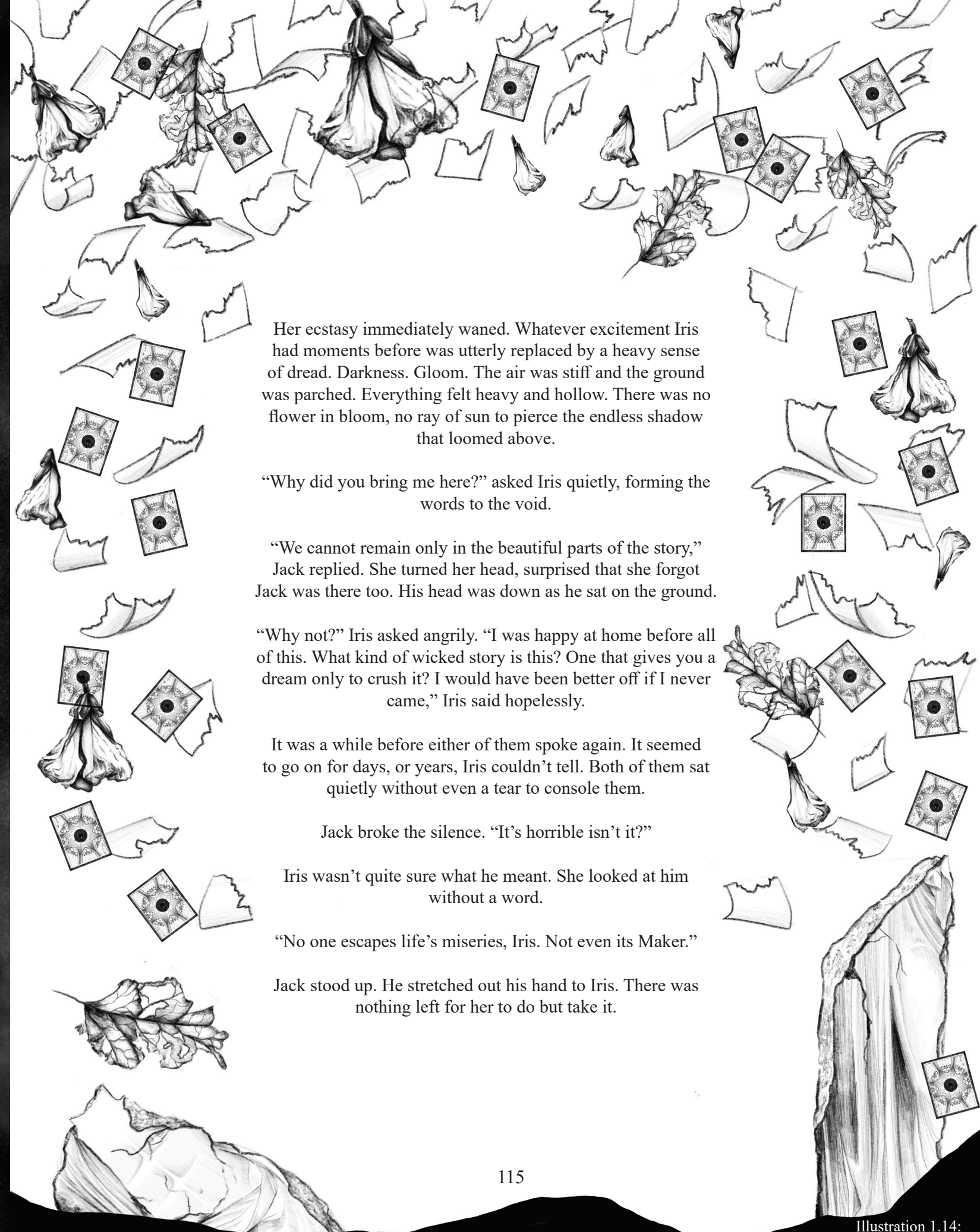
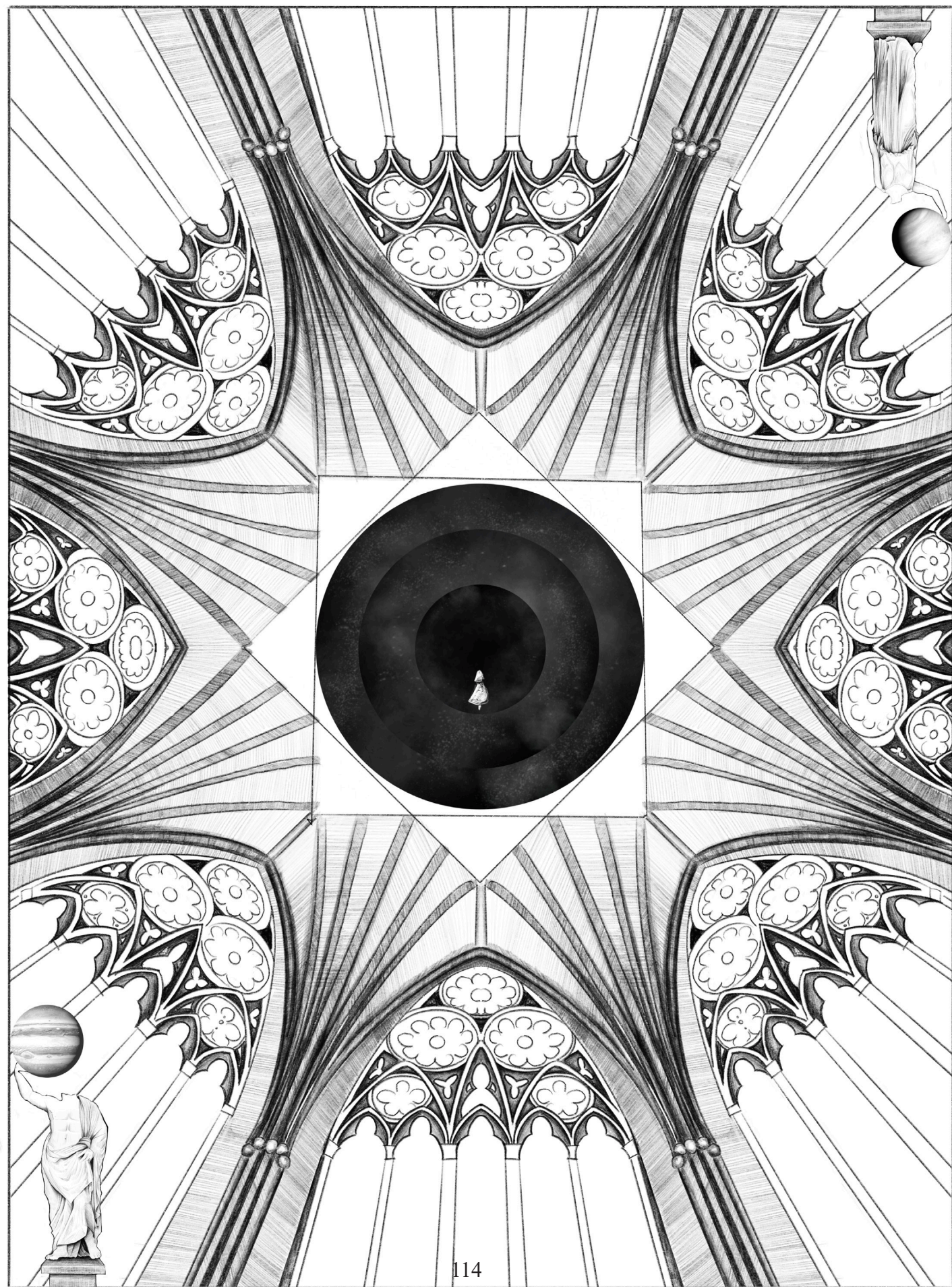
The flickering tune that she heard before continued and grew before her eyes. It steadied and reached above her, as if the cosmos were gathering as a choir in the altar of the cathedral of stars. The practice was over – now was beginning the symphony, each planet taking their place in the orchestra. She heard from her left, then from her right, until it surrounded her in the round. The music touched her beyond her senses. She was enraptured – mind, body, and spirit. She soared with Jupiter and danced with Venus, riding along the ribbed vaults above.

"My eyes have looked upon the marvels of the universe," Iris thought. It was all too wonderful to even say out loud. Iris was so elated by all the wonders she experienced, she only wanted it to continue forever and ever. She settled in her heart that this strange world would be her new home.

111

Illustration 1.11:
Scene 11





Her ecstasy immediately waned. Whatever excitement Iris had moments before was utterly replaced by a heavy sense of dread. Darkness. Gloom. The air was stiff and the ground was parched. Everything felt heavy and hollow. There was no flower in bloom, no ray of sun to pierce the endless shadow that loomed above.

“Why did you bring me here?” asked Iris quietly, forming the words to the void.

“We cannot remain only in the beautiful parts of the story,” Jack replied. She turned her head, surprised that she forgot Jack was there too. His head was down as he sat on the ground.

“Why not?” Iris asked angrily. “I was happy at home before all of this. What kind of wicked story is this? One that gives you a dream only to crush it? I would have been better off if I never came,” Iris said hopelessly.

It was a while before either of them spoke again. It seemed to go on for days, or years, Iris couldn’t tell. Both of them sat quietly without even a tear to console them.

Jack broke the silence. “It’s horrible isn’t it?”

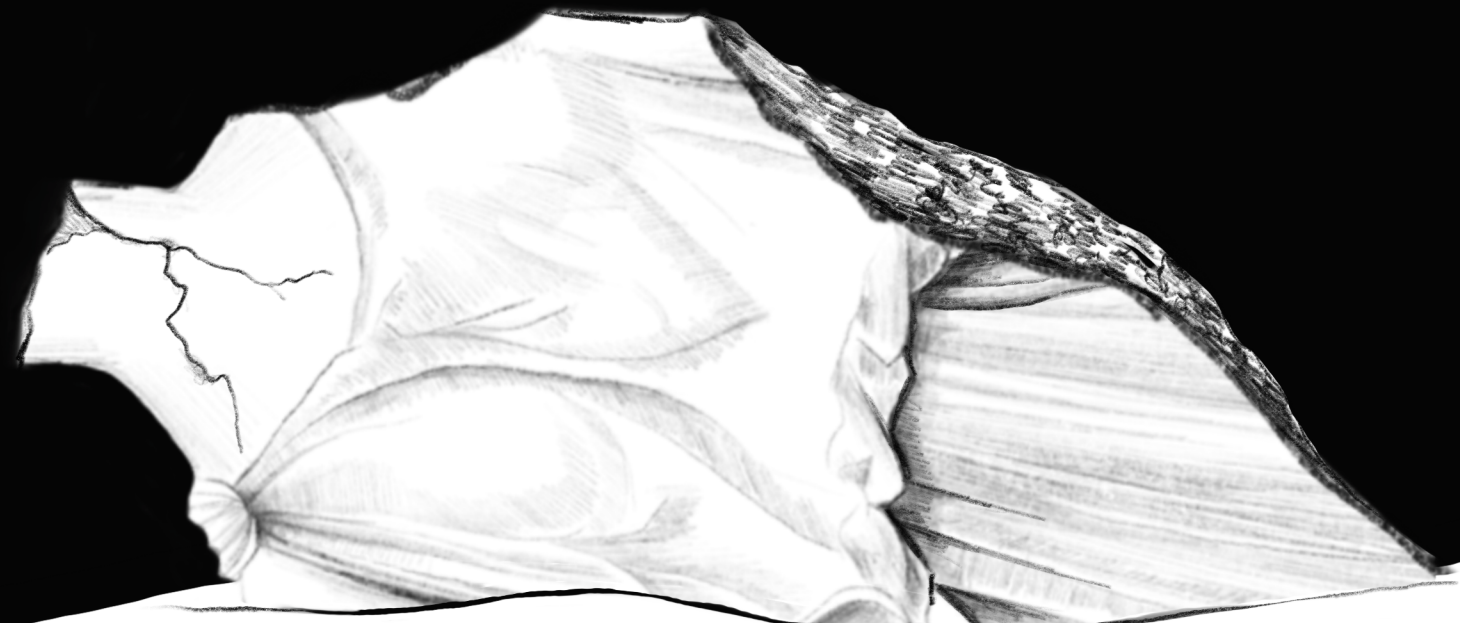
Iris wasn’t quite sure what he meant. She looked at him without a word.

“No one escapes life’s miseries, Iris. Not even its Maker.”

Jack stood up. He stretched out his hand to Iris. There was nothing left for her to do but take it.

She saw everything dashed to pieces. All that surrounded them was in total ruin and disarray. Every star disappeared at once and the dark sky seemed to close in on her like a casket door. All sound gave way to utter silence. She deciphered that she was in a dungeon of disappointed dreams.





She sank to her knees, unable to bear the weight of devastation.

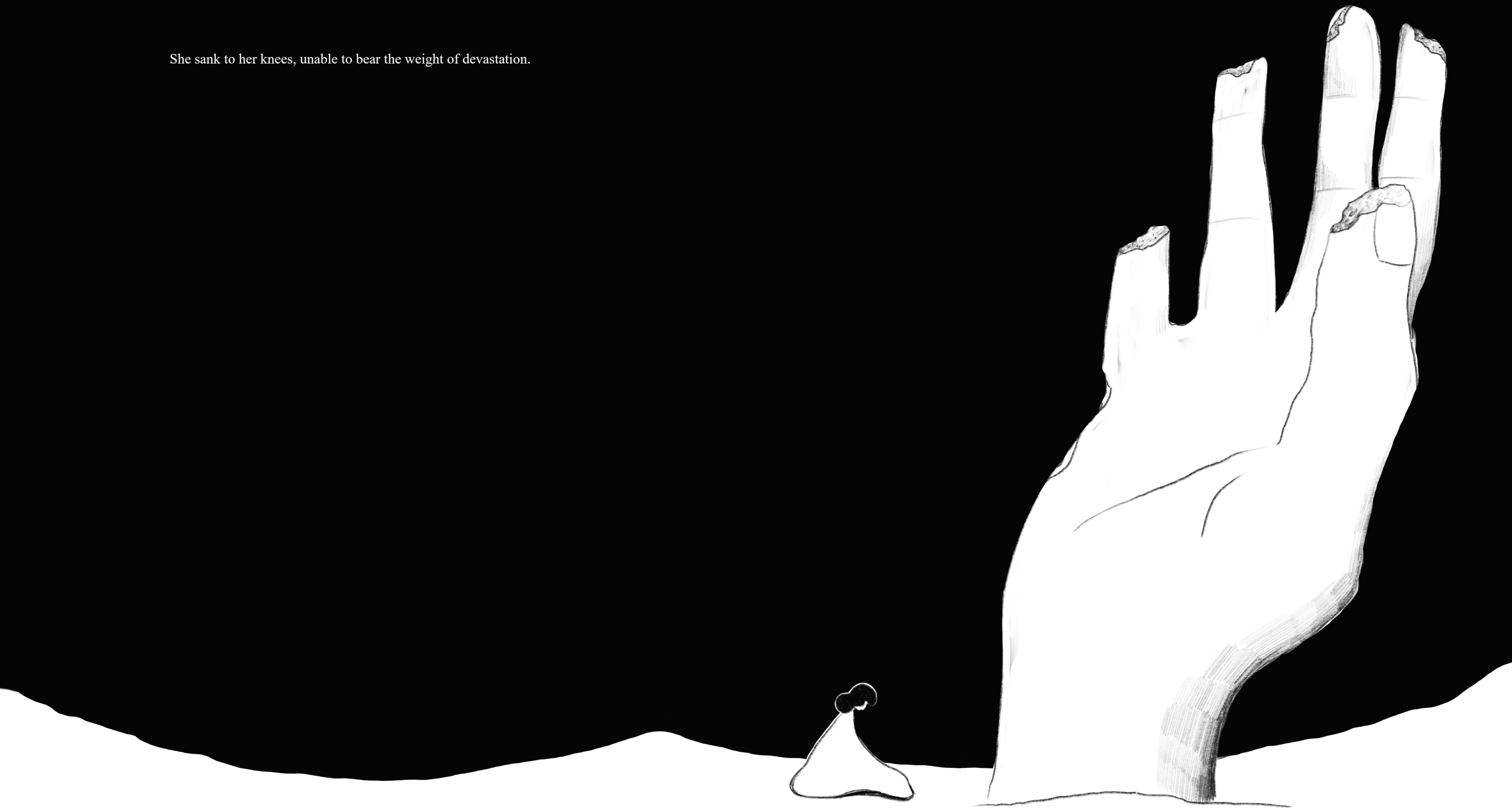




Illustration 1.18:
Scene 18

And so they both went on together through the desolate dune. She looked up and in the distance saw something white. Her heart leapt inside of her. It was another portal. She immediately turned to Jack with a seed of hope and solemn anticipation. Jack gave a faint smile. “Doesn’t the day come after every night in your world? Doesn’t spring come after every winter?” Iris was baffled. How could she not have realized such a simple thing that happened all the time around her? She quietly pondered these things in her heart. “The seed must fall to the ground to die,” Iris whispered to herself. “To then spring forth in multiplied bloom.” Jack finished her thought. “Even the flowers know better than you and I.” They laughed reverently to themselves.

Suddenly they stood before the open way as it streamed with light. It was not like the other portals in their elegance or beauty; just a rugged opening high enough for Jack to walk through. He stepped forward. Iris remained. “Aren’t you coming?” Jack asked. Iris stood for a long time in resistance. “Can’t we go back? I bet we can go through the portal to the cathedral of stars. And oh, to dance with Venus and Jupiter again! To touch the walls of that heavenly cathedral! Even the library full of books, how much I want to read them! Those cosmic delights were like nothing I’ve ever tasted. Jack please, let’s go back the other way!”

Jack looked at Iris, perplexed. “My dear Iris. You have learned so much, yet so little on your journey. Can’t you see? We can’t go back.” She looked down. He could tell she was afraid. “Iris, look. I mean, really look. See how this portal is different? Touch it, what does it feel like?” Iris put her palm to the side of the portal. It was hard, harder than any surface she’s felt before.

“Something about it feels more,” her voice trailed off as she thought. “Real.” She could barely get the word out.

Jack smiled. “Yes! And so it is. The other places I took you, wonderful as they were, did not have the same quality. They were more like shadows, reflections, echoes. We are approaching something real. Why else did you think the air was so heavy in this place?”

All of this had Iris’ head spinning. She still didn’t quite understand, but in another sense, she did. “So what does this mean? Is this the end?” Iris inquired.

Jack laughed. “My dear Iris, this is the beginning of the real story. Everything else was the prologue. Perhaps beyond this door, you will find men and women, nymphs and elves, mountains and planets, singing and dancing together joyfully. Perhaps all we ever could have dreamed of is not a dream at all. But right now, we are on the wrong side of the door. And I am aching to get in!” Iris stood still. “Will you forever go on chasing shadows? Reaching but never holding? Journeying but never arriving?” Jack continued. “We cannot live in the Shadowlands forever, Iris. Now come. Further up and further in! There are far, far better things ahead than what we leave behind,”

Iris conceded. She did not know what lay ahead of her, but she couldn’t help but wonder if Jack was right. She certainly did not want to remain in this place, but she knew she’d miss what came before. Iris took a deep breath and closed her eyes as she stepped forward. And then, she opened them.



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