

Week 3: The Stories We Live By: C. S. Lewis on Narnia and the Importance of Stories

“I thought I saw how **stories could steal past a certain inhibition** which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God and the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze things. 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?**” (C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said”).



Elevenes with C. S. Lewis

The Stories We Live By:
C. S. Lewis on Narnia and the Importance of Stories

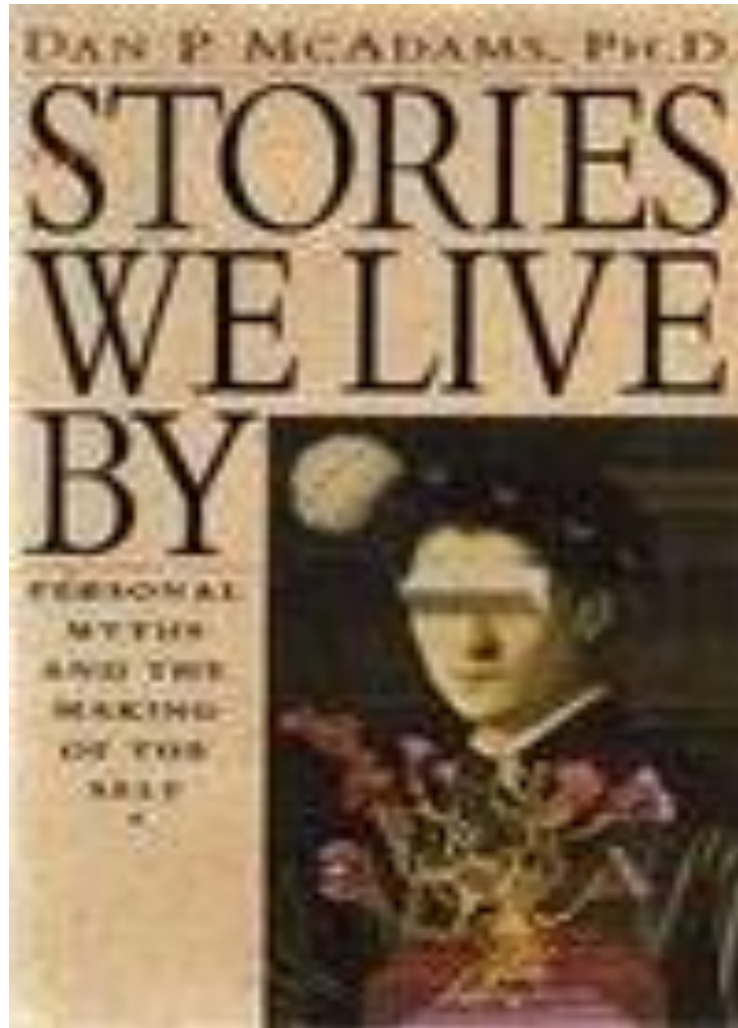
Week 3

October 8, 2017

Plan for the day

- Introduction regarding stories
 - Secular psychology and narratives about the self
- A scene from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- Lewis on stories and an overview of *The Chronicles*
- The context of Lewis' writing and how he came to write the stories
- Highlights of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and the travels of the wardrobe
- *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*: The 'undragoning' of Eustace Scrubb

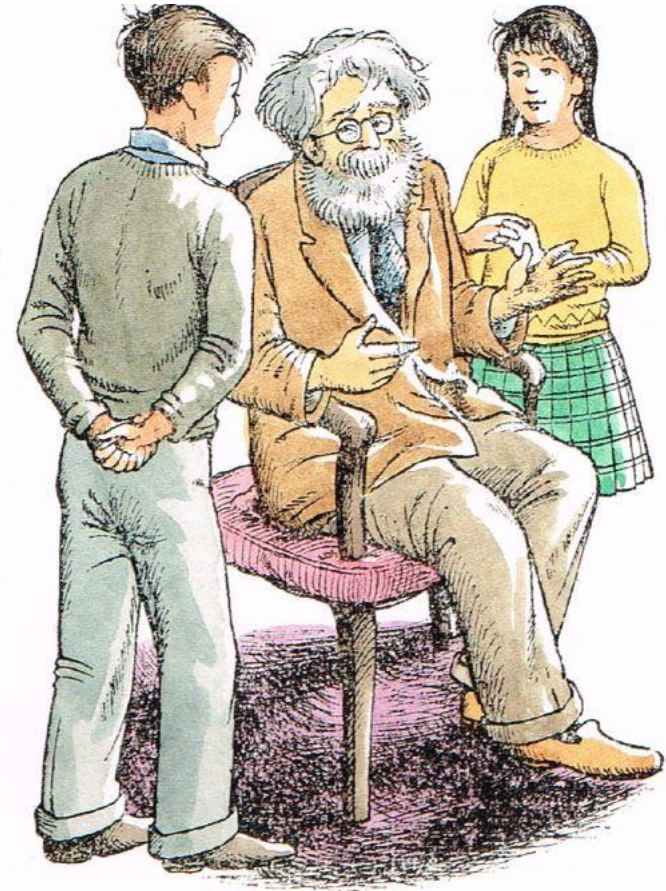
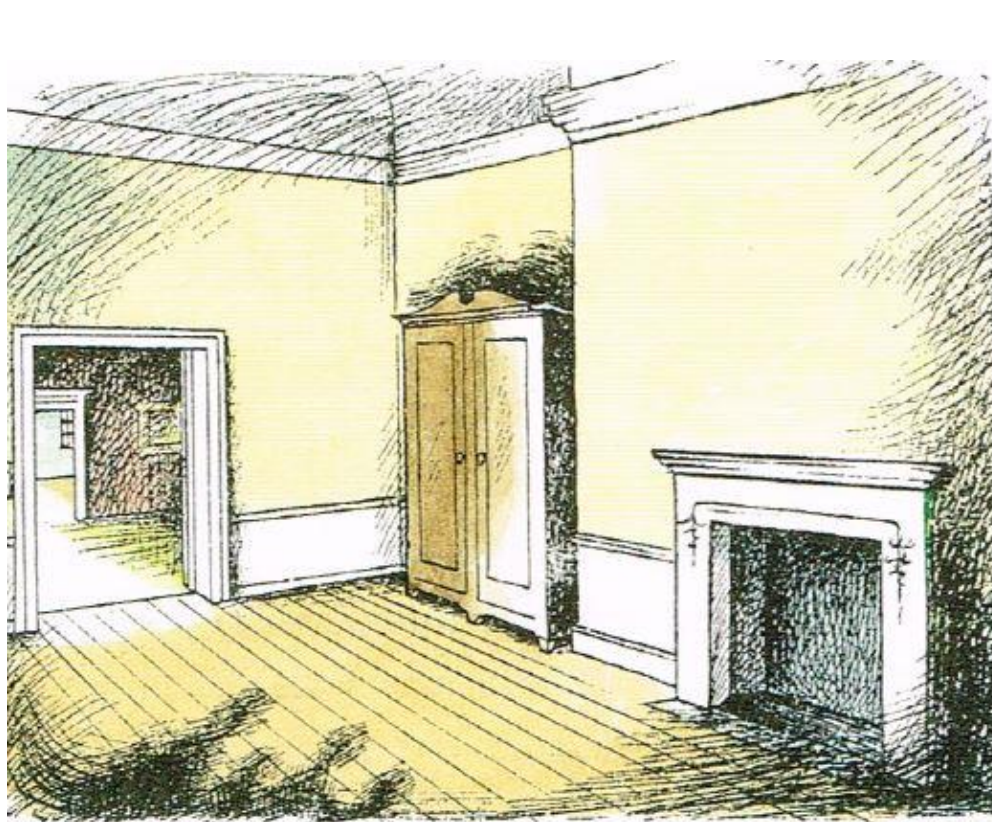
Secular psychology recognizes the importance of our personal narratives—the stories we tell about ourselves



Reading from
The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe
Chapter 5: “Back on This Side of the Door”

- Leah Dye as Susan
- Jonah Camp as Peter
- Harold Delaney as the Professor
- Sarah Camp as Narrator

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe—the first written and most popular of the *Chronicles of Narnia*.



The wardrobe and the Peter, Susan and the Professor as drawn by Pauline Baynes, the young artist selected by Lewis to illustrate *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe—the first movie produced based on the *Chronicles of Narnia*.



Lucy at the wardrobe and the Professor with Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy, based on how the movie portrayed them.

The Chronicles of Narnia present some of Lewis' most important arguments in a form that even adults can understand.

Consider these excerpts from *Mere Christianity*, Bk. II: "What Christians Believe"

- "Enemy-occupied territory—that is what the world is."
 - "What is the problem? A universe that contains much that is obviously bad and apparently meaningless, but containing creatures like ourselves who know that it is bad and meaningless."
 - Regarding giving people free will, "Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently He thought it worth the risk."
- Cleverer creatures can be better and worse than less clever creatures.
 - "The better stuff a creature is made of—the cleverer and stronger and freer it is—then the better it will be if it goes right, but also the worse it will be if it goes wrong. A cow cannot be very good or very bad; a dog can be both better and worse; a child better and worse still; an ordinary man, still more so; a man of genius, still more so; a superhuman spirit best—or worst—of all."

The Chronicles of Narnia present some of Lewis' most important arguments in a form that even adults can understand. Excerpts from *Mere Christianity*, Bk. II: "What Christians Believe" (cont.)

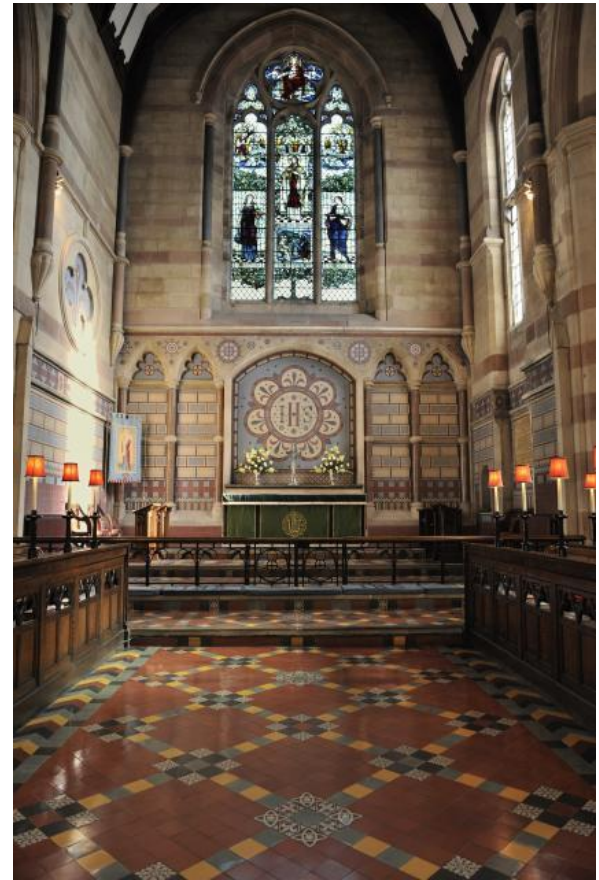
- The trilemma.

- "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. **Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.** But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Lewis on stories: After his conversion, Lewis came to realize that telling stories was an effective way of commending and communicating a worldview

- Lewis mentioned that “a certain inhibition had paralyzed much of [his] own religion in childhood.”
 - Reverence itself did harm.

St. Mark's,
Dundela, Belfast—
the church Lewis
attended as a
child and where
his maternal
grandfather,
Thomas Hamilton,
was pastor.



Lewis suggests in the 1950 *New York Times* article that stories “could steal past those watchful dragons.”

- *What are examples of “watchful dragons” for Lewis?*
 - As a child, being told he should feel a certain way or converse only in “lowered voices” about God and religious topics.
 - As a young adult, perhaps his “dogmatic rationalism” of austere materialism.
- *What might be examples of “watchful dragons” in our day?*
 - The idea for many that religion is characterized by hypocrisy, or detached from real life, or contrary to science, or legalistic, or...

Underlying themes of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*

- We are faced with competing worldviews. Which of the stories is right?
 - Is Narnia really the realm of the tall, beautiful White Witch? Or is she a usurper and Narnia is really the realm of Aslan?
- The grand narrative of the *Chronicles*:
 - Our deepest intuitions point to the true meaning of things.
 - Something beautiful and wonderful is at the heart of the universe, and this may be found, embraced and adored.
- The reader is invited to enter into the story.
 - Whereas *Mere Christianity* allows us to understand Christian ideas intellectually, *Narnia* allows us to step inside and experience the Christian story and its ability to make sense of things.
 - Our own story is given a new significance by becoming part of something bigger.

The “grand narrative” of *The Chronicles* includes Creation, Fall, Redemption and Final Consummation.

- In the order of publication:
 - *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
 - The next four books
 - *Prince Caspian*
 - *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”*
 - *The Silver Chair*
 - *The Horse and His Boy*
 - *The Magician’s Nephew*
 - *The Last Battle*
- Theme
 - The “advent” of the Redeemer
 - Between the 2 advents—the life of faith between the past and future comings of Aslan
 - The Creation and Fall
 - The end of the old order and the beginning of the new creation

The central characters of the story



The context of Lewis' writing of *The Chronicles*: Dark, difficult days

- The beginning of World War II
 - Sept. 1, 1939: Germans march into Poland, and England prepares for war.
 - Sept. 2, 1939: Thousands of children are sent out of London, and 4 girls arrive at the Kilns, Lewis' home in Oxford.
 - Lewis begins writing a story about 4 children, which his friends, he later reports, said was so bad that he destroyed it.
- Perhaps the most difficult period yet in Lewis' life as a Christian
 - Lewis is passed over for senior appointments at Oxford, and loses battles for the direction of the faculty of English.
 - Relationship with Tolkien is strained and Lewis' close friend Charles Williams dies unexpectedly in 1945.
 - Warnie's alcoholism is becoming serious—he is hospitalized for weeks in 1949.
 - Lewis in Jan., 1949 writes “I feel my zeal for writing, and whatever talent I originally possessed, to be decreasing; nor (I believe) do I please my readers as I used to.”
 - Mrs. Moore is a semi-invalid, suffering from dementia, but extremely demanding; Lewis collapses from exhaustion in June, 1949 and is hospitalized.

The inspiration

“The *Lion* all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. This picture had been in my mind since I was about 16. Then one day, when I was about 40, I said to myself, ‘Let’s try to make a story out of it.’”



“At first I had little idea how it would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. I think I had been having a good many dreams about lions at that time.”

“For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds” Job 33:14-15.

How the parts came together: Animals, mythology, and “joy.”

- From childhood Lewis had been writing stories about talking animals, and was something of a pet lover.
- Myths—defined by Lewis as “a description of a state, an event, or a series of events, involving superhuman personages, possessing unity, not truly implying a particular time or place, and dependent for its contents not on the motives developed in the course of action but on the immutable personages [involved],” —let us experience concretely what otherwise would be only an abstraction.
- Joy—a longing or desire for one’s true country, where you are known and are part of a grand narrative—had been portrayed in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, but is presented much more effectively in *The Chronicles*.

The form: Fairy tales

- Some regard as nostalgic, sentimental, adolescent.
 - “When I was 10, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been caught doing so. Now that I am 50, I read them openly. When I became a man, I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.” (“On three ways of writing for children”)
- Are less likely to deceive than “realistic” fiction, e.g. where one becomes a billionaire or lives in a mansion.
 - “Realistic” fiction might be an escape from your dull and disappointing life, but you come back more disappointed with your life.
 - Fairyland, in contrast, arouses a longing for one knows not what: “it stirs and troubles him (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach, and far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth.” “He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all woods a little enchanted.”

The plot of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

- The White Witch tells Edmund that if he will bring his brothers and sisters to her, she will make him a Prince and feed him Turkish Delight every day.
- When the four children do come to Narnia and meet the Beavers they learn that Aslan is on the move, and that the White Witch will be overthrown.
- While they are talking, Edmund slips away to betray them to the White Witch, but on reaching her, learns her true evil nature.
- The White Witch prepares to kill Edmund so that the prophecy of the four “sons of Adam and daughters of Eve” being enthroned at Cair Paravel cannot be fulfilled.
- Aslan, however, offers his life for Edmund’s, satisfying the Magic that the Emperor-over-the-Sea put into Narnia at the beginning.

The plot of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (cont.)

- In Edmund's stead, Aslan is slain on the Stone Table.



- But while Lucy and Susan are sorrowing, the Table is cracked and Aslan is resurrected from the dead.
- Aslan explains the “Deeper Magic from before the dawn of Time”, that if a willing victim who had committed no treachery were killed in a traitor's place, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.

The travels of the wardrobe

- For 50 years, Westmont College has been sending students to England for a semester study abroad.
- In 1974, Walter Hooper spoke to the group and mentioned that the Kilns had been sold and most of Lewis' furniture had been auctioned off, except for one wardrobe which could not be removed from the upstairs room because the hallway had been narrowed in a remodeling. The new home owner wasn't interested in Lewis and was about to have the wardrobe destroyed.
- When Hooper suggested that the wardrobe matched the description in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the Westmont students determined to "rescue" the wardrobe, and were eventually able to purchase it for the cost of the lumber (£20) that the new owner wanted to use to build an American style walk-in closet.
- After paying a carpenter (£100) to dismantle and crate the pieces of the wardrobe for shipment, it was sent to Santa Barbara where it now stands in Westmont College's English Department.

“Perhaps we are so fascinated by the Narnia stories because they open a door, as it were, to another world. A world where someone who is fearsome—but good—walks beside you, and guides you, and loves you so much that he is even willing to die in your place. A world where someone loves you enough to fulfill a debt that you know you owe. Most of us aren't really aware of such a world, even if it hovers all around us, just out of reach of our fingertips. But there is a longing within us that such a world might not only be imagined but be true.”





“What we long for is a world where someone who is both great and good not only loves us but calls us by name. Lewis's stories have introduced unnumbered children, one at a time, to a world that is not only imagined but true.

“Lewis writes about what it feels like for a decent... chap to give in to temptation and betray those who are dear to him. But he also writes about what it feels like to be not just forgiven but redeemed, ransomed, and restored.

“The wardrobe is real. But it opens a door to a world not merely real but true.”

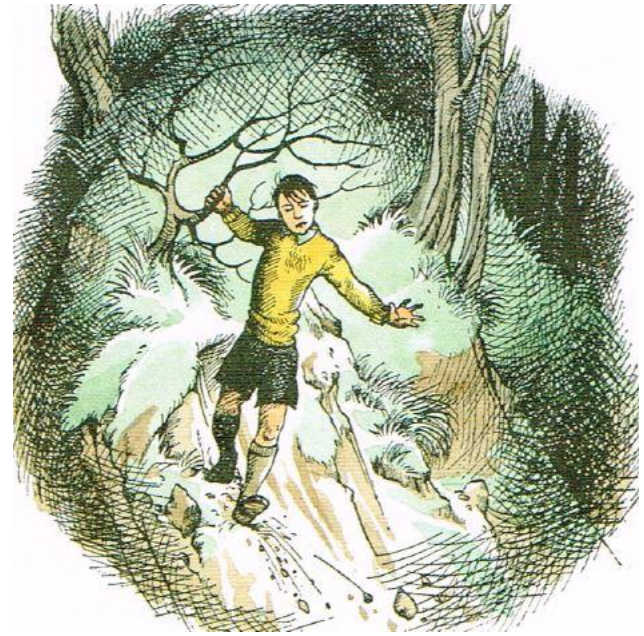
—Paul Delaney
Professor of English
Westmont College

The “life of faith” between the two advents of Aslan

- The next 4 books in *The Chronicles* could be viewed as an exploration of the teaching of Gal. 2:19-20 on the crucified life: “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”
- The child heroes learn to become part of the bigger story of living for Aslan: replacing a self-centered story with an Aslan-centered story.
- How Lewis makes this real is illustrated by “The Adventures of Eustace” in *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”*

Ch. 6: “The Adventures of Eustace”

- The context: Eustace sneaks off from the others (trying to avoid work) and encounters a dragon.
- *What is Eustace’s reaction to finding treasure in the dragon’s lair?*
 - Great! No taxes to pay here! I’ll be rich!
- *What happens when Eustace falls asleep? Why?*
 - “Sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.”
- *Scripture this illustrates?*
 - “For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7)



Ch. 7: How the Adventure Ended

- *How did Eustace become “undragoned”?*
 - Aslan tells him to undress and wash, and when Eustace is unsuccessful, Aslan tells him ‘You will have to let me undress you.’
- *What might the “undressing by Aslan” represent?*
 - “Purify me from my sins, and I will be whiter than snow.” (Ps. 51:7)
 - Jesus to Peter: “Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.” (John 13:8)
- *What was the effect on Eustace?*
 - “He was a different boy, or to be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. The cure had begun.”

The conclusion of *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*: Ch. 16
"The Very End of the World"



- Aslan tells Lucy and Edmund that they will never come back to Narnia, but for them the door into Aslan's country will be from their own world, and that they must return to their own world.
- Lucy sobs, "How can we live, never meeting you?"
- Aslan "But you shall meet me, dear one."
- Edmund, "Are you there too, Sir?"
- Aslan, "I am, but there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there."

"In your world I have
another name...

You must learn to know me
by that name.

This was the very
reason why you were
brought to Narnia,
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there."

-Aslan

