

## On the Border of Concrete Experience: Mythic and Literary Experience in C.S Lewis

Rashad Rehman, University of Western Ontario

The notion of “concrete experience” seems to us relatively clear and commonplace.<sup>1</sup> By “concrete experience,” one often simply means the typical engagements within the world which happen on a daily basis. This definition works well, and it makes possible a question with which this paper is engaged: Are there activities in which we move beyond “concrete experience”, experience or have a glimpse of something beyond the domain of what happens “on a daily basis”? While many candidates present themselves, I want to focus on two found in C.S Lewis’ work. Specifically, I want to exegete how Lewis understands “mythic” and “literary” experience as methods of going beyond concrete experience. To do this, I will first present two notable essays of Lewis, namely, “Myth became Fact” and “On Myth”, which unravel the nature of mythic experience. Second, I outline, starting from Lewis’ “On the Reading of Old Books”, his defense of the thesis that self-transcendence takes place in literary experience. I conclude that Lewis’ understanding of mythic and literary experience make possible a defense of an argument which states that

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Philosophy Student Union at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, for inviting me to speak at the *Western Canadian Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (Sophia)* this March 2018. I have enjoyed the many discussions this paper generated, and I am grateful for the ability to have had this paper critiqued and worked on in light of many illuminating conversations.

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we best understand ourselves by myths (and stories) and not necessarily a series of objective facts about the world (though the latter are often contained in the former). It also diminishes the false dichotomy of “myth” and “truth,” pervasive in contemporary parlance. I conclude that from beginning to end, Lewis’ analyses push one to the boarder of concrete experience.

Lewis’ theses on myth are found in both his “Myth Became Fact” and “On Myth.” Beginning with “Myth Became Fact”, Lewis begins with a dilemma of the human epistemic condition. The dilemma is based on two notions. First, the human mind is “incurably abstract”, and secondly, “the only realities we experience are concrete.”<sup>2</sup> For example, in the experience of pleasure we are not intellectually understanding “Pleasure.” Lewis makes the distinction between experiencing examples or instances of pleasure, and apprehending what these examples themselves exemplify. However, the dilemma is in “lack[ing] one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or to lack another kind because we are outside it.”<sup>3</sup> Put otherwise, “the more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off: the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think.”<sup>4</sup> Lewis’s contention is that the partial solution to this “tragic dilemma”<sup>5</sup> is myth.

Lewis writes that what happens in mythic experience is elusive, that is, the moment we try to capture the experience, it

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C.S. “Myth Became Fact” in *God in the Dock*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

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somehow slips away: "...[in mythic experience] we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction."<sup>6</sup> To avoid confusion, for Lewis myth is not allegory. There is an "abstract meaning" in allegory which is extracted from the allegory itself; in myth, however, nothing of the sort occurs (at least primarily).<sup>7</sup> In attempting to translate the "mythic experience" into natural language, one gets abstractions, indeed "dozens of abstractions", making myth "the father of innumerable truths."<sup>8</sup> However, these abstractions are not indicative of what really occurred in the experience. In mythic experience, one is "not knowing, but tasting..."<sup>9</sup> "Tasting" what? For Lewis, we taste "a universal principle", experienced "only while receiving the myth as a story..."<sup>10</sup> Lewis schematizes and synthesizes how myth fits with truth and reality:

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is, and, therefore, every myth becomes the father or innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley...[myth] is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it like direct experience, bound to the particular.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>7</sup> To be clear, myth is demarcated from fable, story and narrative in this paper, although they are all structurally related. Thus, I also take a myth-centered ontology to include stories and narratives.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 58.

For Lewis, what flows into one from myth is reality, not merely truth. This is not a thesis distinct from usages in Greek. For instance, in an entry in the *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, μῦθος is defined as “the matter itself.”<sup>12</sup> Thus myth is a story or narrative whose sole purpose is to deliver “the matter itself”—*reality*. The distinction Lewis is invoking is a primitive/derivative distinction. What is primitive to the mythic experience is reality itself, while derivative are “innumerable truths on the abstract level.” The danger would be in associating the latter with the former. For just as it would be conceptually inadequate to associate personal reflections on one’s experience of love with the experience of love itself, so it would take away from mythic experience to identify the experience with the extracted, abstract truths resultant from it.

There should be a word on this “untranslatability of mythic experience.” As Lewis pointed out, integral to the mythic experience is its inability to be put into concrete propositions describing schematically what takes place. However, this should be at best unsurprising, for it would be at best presumptuous to desire of language that it should be able to say concretely what occurs in all our experiences. It would be like demanding that sentential logic perform what predicate logic can do. The former cannot do what the latter can do and vice versa, and this does not diminish the value of the former nor the latter. As Goethe put it, “the most wonderful thing is

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<sup>12</sup> Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*. (USA and UK: Simon Wallenberg Press, 2007), 454.

that the best of our convictions cannot be expressed in words...Language is not adequate for everything..." (*Das Wunderbarste ist, daß das Beste unsrer Überzeugungen nicht in Worte zu fassen ist... Die Sprache ist nicht auf alles eingerichtet...*).<sup>13</sup> The medium through which we desire to understand our experiences is often only possible in having the capacity of "that inner silence, that emptying out of ourselves, by which we ought to make room for the total reception of the work."<sup>14</sup> Instead of desiring to master the experience by putting it into linguistic form, mythic experience necessitates a preconditional silence which makes true listening possible. But, is there a way to make progress in philosophically unpacking the "untranslatability of mythic experience" which gives an explanation of the untranslatability? There is partial headway, though it does not satisfy the whole of the question (as I will explain in the final part of the paper). The partial explanation of the untranslatability requires one to go back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Consider what he has to say there about "wonder":

It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too...Now he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant (thus the myth-

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Josef Pieper's *The Silence of Goethe*. (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 53.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, C.S. *An Experiment in Criticism*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 92-93.

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lover is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders)...

[δεῖ γὰρ ταύτην τῶν πρώτων ἀρχῶν καὶ αἰτιῶν εἶναι θεωρητικὴν: καὶ γὰρ τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἐν τῶν αἰτιῶν ἐστίν. ὅτι δ' οὐ ποιητικὴ, δῆλον καὶ ἐκ τῶν πρώτων φιλοσοφησάντων: διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρώτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν, ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν τὰ πρόχειρα τῶν ἀτόπων θαυμάσαντες...ὁ δ' ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἶεται ἀγνοεῖν (διὸ καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφος πῶς ἐστίν: ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων)]<sup>15</sup>

Central to a myth, as Aristotle says, is that it has “wonders” (θαυμασίων). These wonders are what delights both the myth-lover as well as the philosopher—for both are concerned with wonder. It seems the dilemma we face is as follows: If “wondering” has less to do with discursive reason and rational “thinking” and more to do with contemplation, should we be surprised that we cannot put into concrete propositions what takes place in the experience of myth, especially if “the cause of that at which we wonder is hidden from us”?<sup>16</sup> However, there is another objection to this thesis.<sup>17</sup> If myths deliver reality from which we derive philosophical

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle. *Metaphysics I-IX*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), I, II, 982b, 9-11.

<sup>16</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaest. Disp. de potential Dei*, 6, 2. Quoted in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. Trans.

Alexander Dru. Introduction by T.S. Elliot. (New York, NY and Scarborough, ON: A Mentor Book, 1963), 103.

<sup>17</sup> From the *Sophia* conference.

insights, and philosophy only takes place within natural language i.e., in dialogue, we should conclude that what happens in mythic experience just is the experience of putting into natural language philosophical insights. There are two reasons why I regard this to be an implausible objection. First, the mythic experience is a non-philosophical experience, although both mythic and philosophical experiences are contemplative, and both involve natural language. The philosophical act involves contemplating on the whole of being, whereas the reality experienced in myth can be multi-functional, depending on what aspect of reality myth is trying to deliver.<sup>18</sup> Second, the aforementioned analogy between the

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<sup>18</sup> One might respond to this by rejecting my characterization of philosophy—admittedly “traditional”—and the philosophical act. For example, Michael Caditz has argued in his “A Renewal of Philosophy”—featured in this volume—that philosophy might ultimately be non-truth oriented, and may in the end be aimed at subjective, existential significance. I regard Caditz’ position as problematic principally on two levels. First, the proposal that philosophical disagreement is a ground for understanding philosophy as non-truth-oriented is plausibly a faulty inference. I say this for three reasons. First, it overlooks non-rational reasons for persistent, philosophical disagreement i.e., ignorance, inability to accept evidence, incapacity to read untranslated work, et cetera. Second, philosophical progress serves as a counter-example i.e., in solving the logical/evidential problem of evil, philosophical disagreement might persist while the question has itself been answered. Third, if the criteria for settling philosophical disagreement is scientific adjudication, then there are two unwanted implications: First, science would not be truth-oriented i.e., interpretations of relativity and quantum theory are largely disagreed on. Second, scientism would be true, and it is a self-referentially incoherent theory of knowledge i.e., scientism is not a statement of science, but of epistemology. With respect to the second level, Caditz’s Wittgensteinian critique of metaphysical and ethical statements is implausible for two reasons.

experience of love and personal reflections on the experience of love is an *analogical* argument which provides an *in principle* reason why mythic experience is untranslatable.

In “On Myth”, Lewis concerns himself with different, though related questions. Lewis describes the conditions under which something is classified as a “myth”: It must be extra-literary, a permanent object of contemplation, have sympathy at a minimum, deal with the fantastic or preternatural, and it must be awe-inspiring.<sup>19</sup> For philosophical, historical and linguistic reasons Lewis was aware of, giving a univocal definition of

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First, it is inconsistent with Caditz’s understanding of philosophy. If his Wittgensteinian critique of philosophy is correct, philosophy would be truth-oriented and have answered a philosophical question (thereby not being philosophy, on his understanding). Second, it is methodologically unjustified to assume that metaphysical/ethical statements do not fit into a “picture.” For if a theism of sorts is true, metaphysical/ethical statements are well-situated within that ontology. To reject *a priori* the possibility of the truth of a metaphysical thesis like “there is a God” *just is* to beg the question. I would also interject two side notes. First, philosophy is not philosophical insofar as it is always questioning (as Heidegger famously says), but inasmuch as it asks genuine philosophical questions, and is open to the possibility of an answer. It would be at best dogmatic and methodologically unwarranted to assume philosophical questions cannot have answers—perhaps it would even make philosophy redundant (presumably philosophy is not done *primarily* for the sake of personal, existential fulfillment, contrary to philosophy’s original meaning as the love of wisdom). Second and finally, alleged defeaters of classical, essentialist philosophy within the history of philosophy should be judged case-by-case. It is not enough to point out how sentential logic, essentialism and Greek/theistic ontologies have been critiqued. This is a historical note, not a philosophical analysis—I am interested in the latter, not the former.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 43-44.



myth is not, at least given what we know, possible.<sup>20</sup> The sheer amount of myths which were circulated in the ancient world are evidence of this difficulty.<sup>21</sup> With regard to defining myth, Lewis' concern is not in the origin of "myth" either<sup>22</sup>; instead, he is interested in "the effect of myths as they act on the conscious mind" to the effect that when Lewis speaks of myths, he means "myths contemplated."<sup>23</sup> Lewis thus defines myth by their effect:

...the degree to which any story is a myth depends very largely on the person who hears or reads it. An important corollary follows. We must never ["I do not say we can never find out" (Lewis' footnote)] that we know exactly what is happening when anyone else reads a book. For beyond all doubt the same book can be merely an exciting

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<sup>20</sup> Linguistically, see Josef Pieper's *The Platonic Myths*. Trans. Dan Farrelly. (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1965), 5-6. Consider too, the fifteen ways in which myth has been treated historically—which is still a limited list—found in William L. Reese's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*. (New Jersey, USA: Humanities Press, 1980), 375-376. Philosophically, a lengthy and sustained rejection of 'myth as falsehood' has been recently defended in Bryan Metcalfe's *Pedagogy of Mythos*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto PhD Dissertation, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Stephen L. Harris and Gloria Platzner's *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights*. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 59-1069.

<sup>22</sup> Although Hans Blumenberg, for example, is interested in the origin of myth. See his *Work on Myth*. Trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 45.

‘yarn’ to one and convey a myth, or something like a myth, to another.<sup>24</sup>

I will raise and answer three objections to Lewis’ position. First, does the person-dependency of mythic experience make mythic experience, and hence reality, *subjective*? It is worth noting that from the person-dependent nature of mythic experience it does not follow that the reality experienced in myth—the thesis Lewis defended in his “Myth Became Fact”—is subjective. Just as the sober person sees the world with fresh eyes oriented towards the truth of things, so the mythic experience is authentic provided one genuinely experiences the myth. Second, is not what is integral to “myth”—and a definition thereof—the *narrative* structure? Lewis’ response is that this cannot be the sole criteria, since in many cases (counter-examples) there is hardly a narrative at all:

Sometimes, even from the first, there is hardly any narrative element. The idea that the gods, and all good men, live under the shadow of Ragnarok is hardly a story. The Hesperides, with their apple-tree and dragon, are already a potent myth, without bringing in Hercules to steal the apples.<sup>25</sup>

Lewis is not rejecting that what is constitutive of a myth is its narrative element, for myths are intrinsically narratives; rather, he rejects that this should be sufficient to demarcate myth from, for instance, mere stories or allegories. Third, is the mythic experience the same as literary experience? While this requires an analysis of the literary experience, which I am

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

moving toward, Lewis gives one example of how they are different. He writes that “this literary delight will be distinct from [the literary person’s] appreciation of [a] myth.”<sup>26</sup> Put clearly, myth might be cloaked in bad writing, but it is no less a myth for it. Although there is a distinction between mythic and literary experience, what uniquely occurs in the latter?

Lewis’ considerations on literary experience are multifold; however, I regard his position clear from analyzing his understanding of the value of “old books.” What do the old books really do for us? Lewis argues that they not only “correct the characteristics of our own period”<sup>27</sup>, but historically inform us away from our chronological snobbery: “The only palliative [against blindness] is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.”<sup>28</sup> Thus historical consciousness is derivative from our knowledge of the past, not from second hand interpretations, summaries and commentaries on it. There is a *direct* encounter with the text Lewis is advocating for. He goes on to argue that in the reading of old books, we are in effect “stepping out of [our] own age”<sup>29</sup>, whereby we not only inform ourselves, but meaningfully engage with the past. This “stepping out” is a central key to Lewis’ insights on literary experience. Naturally, the distinction between good and bad reading—and readers—is significant and at work in Lewis’ argument, for he writes that good reading involves affectionate,

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, “On the Reading of Old Books” in *God in the Dock*, 220.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

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moral and intellectual activities.<sup>30</sup> Further, Lewis writes that in reading great literature, appreciation of literature as “logos”, namely, “a series of windows”, “admits us to experiences other than our own.”<sup>31</sup> Two questions though should be raised: Is this step beyond ourselves *escapism*? Second, is not the literary experience just a way of losing one’s self in forgetfulness in immersing oneself in the experiences of others? First, Lewis points out that there is an *in principle* distinction between *escape* and *escapism*, and the former need not be identified with the latter.<sup>32</sup> Lewis admits that there is a danger of escaping for too long, or perhaps escaping into the wrong things and thereby evade responsibility in the real world; nevertheless, he reminds us that “we must judge each case on its merits.”<sup>33</sup> In reply to the second objection, this highlights the self-transcending capacity of the reader. Lewis clarifies:

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound; but they destroy the privilege. In them our separate selves are pooled and we sink back into sub-individuality. But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 138.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

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Unpacking this philosophically, Lewis is contending three things. First, individuality, while a great good, has intrinsic to it the need for moving beyond mere subjectivity into the experiences of others. The evidence of this is how small a world the unliterary inhabit.<sup>35</sup> Second, one way we can do this “moving beyond” is by experiencing great literature. Third, this act of self-transcendence carries with it, paradoxically, the way to authentic subjectivity. To sum up, with regard to *content*, mythic experience delivers reality itself, whereas literary experience delivers insights from other ages as correctives of our own. With respect to *effects*, mythic experience delivers a reality which speaks to us of something “beyond concrete experience”, whereas literary experience allows for self-transcendence. Before specifying what this “beyond” amounts to, it is worth reflecting on Lewis’ analyses in their entirety.

Lewis’ analyses of mythic and literary experience are valuable principally for two reasons. First, he makes possible an argument which contends that what is closer to the fundamentals of human existence is a “story” or “narrative”, not merely a set of objective facts about the world. It does not follow that we are not truth-oriented creatures, that objective facts do not tell us about the nature of the world and that an irrationalist philosophical anthropology is correct; contrarily, these stories, narratives and myths are the medium through which we understand ourselves and the world.<sup>36</sup> This is the

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>36</sup> This does not mean that *all* stories, narratives and myths do this. For some stories and narratives foster morally eroding principles. I have been asked at the *Sophia* conference the following: From the possibility of there being

position of German philosopher Josef Pieper, put in his 1965 *The Platonic Myths* as follows:

...could it not be the case that the reality most relevant to man is not a “set of facts” but is rather an “event,” and that it accordingly cannot be grasped adequately in a thesis but only...in a story?

[Könnte es nicht überdies so sein, daß die für den Menschen eigentlich belangreiche Realität nicht die Struktur des »Sachverhalts« besäße, sondern die des Ereignisses, und daß sie folglich gerade nicht in einer These, sondern allein...in der Wiedergabe einer Handlung, also in einer »Geschichte« adäquat zu fassen wäre?]<sup>37</sup>

Lewis was of the same position, for he says explicitly in “On Myth” that “the Event will not reach them unless it is ‘written up’.”<sup>38</sup> This position also makes possible understanding myths as capable of being *contemporary*.<sup>39</sup> Second, Lewis’

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myths with morally eroding effects, what moral responsibility is there on the reader and writer of myth? I would say that there is moral responsibility both in the writer—in not perpetuating or sustaining morally untenable positions within the creation of myths—as well as the reader—in reading the myth authentically and responsibly.

<sup>37</sup> Pieper, *The Platonic Myths*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> In his *Pedagogy of Mythos*, Metcalfe shows how “contemporary myths” can possibly have morally eroding

analyses are significant in that the reality which is “tasted” in myth is not subjective, that for Lewis a myth-centered ontology does not imply giving up truth and reality, but emphasizes the reality *in* and *beyond* the myth. For while the myth delivers reality, we might rightly ask *which* reality. Consider two of Lewis’ own metaphors. First: “Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley...”<sup>40</sup> Second: “...myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to.”<sup>41</sup> What is at the top of the mountain, the continent we really belong to? What lies beyond the boarder of concrete experience?

For Lewis, there is a universal sense of the “other continent”, “top of the mountain”, “scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”<sup>42</sup> As Lewis put it:

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

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effects. I defend Metcalfe in my “Josef Pieper’s Defense of the *Geisteswissenschaften*” (book manuscript in progress).

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, “Myth Became Fact” in *God in the Dock*, 58.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis, C.S. “The Weight of Glory” in *Transposition*. (London, W.C: Butler & Taner, 1949), 24.

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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...<sup>43</sup>

The “sweetness” of what we seek is also found in Canto XXVII Dante’s *Purgatorio*:

Today your hungerings will find their peace/  
through that sweet fruit the care of mortals seeks  
among so many branches.

[Quel dolce pome che per tanti rami/ cercando va  
la cura de’ mortali,/ oggi porrà in pace le tue  
fami].<sup>44</sup>

Nietzsche was convinced that the sweet fruit Dante spoke of could not be had within the domain of history: “[it is] always one thing which makes for happiness:...the capacity to feel unhistorically” (*immer eins, wodurch Glück zum Glücke wird: [...] das Vermögen, unhistorisch zu empfinden*).<sup>45</sup> Did not

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>44</sup> Dante, Alighieri. *Purgatorio*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1982), 104-105.

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben. Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* quoted in Pieper’s *Happiness and Contemplation*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1958), 101.



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Hölderlin, like Dante, speak of the “chords of lyres plucked in distant gardens” in his *Brot und Wein*?

All around the tired town now rests,/ And silence  
slowly fills the dim-lit alleys.../ The market is  
empty of grapes and flowers.../ No noisy hands,  
no hustle any more.../ And yet, the breeze brings,  
softly, melodies,/ The chords of lyres plucked in  
distant gardens...

[Ringsum ruhet die Stadt.../ Still wird die  
erleuchtete Gasse.../ Leer steht von Trauben und  
Blumen.../ und von Werken der Hand ruht der  
geschäftige Markt.../ Aber das Saitenspiel tönt fern  
aus Gärten...] <sup>46</sup>

Shakespeare says similarly in Sonnet XCVIII:

Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,/

As with your shadow I with these did play.

The invocation of Shakespeare, Dante, Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Lewis himself is not an argument; it is an attempt to point out, in light of Lewis' analyses, that attempts to circumvent the desire within us for the “sweet fruit” Dante speaks of, “tasted reality” as Lewis says, the “distant gardens” of Hölderlin, the desire to see what “these shadows” are reflections of, as Shakespeare put it, are attempts to repress

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<sup>46</sup> Hölderlin's *Brot und Wein* quoted in Pieper's *Only the Lover Sings*. Trans. Lothar Krauth. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 65.

longings we find within ourselves which myth and literature attempt to illuminate. Again: What lies beyond the boarder of concrete experience? Lewis answers that just as “myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth”, meaning the heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact...by becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle...If God chooses to be mythopoeic—and is not the sky itself a myth—shall we refuse to be *mythopathic*? For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lewis, “Myth Became Fact” in *God in the Dock*, 58-60. Patrick Sullivan has pointed out to me that one of the original meanings of a “symbol”, many of which are found in myths, is to bring two things together. If this is true, myths in Lewis’ sense bring together—through symbols—the (sense of) the “other continent”, and the concrete world itself. The relationship between myth and symbol does not take traction in this paper, although undoubtedly pursuing this avenue further in future work would prove philosophically illuminating.

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