

***Isle of Knots, A Novel: Religion in *Isle of Knots* and Related Fantasy Fiction for Youth, an
Exegesis***

by

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B.F.A., The University of British Columbia, 2013

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Children's Literature)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

October 2017

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Abstract

In this thesis, I use the ideas of mythologist Joseph Campbell as a framework to compare and contrast the portrayal of religion in my own novel, *Isle of Knots*, with C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. Campbell argues that myths and religious tales must be interpreted as metaphors rather than literal facts (as has been common in the Christian tradition). I explore how *The Chronicles of Narnia* reimagines Christian myth in a fantasy world and contrasts Campbell's view by emphasizing literal belief in God. *His Dark Materials* likewise re-envision Christian myths but attacks literal belief in religion and encourages an experience of the divine in our own world through physical, material means. Pullman's critique of literalism bears some similarities to Joseph Campbell's scholarship, but through my novel, *Isle of Knots*, I strive to present a fictional world even more fully attuned to Campbell's ideas. My protagonist starts with literal beliefs in a fictional religion similar to Christianity but eventually relinquishes such beliefs in favour of a primarily metaphorical interpretation of gods and mythologies. Through this metaphorical interpretation, my characters must also grapple with Campbell's morally ambiguous view of the divine, which transcends the duality of good and evil.

Lay Summary

Joseph Campbell was a twentieth-century American scholar who argued that religious stories should be interpreted as symbols and metaphors, rather than literally true. Using Campbell's ideas, I examine several fantasy novels for youth: *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, which presents a literal interpretation of religion; *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman, which criticizes literalism and therefore partially aligns with Campbell's ideas; and my own novel, *Isle of Knots*, wherein I strive to portray views very similar to Campbell's in a fictional world. The protagonist of my novel starts with a literal belief in his religion but eventually considers his myths and gods as metaphors.

Preface

This exegesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Russell Francis Hirsch. It is the academic portion *only* of a hybrid creative/academic thesis. The creative portion consists of a young adult novel manuscript, *Isle of Knots*, also written exclusively by Russell Francis Hirsch.

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Acknowledgements

I extend my sincere and utmost thanks to the following people:

Alison Acheson, my creative supervisor, for your genuine encouragement, laid-back patience, and Jungian book recommendations.

Dr. Rick Gooding, my academic supervisor, for your honest insights and friendly conversations.

Maggie de Vries, my second reader, for your enthusiasm and experience.

Eric Meyers, current MACL chair, for your attentiveness, advice, and humor.

Judi Saltman, former MACL chair, for your unlimited generosity and wisdom, which kept me north of the border.

The Vancouver Children's Literature Roundtable, for always providing a welcoming and engaging community of children's book enthusiasts.

My lovely MACL classmates, for providing good times and good advice, especially Chris, Laura, Nafiza, Rob, Kathleen, Bonnie, Meaghan, Cecilia, and Marlo.

My classmates in Alison's 2014-15 CRWR 503 workshop and my fellow members of The Purple Stapler Writers Forum, for reading many early sections of my novel.

Most of all, my family, especially my incredible parents, Mary and Kelvin, for your unconditional love and unwavering support of my creative passion; and Matthew, Priscilla, and Ethan for all your love and belief in me the past three years.

Finally, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for their invaluable funding through the Joseph Armand-Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship; and the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies and Dr. Ronald Jobe, for their generous support through scholarships.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is a hybrid creative/academic project. For the creative portion, I wrote an unpublished 180 000 word young adult fantasy novel entitled *Isle of Knots*. This paper is the critical exegesis, in which I analyze the representation of religion in my novel and in several related works of fantasy fiction for youth. Specifically, mythologist Joseph Campbell's ideas about the metaphoric interpretation of religion were foundational to my writing of *Isle of Knots*. Using Campbell's ideas as a framework, I situate my novel in comparison with C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, to better understand and reflect on the portrayal of religious mythology (especially Christian mythology) in each.

In Chapter 1 of this exegesis, I discuss past scholarly work addressing Campbell, Lewis, and Pullman, provide a summary of *Isle of Knots*, and discuss my motivations for writing this thesis. To begin Chapter 2, I outline Campbell's main arguments for interpreting religious mythology as metaphorical, drawing principally from the final book he authored, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion*. I proceed to analyze *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a text that differs from Campbell's view by presenting a literalist interpretation of religion. The following examination of *His Dark Materials* reveals a critique of such literalism and an exploration of experiencing the divine within one's own world—themes that have some resonance with Campbell's theories. However, whereas Pullman accents engagement with material, physical aspects of life as key to this divine experience, Campbell emphasizes engagement with inner realizations and mythic metaphors. The two diverge further through Pullman's focus on the importance of morality, while Campbell argues that realizing the divine within one's own world is ultimately transcendent of good and evil. Finally, through an examination of my own novel, I more deeply explore Campbell's emphasis on metaphor and on

divinity transcendent of morals, considering these as key areas where I differentiate my work from both Lewis and Pullman.

1.1 The Lewis-Pullman Divide and a Review of Scholarship on the Selected Authors

Of the seven novels in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, I focus on books I, II, and VII, respectively, *The Magician's Nephew*; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; and *The Last Battle*. Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy consists of *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass* and I draw from all three novels. The sections on Lewis and Pullman consist mostly of textual analysis, but I also reference the authors' own statements about their work. In considering my own novel, I cannot detach myself from my influences and intentions. It thus feels incomplete to discuss Lewis and Pullman's books without likewise considering some key intentions they have publicly expressed.

Indeed, Campbell, Lewis, and Pullman were (in Pullman's case, are) very willing to bring their views on religion, myth, and spirituality into the public sphere. In the 1980s Campbell gave a popular series of PBS interviews with Bill Moyers, which Moyers' website describes as "one of the most popular TV series in the history of public television" ("Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth"). C.S. Lewis, a renowned Christian apologist, was known not only for his writings, but also his tremendously popular BBC Radio addresses on religion during the Second World War (Hooper 28-9; Hatlen 80). Philip Pullman, "one of England's most outspoken atheists" (Miller), is likewise a regular speaker at conferences on writing, humanism, education, and religion, and has penned several newspaper columns denouncing *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In 1998, amid celebrations of the centenary of Lewis' birth, Pullman wrote a particularly strong rebuke in *The Guardian* entitled "The Dark Side of Narnia," where he calls the Christian themes

in Lewis' books "propaganda in the service of a life-hating ideology [...] Death is better than life; boys are better than girls; light-coloured people are better than dark-coloured people; and so on. There is no shortage of such nauseating drivel in Narnia, if you can face it." Three years later, in *The Horn Book* magazine, Pullman authored an article called "The Republic of Heaven," a thorough and thoughtful reflection on portraying the divine in works for youth, claiming "the Narnia books are such an invaluable guide to what is wrong and cruel and selfish." Pullman has made similar criticisms in interviews with scholarly journals (Parsons et al.).

This ideological rift between two storytelling heavyweights has caught the attention of well-known newspapers and magazines like *The New Yorker* (Miller), *The Telegraph* (Marr), *The Spectator* (Hitchens), and *The Atlantic* (Easterbrook), especially in the early 2000s following the completion of *His Dark Materials*. Considerable academic attention has also been devoted to comparing and contrasting Lewis' and Pullman's representations of God and Christianity (Brittain; Hatlen; Laszkiewicz; McSporran) and their representations of death (M. Brown; Gray). The authors' contrasting views on religion ultimately remain prevalent although *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* share numerous plot similarities and both involve the reimagining of myths (Oziewicz and Hade; Wheat).

The Lewis-Pullman divide is so well-known that I would find it difficult to discuss religion in the work of one without referencing the other. Bringing Joseph Campbell's ideas into the discussion stems largely from the strong influence Campbell has had on my creative and academic work (as discussed below in Chapter 1.3). However, the preoccupation of Lewis and Pullman with religious mythology and Campbell's preeminent scholarship in this area make his ideas a compelling choice for framing a comparison of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*. Reference to Campbell has already entered such comparisons. Some research

considers the overall plot similarities in Lewis and Pullman (and many other works of fantasy for children) as owing to the common motifs and archetypes among mythic stories that Campbell describes (Freeman). Others specifically argue that Lewis' continual appeal in the face of criticism from Pullman (and others) is in how *The Chronicles of Narnia* fit the mythic hero's journey plot cycle (D. Brown). Campbell first described the hero's journey in his 1949 book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, proposing that most myths from around the world follow "one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story" (3), an archetypal sequence of plot events.

However, in this exegesis, what most interests me is not the hero's journey, the sequence of events in mythic stories, but rather Campbell's view on the very nature of mythic and religious storytelling; a view that emphasizes metaphor over literalism; a view that brings Campbell into contrast with C.S. Lewis, as noted briefly in Averhart's article, "Misuse of Myth: Conscious Adherence or Authoritative Control Mechanism," and explored thoroughly by Christian scholar James W. Menzies' book, *True Myth: C.S. Lewis and Joseph Campbell on the Veracity of Christianity* (although Menzies devotes minimal attention to *The Chronicles of Narnia*). I propose to undertake my own analysis of *The Chronicles of Narnia* in this light, while expanding that analysis to include *His Dark Materials* and reflections on my novel, *Isle of Knots*.

Before delving into such an analysis, I must first provide an overview of my novel. The following is not a blow-by-blow plot summary, but an account of the key elements of my fantasy world's mythology and the main actions taken by the characters over the course of the novel.

1.2 Summary of *Isle of Knots*

Isle of Knots is a fantasy novel for young adults set entirely in a fictional medieval world.

According to myth, the Isle of Knots was formed from the bodies of four Giants who long ago

fell asleep in the sea clutching hands. When people first came to the Isle a thousand years before the novel begins, civil war erupted between the southern settlers and the northern settlers. Holy legend holds that this war broke the grip of the Giants, causing the Isle to crack in half and start sinking into the sea. The Isle was saved when the leaders (or Founders) of the Isle created a miraculous knot, the First Knot, which bound the split halves of the Isle together again.

Since then, wars have often raged between the Northerners (called Ikesfolk) and the Southerners (called Gorsfolk), though the Isle has never split again. Also since that time, knots have been foundational in every aspect of life on the Isle. Most importantly, everyone wears a rope necklace called a name-knot, which they believe contains their soul. The Isle has a religious caste of aristocratic, druid-like keepers of law and lore called Knotmakers. Beloved in the South and largely despised in the North, the Knotmakers perform rituals that appease the Giant Gods, and they give children their name-knots and untie the name-knots of the dead, releasing souls into Giant Dreams (heaven).

At the start of the novel, fifteen year-old Nollaig Bren (Noll), heir to the Isle's most powerful Southern Knotmakers, awaits the arrival of a surrender delegation from the North. Convinced the Northerners are rebels and infidels, Noll desperately wants to tie the terms of their surrender into the sacred Great Tapestry. But when the supposed surrender explodes into the Isle's most devastating civil war yet, Noll must flee with his rival Aila Twish, a northern Knotmaker hunted by her own people. While on the run, Noll and Aila discover instructions hidden inside the Great Tapestry, which provide clues about where to find the strands that formed the long-lost, miraculous First Knot that bound the Isle together a thousand years earlier. Furthermore, the instructions claim that retying the strands of the First Knot will raise the

Founders of the Isle and awaken the Giant Gods, triggering the Apocalypse and ascent of all righteous souls to a glorious, heavenly home.

Together, Noll and Aila travel across the Isle in search of the three strands of the First Knot. Noll zealously desires to bring about the end times, while Aila believes the strands have power but is skeptical about whether the end of the world will actually occur. They are pursued by northern Chieftains who want the First Knot for themselves. The Chieftains believe that severing the strands of the First Knot will crack the Isle in half again, but not sink it, breaking the North free of southern domination.

Over the course of their quest, Noll begins to question his literal belief in the Gods and their miracles. Finding the strands of the First Knot exacerbates his doubt. According to holy lore, the strands were made of the first Queen's hair, the first King's sash, and a strip of chain mail from the first northern Chief. However, the Hair, Sash, and Chain turn out to be symbolic names for a rare plant, animal pelt, and crystal. Noll's faith is further unraveled when he learns that he can sever his name-knot, the supposed carrier of his soul, without losing his mind.

In the climax, Noll and Aila unwittingly hand over the strands of the First Knot to a shape-knotting (changeling) northern Chief, who severs them, cracking the Isle in half, like in the old myth of Queen Ash. To the northern Chief's chagrin, the cracked Isle does start sinking. With the old First Knot destroyed, Noll and Aila use ropes they received from the various people they encountered on their quest to make a new First Knot, which ultimately binds the Isle back together again. Although they save the Isle from literally cracking apart, tying this new First Knot does not literally bring about the Apocalypse and Final Judgement that Noll initially hoped for. The overall quest changes Noll's values: he comes to consider his Giant Gods primarily as

symbols for a state of mind that he can achieve within himself: a sense of connection to all existence.

1.3 Motivation and Origins of Interest

“And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe’s great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair” (391). So Joseph Campbell concludes his comparative study of world mythologies, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. I largely agree with Campbell’s assertion that the “tribe’s great victories,” whether that tribe be national, political, or religious, cannot solely provide an ultimate sense of fulfilment to the hero, mystic, artist, or in my case, writer. However, I would be lying if I said the influence of my tribe did not shape my desire to read, study, and write fantasy literature for youth. Having grown up in the 1990s, I was drawn to the genre alongside other children my age, the so-called “Harry Potter generation” (Farr). From *Harry Potter*, I gravitated to other young adult fantasy classics, like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and later, *His Dark Materials*.

Yet within this cultural context, I also developed a deeply rooted inner fascination with fantasy literature, in my “silences of personal despair,” which grew out of the intersection of three significant spheres of influence in my life:

First was religion. My family regularly attended Catholic mass when I was a child. The atmosphere of the university chapel where we worshipped was very relaxed, but the solemn grandeur of ceremonies like the Eucharist, when the congregation’s song swelled with the words, “*Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again,*” left an impression on me long after I left behind any personal label as a Catholic or Christian.

A second influence was the strong respect for science in my family. Both my parents had forestry degrees and through my teenage years, my father managed a team of government

scientists conducting climate change research. This (aided by my steady diet of *Star Trek* episodes!) made me appreciate the wonders of scientific discovery.

Completing this unlikely trinity of personal influences were the New Age healing methods that my family practiced. I did not understand the mechanics of sensing energy fields with wire dowsing wands or meditating on the opening of the chakras, but the idea of intangible influences underlying what we physically see and feel captivated my interest from an early age.

Although organized religion, science, and alternative medicine could be viewed as irreconcilable, growing up exposed to all three made me fascinated with their overlaps and connections. I enjoy fantasy literature as a space where one can imagine the interweaving of mythic and religious archetypes, scientific discoveries, and mystical phenomena. During university, I have explored such intersections academically through my interest in the scholarship of mythologist Joseph Campbell. I have also explored the confluence of myth, religion, science, belief, and metaphor through my creative writing, particularly my thesis novel, *Isle of Knots*. I engage with this confluence not only out of personal interest, but because I believe it holds enormous power to dissolve divisive boundaries between cultures, religions, and worldviews, and ultimately attune us to a fulfilling—even divine—experience of life.

Chapter 2: Critical Analysis

2.1 Joseph Campbell and Religious Myth as Metaphor

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) devoted his scholarly career to studying mythological and religious stories from around the world. According to his 1986 book, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, the nature of myth and religion consists of “two aspects, a universal and a local” (xiii). The universal aspect refers to common motifs found in myths across different religions and cultures. A Jungian, Campbell explains these universal motifs as “archetypes of the collective unconscious” (xiv), symbols that are spurred to expression by “the primal energies and urges of the common human species” (xv). However, cultures imbue these common motifs with distinctive characteristics and interpretations; the symbols of myth are “differently understood and developed in the differing traditions” (xiii) and are “all conditioned, of course, by local geographical and social necessities” (xiv). Borrowing terms from nineteenth-century anthropology, Campbell often refers to the common mythic motifs as “elementary ideas” and their culturally conditioned manifestations as “ethnic or folk ideas” (xiii).

Despite the way elementary ideas assume concrete historical and cultural characteristics wherever they are expressed, Campbell stresses that their unconscious origin marks them as symbols rather than actual people or events: “[Mythic] narratives and images are to be read, therefore, not literally, but as metaphors” (28). Over-accentuating the culturally conditioned or “folk ideas” leads to the myths being “misread prosaically” (xxiii) as real facts. The solidification of fluid mythic metaphors into hard, historical facts leads to “tribal literalism” (31) and cultural conflict. Interpreting religious metaphors as literal truths also renders them incompatible with the unfolding discoveries of science. For example, Campbell describes how

Copernicus' model of the universe, which displaced Earth from its central point, was never mythologized, stating that "science and religion have therewith gone apart" (17).

According to Campbell, these ideas are especially relevant to those of us inheriting "the Judeo-Christian-Islamic mythic complex," in which "the prosaic reification of metaphoric imagery" (xxiv) has been particularly prevalent. However, faced with the conflicts caused by this reification, Campbell does not suggest we completely abandon mythology, "dismissing the metaphors as lies (which indeed they are, when so construed), thus scrapping the whole dictionary of the language of the soul" (31). Rather, he argues that religious and mythic vocabulary can continue to express vital and fundamental human experiences, but only if we recognize that vocabulary is metaphorical, and ultimately transcendent of tribe and custom.

What then of the religious myths we re-envision in fantasy texts for youth, especially Christian myths? What interpretation, literalist or metaphorical, do *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *His Dark Materials*, and my thesis novel, *Isle of Knots*, present through their narratives?

2.2 *The Chronicles of Narnia*: Literalist Interpretation

In 1961, C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) received a letter from a young reader who had questions about the death (and resurrection) of his character, Aslan the Lion. In response, Lewis provided an explicit account of the Christian influences in *The Chronicles of Narnia*:

The whole Narnian story is about Christ. That is to say, I asked myself 'Supposing that there really was a world like Narnia and supposing it had (like our world) gone wrong and supposing Christ wanted to go into that world and save it (as He did ours), what might have happened?' The stories are my answers. (Hooper 426)

The above lines indicate Lewis' literal belief in mythological Christian events like the Fall and Redemption of humanity. It is therefore no surprise that Lewis' novels reimagine numerous episodes from Christian mythology in a Narnian setting, nor is it surprising that the novels emphasize a literalist interpretation of religion.

The opening book of the series, *The Magician's Nephew*, re-envision scenes from Genesis in the Narnian context. Using magic rings, two English children, Digory and Polly, leave our world and witness how Aslan the Lion sings Narnia and its neighbouring lands into existence, creating the stars, landscape, and the various sentient Talking Beasts that populate it. Unfortunately for these inhabitants, Digory brings the Narnian equivalent of Original Sin into their new world in the form of Jadis, the evil white witch. Early in the novel, during the children's first foray outside our world with the magic rings, Digory and Polly visit not Narnia, but the witch's dying world of Charn. There, Digory selfishly strikes a magic bell against Polly's better judgement, awakening Jadis from an enchanted sleep. After a brief spell back in our world where Jadis wreaks havoc in London, the children try to return her to Charn, only to find it replaced with the new world of Narnia.

Digory atones somewhat for his mistake in a later scene resembling the Temptation of Eve: in an enchanted garden, the witch plays the role of serpent, trying to persuade him to taste an apple that will make him immortal, but he ultimately resists. However, the initial damage is done; evil has entered Narnia. Aslan explains this and foreshadows his own role as Redeemer:

“You see, friends,” he said, “that before the new, clean world I gave you is seven hours old, a force of evil has already entered it; waked and brought hither by this son of Adam.” The Beasts, even Strawberry, all turned their eyes on Digory till he felt that he wished the ground would swallow him up. “But do not be cast down,”

said Aslan, still speaking to the Beasts. “Evil will come of that evil, but it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself.” (Lewis 80)

In Book II, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis presents this Narnian version of the Redemption. Digory is now an old professor with a home in the English countryside, where he houses the four Pevensie children (Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy) when they are evacuated from wartime London. The children soon discover the titular wardrobe, a magic portal for entering Narnia. A thousand years have passed since Narnia’s founding and for the last century, Jadis, the white witch, has reigned, locking the land in permanent winter (as per the timeline in Hooper 420-3).

The Pevensie children help Aslan, who returns to Narnia after a long absence, overcome the witch. Aslan’s victory parallels the Christian Easter story. Aslan offers himself as a sacrifice to Jadis (in place of Edmund, who initially helped the witch before turning against her). Jadis proceeds to put Aslan to death at the Stone Table. This mirrors the Christian myth of the crucifixion, in which an innocent Jesus sacrifices himself in atonement for the sins of humanity.

The subsequent resurrection scenes for Jesus and Aslan unfold nearly point-for-point. In Matthew 28:1-10, Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James, visit Jesus’ tomb and “there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it” (*King James Version*). The two women see the tomb is empty and shortly thereafter, the resurrected Jesus greets them. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy and Susan Pevensie witness the death of Aslan and when Jadis and her followers depart, the two girls go to the Stone Table to mourn him. When dawn comes, “they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant’s plate” (184). They turn around and discover that “the Stone Table was broken into two

pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan” (184). The girls despair until Aslan reappears a moment later, alive and well. He explains how he has fulfilled his role as Redeemer: “[...] when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards” (185). As a willing sacrifice, Aslan atones for the sins of Edmund Pevensie and banishes the witch and her winter from Narnia, undoing the Original Sin that Digory brought to that world long before.

The first two books depict Creation, Original Sin, and Redemption, and the seventh, concluding book in the series presents Final Judgement. In *The Last Battle*, a talking ape named Shift uses a donkey dressed in a lion skin (a false Aslan) to intimidate the inhabitants of Narnia while colluding with Narnia’s southern rival, Calormen. King Tirian of Narnia and two children from our world, Jill and Eustace, launch a final battle to wrest Narnia back. They are overwhelmed on the battlefield and driven into a stable, but the stable is in fact a portal to a literal heaven, called “Aslan’s real world” (759). There they find Digory, Polly, and most of the Pevensie children, who have entered that heaven from our world after dying in a train accident.

Aslan then presides over the end of Narnia and its neighbouring countries, summoning all their inhabitants to the stable door so he may pass Judgement on them. He admits some to his heavenly “real world” while the others “swerved to their right, his left, and disappeared into his huge black shadow [...] The children never saw them again. I don’t know what became of them” (751). Those who enter Aslan’s “real world” find themselves whole, healthy, and reunited with equally hale, resurrected loved ones, as young King Tirian discovers when he sees his predecessor: “This was his father, young and merry, as he could just remember him from very early days when he himself had been a little boy playing games with his father in the castle

garden at Cair Paravel, just before bedtime on summer evenings” (763-4). The people and creatures Aslan admits to his “real world” are those who “loved him” (751), whereas his shadow swallows those that look at him with “fear and hatred” (751).

A group of dwarfs also comes through the stable door but because they refuse to believe in Aslan, they do not realize they are in the pleasant orchards and gardens of his “real world.” Rather, they insist they are still in the dingy darkness of the stable, even when Tirian and the children try to convince them otherwise. As Aslan explains: “They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out” (748). If the dwarfs believed in Aslan’s realness, they would be able to enter his heaven. Faith is what matters most in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

This literalism is essentially the opposite of Joseph Campbell’s view, where interpretation and understanding are much more vital than faith. Quoting Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Campbell writes that “gods are levels of reference and symbolic entities which are neither places nor individuals but states of being realizable within you” (xxiii). I am not suggesting that the dwarfs have realized such a state of being within themselves, but in the Campbellian view, they could realize such a state by opening the so-called “prison” of their minds to an understanding of Aslan as a “symbolic entity,” a metaphor, but not through literal belief in him.

However, *The Last Battle* makes it very clear that we are to read Aslan as literally real. The suggestion that he may not exist is so contrary to Lewis’ view, he raises the idea through two of the novel’s villains, a talking cat named Ginger and a Calormene warrior, Rishda Tarkaan. They discuss Aslan and the god of Calormen, Tash:

“Noble Tarkaan,” said the Cat in that silky voice of his, “I just wanted to know exactly what we both meant today about Aslan meaning *no more* than Tash.”

“Doubtless most sagacious of cats,” says the other, “you have perceived my meaning.”

“You mean,” says Ginger, “that there’s no such person as either.”

“All who are enlightened know that,” said the Tarkaan. (710)

Lewis portrays these two as self-satisfied unbelievers, who ironically consider themselves enlightened in the final days before a very real Aslan gives a very real Final Judgement. In contrast, for Campbell, the literal belief is the unenlightened practice. He calls it “evident nonsense” to accept as “hard fact” the idea of God “denoting an actual though invisible, masculine personality, who created the universe and is now resident in an invisible though actual, heaven to which the ‘justified’ will go when they die, there to be joined at the end of time by their resurrected bodies” (27). There is a strong discrepancy, to say the least.

The literalism in the Narnian view of God naturally leads to tribalism. From the Campbellian perspective, we might consider Aslan and Tash as two culturally conditioned personifications of an ultimate, transcendent mystery. However, Lewis discourages such an interpretation by once again proposing something similar through a villain figure, Shift the Ape:

“Tash is only another name for Aslan. All that old idea of us being right and the Calormenes wrong is silly. We know better now. The Calormenes use different words but we all mean the same thing. Tash and Aslan are only two different names for you know Who. That’s why there can never be any quarrel between them. Get that into your heads, you stupid brutes. Tash is Aslan: Aslan is Tash.”
(685)

Lewis soon reveals Shift is incorrect, for shortly thereafter, Tirian, the children, and their allies see Tash enter Narnia:

“It seems, then,” said the Unicorn, “that there is a real Tash, after all.”

“Yes,” said the Dwarf. “And this fool of an Ape, who didn’t believe in Tash, will get more than he bargained for! He called for Tash; Tash has come.”

(713)

As those menacing words suggest, Tash proves more demon than god. In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Aslan accepts a good-hearted Calormene named Emeth into his heavenly “real world.” This surprises Emeth since he has always worshipped Tash. He recounts his conversation with Aslan to Tirian and the children:

“I overcame my fear and questioned [Aslan] and said, ‘Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one?’ The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, ‘It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites—I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him.’” (757)

Lewis presents Aslan, regionally accepted as God by the Narnian tribe, as the embodiment of all goodness in that entire fictional world. In contrast, Tash, worshipped regionally in Calormen, is the embodiment of all evil. After all, in a monotheistic literalist interpretation, there can only be one true God out of many; the rest must be relegated to the role of false gods, devils, or idols. But for Campbell, it is the literalist interpretation itself that leads astray: “The first step to mystical realization is the leaving of such a defined god for an experience of transcendence,

disengaging the ethnic from the elementary idea, *for any god who is not transparent to transcendence is an idol, and its worship idolatry*” (18).

There is a clear contrast: Campbell suggests metaphoric interpretation of gods as symbols referring to states of mind unbounded by cultural or geographic boundaries; Lewis depicts, in his fictional reinventions of Christian myth, a literal God championed mainly by one specific nation.

2.3 *His Dark Materials*: Literalist Critique and Materialist Spirituality

As discussed earlier, Philip Pullman (born 1946), author of *His Dark Materials*, is a harsh critic of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Like Lewis, Pullman re-envisioned a number of episodes from Christian mythology in his books, but he does so in a way that attacks religious literalism. As a result, Pullman’s novels find some accord with Joseph Campbell’s ideas.

His Dark Materials does feature a literal God, called the Authority, and Pullman leaves no doubt that it is the Christian God: “The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty—those were all names he gave himself” (*The Amber Spyglass* 31). However, unlike Aslan, who is literal creator of Narnia and its neighbours, the Authority built this reputation on falsehoods: “The first angels condensed out of Dust, and the Authority was first of all. He told those who came after them that he had created them, but it was a lie” (32). Pullman’s Authority is hardly more authentic than the false Aslan that Shift the Ape makes from a donkey dressed in a lion skin.

The Authority likewise resembles the god Indra featured in a Hindu tale that Campbell recounts (*The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* 19-25). After defeating a dragon that kept the world in drought, Indra starts to think highly of himself and believes that he is the be-all-and-end-all supreme God. He is greatly humbled when two greater divine personifications, Visnu and Siva,

who are “far beyond and above the historical sphere of Indra’s temporal victories” (21) arrive to put his position in the cosmic order in perspective: “O King of Gods, there are those in your service who hold that it might be possible to number the particles of sand on earth, or drops of rain that fall from the sky, but no one will ever number all the Indras” (23).

Pullman’s Authority likewise projects himself as a more powerful divine entity than he truly is. However, the power and influence the Authority wields is still considerable. Unlike Aslan, who Lewis depicts as the embodiment of goodness, the Authority (and the churches he oversees in countless parallel worlds) are portrayed as tyrannical: “That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling” (*The Subtle Knife* 50). Faced with this oppressive God, one of Pullman’s characters, Lord Asriel, launches a war against the Authority. Through this plotline, Pullman reinvents the Christian myth of the heavenly war between God and Satan’s party of rebel angels (*King James Version*, Revelation 12:7-9). This is explicitly spelled out in *The Subtle Knife*: “Lord Asriel is gathering an army, with the purpose of completing the war that was fought in heaven eons ago” (198). Counter to the Christian narrative, Pullman’s portrayal favours the revolt: “the rebel angels, the followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; the Authority and his churches have always tried to keep them closed” (*The Amber Spyglass* 479).

Against the backdrop of Asriel’s war on the Authority (who is ultimately defeated), Pullman foregrounds the principal plotline, which follows Lyra Belacqua (Asriel’s daughter). Lyra, a girl from a parallel-world Oxford, is on a quest to learn more about mysterious particles of consciousness called Dust, which the Church hopes to obliterate, considering them “physical evidence for original sin” (*The Golden Compass* 371). Along her journey, Lyra befriends two people from our world, a boy named Will Parry and a nun-turned-scientist, Dr. Mary Malone.

Lyra's adventure also reinterprets several Christian motifs, most specifically the Temptation and Fall. According to a prophecy, Lyra is a second Eve, as explained by her mother, Mrs. Coulter: "Of course. Asriel will make war on the Authority, and then... Of course, of course. As before, so again. And Lyra is Eve" (*The Subtle Knife* 314). The trilogy culminates in Lyra's Fall, wherein she and Will, who have reached puberty, realize romantic feelings for each other and experience sexual pleasure for the first time (*The Amber Spyglass* 465-6). Far from disparaging this moment of physical, sensual pleasure as dreadful Original Sin, Pullman emphasizes it as triumphant. The consciousness particles of Dust have been disappearing from all the worlds, but after Lyra and Will discover sexual pleasure, Dust returns in force; Lyra and Will themselves become:

[...] the true image of what human beings always could be, once they had come into their inheritance.

The Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again, and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all.

(*The Amber Spyglass* 470)

In Pullman's re-envisioning of the myth, the Fall is positive. Without Dust "the universes will all become nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty, of thought, feeling, life" (*The Golden Compass* 310). Eve's temptation brings death upon humanity in the Biblical account (*King James Version*, Genesis 2:17 & 3:3), Digory's resistance to the white witch's temptation holds evil at bay for a time in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but Lyra's acceptance of temptation is what restores vitality to the worlds in *His Dark Materials*.

Just as Pullman critiques belief in a literal God by making that God tyrannical, he critiques belief in a literal heaven by portraying such a place negatively. In *The Amber Spyglass*,

Lyra and Will journey to a literal world of the dead, but it is a vast, dull cavern, a changeless purgatory, far from the glorious heaven the church has promised. As one ghost there describes:

“And they said that Heaven was a place of joy and glory and we would spend eternity in the company of saints and angels praising the Almighty, in a state of bliss. [...] It’s a place of nothing. The good come here as well as the wicked, and all of us languish in this gloom forever, with no hope of freedom, or joy, or sleep, or rest, or peace.” (320)

Lyra descends to this world of the dead and re-emerges alive, opening a way out for the millions of ghosts imprisoned there. In so doing, Pullman positions Lyra as a Christ figure who essentially dies and is resurrected and who, in so doing, vanquishes death for everyone else:

“Death is going to die” (309). The scene is also reminiscent of the dead rising at Judgement, but it produces very different results than the Narnian eternal life in Aslan’s “real world:”

The first ghost to leave the world of the dead was Roger. He took a step forward, and turned to look back at Lyra, and laughed in surprise as he found himself turning into the night, the starlight, the air... and then he was gone, leaving behind such a vivid little burst of happiness that Will was reminded of the bubbles in a glass of champagne. (364)

For Pullman, the ultimate end does not involve a literal realm of unchanging youth and bounty beyond our perceived world, but rather a graceful dissolution back into the physical realm.

In the final chapter of *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman further stresses the rejection of a literal heaven beyond one’s own world. As Lyra says on the final page of the trilogy:

“He meant the Kingdom was over, the Kingdom of Heaven, it was all finished. We shouldn’t live as if it mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place.” (518)

This strikes a stark contrast with C.S. Lewis. The heaven portrayed in the end of *The Last Battle*, is called the “real world;” the worlds the characters previously inhabited being nothing more than “Shadowlands” (767). In Pullman’s critique of literalism, especially the idea of displacing the experience of heaven elsewhere, *His Dark Materials* largely aligns with Joseph Campbell’s ideas. Lyra’s statement, for example, is very similar to lines that Campbell quotes from the gnostic gospel of Thomas, which imply heaven is all around us: “The Kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth and men do not see it” (*The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* 33).

The accent on physical pleasure in Will and Lyra’s moment of triumph, Roger’s death through joyful physical dissolution, and the focus on achieving heaven within one’s own world all underscore an emphasis on materialism in Pullman’s series; an appreciation for tangible, sensual, physical experience. For Pullman, the belief in a literal God is replaced by an experience of the divine that is deeply rooted in the material world. As scholars Oziewicz and Hade express: “If the *Chronicles [of Narnia]* show a material world that is broken and needs to be redeemed from evil, *His Dark Materials* celebrates the material world as good and complete, needing redemption from religious zealots” (52). In Pullman’s trilogy, the divine involves the cultivation of Dust, of “particles of consciousness” (*The Subtle Knife* 88). Angels are “structures” or “complexifications” (249) of these particles. The character of Mary Malone converses with these angels and is told that “Matter and Spirit are one” (249), but the particulate, atomistic description of Dust gives matter the emphasis in this unity.

Pullman's own comments and clarifications further underscore this emphasis on an experience of the divine steeped in engagement with the material world. With the Authority (the literal God) defeated, Lyra calls the future that awaits "The Republic of Heaven" (*The Amber Spyglass* 518). In his *Horn Book* article, also called "The Republic of Heaven," Pullman stresses that such a place "will involve a passionate love of the physical world, *this* world, of food and drink and sex and music and laughter, and not a suspicion and hatred of it." He further explains that this material experience can lead to a sense of connection where the self dissolves, not displaced from this world to some other heaven, but fully immersed in heaven-on-earth:

At the furthest extent, this sense of delight in the physical world can blend into a sort of ecstatic identification with it. "You never enjoy the world aright," said Thomas Traherne, "till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world."

The Campbellian view of the divine encourages a similar identification with the world around us. In *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, Campbell quotes Schopenhauer, capturing a very similar sentiment: "My own true being actually exists in every living creature as truly and immediately as known to my consciousness only in myself" (84).

However, there is a difference in emphasis in Campbell and Pullman. For Pullman, the materialist, heaven must be developed and constructed here on earth. As Lyra expresses in the closing passages of *The Amber Spyglass*: "We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and patient, and we've got to study and think and work hard, all of us in all our different worlds, and then we'll build [...] The Republic of Heaven" (518). For Campbell, however, experiencing this world as divine is not a matter of construction, but of perspective:

“The Promised Land, therefore, is any landscape recognized as mythologically transparent and the method of acquisition of such a territory is not by prosaic physical action, but poetically, by intelligence and the method of art” (34). Lyra’s assertion that “we’ve got to study and think and work hard” appears quite similar to Campbell’s accent on “intelligence and the method of art.” However, for Pullman, study and reflection are the first steps in a process that leads to tangibly building an improved outer world. For Campbell, study and reflection help one to perceive the world as divine, whatever its outer state, through a sense of rapture and “esthetic arrest” (93). For both, heaven-on-earth involves an identification and sense of connection beyond oneself with the surrounding world, but they give different inflexions for the means of reaching that point: Pullman emphasizes a process of engaging with the material world around us, understanding it, and improving it; Campbell emphasizes attaining a perspective informed by metaphoric inner realizations, regardless of the world’s outer condition.

From this arises another crucial difference: Lyra’s call to build heaven-on-earth involves a moral imperative, whereas the experience of the divine suggested by Campbell is beyond good and evil. Lyra’s words at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* highlight morality, acting “cheerful and kind and curious and patient.” As Pullman writes in “The Republic of Heaven” article: “So part of this *meaning* that I’ve suggested we need, the sense that we belong and we matter, comes from the moral and social relations that the Republic of Heaven must embody. In the Republic, we’re connected in a moral way to one another, to other human beings.” For Campbell, realization of the divine, or viewing the world with “esthetic arrest,” is transcendent of moral dualities. It involves an “elevation of mind, and, with the mind, the eye, above desire and loathing, desire and fear” (94). It is not an effort to build an improved world, but a state of mind for perceiving the world with “contemplation and enjoyment” (93).

In summary, Pullman's reinterpretation of Christian myth in *His Dark Materials* critiques the religious literalism typical of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in particular the displacement of the divine to a heavenly realm literally separate from our own. Pullman focuses on achieving heaven-on-earth by building a knowledgeable, moral society, and on this level, his work is more aligned with, but not exactly consistent with, the ideas of Joseph Campbell because Campbell emphasizes achieving heaven-on-earth as a change in perspective, where any individual can view any place or experience as metaphorically divine, open to "the utter wonder of all being" (xx)—*all* being, whether good or evil.

2.4 *Isle of Knots*: Metaphor and the Miraculous

In my novel, *Isle of Knots*, I further explore Campbell's emphasis on the metaphorical realization of the divine within the world, and also on the nature of the divine as being beyond good or evil.

2.4.1 Initial Literalism and Parallels to *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Noll, the protagonist of *Isle of Knots*, ultimately adopts a metaphorical interpretation of religion fairly consistent with Joseph Campbell's theories, but this is not his view at the opening of the novel. Unlike *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, which move between our world and invented worlds, *Isle of Knots* takes place entirely in a secondary world; however, within that secondary world, Noll and his fellow Southerners (Gorsfolk) practice a religion called the "knot-lore" (5), which features mythical episodes similar to Christianity. Initially, Noll believes these myths literally, holding a view that aligns with *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Southerners on the Isle of Knots worship a variety of celestial and terrestrial Giants. Although polytheistic, the knot-lore religion bears similarities to the literal interpretation of

Christianity. The Southerners believe their Giant Gods actually created the universe. In particular, they believe their Isle is formed from the bodies of four sleeping Giants and that it was first settled a thousand years ago by a founding group of ancestors (Hirsch 57-8). Noll believes these ancestors were called to the Isle by the Giant Gods, “a chosen people worthy enough to call [the] blessed [Giant] bodies home” (58). Furthermore, Southern belief holds that the Isle was initially a literal Eden: “Gentle rain fell to wash away any past sins of the people. The Isle was like a garden in eternal summer. A paradise. No one would grow old, no one would die, and the violence of the Mainlands was left far behind” (58).

Like Narnia, this idyllic Isle quickly experiences a Fall. Southern mythology blames Original Sin on Obard, leader of the Isle’s first northern inhabitants, who supposedly tried to kidnap the first ruler, Queen Ash. In punishment for this sin, the Giants became wrathful and threatened to drown everyone on the Isle, but this opened an opportunity for Redemption through a Christ figure: Queen Ash herself. Southerners believe that Ash offered her life to the Giants as ransom for the lives of everyone on the Isle, casting herself into the breach between the splitting Giants. To show she represented everyone, she took the First Knot, made with strands of rope from each side of the conflict. This knot miraculously grew and helped bind the cracked halves of the Isle back together, after which Queen Ash arose, resurrected (59-60).

Despite Queen Ash’s actions, the inhabitants of the Isle face some punishment for their disobedience. Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise (*King James Version*, Genesis 3:23-24); the folk of the Isle are not forced to leave their new home, but it loses its Eden-like qualities:

The Giants had spoken to [Queen Ash] and she revealed their words: the Isle would no longer be a paradise. The South, where she and Cliff dwelt, would remain bountiful, but not so much as before. Obard and his followers were

condemned to the North, which would become a tough, cold land. All the people of the Isle would grow old. They would die. (60)

However, because of Queen Ash's sacrifice, Southerners believe that they have the chance to dwell in Giant Dreams (heaven) when they die and that the living and dead alike will eventually face an Apocalypse:

When [Queen Ash] died, she made a final promise: she said that far in the future, when the tether of time reaches its end, she, Cliff, and Obard, the Founders of the Isle, would rise again to pass final judgement on the living and dead. Then the Giants would awaken once more, shake the unworthy from their backs, and carry the righteous to a true Promised Land in the night sky where the eldest, starry Giants still dwell. (61)

Queen Ash, like Aslan, assumes the role of Redeemer, and eventually, Judge. Her starry Promised Land is the equivalent of "Aslan's real world" (Lewis 759). Just as unworthy Narnians and Calormenes are swallowed by Aslan's shadow, the unworthy islanders will be eliminated, shaken from the backs of the Giants. According to the Southerners, salvation is dependent on the strength of one's faith, as illustrated by how characters are expected to treat their name-knots, rope necklaces believed to contain their soul:

If someone's name-knot was destroyed, they would go mad; they would not be able to think or feel, a reminder that we only truly live through the grace of the Giants [...] However, those who respected their name-knots and believed in the Giants would have their name-knot cords untied when they died. That way, their souls would be released to reverberate in the heavenly songs of Giant Dreams. (60)

This likewise parallels the Narnian story, where belief and love for Aslan prove the ultimate deciding factor for admission into his “real world.”

Additionally, the Southern view blames the Fall on an actual, historical personality (in their world): Obard, first leader of the North. The Southerners therefore demonize the Northerners (Ikesfolk) and Noll espouses bigoted, xenophobic sentiments in the early chapters: “They have always been infidels and rebels. The Giant Gods smile on us Southerners. It is our holy duty to keep the Ikesfolk in line” (42). Noll’s tribal literalism extends past the borders of the Isle to outsiders from the nearby Mainlands: “Mainland smugglers bring disease to our ports, like the bone fever that hobbled Queen Nessa, and they bring dangerous ideas and tales of false Gods” (51). Noll starts the novel with beliefs consistent with those prevalent in C.S. Lewis’ novels: he literally believes that his Gods (and not those of any other culture) created the world, saved it from sin, and will eventually end it, taking faithful believers to a real heavenly home.

2.4.2 Transition from Literalist Belief

As the book progresses, Noll’s literalist beliefs are challenged. During his travels, he encounters his friend Aedan, a fellow Southerner, who has lost faith through the traumas of war:

“There are no Giant Gods, Noll!”

I step away. “Take that back!”

But he presses on. “The rivers are not their blood! The soil is not their flesh! We do not dwell on sleeping Giant bodies—” He starts to laugh, high and delirious. “We dwell on a rock! Just a rock. And the Mainlands are not dead Giants. There never were Giants to begin with!” (336)

Aila Twish, the Northern Knotmaker who quests with Noll, also challenges his literal interpretations, arguing for a more metaphorical understanding of the Isle's mythology:

Now she stands. "Look. Maybe it did rain on our ancestors when they came across from the Mainlands, but that's just..." she searches for the word.

"*Symbolic*. It means they wanted to wash away memories of fighting and have a fresh start. But when they got here, there was a war. And it wasn't just one side's fault! That's what I think!"

I gather my cloak and glare at her. "Well... I never believed I would meet a so-called Master Knotmaker who thinks so wrong." (157)

Noll's description of Aedan as "delirious" and his outright rejection of Aila's argument demonstrate how he struggles to surrender his initial beliefs. However, such conversations, along with memories of his own father's progressive views, do provoke moments where he begins to question his religious tribalism. When he first decides to travel with Aila, he wonders: "*The greatest sin*. What if the rebellion of the Ikesfolk was not the greatest sin? What if it was war itself, on both sides. Civil war, brother against brother, a people divided—and their Isle divided with them?" (126). Eventually, Noll also begins to question the literalism of his religion. He and Aila discover the tomb of Queen Ash and must remove the strand of hair that she supposedly contributed to the First Knot. But the discovery of this holy relic proves less literally miraculous than Noll expects:

The Queen's Hair was not truly her hair, but the name of a plant. That bothers me as well. It is too *symbolic* as Aila might say. If something is called hair, it ought to really be hair. I expected it would be miraculously preserved... And then there was our experience with the bridge. It seemed miraculous as well. We walked on

the air! Or so we thought, until the effects of that juice wore off and we realized there were glass planks. If the Queen's Hair and the bridge were not truly miraculous, then what of the old stories of the Founders? (294-5)

Confrontations with Aedan and Aila, along with his own experience of religious relics and holy locations, catalyze Noll's crisis of faith.

At first, Noll's response to this crisis is not rejecting or re-evaluating his beliefs, but trying to believe harder: "Surely, I am overthinking these things and who am I to question the Giants and Founders? I must keep my faith" (295). However, after a later conversation with Morgaine, another character who questions his beliefs, Noll's thoughts cascade in repetitive, incessant prose that evidence how his old views are starting to lose sway over him, even as he tries to cling to them: "*I believe*, I think fiercely, trying to convince myself, trying to regain certainty in our Gods, in our histories, in our quest" (365). It is as though he grasps at straws, listing all the things he still wants to believe in and hoping one of them holds. By the end of the novel, Noll has largely set aside his old beliefs and puts considerably less stock in the power of belief itself, relegating it to a sort of placebo effect or self-fulfilling prophecy. As he expresses in his final conversation with Aila: "And I suppose there is a certain power in belief: a power over oneself. Look at Fabian, who used to believe he could not leave Weslex and now he can. But belief does not make the Gods real" (601). At the end of the novel Noll no longer accepts belief as the most important factor in experiencing the divine and he questions the very reality of the Gods he had previously accepted so literally. To use Campbell's terms, Noll considers his religion "poetically" rather than "prosaically" (xxiii).

2.4.3 Metaphoric Interpretation and Paradoxical Miracles

Despite his eventual transition, Noll often relapses into his literalist beliefs. One reason why Noll struggles to surrender these beliefs is because there *are* moments of literal miracles in the novel. For example, Aila wears a miraculous name-knot that encircles her neck as an endless loop of rope, a physical impossibility. This causes Noll great consternation: “How can she wear a miraculous cord around her neck but disbelieve miracles attributed to the Founders?” (161). Later, Noll severs his name-knot cord and when he replaces it around his neck, it becomes similarly endless (492-4). In the climax, Noll and Aila enact another literal miracle: with the Isle actually cracking and sinking like in the myth of Queen Ash, Noll and Aila create a miraculous loop from cords that Noll gathered during their travels, and they use this rope to rejoin the split halves of the Isle (534-9).

Why include these moments of literalism? I claim to advocate the Campbellian idea of interpreting religion as metaphor; don't these literal miracles contradict that? Paradoxically, I am striving to use these literal miracles to emphasize the Campbellian viewpoint: Noll can only perform actual miracles in moments when he accepts and understands the symbolism underlying them. For example, Noll receives his own endless name-knot cord in Ikebane when he accepts that it does not literally contain his soul. He then hallucinates a conversation with High Chief Obard, who explains: “When you understand the symbols, that is when the miracles flow” (494). Later, in their final conversation, Noll and Aila discuss this paradox in more detail:

“Yes,” Aila says firmly. “We had to surrender our blind faith. We had to stop believing in the Gods, for when we did, we learned to understand what they truly represented. And when we understood that, that is the moment when miracles

occurred—that is the moment the Gods became real again—when the Giants awoke and spoke to us.”

“It seems quite a contradiction.”

Aila considers this. “Maybe. But it makes sense. The Giants woke up for a moment, because we had awoken them in ourselves.” (602)

The manner of that awakening is not belief in literal Gods and miracles, but understanding them as metaphorical symbols containing wisdom. When Noll taps into that wisdom, he can, for a moment, make the God or miracle literally true; when he understands the symbolism of the “elementary idea” he can actually bring its “folk” manifestation to life. Yes, this paradox stretches a strictly Campbellian view back toward literalism, but it is intended to highlight the Campbellian definition of divinity mentioned earlier: “gods are levels of reference and symbolic entities which are neither places nor individuals but states of being realizable within you” (xxiii).¹

Furthermore, the kinds of metaphoric insights that Noll and Aila achieve align with Campbell’s interpretations of mythology. For example, Noll comes to view his Giant Gods not as actual enormous humanoids, but as symbols for the totality of interconnected lives forming the Isle: “We live off the land and when we die, other things live off of us. We are all changing and

¹There are admittedly some moments of literal miracles and enchantments in the novel that do not occur because the characters have realizations about symbols. For example, while in Weslex, Morgaine explains that the reason Noll can hear the enchanted Underfolk is not because of symbolic realization, but because of his bloodline, a very material factor:

I regain my breath and follow her, completely disoriented, and abashed. “You also hear them? The Underfolk?”

“Most Wesfolk do, from an early age. We learn to ignore them. Your Wesfolk heritage must make you hear them.” (361)

Such moments are holdovers from early drafts of the novel and in future edits, I would like to change the book so that the Underfolk, like the Giants, are only literally seen or heard when their metaphorical significance is understood.

becoming other things over time, so, in that sense, we are all connected, all one. The whole Isle—one life, one enormous, complex, giant life” (601). Although Noll and Aila endure a physical journey over the course of the novel and take some physical action to mend the breach that cracks the Isle in the climax, the oneness achieved in that climactic moment is first and foremost an *inner* experience, a communion with the interconnectivity of all life that transcends mortal forms. This parallels Campbell’s metaphoric interpretation of Biblical accounts depicting bodies that ascend to heaven:

That is to say, what is connoted by such metaphorical voyages is the possibility of a return of the mind in spirit, while still incarnate, to full knowledge of that transcendent source out of which the mystery of a given life arises into this field of time and back into which it in time dissolves. It is an old, old story in mythology: of the Alpha and Omega that is the ground of all being, to be realized as the beginning and end of this life. (5)

Indeed, in that climactic moment, Noll feels the dissolution of his individual identity and a common oneness with others: “I catch a glimpse of Aila’s face whirling past, but now I do not truly know where I end and the others in the line begin. We dance. We dance as one” (536).

This sense of oneness fascinated me and accounts for the mechanics of how an inner realization can cause an outer, literal miracle in the novel. Such miracles happen when characters understand the Giant Gods (or the First Knot that bound them together) as symbols for the ever-changing but eternally interconnected life of all things. If someone were truly attuned to that continual coming and going, arising and dissolving, tying and untying of forms within an interconnected universe, then perhaps they could actually perform miracles. If someone realizes all things are ultimately one despite their perceived different forms, then in that state of mind,

what truly would be the difference between water and wine (*King James Version*, John 2:1-11), diseased flesh and healthy flesh (Matthew 8: 2-4), or death and life (John 11:43-45)? Or likewise, between severed cords and endless loops (Hirsch 494), cracked landmasses and whole ones (537), one's self and one's Gods (602)? I enjoyed exploring the idea that literal miracles might occur, not through the agency of a divine entity external to oneself, nor through Pullman's involved engagement with the material world, but as the result of the symbolic realization of one's connection to, and identification with, the entirety of existence.

Miracles achieved through inner realization are very flexible because a metaphorical experience of the divine is not inherently locked to specific holy relics or locations. Noll initially believes that only the strands of the mythical First Knot (Hair, Sash, and Chain) can hold miraculous power. By the end of the novel, he realizes that the specific physical objects do not matter. As he says to Aila: "Once we knew what the First Knot represented, we could make it out of any cords" (601). Such fluidity parallels a vision of Black Elk, a Sioux medicine man discussed by Campbell. In the vision, Black Elk sees "the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all things as they must live together, like one being" (8) and although the vision takes place at Harney Peak (now Black Elk Peak), the mythological centre of the Sioux world, Black Elk states: "But anywhere is the center of the world" (8). The geographic location and physical props involved with a religious ritual become secondary to the perspective of mind and heart achieved in the inner mystical experience. As Campbell summarizes: "A mythology is, in this sense, an organization of metaphorical figures connotative of states of mind that are not finally of this or that place and time, notwithstanding that the figures themselves initially suggest such localization" (xxiii). When the inner realization is accessed, the locality dissolves, and the mystical experience can be transposed anywhere, using anything.

2.4.4 Differing Emphases in *Isle of Knots* and *His Dark Materials*

There are some events in *Isle of Knots* that occur *only* as inner realizations, with no corresponding material result. Most importantly, Noll and Aila's quest does not ultimately transport them to a starry Promised Land like Aslan's "real world," but their realization of oneness functions as an inner equivalent, which Campbell describes as "the high mystical experience of an absorption of mortal appearance in immortal being; for which another historical figure of speech is the 'End of the World'" (34-5). Like in *His Dark Materials*, I wanted to portray characters experiencing heaven in their own world rather than physically displacing it elsewhere. However, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2.3, rather than emphasizing the experience of the divine through intense engagement with the sensual, physical, material world, *Isle of Knots* aligns more closely with Campbell by accenting the role of metaphorical realization. The Giant Gods are metaphorical personifications and only literally exist when one realizes what they represent symbolically. They become real in "outer space" only when accessed in "inner space."

In Chapter 2.3, I also examined how the end of *The Amber Spyglass* includes a moral imperative, with the protagonist, Lyra, recognizing the need to build heaven-on-earth by cultivating Dust through moral action. As the angel, Xaphania, explains to her: "Dust is not a constant. There's not a fixed quantity that has always been the same. Conscious beings make Dust—they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on" (491). Creating and safeguarding Dust is a dynamic process, or as Campbell would say (using a term from James Joyce), "kinetic" (93). Such kinetic action, in art and mysticism, "moves one, or at least is meant to move one, to action, either with desire toward the object, or with fear or loathing *away* from it" (93). However, unlike Pullman, Campbell does not consider such kinetic moral action part of experiencing the divine within the tangible realm. For

Campbell, this is achieved through inner realizations that enable one to view the world, whatever good or ill is befalling it, with a mindset of “esthetic arrest” (93). This is a “static” state unaffected by the “fear or loathing” involved with the kinetic state (93).

The sense of oneness that Noll and Aila experience in the climax of *Isle of Knots* is a “static” state of mind, a state of “wholeness, harmony, and radiance” (101) through its connection to *all* existence, transcendent of good and evil. That state of mind is not a substance that can be increased and depleted like Pullman’s Dust; it is theoretically always accessible. However, it proves very difficult to access when the dualities of existence, like life and death, become ethically overwhelming. Noll experiences this while burying dead soldiers after he and Aila miraculously heal the rift that cracked their Isle apart: “I look at the long line of bier-bearers circling from the castle and back. In the breach, we danced with countless dead, but it felt like a line of life and it filled me with wonder, with transcendent joy. The dead feel very different now. These lines hold only silence, only sorrow” (573). In their final conversation, Noll and Aila continue to struggle with the moral ambiguity of the divine, considering how their experience parallels the nature of the book’s villain, a shape-knotter (changeling) named Old Lord Skale:

“It *is* frightening,” Aila says. “How we felt in the breach—connected to all things, all those cycles of things coming and going, of life and death. All things being one thing just changing forms over and over again... in a way, it’s no different from a shape-knotter.”

I shudder at how the holy and the corrupt can seem so similar. (602)

The sheer totality of their connection with the divine in the climax makes it difficult, and morally challenging, to maintain. As Campbell explains, such moments, whether in art or in spiritual realization, are not good or evil, but “sublime [...] that which arouses sentiments of awe and

reverence and a sense of vastness and power outreaching human comprehension” (92). As such a state of mind strives to connect with realizations beyond human comprehension, Noll and Aila can only access it when immersed in oneness beyond their individual human forms. Following the climax, they regain their sense of individual self and lose the divine state of mind, but its echo lingers, and they know it can be awoken again, not through faith in a literal external entity, but through the rediscovery of their own connection with eternity. For Pullman’s protagonists, Lyra and Will, the way to that connection is engaged immersion in the material world and building a moral society, whereas for Noll and Aila, in keeping with Campbell’s views, the path journeys primarily inward, through symbolic understanding of gods and myths as metaphors, and the oneness spurred by such understanding goes beyond good and evil.

Chapter 3: Conclusion and Reflection

Through a protagonist who shifts from literal and tribal religious beliefs to a metaphoric view, I strove to differentiate *Isle of Knots* from *The Chronicles of Narnia* and align it with Joseph Campbell's scholarship. While writing my book, Noll's prejudice and literalism often made him a frustrating character to inhabit (especially in first person), but he also proved a very interesting and layered thought experiment for considering how someone grapples with a seismic change in worldview. While I let my imagination run paradoxically beyond Campbell's ideas in the novel by depicting several literal miracles enacted through symbolic realization, I believe the spirit of the book is largely consistent with Campbell's call to read myth as metaphor.

Studying Philip Pullman's work revealed many similarities to my own novel and to Campbell's scholarship. Ultimately, both Pullman and Campbell insist on the importance of not displacing the divine elsewhere, but of experiencing it here in our own world. According to each, this experience infuses one with a sense of wonder, joy, awe, and connection with the surrounding world. However, throughout the process of writing this exegesis, it continually struck me that Pullman was emphasizing the experience of the divine in our world through an engagement with the material aspects of life around us, whether that engagement was sensual, like Will and Lyra's romance or scientific, like Mary Malone's observations of Dust particles. I do not think Campbell would fully disagree with Pullman's approach, but as a mythologist, Campbell's approach naturally involves a focus on engaging with metaphorical mythic symbols; understanding such symbols is the Campbellian key to perceiving the divine in the world around us and this is the view that I strove to depict in *Isle of Knots*. Pullman's insistence on morality also emerged as a main difference. Campbell would undoubtedly encourage the living of a moral life, but his view of the experience of the divine involves participation and identification with all

of life's processes and recognition that those processes include the beautiful and horrifying alike. For Campbell, oneness encompasses, and ultimately transcends, duality.

I have no doubt that all of these texts have influenced me in many ways not detailed in this exegesis. I have greatly enjoyed engaging with the powerful and imaginative ideas in Campbell's scholarship, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *His Dark Materials*, and I have encountered many other books in my four years during my Master of Arts in Children's Literature that have left their stamp on me as a writer and a scholar.

For Noll and Aila, and for me, the journey does not end here. In *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* Campbell writes: "The old gods are dead or dying and people everywhere are searching, asking: What is the new mythology to be, the mythology of this unified earth as of one harmonious being" (xix). Fantasy literature, my novel included, has a long history of drawing from predominantly European medieval settings and in this book, the characters do not physically leave the shores of their Isle. Even their broad mythological insights remain bounded by their symbolic culturally vocabulary: Giants and knots. In a dream directly following the climax of my novel, Noll and Aila repair a patchwork map of their Isle, just as they have mended the cracked landmasses in the climax, but they also feel an "overwhelming urge [...] to look around" (541). Although they achieve a very wide sense of connection and oneness in the climax, there remains a great deal more for them to explore in both the outer world and the inner realms of realization. Likewise, my own writing must continue to explore new symbols and ideas for the "new mythology" of the "unified earth." Noll and Aila's patch of map is one patch in the great tapestry of the human experience; this novel one yarn in a vast web of story. Onward, then, to the next patch, to the next story, to the next string resonant with "harmonious being."

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