

The following is a transcript taken from a dramatic [reenactment](#) of the infamous late-night walk during which J.R.R. Tolkien converted C.S. Lewis to Christianity. The relationship between these two is the subject of an upcoming film, [The Lion Awakes](#).

Tolkien: "The magic of myths or fairy stories is not an end in itself; it exists to serve virtue, to satisfy certain primordial human desires."

Lewis: "But myths are fiction. The stories they tell aren't true. They're lies, and therefore worthless, even though breathed through silver. They're just beautiful lies; you can't seriously believe in fairy tales."

Tolkien: "Why not? I can! In fact, I do!"

Lewis: "But this is preposterous! How can you seriously believe a lie?"

Tolkien: "Oh, Jack, myths are not lies! In fact, they are the very opposite of a lie. Myths convey the essential truth, the primal reality of life itself."

Lewis: "Go on."

Tolkien: "Well, you see, we have been duped into using the word myth as being synonymous with a lie, because we have been duped into accepting the first real lie of materialism."

Lewis: "What is that?"

Tolkien: "That is the hideous claim that there is no supernatural order to the universe. The materialists have imprisoned us in a world of mere matter, of physical facts, divorced from and devoid of metaphysical truth. Well, I say that they are lying! I say that they are the ones who have come up with a false myth. Their world doesn't exist; it's merely a figment of their imagination. Well, fine; however, there's a problem. The problem is they have convinced us that it is true! They have made us believe that this is all there is: three dimensions, five senses, four walls!"

Lewis: "Isn't it?"

Tolkien: "Most emphatically not! Jack, the four walls of materialism are the four walls of a prison, and the materialists are our jailers! Don't you see? They've put us in a prison, a prison of four walls. They don't want us to see what's beyond those walls. They don't want us to discover what lies outside their narrow philosophy. Worse than that, they think that any attempt to escape the prison is an act of treason."

Lewis: "Well, wouldn't it be an act of treason against rationality to believe otherwise?"

Tolkien: "Now, Jack, think for a moment. How can it be wrong for a prisoner to think of things that exist other than walls or jailers? Doesn't the fact that the prisoner is able to think of things outside the walls suggest that, perhaps, things do exist outside the walls? After all, if the prison really is all there is, how are we able to picture things that exist beyond the prison? And this is where myths come in, you see."

Myths exist outside the prison. Myths allow us to escape from the prison. Or, if we are not able to escape, at the very least they allow us to catch a fleeting but oh-so-powerful glimpse of the beauty that lies beyond the walls.”

Lewis: “But what is it that we’re meant to be glimpsing?”

Tolkien: “Well, don’t you see? The truth, Jack! Myths show us a fleeting glimpse of truth itself.”

Lewis: “Truth. Truth. What on earth is this truth that you’re talking about?”

Tolkien: “Ah! Quid est veritas? What is truth? I’m glad to see that you’ve entered into the spirit of the myth, Jack. You’ve just cast yourself into the role of Pilate.”

Lewis: “Pilate! Oh, I see. You’re able to believe in the lesser myths because you’ve already accepted the big one. Once you accept the big myth, the lie of Christ, it’s easy to accept the smaller ones. All right, Toilers, I’ll play the role of Pilate. I wash my hands of the whole nonsense.”

Tolkien: “Well, Jack, you may be able to wash your hands, but your mind is still muddled. You’re not thinking clearly at all, old chap. You’re acting as though myths are mere arbitrary inventions of fiction, as if we pull them out of thin air. But what you don’t understand is that we make things by the law in which we are made. We create because we are created. Creativity, imagination, is God’s imageness in us. We tell stories because God is a storyteller. In fact, He is the Storyteller. We tell our stories with words. He tells His story with history. The facts of history are His words, and Providence is His storyline.”

Lewis: “Are you suggesting that all history, that everything around us, is all part of some divine myth?”

Tolkien: “We are all part of His story. This very conversation is part of His story.”

Lewis: “But perhaps it isn’t His story. Perhaps it’s only your story. How can you know that your story, the story that you believe, the Christian story, is any more real than the other stories?”

Tolkien: “But don’t you see? It isn’t my story; it’s His story. You’re acting as though Christianity is one myth among many; it’s not. It’s the true myth! Christianity really happened! Jesus really existed, so did Pilate, and yet it is this true story that makes sense of all the other stories. It is the archetype. It is the story in which all the other stories have their source, and the story to which all the other stories point. It has everything. It has catastrophe, and its opposite: what we might call eucatastrophe. It has the joy of the happy ending, the sudden joyous turn in the story that is essential to all myths. It has, to a sublime degree, this joy of deliverance, this evangelium, this fleeting glimpse of the real joy, to which all other joys are but a distant echo.”

Lewis: “Toilers, what did you mean by catastrophe and eucatastrophe?”

Tolkien: "Oh, for example, it has the catastrophe of the Fall and the eucatastrophe of the Redemption. It has the catastrophe of the Crucifixion and the eucatastrophe of the Resurrection. It has everything Man's heart desires, because it is being told by the One Who is the fulfillment of desire itself. It is a story that begins and ends in joy."

Lewis: "But just because a story brings joy, it doesn't necessarily follow that it's true. There are many joyful myths. They all seem rather flimsy to me, ring rather false."

Tolkien: "And yet this story has the inner consistency of reality. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits."

Lewis: "Perhaps it's just a very well-written artifice."

Tolkien: "This story has the supremely convincing tone of primary art, not fiction, but of Creation. And to reject this leads either to darkness or to wrath. And in my own life it has led me from darkness to Light."

Lewis: "Astonishing. Toilers, you astonish me. You're absolutely astonishing."

Aftermath:

You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. —C.S. Lewis

Really, a young Atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side... In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald, I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere — "Bibles laid open, millions of surprises", as Herbert says, "fine nets and stratagems". God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous. —C.S. Lewis

[T]he chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do as we say in the Gloria in Excelsis... We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour. And in moments of exaltation we may call on all created things to join in our chorus, speaking on their behalf... all mountains and hills, all orchards and forests, all things that creep and birds on the wing. —J.R.R. Tolkien

<http://rdgstout.xanga.com/770807738/the-true-myth/>