C. S. LEWIS ON REALITY AND METAPHOR. FROM MYTH TO HISTORY AND BACK AGAIN

Estera FEDERCIUC
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi

Abstract

The role of metaphor in understanding reality has been a recurring question in the field of metaphor theory. C. S. Lewis, influential scholar, author, and Christian apologist, presents a compelling perspective on metaphor as a means of understanding reality. This paper explores Lewis's view on the possibility of speaking about reality through metaphor. By reality, Lewis understands both the physical and the supra-physical world. The first section of this article outlines how, for Lewis, metaphorical language can depict the spiritual or supra-natural world. The second section argues that a good metaphor has a meaning that is given rather than invented and the physical realm functions as a basis to understand the spiritual realm, and that this up-down-up direction of metaphorical expression conveys it most effectively. In the third section, I show how good, meaningful metaphors are true and allow us to make valuable and true statements because they convey reliable knowledge about reality. They also require action, the work of the will towards the good, and encourage stock responses. Section four presents metaphor as a linguistic tool which can unveil a connection between the observable physical world and the non-observable world. Additionally, the article briefly examines the disparities between Lewis's views and some dominant philosophical trends, as well as two theories of metaphor, the interaction theory and the conceptual theory. The choice of these two theories of metaphor is based on their particular differences with Lewis's view on two key aspects that are fundamental to the theory of metaphor, namely, meaning and truth.
THE EXISTENCE OF A PHYSICAL WORLD AND A SPIRITUAL WORLD.
METAPHOR DESCRIBES BOTH THE PHYSICAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

Apart from our physical world, Lewis postulates the existence of a spiritual world. For Lewis, this supersensible realm is the true reality, while our world is the *Shadowlands*—a place where the shadows of things are less than the things themselves. However, he maintains that these shadows can still be reliable when they produce true beliefs about the things that cast them. Even a shadow has the potential to reveal what it casts. Lewis echoes the philosophy of Plato, who affirms in several places in his dialogues (the *Timaeus*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Phaedo*) that shadows, while unable to confer knowledge on their own, may be reliable if thought produces true beliefs about the things they represent. If our senses can be deceived by appearances, such as when a stick appears bent in water, then appealing to the senses themselves cannot solve the problem. There must be something other than matter and our senses that can distinguish between true and false perceptions. Reason, mind, or thought is that immaterial part that can question appearances. The non-rational, non-cognitive sensations received in the lowest part of the soul are judged by the rational, highest part of the soul.

Plato had a particular influence on Lewis’s rejection of philosophies that see reality as of one kind. Plato provides the most important distinction between two kinds of existing entities in the *Phaedo*, one which can be known through the senses (*aistheton*) and one grasped by the mind (*noeton*). For Plato, the nonsensible constitutes genuine reality (*ontos on*); the sensible, also called the physical, is of a lower order; thus, the non-sensible—for Plato, these are the Ideas or the Forms—lies beyond and above the physical. Forms are non-physical and extra-mental, but they are more concrete and more real than the physical. Forms transcend the empirical realm, and the physical world we experience through our senses is only a shadow or image of the true reality of the realm of Forms. The Forms stand behind physical phenomena rather than within them, and matter “participates” in form, *methexis* being the relation between a particular and its form. The particular objects are copies of the ideas; the resemblance of the particular to the idea represents its participation in the idea. The metaphors
of participation (methexis) and imitation (mimesis) entail both a distinction and a connection between Being and partaking, between the Imitated or Exemplar and the imitation. It should be noted, nevertheless, that the particulars are not extensions of the Forms. Thus, we read in the Symposium (211a-b) and the Timaeus (52a) that we cannot find, for instance, the Form of Beauty itself in a beautiful thing, that is, in a particular. Plato’s philosophy resembles but does not coincide with Lewis’s view. For Lewis, the not-yet observable reality constitutes eternal reality1 while the observable reality is temporal. The physical nature is mortal, while human souls are eternal and will outlive it. Nature is only an image, a symbol and a representation. Still, we must use it as an example of obedience to transcend it in the splendour it reflects imperfectly (Lewis, ‘Transposition’, in The Weight of Glory, 43-44). Metaphors, in turn, are exemplars of the spiritual reality that can guide our minds to conform to this reality (Mosteller, 169).

In Lewis’s view, one can gain insight into the non-physical reality through metaphor. In the essay ‘Is Theology Poetry?’, published in 1941, Lewis uses interchangeably terms such as (capitalised) ‘Truth’, ‘Myth’, and ‘Fact’, ‘God’, and ‘the essential meaning of all things’ (Lewis, ‘Is Theology Poetry?’, in The Weight of Glory, 129-130). He further elaborates on this idea in the poem ‘The Birth of Language’ (1946), where the Fact from heavens shrinks to truth on earth, generating many meanings and words that are dry like death, bony and abstract. Among these dead words, metaphors are the means through which we can “lift the curse” and “feel in dreams [our] native Sun.” (Lewis, ‘The Birth of Language’, in Poems, n.d.). In Miracles (1947), Lewis defines myth as “at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.” Here, the truth “first appears in mythical form and then . . . becomes incarnate as History.” (134). In the essay ‘Myth Became Fact’ (1970), Lewis distinguishes between truth and reality. ‘Truth’ has the same meaning as that in the poem ‘The Birth of Language’. From myth flows reality, not truth. Reality is what truth is based on, therefore (the concrete) myth is the mountain from which reality flows and becomes numerous (abstract) truths in the earthly valley of separation. While truth is fragmented, myth is unified. Unlike truth, myth is not an abstract concept nor

1 Lewis introduces not only the idea of a supernatural Nature beyond Nature but also the idea of several “floors or levels intermediate between the Unconditioned and the world revealed by our present senses”, distinct but interlocked (Miracles, 154).

In The Pilgrim’s Regress (1933), through the voice of the Landlord (God) addressing John, the main character, Lewis presents God’s Myth as the veil under which He has chosen to appear to our senses and our imagination (172). In man’s mythology, words are myth and metaphor, but they forgot their meaning and purpose as tools, and, as a result, the myth became master. In God’s mythology, the myth and metaphor are servants. The fundamental difference between the myth of man and the myth of God is that, as Lewis put it, Myth became Fact.

Myth and metaphor are the means that help us get a glimpse beyond physical reality. Metaphor, Lewis argues, is by necessity used to describe all non-physical reality². Any discussion of non-observable, transcendent or supersensible reality—as opposed to the observable, temporal or phenomenological reality—is dependent on metaphor, which uses the material and language of this world (Miracles, 73). In his essay ‘Transposition’, Lewis shows how describing a world in four dimensions to a three-dimensional world inhabitant can be made only with three-dimensional shapes or language (‘Transposition’, in The Weight of Glory, 100-101). The Flatland metaphor exemplified by Lewis in the essay ‘Bluspels and Flalansfers’ helps us understand how our three-dimension world can make us begin cognising the fourth dimension. (‘Bluspels and Flalansfers, in Selected literary essays, 252-254).

Lewis’s confrontation with the prevailing philosophies of his time, which he once embraced—that negated the spiritual world or dismissed the physical—was a significant departure. He rejected various monist philosophies, including materialism, and its stricter form, physicalism, and idealism. According to him, one problem with our understanding of reality is its reduction to the purely physical and psycho-physical sphere. Naturalism asserts the reality of only physical, measurable objects, or non-physical entities that are dependent on the physical (the functional theory). Truth is distilled to empirical knowledge, and

² This is to be contrasted with some instances when the New Creation has already manifested itself in our world, such as the Resurrection—in such cases, he adds later in Miracles, the language used to talk about the New Creation is no longer metaphorical (96) because metaphor and myth have already become fact and reality. This is also specified in the essay ‘Bluspels and Flalansfers’. When myth descends into history, metaphor can be dispensed with.
consciousness is attributed to the functioning of neurons in the brain (the ‘emergent’ view suggests that the non-physical, i.e., the soul, emerges from corporeal structures without being corporeal itself). Yet, both materialistic and non-materialistic forms of naturalism encounter significant challenges when it comes to accounting for the truth of rational thought. The other problem with understanding reality is the reduction of the physical and psycho-physical spheres to the mind. Idealism assumes that reality is fundamentally non-material and that either mind is the only thing that exists or that material things owe their existence to mind(s) or to an impersonal Absolute Mind. The reality of the body is denied by reducing it to sensations.³

I. A. Richards, author of the interaction theory, rightly states that man’s science can only know the ‘how’, not the ‘what’ of reference: For science, which is simply our most elaborate way of pointing to things systematically, tells us and can tell us nothing about the nature of things in any ultimate sense. It can never answer any question of the form: What is so and so? it can only tell us how so and so behaves (Science and Poetry, 52-53). But, unlike Lewis, Richards believes that ‘what’ and ‘why’ are “not questions at all; but requests—for emotional satisfaction.” (53) While a material perspective can only answer, ‘how does it work?’ and ‘what material is it made of?’, Lewis believes that a spiritual perspective can answer the questions, ‘what does it mean?’ or ‘what truth does it embody?’. In his preface to Harding’s The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth, Lewis criticises this claim that “[a]ll the questions which humanity has hitherto asked with deepest concern for the answer turn out to be unanswerable . . . because they are nonsense questions” (10).

The conceptual theory of metaphor leads to a philosophy of embodied realism, where metaphor can only teach us what we understand through our bodily experience. Metaphors can give us knowledge about our physical world, but always in a cultural context that makes it relative. “Metaphors are basically devices for understanding and have little to do with objective reality, if there is such a thing.” (Lakoff, Metaphors We Live By, 184).

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³ With panpsychism, a view according to which the non-mental properties are derived from the mental ones, and all things have a mind-like quality, man has done nothing but move from ‘mind evolved from matter’ (emergent physicalism) to ‘matter is continually evolving from mind’ (panpsychism).
MEANING IS DISCOVERED, NOT CREATED. METAPHOR EXPRESSES IT

The questions of ‘what’ and ‘why’ relate to meaning. In the preface to The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth, Lewis illustrates how humanity has transitioned from a world filled with complexity to one that is overly simplistic and even nonsensical: first, man emptied the world of all meaning, getting rid of the Object for the Subject; eventually, he emptied himself of meaning, denying Subject and Consciousness:

While we were reducing the world to almost nothing we deceived ourselves with the fancy that all its lost qualities were being kept safe (if in a somewhat humbled condition) as ‘things in our own mind’. Apparently we had no mind of the sort required. The Subject is as empty as the Object. (Harding, The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth, 10)

This nihilistic philosophy of man with no ‘inside’ is devoid of objective meaning. This philosophy seems so irrational that it can only be accepted by man in a state of madness, Lewis claims: I have heard that there are states of insanity in which such a nihilistic doctrine becomes really credible: that is, as Dr. I. A. Richards would say, ‘belief feelings’ are attached to it. The patient has the experience of being nobody in a world of nobodies and nothings. (11) Richards concludes that the world, including metaphor, is nothing more but our personal opinions:

the world—so far from being a solid matter of fact—is rather a fabric of conventions, which for obscure reasons it has suited us in the past to manufacture and support. Our beliefs are an artificial veil between ourselves and something that otherwise than through a veil we cannot know. (The Philosophy of Rhetoric, 41-42)

In the interaction theory of metaphor, the concept of meaning is derived from sensory experiences resulting from repeated exposure to the same or similar
sensations.\(^4\) However, thinking is only a sorting activity that involves no value judgments (29-30). Man creates meaning which he imposes upon objects. The theory also claims that meanings “are nothing” (10). This raises the question of how a sum of *nothings*, that is, a sentence of *nothings*, can mean anything. Since meanings that “are nothing” create reality, then reality is a sum of *nothings*. In a sense, for Lewis, the meanings we invent are, indeed, nothing because true meaning is not invented. Man’s words have unreal meanings, incapable of establishing a reality other than their own. Moreover, unless his words are anchored in the Word, they will ‘uncreate’ rather than create anything. The human word, the component or sign of a language, the primary instrument of inter-human communication and the product of human language, is used by man to organise the world according to his purposes linguistically, but, for Lewis, man should relate to the world according to a purpose higher than his own and see things as we were meant to see them. When man’s word (and metaphor) is rooted in the transcendent Word and receives its meaning from above, it will be a vehicle of Life because it will be a witness to Life.

In the conceptual theory of metaphor, meaning is a human invention and has no transcendental origin. In this framework, what Aristotle calls final cause, i.e., the purpose(s) of a thing, is not objective—“there is no reason to believe that there is any absolute truth or objective meaning” (Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, 217). Meaning is never disembodied or objective and can only be understood in relation to how people function and understand the world (Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, 197, 217-218). We only have access to beliefs; something has meaning if someone understands it. We have seen that, for Lewis, the meanings are ‘birthed’ by truth which is shrunken Fact descended from heavens (‘The Birth of Language’). In the conceptual theory, personal opinion is confused with truth. Lewis warns of this danger in his works, especially in *The Abolition of Man*. Man is not the centre; rather, he is in the centre of the world. Man is not the ultimate reality, but he can be a good measure of the world only if he receives the meaning from a correct relation with the ultimate Reality.

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\(^4\) To further illustrate his point, Richards poses a thought experiment where we do not have any sensations. Instead, what we have are perceptions that create meaning that comes from both past and present experiences—but one might wonder how perception could exist without sensation.
For Lewis, metaphor is an instrument of knowledge of reality because it reveals rather than creates meaning. To him, the function (meaning) precedes the functionary (matter). Lewis’s point of view is teleological. In his essay ‘Christianity and Culture,’ he points out the importance of judging things based on what they are, for their main purposes, not for their secondary purposes or for purposes for which they were never made. Lewis drove his message home with a metaphor: “you cannot judge any artefact except by using it as it was intended. It is no good judging a butter-knife by seeing whether it will saw logs.” (Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces, 102). Man can use wood for several purposes: to warm himself, to bake bread, and to make a god and worship it. With no objective meaning, the individual’s feelings, undirected by a higher element, become the foundation of all knowledge. Subjectivism led to the fatal conclusion that there is no objective truth. Inspiration was replaced with confusion. The Good became indistinguishable from the useful, the Truth from misaligned emotions, and the Beautiful from personal taste. The grounding of truths about reality only in the empirical world and on oneself can only lead to cognitive confusion driven by physical desires.

The a-teleological materialism that emptied the world of all meaning and purpose (Lewis, ‘Early Prose Joy’ 31) is one of the opposing views to Lewis’s. The modern man remained with the facts and lost the meaning. We are taught that the world can only be accessed through abstractions and theoretical explanations. The abstract skeleton created to understand reality has replaced reality itself. Another opposing view is idealism, which makes it possible to justify all one’s “dearest imaginings” while picturing the Absolute as an abstract principle (31). Human freedom, uncoupled from any “pretension” to a supersensible Reality that determines meaning and purpose to everything, has traded the quest for self-knowledge for a nihilistic self-invention. Once fact is separated from meaning, truth and value are but empty words. For this reason, Screwtape advises his nephew Wormwood to use ‘feeling’ jargon rather than the terms ‘true’ or ‘false’ (Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 11). Rather than logic and reason, which “move[s] the whole struggle onto the Enemy’s own ground,” Wormwood is advised to focus his patient’s attention on the “stream of immediate sense experiences” and to “[t]each him to call it ‘real life’ and don’t let him ask what he means by ‘real’.” (12)
THE WORLD HAS VALUE. GOOD, MEANINGFUL METAPHORS ALLOW US TO MAKE TRUE, VALUABLE STATEMENTS

However, mere imagination becomes imaginary. Feeling and imagination, not ruled by reason, are unreliable. A good, meaningful metaphor is necessarily true. Metaphor creates neither meaning nor truth. Meaning grasped with the imagination and expressed metaphorically is understood and validated by reason, “the natural organ of truth.” (Hooper, Selected Literary Essays, 265) The referentiality of metaphor is the grounds for the validity of reason.

At the same time, reason cannot work without imagination. Reason is a mill that requires corn to produce flour and draws conclusions based on given premises. Reason does not work without imagination. In naturalism, the fact remained without the meaning; the reason remained without what to work with, namely the meaning (the flour for the mill). Reason is the natural organ differentiating between true and false meanings and good and bad metaphors. A true meaning has its source in the psycho-physical parallelism existent in the universe. A good metaphor is meaningful and true and, consequently, encourages good stock responses. However, reason is not just the power to logically deduce one proposition from another, which Lewis describes as the ratio of reason. Intellectus is the other function of reason that helps us ‘see’ a self-evident truth (Lewis, The Discarded Image, 156-158).5

Reason also has a moral element—the reason is ‘the organ of morality’. To reach a moral, true conclusion, we need not only the premises but also conscience or a moral sense (Lewis, The Discarded Image, 158-159). Nevertheless, reason remains imperfect and insufficent for a complete understanding of reality. To his friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis wrote that sometimes reason must appeal to a higher authority when the nerves do not obey it.6 In a letter to Elsie Snickers,7 Lewis writes that the will is not necessarily determined by reason but also by desire. Reason is deceived when desire is stronger than reason.

Richards rightly concludes that the universe cannot teach values (Science and poetry, 66-67), while Lakoff states that morality arises from our bodily

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5 See also the letter to Mary Van Deusen, 7 July 1951, Collected Letters, Volume III, n.d.
experiences of well-being, especially physical well-being (*Philosophy in the flesh*, 290). Lewis agrees with Richards: nature does not give instructions on morality. Instead, it presents “moods” or “spirits” images, such as “terror, darkness, cruelty, jocularity, lust, innocence, purity”, into which man “clothes” his own beliefs or moral values, learned from theologians or philosophers. Nature can provide the soil on which what comes from the other side falls. Lewis presents this idea in his essay, ‘Dogma and the universe’:

Being what we are, rational but also animate, amphibians who start from the world of sense and proceed through myth and metaphor to the world of spirit, I do not see how we could have come to know the greatness of God without that hint furnished by the greatness of the material universe. (*God in the Dock*, 42)

In line with Platonism and Neo-Platonism, it is reasonable to suggest that Lewis (partially) concurs with the notion that man, looking back to its cause, receives the images of the supra-natural (the Platonic Ideal Forms), which subsequently transmute into concepts. The concepts find, in turn, a “clothing” in the material world. Hence, man constitutes the medium that brings form and meaning into matter, and metaphor is meaning brought down and ‘dressed’ in words. But matter, as the principle that renders forms perceptible, does so imperfectly, thereby failing to reflect the forms in their entirety. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis notes that the Creator cannot be observed as one of the facts within the universe. Rather, it exists beyond the observable realm as a Reality that gives rise to the observed facts. To explain this, Lewis uses a metaphor for the relationship between an architect and a house, noting that the architect cannot be equated with any of the elements within the house but is instead the creator behind it (*Mere Christianity*, 24). As suggested above, nature can only give us images to (partially) understand His attributes.

Because the universe does not teach values, experience becomes for Richards the origin of a psychologically constructed value system. If meaning equals personal feelings and attitudes, then instincts form the basis for value judgements and the function of metaphor is to manipulate emotions. According to Richards, value is defined as the satisfaction of our impulses, which can be ranked in a hierarchy without any external criterion of judgment. In Richards’s theory of metaphor, the “visceral man” (appetite) reigns supreme, while the
“cerebral man” (reason) is conflated with the visceral, and “the Chest . . . the indispensable liaison between cerebral man and visceral man” is completely relegated (Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 15-16).

Lewis argues that the knowledge to discern between instincts is not itself instinctive. Impulses ought not to be obeyed but rather be ruled by reason. In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis distinguishes Richards’ view from his own:

> in Rhetoric imagination is present for the sake of passion (and, therefore, in the long run, for the sake of action), while in poetry passion is present for the sake of imagination, and therefore, in the long run, for the sake of wisdom or spiritual health—the rightness and richness of a man’s total response to the world. (Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 54).

Whereas for Richards, poetry—and metaphor—can save man through impulse manipulation, for Lewis, emotions must be trained through reason to correspond to reality in order for man to respond ethically in the world. While Richards attacks the value of “stock responses” in literature (*Principles of Literary Criticism*, 199-207) and promotes in its stead “the direct free play of experience”, Lewis thinks that a stock response is

> one of the first necessities of human life, and one of the main functions of art is to assist it. All that we describe as constancy in love or friendship, as loyalty in political life, or, in general, as perseverance—all solid virtue and stable pleasure—depends on organizing chosen attitudes and maintaining them against the eternal flux (or “direct free play”) of mere immediate experience . . . To me . . . it seems that most people’s responses are not “stock” enough, and that the play of experience is too free and too direct in most of us for safety or happiness or human dignity. That elementary rectitude of human response . . . is a delicate balance of trained habits, laboriously acquired and easily lost, on the maintenance of which depend both our virtues and our pleasures and even, perhaps, the survival of our species. For though the human heart is not unchanging (nay, changes almost out of recognition in the twinkling of an eye) the laws of causation are. When poisons become fashionable they do not cease to kill. (A *Preface to Paradise Lost*, 55-57)

Richards’s theory of value is a “purely psychological one” which gave to “poetry a
kind of soteriological function; it held the keys of the only heaven that Dr. Richards believed in.” (Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 12). For Lewis, reason and emotion are to remain connected to a different heaven if we do not want humanity to be abolished.

According to the conceptual theory of metaphor, values are metaphorically created through human experience and embedded in a culture through metaphors (Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, 22). However, the focus is not on whether a metaphor is true or false but rather on the implications and actions it leads to, defined as good or bad by each culture (158).

In the experientialist account of truth, meaning and metaphor runs counter to Lewis’s position. He does not deny the importance of experience in apprehending truth; on the contrary, he considers it one of the three ways of grasping truth, along with authority and reason (‘Religion: Reality or Substitute?’ in *Christian Reflections*, 41). We have seen that, for Lewis, reason depends on imagination, which depends on physical sensations. However, unlike the conceptual theory of metaphor, for Lewis, reason must judge the veracity of both authority and experience. The truth or falsehood of a metaphor, created within ‘the organ of meaning’, that is, imagination, is judged by ‘the natural organ of truth’ (emphasis added), that is, reason.

The truth or falsehood of metaphors must also be in alignment with what Lewis calls the Tao in *The Abolition of Man*. The Tao is the universal moral law that helps man distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, sense and nonsense. Just as man, through reason, differentiates between appearance and reality (the stick bent in water), so, through the moral law, man can call a line crooked because he has “some idea of a straight line.” (*Mere Christianity*, 38). There is a Real Morality that judges the truthfulness of one’s idea over another’s, just as one’s idea of New York can be truer or less true than another’s because “New York is a real place, existing apart from what someone thinks (13-14). The Tao is reflected in human reason, but it transcends it because “[h]uman thought is not God’s, but God-kindled” (*Miracles*, 29). Its truth is not contingent upon our understanding or purposes. Feelings cannot constitute or inspire morality. (Lewis, *The Discarded Image*,159-160). In *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, the pagans’ imagination becomes corrupt because the imaginative pictures are not guided by the moral principles of the Shepherd People, a metaphor for the law given to Moses, and thus, their imagination becomes imaginary.
For Lewis, the world has meaning and value, and metaphor allows us to make true and valuable statements. In line with Barfield, Lewis argues that there is a given relation “between objects and feelings or ideas” (Barfield 86). Emotions aroused by association through metaphor are in accord with reason, and our emotional responses are judgments of value, “recognitions of objective value or responses to an objective order” (Lewis, The Abolition of Man, 12). In The Screwtape Letters, the senior devil advises his nephew to sever his patient’s connection between the cerebral and the visceral (the chest) and to place the virtues in his imagination in order to keep them “out of his will” (69-70). But the world has value only if the physical dimension is grounded in the supra-natural dimension. Without the transcendent, meaning has no meaning and no real identity. It is only through the transcendental that the physical realm receives consistency and significance. If not, it remains but a shadow that one day will pass.⁸

In the introduction to The Problem of Pain, Lewis paints a grim picture of materialistic thinking: “[a]ll stories will come to nothing: all life will turn out in the end to have been a transitory and senseless contortion upon the idiotic face of infinite matter.” Realism may appear to be a way out of this nonsensical view of the world, but if we look more closely, Lewis argues, that realists are no more than ‘half-hearted materialists’ because they believe that the world is made up of meaningless physical processes, while claiming that the discoveries of science and their own truth statements are of value (Lewis and Tillyard, 28).

A ‘LINK’ BETWEEN THE TWO REALMS. METAPHOR SHOWS SIMILARITY

We come full circle to conclude with the last point, which is that the two realms—the seen and the unseen—have a common source that makes possible the understanding (although partial) of the latter through the former and an even greater understanding of the former through the latter. In Lewis’s view, we cannot fully see this ultimate Reality “from this side of the door” but we can see some glimpses of it because there is a ‘link’ between the two realms, as one has been created by the other. In his words, this link is “the all-pervasive principle of concretion or cohesion whereby the universe holds together. All things, and

⁸ See the ending of C. S. Lewis’s Mere Christianity.
specially Life, arose within Him, and within Him all things will reach their conclusion—the final statement of what they have been trying to express.” (Miracles, 76, 154). For Lewis, this “uncreated and unconditioned reality which causes the universe to be” is God—the basic Fact or Actuality, the fountain or source of all facthood (53). Metaphor is the means through which we can grasp the Absolute Transcendental.

The subjective human mind recognises objective patterns and participates in them. It is the higher that reproduces itself in the lower—this is what Lewis calls ‘transposition’—because the spiritual is richer than the natural, but those who know only the lower medium believe it is the other way around (The Weight of Glory, 103-108). Our shadows depict heavenly reality. Heaven is the glorified form which casts its earthly shadows into this world. (Lewis, ‘The Birth of Language’, in Poems, n.d.) Nature is only the commentary, the notes to a poem. The poem is a Person (Lewis, Miracles, 130). Metaphor, then, is not a transfer that carries the supposedly purely sensible into the realm of the supersensible. On the contrary, it is the other way round. Infinity tries to translate itself into the language of the finite and metaphor mediates between the Infinite and the finite in me. However, in the essay ‘Transposition’, Lewis stresses that resemblance is not identity—tension and resemblance work together in the metaphoric process. According to Owen Barfield’s theory of meaning, the ground ‘zero’ of human language centres on the ‘ancient semantic unity’, as he calls it in Poetic Diction, a theory Lewis adhered to (Miracles, 78). For the archaic man, there was no distinction between the literal and the metaphorical meanings because both had previously been united into a coherent whole. Primitive man could conceive neither pure spirit nor mere matter. Moreover, sensible objects were not detached from thinking and emotional feeling. To the ancient mind, physical objects had spiritual significance. The meaning of words did not presuppose any dichotomy between the literal and metaphoric.

Reality is not of one kind, material or immaterial, as materialism, idealism, and realism purport. Nonetheless, compared with the spiritual world, which is more consistent than matter, this world is insubstantial and characterised by transformations. As we have already seen, Lewis proposes that our current world is the Shadowlands compared to the authenticity of the ultimate Reality, which is too concrete and too definite for the inevitable imprecision of language. Our images, limping metaphors, and language are only
broken speech used to describe the Indescribable. In *The Great Divorce*, a solid heavenly Spirit invites a ghostly bishop who has “experienced truth only with the abstract intellect” to come and taste Truth “like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom.” Alas, the ghost refuses the invitation as he returns “down there” in the grey town to read a paper at a little Theological Society (29-30).

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this paper I have explored Lewis’s worldview of reality, the place of metaphor in it, and some differences from other worldviews. For him, the ultimate Reality is the very basis of our physical reality. Divine thought expressed in the Word created this world, which is physical, meaningful, and valuable as long as it remains connected to its Source. This interlacing of material and immaterial works as a metaphysical metaphor for the nature of our own human language—referent and meaning, thought and spoken/written word. Metaphor bridges the chasm between language and reality, becoming, like Nature, an instrument of revelation and manifestation for certain metaphysical principles that are otherwise beyond the comprehension of the human mind.

However, both metaphor and nature remain imperfect instruments. Although temporal reality is a part of ultimate Reality, it is an exception to its rules. This world is fallen and it does not perfectly reflect the Real. According to Lewis, here we are experiencing the “frosts and east winds of Old Nature” (*Miracles*, 142). This Nature is under the influence of time and decay. However, in Lewis’s view, Nature found an order which to disintegrate because there existed a time when the opposite processes to those we see now were at work, and the Christian claim is that these reverse processes will take place again. One day this Nature, this “old field of space, time, matter, and the senses is to be weeded, dug, and sown” to produce “the vigour and variety of the new crops”. Since scientific explanations are based solely on the observation of this decaying old Nature, it is unable to provide any insights into the New Creation; for the moment and for the most part, we have to think of it metaphorically (152-153). Moreover, since scientific explanations cannot answer questions related to purpose, which is outside their scope, then the ‘debate’ between ‘natural’ (fact, mechanism) and ‘supernatural’ (meaning), between science and theology does not exist.

Because of this partial interlocking, patterns which are in the Creator,
such as the Death and Re-birth pattern, are also facts that we can find in nature and meanings that we find in metaphors. The New Creation will heal not only the estrangement between Spirit and Nature but also between literal and metaphoric. “The archaic type of thought which could not clearly distinguish spiritual ‘Heaven’ from the sky” will one day be true—Spirit will perfectly ride Nature and the two together will “make rather a Centaur than a mounted knight” (99). The pattern of death and rebirth in Nature, of descent and reascent, is the formula of reality, a transposition of the Divine “into a minor key” which will one day manifest in full (73). But one must die in order to rise—and death will start working backward. This pattern of death will culminate with a rebirth and a reunion:

The old, richly imaginative thought which still survives in Plato has to submit to the deathlike, but indispensable, process of logical analysis: nature and spirit, matter and mind, fact and myth, the literal and the metaphorical have to be more and more sharply separated, till at last a purely mathematical universe and a purely subjective mind confront one another across an unbridgeable chasm. But from this descent also, if thought itself is to survive, there must be reascent and the Christian conception provides for it. Those who attain the glorious resurrection will see the dry bones clothed again with flesh, the fact and the myth remarried, the literal and the metaphorical rushing together. (99-100)

Using an apt metaphor of the world as “a great sculptor’s shop” and men as statues that come to life only if the spiritual life is within him (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 159), Lewis expresses the hope that, in the end, the veil will be lifted off, rendering the use of metaphor obsolete because all the dichotomies caused by our proclivity towards abstraction will be reconciled, and all the unnatural division will become the original unity again, this time glorified.⁹

**Works Cited**


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BIONOTE

**Estera Federciuc** is currently a PhD student in the Doctoral School of Philological Studies, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iasi, currently preparing a thesis on the functions of metaphors in C. S. Lewis's works from a translation perspective. She earned an MA in Specialised Translation and Studies in Terminology from the University of Bucharest and a BA in Translation and Interpretation at “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi. She studied as an Erasmus student at the Catholic University of the West in Angers (BA) and at Lumière University Lyon 2 (MA) and will be at Sorbonne Nouvelle University, again as an Erasmus+ student, during the second semester of her current PhD year. Before starting her PhD, she worked as a trainee translator in Luxembourg, as an English teacher and French-Romanian interpreter in Lyon, as a translation project manager for a company in Bucharest and as a French teacher at the French Institute of Bucharest. In addition to her interests in C. S. Lewis, linguistics and translation, she enjoys conversations about the writings of the other Inklings, especially J. R. R. Tolkien, and about biblical theology and philosophy.

*E-mail:* estera.federciuc@yahoo.com